Introduction to the Special Issue: Power and Positioning in Purposeful Community Change

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Our dilemma: How do we tell the story of a community-wide change initiative where political intrigue, personal stories of activism and struggle, successes and ultimate failures of similar initiatives weave together into a complex tale? This special issue is our first attempt to do so. But this issue represents an academic version; we still have much work to do to tell the community residents' story. The story we tell in this issue begins at a presentation at the editors' graduate school of education on what we now call the Community for the Children of Lakeview (CCL). Larson realized with excitement that doing an ethnography of this initiative would be an incredible opportunity to both deeply understand urban community efforts at transformation generally and to document that effort for the community itself more specifically. At another administrative meeting with the city school leader of the initiative, she made an immediate connection with that leader. Julie,¹ the designated person in charge, was herself a doctoral student at an out-of-state education leadership program and thus understood not only the value of research but also, more importantly, the value of ethnography. Ares and O'Connor stepped in to form a collaborative ethnography team, with all three researchers meeting with members of the CCL to seek permission to conduct an ethnography of the initiative. And so began our "entry" into the setting, as ethnographers typically call such endeavors.

This introduction to the special issue will give an overview of the long-term ethnography we are conducting of the change initiative that will provide the context for each article that follows; it will describe our general theoretical orientation to the research, our methodological strategies and challenges, and it will introduce each article of the edition. We close with a discussion of our preliminary claims and some implications for research and practice. We invite you into this complex tale, however incomplete it is at this time.

Trying to Change the World

Urban areas throughout the United States are challenged to support the learning and development of children and youth, given the entrenched social and economic problems and disparities concentrated in many cities. Recent work in anthropology, sociology, and related fields has explored processes by which social movements bring together diverse groups to address protracted political, economic, and educational issues of communities (Lee and Díaz 2007; Straus 2009). This work points to the complexity of social change in the face of enduring structures of oppression, and to the operation of multiple perspectives, as well as multiple and shifting alliances that support and undermine efforts for transformation. As educational ethnographers committed to understanding human development and action within communities, we have studied one such change process in Lakeview, a medium-sized city in the eastern United States. The articles in this special issue present multiple vantage points on this community change initiative that took

education, broadly conceived, to be at the heart of its mission. An overarching claim that unifies the articles is that race and racism, language, and ethnicity were underlying factors within which the ultimate demise of the initiative could be rooted.

This introduction briefly describes a three-year ethnographic study with a historically underserved urban community that undertook a major community development initiative. Over the course of the project, initiative leadership attempted to shift the focus to be more community based with a goal of authentic collaboration with community residents. One aim of this research has been to provide a multifaceted analysis of this community change process and to document apparent tensions between authentic community participation and bureaucratic goals and between diverse racial and cultural groups. Although the phenomena we explore are situated in a particular context, our findings inform a diverse set of problems and opportunities shared by communities and addressed by researchers more broadly. These include coalition building among nondominant, underresourced communities; relations of power among stakeholders involved in community and school transformation; the role of language and culture, race and racism in such efforts; and discourses of activism, bureaucracy, and power circulating and changing as initiatives evolve.

Given that each article tackles unique questions using varied theoretical frameworks, our work will be of interest as well to researchers and practitioners in several fields (anthropology, linguistics, education, political science, sociology, community development, community psychology) and those drawing on a variety of theoretical frameworks (i.e., sociolinguistics, critical theories, Critical Race and Latina/o Critical Race Theories (CRT and LatCrit, respectively), critical discourse, and literacies, sociocultural theories of learning and development).

Because each of the articles in this special issue offers unique analyses of Lakeview's community change initiative, we provide some background and history about the research context in the following section that will be relevant across the articles.

Northeast Lakeview

In 2006, the Lakeview City School District (LCSD) initiated a major community development program, with support from community residents, local government, and business and social service organizations, to address the complex problems and challenges of a particular area of the city that was modeled after other comprehensive change initiatives such as Harlem Children's Zone and the Obama administration's recent Promise Neighborhood program focusing on the creation of high quality, comprehensive projects that transform whole neighborhoods and improve educational outcomes for the children in those neighborhoods.

Northeast Lakeview has a history of intergenerational poverty, student underachievement, health problems, adult unemployment and underemployment, violence and crime, and disrepair of many commercial and residential buildings. There are over 1,000 city-owned abandoned, boarded up homes in the area, for example. At the same time, it also has a rich history of resilience in the face of such challenges, as well as political activism, community-based advocacy, and cultural and linguistic diversity that bring vitality and important resources to the neighborhoods.

