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“Do You Want to Tell Your Own Narrative?”: How One Teacher and Her Students Engage in Resistance by Leveraging Community Cultural Wealth

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Abstract

This qualitative case study offers a window into one classroom in which one Latinx English language arts teacher and her newcomer high school students tapped into *community cultural wealth* (Yosso, 2005) as they engaged in literacy practices to resist oppression, denounce discrimination, and strive for social justice. We draw upon Yosso’s (2005) framework of community cultural wealth (CCW) to understand how teachers can encourage resistance among historically marginalized students within the current racist and xenophobic political climate; and we examine how students respond to the teacher’s invitation to engage and develop their resistant capital through their writing. Data analyzed for this study include student letters, teacher interviews, and fieldnotes from one lesson, which was situated in a year-long ethnographic study. We found that the teacher cultivated resistant capital by tapping into students’ lived experiences to scrutinize oppressive rhetoric and persist in the face of adversity. Students seized the opportunity to resist the dominant anti-immigrant narrative by leveraging their resistant capital through counter-stories, assertions of experiential knowledge, and appeals to a moral imperative. Our study contributes to scholarship on CCW by exploring how CCW is utilized in a previously under-examined context and has implications for educators by offering

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examples of classroom practices that cultivate CCW and transform deficit discourses that threaten to impede academic success, especially among Latinx students.

Keywords: Community Cultural Wealth, Immigrant, Narrative, Resistance.

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Introduction

As I arrived at the school, I was struck by the somber mood in the front office, where the staff (who wore buttons that read “I support immigrant and refugee students”) looked sleepless, like me, reeling from the unexpected results of last night’s presidential election. The assistant principal commented, “This is a sad day to be an educator. Many kids came in very worried about the election news.” When I greet Nancy [teacher] in the hallway, she tells me she needs to let her students talk about the election today, as a cathartic moment. When I enter her classroom, I am overwhelmed by youthful energy as students are bustling to their tables and greet me with a hug or a reassuring smile. The students seem unstoppable. Nancy displays the following writing prompt on the smart board at the front of the classroom:

“Today, we are going to think about the election yesterday. Donald Trump was elected our new president last night. Most of you could not vote, however, it is still important to make your voice heard. We are going to write letters to President-Elect Trump. His campaign slogan was “Make America Great Again” but each of you came to this country because you or your family thought there were great things about this country already. In your letter, explain what you think about America now, and what you would like to see happen in the future. Together, we can impact the direction of this country.” (fieldnotes, Nov. 9, 2016)

In the months leading up to the 2016 election, Latinx¹ communities around the U.S. were under attack as presidential candidate Trump threatened to deport millions and propagated insults towards immigrants, which fueled White supremacist ideologies. During those pre-election months, Nancy and her colleagues at LHS² (a high school for recently-arrived immigrant students) worked tirelessly to refute Trump’s disparaging remarks and explicit attacks on Latinx communities. Nancy frequently reassured her students that they were still safe, since it seemed impossible that a candidate who so openly endorsed racism could win the majority of American votes. Although LHS teachers and administrators tried to comfort the students, they still feared for their students’ futures. The election results solidified resentment against immigrant communities and reified deficit discourses about Latinx youth. It is within this hostile environment that educators are most needed to recognize and leverage students’ assets to resist and transform deficit discourses.

In this article, we offer a window into one classroom in which we can see the powerful ways that a teacher and students tapped into community cultural wealth (CCW; Yosso, 2005)

to challenge dominant narratives—i.e., to engage in *counter-storytelling* (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001)—and raise their voices to resist oppression, denounce discrimination, and strive for social justice. We focus on two research questions:

1. How does one teacher’s pedagogical approach encourage resistance and cultivate resistant capital among immigrant youth?
2. How do students respond to the teacher’s invitation to engage in resistance and draw upon their community cultural wealth through their writing?

We contend that, while the theoretical scholarship on CCW is strong, educators need more empirical studies that illustrate how to utilize CCW in classroom practice. Our study contributes to this empirical literature by shedding light on classroom practices that educators need now more than ever, as we seek to transform deficit discourses that threaten to impede academic success, especially among Latinx students.

Conceptual Framework

Our study is informed by asset-based pedagogies and perspectives, such as *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017), *culturally relevant pedagogy* (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014), *funds of knowledge* (González, Moll, & Amanti 2005; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), and *community cultural wealth* (Yosso, 2005). Asset-based approaches counter deficit-informed educational stances that frame People of Color as “lacking” by instead highlighting the capacities, skills, and assets of historically marginalized communities to enhance their educational opportunities and critique dominant power structures (Moll et al., 1992; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002; Valencia, 2010).