The Lakeview initiative, first called Lakeview Total Care (LTC) and later changed to Community for the Children of Lakeview (CCL),² was initially conceived by the superintendent of the LCSD as a way of bringing together, coordinating, and expanding existing efforts by the school district, individual schools, community service organizations, non-profit organizations, social service agencies, churches, the business community, and local government to address the complex problems and challenges of this part of Lakeview,

with the specific aim of producing more positive developmental and learning outcomes for children and youth while eliminating the ineffective “silo” structure of current efforts. This initiative, as a result of the insistence of community residents, also came to have as a core value that the rich resources and social networks already existing in the community should be recognized and incorporated into the effort, combining clear acknowledgment of the real and dire challenges involved with an asset-based view of CCL residents and neighborhoods.

Although there had been many failed reform efforts directed toward improving the lives of children in this community, there are a number of features of the CCL initiative that distinguished it and that made it important as a site for educational ethnographers committed to understanding human development and action within communities and institutions struggling to challenge the inequitable production of social, educational, and material outcomes. Lakeview’s poorest neighborhoods share much with poor urban neighborhoods across the country, and the challenge of reinvesting and rebuilding these urban neighborhoods, the schools, and social service organizations was and is one of the biggest challenges facing Lakeview. The specific geographic area CCL targeted presented with the following demographics that were of concern to initiative leaders:

- High concentrations of teen pregnancy, drug trafficking, high school drop outs, and HIV/AIDS;
- 42% of the residents lived below the federal poverty line compared to the citywide poverty of 26%;
- Median household income of approximately \$19,000 compared to the citywide income of \$27,000;
- 8.3% of CCL area residents were unemployed;
- 68% of households were headed by females;
- 96% of students eligible for free or reduced lunch (13% higher than rest of the District);
- Highest concentration of lead poisoning cases in the city (30 to 34 percent of children screened had some level of lead poisoning) [U.S. Census Bureau 2006]

In 2006, Northeast Lakeview was home to approximately 50,000 residents; 50 percent were African Americans, 30 percent were Latinas/os (half of the city’s Latina/o population), 30 percent spoke a language other than English, and 10 percent were born outside the United States. A profile of LCSD schools located in this area of the city can be found in Table 1.

Table 1.
Demographics of the Original Seven Schools (School Names Substituted)

2005–2006 School Data	Student Population	% of non-white students	Poverty rating*	State ELA** Scores % of students at Level 1 & 2
Elementary School A	368	98.9%	96.6%	62.2%
Elementary School B	593	97.6%	98.5%	50.7%
Elementary School C	699	98.7%	98.1%	52.7%
Elementary School D	506	97.0%	97.1%	53.0%
Elementary School E	400	94.5%	95.6%	62.8%
Elementary School F	722	97.0%	96.7%	63.5%
High School G	967	95.8%	94.6%	90.9%

* Based on percentage of students receiving Free and Reduced Lunch.
** State English Language Arts.

This was the context within which this initiative began. CCL was an ambitious, multi-faceted approach, some of whose participants came to see it as it developed as distinguished from prior local efforts in its explicit commitment to a grassroots strategy in which parents, families, and community and social service organizations would have a central role in determining the direction toward and the means through which their community would develop. Thus, of particular interest for us as researchers documenting this ambitious initiative was the view of the community as not only struggling but also full of important resources, practices, commitments, and insights that needed to be brought to the table for the whole effort to proceed and be sustainable. As educational ethnographers, our attention was also captured by the fact that the initiative began in the school district and had learning, development, and schooling as core foci. We saw an opportunity to understand these processes in the context of a reform that saw schools as situated in larger social, economic, and historical contexts.

A second feature of the initiative was that it brought together interested parties from diverse social positions and varied interests. Residents of the target geography were African American, Latina/o, multiracial, and white, with members of each group being drawn from different social classes. Nonresidents participating in the planning and reform processes also represented these racial groups, social classes, and also various institutional, government, and business interests (e.g., school district, university, service providers, nonprofits, and funders). The complex interactions of cultural groups, social classes, and residents and nonresidents provide an important context for understanding the negotiation of both the positioning of residents from nondominant groups in relation to the powerful institutional and political entities involved, as well as complex positioning taking place within the community.

Gaining Research Access

After the initial connection with Julie, we set about to negotiate access to the project through a process Julie laid out. First, she sent Larson all her university research journals, course papers, and research projects almost immediately. She was committed to transparency as a research participant herself. Next she facilitated the three of us meeting her “team,” the inner circle of people who were helping her get the initiative up and running. It was clear to us this was a rite of passage and that if we didn’t pass muster with this group, we wouldn’t be able to go forward. Evidently, we passed because we were informed that our next step was to get permission from the CCL Design Team. We were asked to present a proposal to the team that included consent forms. The Design Team put together a smaller group (what they called a “teamlet”) to review the materials and asked to meet with us about the project.

When the day came to meet with the teamlet, all three of us were excited. We went together not knowing fully what to expect. We were not expecting the two full whiteboards of questions they had prepared for us. There were general questions about research details and consents, but in the end, it was about trust. They asked challenging and critically important questions about such issues as our knowledge of CCL schools and neighborhoods as well as the larger sociopolitical context of the region. They asked additional questions about how we as middle-class white researchers could ever hope to describe and understand communities of underserved people of color, about where we lived and where our children went to school, about our knowledge of and thoughts about institutional racism, and about power relations among researchers and CCL participants. Clearly, the community residents needed to know why they should trust a group of white researchers from the university to do research on their lives. Could they trust us not to portray them as deficient, in need of fixing? What would they get from this? After telling

Figure 1.
Organizational structure for participation in the planning process.

them who we were and about our research commitments, they said yes. We were simultaneously thrilled and somber. Even though all three of us were experienced ethnographic researchers, we kept looking at each other and saying “wow”; we had just been given a huge responsibility. They said they would trust us. We had to tell the story well and hold true to the trust they had just given us. This commitment to community residents has continued to challenge us as we begin the process of writing and publishing the research.

We began to attend meetings immediately. The three of us were the primary data gatherers throughout the project, even though our eventual team of doctoral students participated with us in the last two years of the project. Our research team totals 11. We are multidisciplinary, multiracial, multilingual, and male and female. Larson, Ares, and O'Connor are situated in literacy studies, social foundations, and cultural psychology, respectively. The team of doctoral students' research varies in fields from human development, counseling, and teaching and curriculum. Racially and culturally, we are white, African American, Puerto Rican, and deaf; three of us are bilingual (Spanish–English and ASL–English). One is a resident of the CCL area. This highly diverse team contributed rich analytic insights throughout the project.

The organizational structure of the CCL is presented in Figure 1. Over the three years of the project, we observed all meetings of the Design Team, Strategy Team meetings, working groups, and recorded meetings in community and institutional settings; gathered documents and electronic communications; and interviewed key participants (usu. several times) and many other participants who had varied perspectives on the problems, solutions, and processes involved in the Initiative. Our overarching research question was: *How is the attempted development and capacity building of individuals, groups, community(ies), and institutions mediated by the network of influences brought to bear in comprehensive community development efforts?*

Initiative Structure

The LCSD superintendent developed the initial concept for CCL along with three other men: a local politician, a social service agency director, and an attorney. The vision of CCL was to more effectively deliver integrated services that would improve the health, wellness, education, living conditions, and livelihoods of children and families in the targeted section of the city. This group turned over the operations for the initiative to an LCSD officer whom we call Julie. Julie formed a CCL “Design Team,” comprising about 15 people. She took leadership in bringing more community residents to the planning committee even though authentic resident participation was not an explicit goal at the beginning of the process. The Design Team eventually included residents in addition to social service providers, government staff, and district personnel, and was charged with marshalling resources and people to begin the first phases of the effort. Julie, with input from the Design Team, also engaged a community organizing consulting organization from a different city to guide and facilitate the CCL community planning process. Between January 2006 and February 2007, they provided meeting facilitation, community planning and capacity-building expertise, and training to participants in the CCL’s planning process.