We find the concept of *community cultural wealth*—rooted in Critical Race Theory (CRT)—particularly useful because it offers an expanded view of the resources and knowledge that Students of Color bring to the classroom. Educational researchers have used CRT to theorize how educational structures, processes, and discourses contribute to racial inequality in society (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Villalpando, 2004; see Jennings & Lynn, 2005, for more on Critical Race Pedagogy). CRT is a powerful lens to analyze the pervasiveness of race and racism while employing praxis as a tool for transformation and

social justice, valuing experiential knowledge, and countering dominant ideologies (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Drawing on CRT, Yosso (2005) critiqued Bourdieu's narrow view of *cultural capital*, a concept that can be misconstrued to portray European-descendant elites as the norm and to render People of Color as culturally deficient. Yosso (2005) expanded cultural capital by introducing the construct of *community cultural wealth* (CCW), which she defines as an array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts that can foster academic and life success among Students of Color. According to Yosso (2005), CCW comprises six interrelated forms of capital: *Aspirational capital* is "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77). *Linguistic capital* "includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (p. 78). *Familial capital* comprises "those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition" (p. 79). *Social capital* involves "networks of people and community resources" (p. 79). *Navigational capital* means "the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind" (p. 80). Finally, *resistant capital* refers to "knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80).

Resistant capital abounds among immigrant students, especially Latinxs, who hold a legacy of school resistance and grassroots leadership (see Delgado Bernal, 1998) and who often confront the policies and practices that undermine their educational opportunities. Although resistant capital is a distinct type of capital, we contend that the other forms of capital can be used in conjunction with resistant capital to strengthen People of Color's resistance to untoward circumstances. In this article, we show how a Latinx teacher and her Students of Color drew on their diverse forms of capital for an overall purpose: to resist oppression and silencing. Encouraging this type of resistance among Latinx immigrants is particularly relevant in the current sociopolitical context, where anti-immigrant and anti-Latinx discourses are pervasive.

Empirical Literature on CCW

While empirical studies illustrating how K-12 teachers utilize CCW are scarce, a few studies offer examples of the benefits of incorporating CCW in teaching practices (e.g., Cuevas, 2016; Rodriguez, 2016). For instance, Cuevas (2016) tapped into his students' CCW by implementing a curriculum in a middle school that encouraged the students to explore personal counter-stories, or *testimonios*. Cuevas found that Latinx middle-school students recognized and drew upon their resistant, aspirational, and familial capital. Cuevas (2016) argued that these multiple forms of capital emboldened Latinx students to overcome obstacles in their educational pathways; however, more research is needed to shed light on the processes of incorporating CCW in classroom discourse practices.

Similar to Cuevas (2016), DeNicolo, González, Morales, and Romani (2015) examined how school teachers draw on and expand Latinx students' CCW using *testimonios*. Analyzing classroom interactions in a 3rd-grade, bilingual classroom, the researchers found that students employed three interrelated forms of CCW: aspirational, linguistic, and navigational capital. For example, in their written *testimonios* several of the participants referred to their plans, hopes, and dreams and explained how their family's *consejos* (advice), knowledge, and expectations encouraged them to be resilient and overcome institutional challenges they encountered in school. Therefore, DeNicolo and colleagues (2015) contended that educators should model and offer explicit opportunities to connect CCW to school learning. Further studies are needed to explore resistant capital explicitly since this was not the focus of the previous studies.

In sum, the extant literature shows that teachers can build on Latinx students' CCW to enhance their educational opportunities. When teachers provide students with explicit opportunities to draw on multiple forms of capital, Latinx students increase their engagement in school activities and in transforming their social conditions (Cuevas, 2016, DeNicolo et al., 2015; Rodriguez, 2016). Thus, as Rodriguez (2016) argues, CCW can be a pedagogical approach that:

Not only gives us an opportunity, but requires a social, political, and educational commitment to be forthright and visionary so all our Latina/o students across the educational pipeline are recognized as agents of their own conditions and have the

capacity to transform these conditions by growing, building, and thriving together (p. 87).

Our study builds upon this scholarship, informed by CRT and Yosso's CCW framework, as we identify these qualities in one teacher's pedagogical approach and shed light on the ways that students leverage CCW for resistance in an oppressive sociopolitical context. Our work also contributes to the empirical literature—which has focused on either higher education (Rodriguez, 2016) or the elementary (DeNicolo et al., 2015) and middle (Cuevas, 2016) grades—by exploring how CCW is utilized in a previously under-examined context (i.e., high school). Our study begins to address these gaps in the extant research to better understand instructional practices that leverage Latinx students' CCW along the K-20 educational pipeline.