For the bulk of its life, CCL was made up of three levels of organization (see Figure 1). The “Strategy Team” included about 120 people, and met monthly to develop the CCL “Community Plan,” a document containing 40 “multiyear objectives” and 186 “strategies” aimed at community transformation. From its start, members of the Strategy Team expressed a strong commitment to recruiting and supporting participation by residents of the CCL’s area of focus, to maximize resident control of the initiative. Over time, this became formalized in an agreement that 51 percent of Strategy Team members would be residents of the area (the definition of *resident* and the percentage of their participation was agreed to through lengthy negotiations aimed at ensuring resident control of the initiative). Members of the Strategy Team eventually spun off into eight interrelated “Work Teams” (see Figure 1) that concentrated on focus areas the Strategy Team identified as critical to the initiative—adult education, training, and jobs; community safety; early development and care of children; education, pre-K–12 and undergraduate; health and wellness; housing and community development; youth support; and supports for parents and guardians. The Design Team (later renamed the “Subcommittee” to emphasize its official subordinate position in relation to the Strategy Team; Figure 1 represents this changed positionality. Hereafter, this group will be referred to as “the Subcommittee”) supported the work of the Strategy Team, gathering all the input and documents created by the Strategy and Work Teams, compiling information and documents to give back to the teams, and guiding the process toward development of the final Community Plan. The Subcommittee served as a proxy for the CCL itself, given the entities the members represented, that is, residents, social service providers, city government, and district (see Table 2). They brought the historical development and current milieu of the area with them through their own personal and professional experiences in and with the communities involved. In the second year, control of the CCL was moved out of the city school district to an incorporated board, CCL, Inc., comprising residents, social service providers, nonprofit personnel, and local politicians. The Work Teams were modified to become Action Teams that sought to implement strategies identified in the Plan.

Methodological Strategies and Challenges

This is a long-term ethnography, which required that the methods used develop and evolve as the study proceeded. We began by using participant observation in various

Table 2.
Subcommittee Members

Name	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Organization
Anna R.	Asian	Female	Community Organization
Julie C.	White	Female	School District
William G.	African American	Male	Provider Organization
Sharice C	African American	Female	Resident
David H.	White	Male	Provider Organization
Alicia J.	African American	Female	Resident
Reginald J.	African American	Male	Provider Organization
Moses L.	African American	Male	Principal
Karen L.	White	Female	Provider Organization
Norma P.	Latina	Female	School District
Derrick P.	African American	Male	Mayor's office
Helena E.	Latina	Female	Provider Organization
Jesus S.	Latino	Male	Resident
Carina W.	Biracial (Puerto Rican, African American)	Female	Resident
Terrence W.	African American	Male	Resident
Dennis	African American	Male	Facilitator
Anika	Latina	Female	Facilitator

Table 3.
Data Corpus

Data Source	Approximate Corpus (Data collection ongoing)
Interviews	21; 54 files (audio and transcription, 3.3 GB)
Observations (video)	170 hours
Observations (field notes)	40 sets
Documents (including newspaper, meeting minutes, handouts, historical, plan drafts)	226 files

settings to get to know members of the community, schools, and other organizations. Concurrently, we gathered historical and demographic data and other documents to describe the targeted area of the city and the process of the CCL project. Data sources include the following: (1) audio- and videotaped interviews; (2) videotaped or audiotaped observations; (3) field notes taken during participant-observations; and (4) documents. Table 3 represents our approximate data corpus at the end of year two. Even though the formal CCL dissolved, we continue to work with community organizations that are trying to continue to transform their community.

The research team has used a variety of analytic methods in approaching these data; specific descriptions of the analytic approaches used in each analysis presented here are included in the individual articles. However, we did follow a general inductive process overall, using a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2006) to develop codes and to find themes. After general themes were identified, we pulled out topics for focused analysis; the articles in this special issue represent some of those focused analyses. Before turning to an overview of these articles, however, we present an overview of major themes that emerged, as well as some initial discussion of three main points: (1) how schools were addressed or not in the initiative; (2) that social, cultural, historical, and political relations between groups had significant impact on the community's ability to construct and implement the initiative; and (3) that race and language proved to be at the forefront of their conversations and slowed trust building, had material consequences for

the ways that race and language were included and excluded in documents, highlighted existing power relations, and limited the participation of community members.

Overarching Themes

At several points in the research, initiative leadership asked us for feedback about what we were seeing. It was our commitment at the beginning of the study to offer ongoing analytic insights into the process so as to inform the work, something we saw as a significant implication of this kind of community ethnography. Midway through the project, we identified themes as described below:

Deep commitment to resident involvement among leadership teams

Personal and professional identities backgrounded in planning process

They are clear that who they are impacts the impressions the community has of them and their work, including their jobs, their race/ethnicity, and class. Issues of race, culture, language, and position among the team are explicit, and named and discussed when conflict or concern arises

Not politics or business as usual; deep commitment to community transformation

Conflict seen as opportunity for growth

Social and cultural capital of team members explicitly used to further initiative goals

Concern about multiple initiative working in parallel silos that results in lack of communication or collaboration among them

Definition and positioning (repositioning) of control of process versus content in the development of community plan

Specific to analysis about schooling, our analysis of the Community Plan document—the culmination of a yearlong community-based process—indicated that, by and large, schools or schooling, curriculum or pedagogy were not addressed beyond word level mention. Literacy was most often referred to as something that needed attention, but definitions of what literacy was were left unexamined. Our analysis of the final plan revealed 14 references to literacy, but only as a noun (literacy summit, cultural literacy, literacy); there was one reference to literacy development as a skill-building activity. Similarly, the 108 references to school were all as nouns (city schools, low-performing schools, school district, school, and community). Finally, for mathematics and other disciplines, there was a deafening silence.