Methods

School Context

This qualitative case study focuses on a lesson taught by an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher (Nancy, the fourth author⁴) at a public high school designed for recent immigrant students. The school, LHS, is located in an urban, working-class neighborhood in a mid-Atlantic state where the Latinx student population has increased 185.4% since 2000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017) and 33.8% of the state's population voted for Trump (The New York Times, 2016). This metropolitan area is home to the third largest population of foreign-born Central Americans in the U.S.—after only Los Angeles and New York (Lesser & Batalova, 2017). LHS opened in the 2015-2016 academic year and is part of the International Network for Public Schools, an educational nonprofit organization that supports schools serving newly-arrived immigrant students. While LHS students currently represent 24 countries and one U.S. territory, nearly two-thirds of the students come from El Salvador or Guatemala. The students speak a wide variety of home languages (e.g., Spanish, Farsi, Chinese), but the majority (87%) of students speak Spanish at home. Twelve percent of students are categorized as Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE). The percentages of the school population that received free or reduced lunch or are labeled ELLs were both over 95.0%.

Teacher and Researcher Positionality

Nancy is one of the founding teachers at LHS and describes her own pedagogical journey as deeply influenced by LHS as well as her own personal experiences. Indeed, Nancy's family's experiences as newcomers in the U.S. inform her teaching philosophy and allow her to bring her own CCW to her teaching practices. She openly shares her own family's story with her students when she tells them about her father and mother who immigrated to the United States during the Salvadoran Civil War. With just an elementary school education, her parents raised four children and worked long hours as a truck driver and housekeeper. As the third of four children, Nancy recounts her oldest sister's early struggles in school. With parents still learning to navigate the U.S. education system, her older sister was labeled an English language learner (ELL). Nancy explained how she benefited from her sister's experiences, entered kindergarten fully bilingual in English and Spanish, and followed her sister's college trajectory. Nancy believes it takes a whole community approach to help students succeed, and she sees herself as not just a language teacher but an advocate.

During her undergraduate studies as an English major and U.S. Latino/a Studies minor, Nancy became acutely aware of educational inequities and sought to address these inequities by joining Teach for America. During her first year of teaching, she realized she needed more tools for teaching ELLs in particular, so she enrolled in a master's program in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Upon completing her Master's in Education, she was inspired to join LHS, which she found espoused her own teaching philosophy and offered her the tools, resources, and support to work effectively with ELLs. Nancy believes that LHS has created a hub of teachers, partners, and families working toward a shared mission: whole-student development through a project-based approach to critical thinking. She is currently pursuing a J.D, focusing on legal advocacy for immigrant communities.

Nancy explained that the lesson we observed was reflective of the school's shared mission and core goals, which we observed in both teacher and student talk. The school refers to teachers, students, administrators, and staff as "community members" who share the core values of "empowerment, collaboration, and critical thinking", which resonate with key tenets of critical pedagogy. For example, the school vision reads, "Community members will facilitate

whole-student development that empowers students to navigate their communities, advocate for their personal growth, and succeed in a diverse and evolving global society.” Nancy explained that the school’s focus on social justice is what attracts many teachers to the school.

LHS was open to collaboration and sought out partnerships with our university and community organizations. The students and staff were accustomed to many visitors in the classrooms and developed a close working relationship with our research team. Our university-based research team (Andrés, Angélica, and Melinda) brings distinct forms of CCW: some of these resemble those of the LHS students, but at the same time our experiences differ greatly in terms of our educational privileges, intersectional positionalities, and professional status. Andrés and Angélica bring their personal experiences as immigrants from Peru and Colombia, respectively, and their experiences as graduate students and language teachers of adults and adolescents. Melinda brings her bilingual teaching and personal experiences in a transnational family across Brazil, Venezuela, and the U.S. Melinda was the participant observer present in Nancy’s first post-election class and Andrés and Angélica participated in several observations across the school year. Together, the four authors share a common commitment to building upon culturally and linguistically diverse students’ experiential knowledge, enhancing educational opportunities of immigrant students, and pursuing social justice.

Data Collection

This study was part of a larger, year-long ethnographic study in which we examined literacy activities in ELA classes and during an extracurricular program at LHS. We observed and analyzed the focal lesson as part of the larger research project, for which we conducted weekly observations and multiple interviews with the teachers and students involved in the project between September 2016 and June 2017.

In selecting our case for this study, we engaged in what Patton (1990) calls *operational construct sampling*. That is, out of the more than 30 lessons we observed throughout the year, we focused on one that we felt to be especially representative of the construct of “resistance.” Specifically, in this lesson (which took place on November 9, 2016, the day after the 2016 presidential elections) the teacher modified her lesson plan to ask students to write a letter to

president-elect Trump. Both in the act of writing the letter and the content of the students' responses, the notion of resistance became salient, as we discuss in our findings.

Following case study methodology (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009), we relied on multiple sources of data to examine this lesson. We took ethnographic fieldnotes during the sixth-period ELA class while students wrote letters; we removed all student identifiers and read scanned versions of the letters from all four of Nancy's combined 9th/10th grade ELA classes ($n = 72$). We then analyzed transcribed interviews with Nancy. The students in Nancy's classes were aged 14 to 18, and most had arrived in the U.S. as adolescents, immigrating from 24 countries across the world, with the majority from Central America. Many of the students had undergone long periods of family separation and many were unaccompanied minors. As we conceptualized this article, Nancy offered insight about her students and the ripple effects of this focus lesson in an in-depth, semi-structured interview a year after the lesson.

Data Analysis

Our data analysis procedure was both *deductive* and *inductive*: deductive insofar as Yosso's (2005) CCW framework informed our codes (e.g., resistant capital, aspirational capital), and inductive in that we were open to coding themes outside this framework. Each member of our team read the students' letters to president-elect Trump, fieldnotes, and Nancy's end-of-year interview (2017) to identify patterns and themes in the data. We wrote analysis memos and discussed the themes until we came to a consensus about representative examples of CCW. As a team, we identified themes in the letters, which we distilled into three major categories: (1) counter-stories, (2) experiential knowledge, and (3) appealing to a moral imperative. We compiled excerpts from the 72 letters into a document that was discussed with Nancy during our 2018 interview, and she offered her own insight and analysis of these themes as well as themes in her own teaching, which we identified as: (a) recognizing and invoking experiential knowledge, (b) encouraging students to challenge inequalities and resist authoritarianism, and (c) persisting and advancing in the face of adversity. We triangulated our findings by seeking convergence across multiple sources of data and researcher perspectives, which is an essential way of enhancing the reliability of case-study findings (Merriam, 1998).

Findings

Our findings show how Nancy and her students leveraged CCW to respond to racialized, xenophobic threats in the current sociopolitical context and engaged in resistance through their literacy practices. Although the students and their teacher simultaneously drew upon multiple, interconnected forms of CCW such as linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, and navigational capital, we focus on *resistant capital* in order to operationalize forms of resistance, corresponding to the focus of this special issue. In what follows, we offer a more nuanced understanding of resistant capital by illustrating how Nancy and her students employed this form of capital in their class discussion and their letters. In the first section of our findings we focus on the first research question—i.e., how does one teacher’s pedagogical approach encourage resistance and cultivate resistant capital among immigrant youth?—and in the second section we discuss examples from students’ writing to answer the second research question—i.e., how students responded to the teacher’s invitation to engage in resistance and draw upon their community cultural wealth through their writing.

Teacher Drawing upon Resistant Capital

We found that Nancy encouraged resistance by modeling and cultivating *resistant capital* in her pedagogical approach (and this lesson in particular) as she (a) recognized and invoked students’ experiential knowledge and allowed students to voice their concerns of the current sociopolitical situation; (b) encouraged students to question oppressive structures, and (c) persisted in the face of adversity.

Recognizing and invoking experiential knowledge to resist. As the fieldnotes at the beginning of the article demonstrate, Nancy understood that her students needed to talk about the election, so she completely changed her planned lesson for the day, knowing that she would count on school leaders’ support. In her retrospective reflection of the lesson, Nancy emphasized that teachers need not be afraid to “pause the curriculum” in order to work through social, emotional, or political issues that are important to students. In fact, Nancy expressed her belief that socio-emotional and leadership development should be embedded into the classroom daily. Nancy skillfully connected this impromptu lesson to a project-based

unit on personal narrative writing, inspired by the film *I Learn America*, to connect English curriculum requirements to students' community cultural wealth.

In her writing prompt, Nancy explicitly stated that it is "still important to make your voice heard," and began her lesson by asking the students how they felt about the election. In the prompt, Nancy acknowledged students' political marginalization when she stated, "most of you could not vote," thus recognizing exclusion and oppressive structures. However, she also invited resistance by asking students to draw upon their own experiences to write letters to the new president.

The following excerpt is from the beginning of the class observation, when Nancy compelled students to problematize Trump's slogan "Make America Great Again" (MAGA). Students' responses show that they were acutely aware of racial and xenophobic threats rampant in the sociopolitical context.

Nancy: What was Donald Trump saying during the campaign?

Alex: Que va a hacer el muro [that he's going to build a wall]

Beatriz: I hate mexicanos!

Julia: ¡Que nos va a deportar! [that he going to deport us!]

Liliana: ¡Que es racista! [that he is a racist!]

Manuel: Miss, do you think that you will be deported?

Johnny: She was born here!

Manuel: But he said he would deport all kids of immigrants.

Nancy: Today you are going to write letters to Trump. Tell him what you think we can do to move forward and make this country better. We might not agree with him, you can tell him that too! (fieldnotes 11.09.16)

In affording this writing opportunity to her students, Nancy encouraged them to directly address and challenge Trump's discourse about immigration. Though ultimately conciliatory in that it pressed students to think about "moving forward" as a country, Nancy's prompt was also oppositional in nature, reminding kids that it was fine for them to disagree with the president in their letters. Hence, the writing of these letters exemplified the "oppositional behavior" by which Yosso (2005) defines resistant capital.

Another form of capital manifested in this lesson is *linguistic capital*, which is part of students' experiential knowledge and permeates the entire lesson. Indeed, the students drew upon their linguistic capital as they voiced their resistance using both Spanish and English. An example of how this was part of Nancy's pedagogical approach was illustrated when one student commented, "I don't know what to write. Can it be in Spanish?" Without hesitation, Nancy responded, "Your letter can be in English or Spanish."

The students also drew upon the teacher's experiential knowledge when they referred to her own family's immigration status. Earlier in the year, Nancy had shared her own family's experiences immigrating from El Salvador and growing up bilingually and transculturally in the U.S. Because Nancy and her students shared similar CCW, they established a close teacher-student relationship and could relate with many of the same challenges and opportunities of navigating multiple cultures. But Nancy did not simply acknowledge those injustices; she went on to encourage the students to challenge the injustices by engaging in oppositional discourse (e.g., "we might not agree with him"), which we discuss further in the following examples.

Encouraging students to challenge inequalities and resist authoritarianism.

Nancy's lesson that day invited students to use their own lived experiences to scrutinize oppressive rhetoric (e.g., challenging the legitimacy of Trump's campaign slogan) in order to become agents of social change. Nancy modeled resistance in the writing prompt (see above), which positioned her students as agents and authors who were worthy to be heard by the new president. In the prompt, Nancy drew upon the students' various forms of CCW, referring to their aspirational capital and familial capital ("you and your family thought there were great things about this country"), which she connected to resistance and oppositional discourse. She also encouraged them to leverage their resistant capital when she marked a contrast between her students' experiences and the false rhetoric about this country, while simultaneously empowering students by affirming that they "can impact the direction of this country."

In the following quote from her lesson, Nancy discussed issues of power and articulated the limits of the president's power when she reminded the students about the three branches of the U.S. government:

Remember that a president is *only one* person in this whole country. The executive branch has to work together with the other two branches of the government, Congress and the Supreme Court to enact laws like that. (fieldnotes 11.09.16)

As Nancy emphasized that the president was “*only one* person in the whole country,” she challenged his power and potential authoritarianism. She also helped her students reflect on the importance of telling their *own* stories when she asked them: “Do you want Trump telling your narrative now that he is president, or do you want to tell *your own* narrative?” By encouraging students to tell their own narratives, Nancy connected to her curricular unit on narratives while simultaneously allowing them to develop *counter-stories* that challenged dominant discourses about immigrants. Solórzano and Yosso (2001) define the counter-story as “a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform” (p. 32). We observed students challenging majoritarian stories and echoing Nancy’s words in their own writing and discussions during class.

Nancy also cultivated a space for students to raise awareness of current and historical injustices and to take a proactive stance for social transformation. One student from Guatemala commented, “In this country, the African Americans were discriminated against! Yes, and we still see discrimination. Knowing that we fought for justice in the past, and in the future means that we can keep fighting.” This student’s comment acknowledged inequalities and was also related to *persistence*, the final theme in our analysis of how the teacher’s pedagogical approach cultivated resistant capital.

Persisting and advancing in the face of adversity. At our interview in June 2017, we asked Nancy how her school was responding to the anti-immigrant sociopolitical context. She responded by drawing upon her own resistant capital, explaining how she and her students were determined to tenaciously press on in the face of adversity:

I think our response doesn’t stop, it’s just been to keep doing what we are doing... we still have plenty of people supporting our school. This story is not the only narrative out there. And, like, the best we can do is continue going to school, continue getting an education. And, you know, of course, your immigration status and your family’s

immigration status all of that is important and relevant, but it should just serve as further motivation to continue what we are doing here. And I think that's what we've tried to communicate to students who, maybe, struggled with it a little more... we are still learning. We still have our own goals... there's nothing he [Trump] can do to stop you from being educated while you are here, so we are gonna give you the best education we can. (interview 06.08.17)

In this quote, Nancy articulated the tensions and power struggles that continue. She affirmed the importance of students' CCW (including aspirational, familial, and resistant forms of capital) and even reframed their immigration status as motivation to continue their education. She drew upon her resistant capital to resist subordination. Nancy's use of "we" suggests her solidarity with her colleagues and students at the school, who are united in their fight against unrelenting injustices.

Students Engaging Resistant Capital

When Nancy reflected on what stood out to her about the lesson, she remarked that "students were 100% engaged." This was confirmed in our fieldnotes, where we noted that students were engrossed with the writing prompt and actively talking about and working on their writing together. This assignment evoked a passionate response from the students, who wrote more than we had ever observed them write during a single class period.

As we read and re-read their letters to the president, we identified three main ways that the students manifested resistant capital in this context: (a) counter-storytelling to reframe immigrants as important contributors to this country; (b) utilizing experiential knowledge to position themselves as expert navigators through hardships; and (c) appealing to a larger "moral" imperative to do what is right and sympathize with immigrants, their hopes, and aspirations.

Counter-stories: Immigrants as agents and builders of this country. Across multiple letters, students depicted immigrants as the people who have actively contributed to the building of this country and who make it as great as it is—echoing Nancy's prompt while also drawing upon their own experiences. Thus, they resisted and challenged Trump's discourse about immigrants as "bad" or "threatening" by providing their own counter-stories (cf. Cuevas,

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2016). For example, one of the students in the class commented, “You know all his fancy buildings? It’s people like me from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador who build them. I know, I work in construction. *¡Somos el brazo derecho de este país!*” (We are the right hand of this country!).

Multiple students directly alluded to and argued against Trump’s MAGA slogan in their letters. As one student wrote:

You said that you were going to get out at all the immigrants, and “make America great again,” you have a big problem with that ‘cause all those immigrants are the people that make this country great. All these persons are the ones who do the hard work that maybe you cannot do*.⁵

This excerpt not only took up some of the wording from Nancy’s prompt, but it also epitomizes the oppositional tenor of most students’ responses to the MAGA slogan: The country is already great as it is, and immigrants are the reason for it. Moreover, the student reframed the dominant immigrant narrative into a more positive one, asserting that immigrants do the “hard work” that people like Trump cannot—or will not—do. Similarly, another student wrote: “I would like to remind you that this country was made up of undocumented immigrants and they are still helping* this country in the economy.”

Concrete examples of the contributions of immigrants (and the Latinx community in particular) appeared in multiple letters, and these centered chiefly on the work of construction. One student, for instance, wrote that “Hispanics made America a better place, because of all the hard work we do... Hard work like making houses, doing construction, hotels where you sleep, cars that you drive are fixed by IMMIGRANTS.” Another student made a similar point, challenging Trump’s inconsistent words and business practices regarding undocumented workers: “*Todos los trabajos de construcción son latinos hasta en la mansión* que usted está haciendo hay personas indocumentadas*” (“all construction work[ers] are Latino, even the mansion that you are building has undocumented people [working on it]”). These two examples present immigrants as the “builders” of this country, both inextricable from it and essential to its functioning.

Lastly, some letters explicitly resisted the dominant narrative about the economic burden that immigrants cause to the country. Such was the case of one student, who wrote about immigrants: “*Ellos vienen a trabajar duramente y a pagar todos sus impuestos, la gente no vive de gratis aquí*” (“They come here to work hard and to pay all their taxes, people don’t live here for free”). Echoing the narrative of immigrants’ hard work evidenced in prior excerpts, this student further added that immigrants do not get a “free ride,” but rather actively contribute to the U.S. economy through their taxes.

In sum, various letters aimed to dispel detrimental myths about immigrants that were common in Trump’s rhetoric throughout the electoral campaign, such as their lack of material and economic contributions. As Nancy reminded us in her May 2018 interview, students took these examples from their own lives: they see their parents (or even themselves) working hard in industries like construction and paying taxes. Thus, the basis of these counter-stories is students’ *experiential knowledge*, to which we turn next.

Experiential knowledge: Navigating through hardships. The students used their personal, experiential knowledge not only to provide counter-stories but also to position themselves as “expert navigators,” possessing a kind of expertise that Trump lacks: the ability to navigate and endure hardships in life. Many students had previously brainstormed related themes when discussing plot structure in their ELA class, which they manifested as resistance in their letters by rejecting the dominant discourse that they, as immigrants, are somehow “less-than.”

For some students, the long and often painful journeys that immigrants made to come to the United States underscored their ability to endure hardship. One student, for instance, disagreed with Trump’s proposed border wall and deportations “because like me and many other Latinos we have been through a lot and had to fight to get here.” Likewise, another student encouraged Trump to “listen to their [i.e., immigrants’] reasons of why they decided to come here and try to imagine everything they had to go through in order to be in the United States... it’s not something everyone would do.” By alluding to the very real perils that many immigrants endure in their journeys to the U.S., these letters portrayed the president-elect’s

immigration policies not only as unjust but also as oblivious of all the sacrifices immigrants make to arrive and survive in a new country.

Other students, meanwhile, tied their challenging migratory journeys to other difficulties in their daily lives, thus further illustrating how immigrants' capacity to deal with these issues makes them strong members of society. One student, for example, shared his experiences with poverty and how they gave him a perspective that the president-elect lacks:

I agree with most of your policies except the ones on immigration. I am an immigrant from Eritrea, where me and my family escaped poverty and in God's name we made it to this beautiful nation with a lot of opportunity. Respectfully I don't think you know what poverty feels like, knowing you've been a millionaire your whole life...you need to realize there are families who had to struggle tremendously and risk their lives through several countries just to make it here and it's not respectful for you to call them rapists and murderers.

As this student posits, if Trump had experienced the same kinds of poverty and danger that many immigrants and refugees experience in life, his views on immigration might be different and more cognizant of what immigrants bring to the table. Or, at the very least, he would have been less offensive with his choice of words. This is an example of how students were aware of Trump's racialized and xenophobic threats, which they sought to challenge.

In sum, a second line of argument by which students used their letters to resist Trump's discourse on immigration was to position themselves as more experienced in dealing with hardships than others, the president-elect included. Their resistant capital was linked to their *navigational capital*, or "the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Just as immigrants help build this country, then, so do they bring life experiences (i.e., painful immigration journeys, surviving with few resources) that give them a unique perspective—one that the president may not empathize with but should acknowledge.

Appealing to a moral imperative as resistant capital. A third salient form of resistant capital that recurred in students' letters related to a moral imperative for the president-elect to do what is right with his newly-gained power. Moreover, calls for empathy

often accompanied these statements, with students wishing that Trump either put himself in immigrants' shoes or at least take into consideration their hopes and aspirations.

A common exhortation for Trump was for him to “think [more carefully],” and this verb made multiple appearances both within and across students' letters. One student, for example, gave Trump the following advice: “think better about how you're* going to use your power when you'll be president.” Another wrote: “My suggestion is that you think twice what you are going to do as president of the U.S.A. Think about helping poor people. Think about doing things... to help immigrants and all the people in the U.S.A.” Like these two letters, other students urged the future president to think more carefully about the way he wanted to change immigration policies.

Some of these moral calls also encouraged Trump to be more empathetic with the plight of immigrants and other minoritized communities in the United States. As one student argued, Trump needs to get to know and understand people who are different from him, because “hating on people you don't even know and treating them like nothing isn't going to help anyone.” Moreover, students argued that he needs to “have a heart” with regards to the traumatic experiences of immigrant groups:

Quiero saber si usted no tiene familia, no tiene sentimientos, no tiene mujer; porque si la tuviera, no insultaría a las mujeres. ¿No tiene hijo usted? ¿Sabe cuántas madres tienen que pasar años sin ver a su hijo? Y ahora que lo tiene al lado, usted quiere venir a quitárselo. Eso se llama no tener corazón.

(I'd like to know if you don't have a family, if you don't have feelings, if you don't have a wife. Because if you had one, you wouldn't insult women. Don't you have a child? Do you know how many mothers spend years without seeing their children, and now that they are by their side, you want to take them away? That's called not having a heart.)

In this poignant appeal, this student exemplifies the various letters appealing to Trump's empathy—or lack thereof, as his offensive words and behavior seem to imply.

Finally, some students appealed to the hopes and dreams they had for their future. In these cases, they leveraged their *aspirational capital* (Yosso, 2005) for the purposes of resistance. That is, students discussed their educational and professional plans in order to

change Trump's perceptions about immigrants and, in turn, the dominant discourse about them. One student remarked:

Mi estudio es muy importante para mí y para mi hijo; por eso me sacrifico día a día [...] Quiero estar aquí y estudiar lo que más pueda por lograr mis sueños, mi gran sueño de ser enfermera.

(My education is very important for me and for my son, that's why I make sacrifices every day [...] I want to be here and study all that I can to achieve my dreams, my great dream of becoming a nurse.)

Another student raised a similar point, writing in his letter that he "came to this country to have a better education and future." Furthermore, this same student then advocated for his schoolmates, remarking to Trump that "here are many immigrant students that want a better life, that's why they come here."

Implicit in these excerpts (and many others) was the idea that the future president of the United States has a moral duty to do "the right thing" about immigration. Hence, these students aimed to resist and change Trump's rhetoric by reminding him of this moral imperative and by encouraging him to have more empathy for the experiences and aspirations of immigrants.

Conclusion

In this article, we shed light on a pedagogical approach and literacy practices that can cultivate resistant capital among students, which is needed more than ever as Students of Color face discrimination and racialized violence that threatens their academic success and livelihoods. Our findings illustrate how a teacher can cultivate CCW by tapping into students' lived experiences to scrutinize oppressive rhetoric and persist in the face of adversity. Our analysis of student letters revealed how students seized the opportunity to resist dominant anti-immigrant narratives by leveraging their resistant capital through counter-stories, assertions of experiential knowledge, and appeals to a moral imperative. Our findings align with the work of Yosso (2005) and colleagues, who have argued that the experiential knowledge of People of Color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to engage historically marginalized students in formal education and transform social injustices. As a Latinx teacher, Nancy brought her own

unique experiential knowledge, which promoted the CCW of her students and allowed for the development of transformational resistance. We observed what Rodriguez (2016) describes as CCW-focused pedagogy “centered and driven by our students” (p. 69). Our findings highlight what students can do if given the opportunity to draw upon CCW, which have implications for educational practice and research.

Our findings also show how teachers can design literacy activities that allow students to master curriculum content aligned with rigorous standards (e.g., mastering plot structure to write a personal narrative) while simultaneously building upon CCW. As teachers foster literacy practices that invoke students’ experiential knowledge, allow students to voice their concerns and question oppressive structures, and encourage students to persist in adverse sociopolitical circumstances, they cultivate resistant capital that will promote future literacy development. Our study offers these implications for teachers with the caveat that incorporating students’ CCW into classroom practices takes time as teachers develop relationships with students and thus must consider long-term goals beyond one lesson.

When considering long-term goals, it is helpful when both school leaders and teachers collaborate in implementing and sustaining CCW-focused pedagogy, as Cuevas (2016) intimates, not only at the classroom level but also at the school and community levels. However, it is important to recognize that not all educational contexts are supportive of teachers who modify curriculum to cultivate CCW. We understand that many teachers are situated in ultra-regulated K-12 environments that allow little space for student or teacher voices, and thus need to be prepared to explain the “alignment” of practices that cultivate CCW with mandated standards. This calls for teacher education that better prepares teachers, leaders, and policy makers to understand the importance of CCW and incorporating social capital of historically marginalized populations into everyday teaching and learning. Future research is needed to explore how educators can connect students’ CCW across subject areas and how school communities can work together to identify and build upon diverse students’ forms of capital.

This article makes a scholarly contribution to CCW literature by delving into *how* resistant capital is manifested in high-school classroom practices. As evidenced in the students’ letters, resistant capital is interwoven with navigational and aspirational capital. Moreover, the

act of writing and discussion showed how students' linguistic capital (multilingual repertoire) permeated the whole lesson. Thus, this case study calls for future research examining how teachers and students intertwine various forms of CCW to resist and transform oppressive sociopolitical contexts.

In the present socio-political context that validates oppression and explicit anti-immigrant sentiments, it is increasingly important to understand ways that teachers and students can manifest and draw upon resistant capital. We acknowledge the limitations of this study, which focused on one supportive teacher who taught in a school that explicitly supported immigrant students and sought to empower students as advocates challenging the status quo. Therefore, our intention is not to generalize our findings to other classrooms, but rather, to shed light on how resistant capital was cultivated in a specific context to open possibilities in other contexts. More research is needed to examine how teachers can leverage students' resistant capital in less supportive schools that reproduce racialized and xenophobic threats.

Finally, it is worth noting that Nancy had intended to send the letters to the White House per her initial explanation of the lesson to the students. However, upon further reflection and conversations with colleagues and school administrators, who were legitimately concerned for student safety, she decided not to send them. This is yet another example of the consequences of the threats our students and teachers encounter daily, which attempt to stifle free expression. Although these letters were not sent, we argue that the students' experience expressing their concerns was a transformative act on its own and that leveraging their voices and CCW supported their academic and socio-emotional development. We offer this study as a possibility for hope within an oppressive political context, while also standing in solidarity with teachers and students who continue to face systemic racism and oppression in their everyday struggles.

Notes

¹ We use *Latinx* as a gender inclusive term to refer to *all* people from Latin American descent, including those who do not conform to the traditional gender binary Latino/a. For a discussion on the term *Latinx*, see de Onís (2017).

² All names (except the authors') are pseudonyms.

³ In this article, the terms *People*, *Community*, and *Students of Color* refer to those persons of African American, Latinx, Asian American, and Native American ancestry.

⁴ This article was truly a collaborative effort and would not have been possible without the contributions of *all* the authors (thus, author order is not meant to be hierarchical). As we grappled with how to represent all the authors on this article, we chose to use first-person plural (we) to refer to our entire research team and third person (she) when describing Nancy, the focus teacher of this study.

⁵ Most examples from the student writing were transcribed exactly as they were handwritten; however, in a few instances (noted with *), we edited the student's writing to correct typos, misspelling, or minor morpho-syntactic errors that may distract readers from the central meaning of the passage. We argue that this slight editing was helpful for this publication because we are focused on meaning-making, not grammatical form. Because these were rough drafts written in one class period, they did not reflect the writing process in this class, which usually involved several stages of revisions and edits along with teacher guidance.

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