Implications for this relative silence about definitions and pedagogical practices were especially important in relation to the asset-based approach the initiative embraced. An extensive literature points out that literacy and numeracy practices that residents, families, youth, and children engage in to negotiate everyday life outside of school are numerous, varied, and rich (cf. Fisher 2003; Ito et al. 2010; Lankshear and Knobel 2010; Moje 2000; Street et al. 2005). These practices represent important resources that can support the learning and development of children, as well as many objectives of the CCL, including those other than pre-K–12 and undergraduate education. Furthermore, teachers were often left out as central actors in these efforts, which suggests a deficit perspective of teachers (Irvine and Larson 2007). Specifically, teachers were not allowed to participate as teachers on the Subcommittee or Strategy Team. If a teacher met the definition of resident, she or he could be a member of the Strategy Team as a resident, not as a teacher. Initial explanations of this decision focused on trying to make sure the initiative was not perceived as a school district project, but instead as a community project.

Resident suspicion and lack of trust in “fix them” reform efforts led to ongoing tensions between the “us” of residents and the “them” of the Subcommittee, even though the

Subcommittee had resident members. Defining and positioning residents and “strategically” controlling the process and content relationship as the plan developed were deeply connected to historical mistrust and ongoing struggles between racial and cultural groups in the area. These complex processes overshadowed the work of problematizing schools, curriculum, and pedagogy that we and some participants saw as essential to authentic and sustainable community transformation. Furthermore, as the potential for state funding emerged, ongoing revisions of the plan were focused on an external audience who wanted “measurable outcomes,” further delaying the potential transformation of the instantiated “grammar of schooling” (Tyack and Cuban 1995). Not questioning these now hegemonic assumptions about what counts as school, literacy, numeracy, and learning may have had adverse consequences on the stated goals of transformation and not doing “business as usual.”

The implications that follow from our analyses of the silence around schooling included a continuation of differential access to powerful discourses, practices and learning, and narrowed curricula and pedagogy (e.g., scripted lessons, “basics,” focus on drill and practice). This kind of reductionist curricula—so commonly found in most urban school-community revitalization efforts—continues to prevent schools and teachers from engaging students and families in rich, authentic learning and activity (Ares and Buendía 2006). Although there is good work in transforming schools (Meier 1995) and in transforming communities (Benson 2003), there is most often no connection among them. We worried that not engaging in opening the black box of schools would ensure that this innovative initiative would follow the path of failure residents feared. Although not the only cause of the initiative’s eventual collapse, it may have played a key part in that result.

As noted above, each of the articles reports on forays into the data corpus to find answers to particular questions. Although they do so by drawing on diverse theoretical frames, they share an overarching sociocultural theoretical framework. We present a discussion of central theoretical frameworks that help us understand the CCL and other such initiatives more broadly, followed by a brief summary of each article.

Aims and Structure of This Special Issue

This special issue will address the first two years of the CCL process, which encompassed the development of the CCL Community Plan and its transition to the implementation-planning phase. We have two main aims in assembling these articles. First, theoretically, we aim to understand the operation, maintenance, and potential overcoming of divisions within and across communities that share oppressive conditions. And second, methodologically, by looking at complex rather than simple social organizations we are able to draw out theoretically and practically important aspects of development and social change that sociocultural theory would take to be characteristic of all social activity, and explore how these sets of relations form and are formed by the context for schooling.

Although each article brings a particular lens to the analyses, we share a common general framework rooted in sociocultural theories of participation and communication in situated social activity. This interdisciplinary framework draws on multiple fields, including linguistic anthropology (Blommaert 2005; Duranti 1997; Wortham 2006), sociolinguistics (Bloome and Bailey 1992; Egan-Robertson and Bloome 1998; Green and Harker 1988), sociocultural psychology and activity theory (Gutiérrez 2008; Wertsch 1998), critical social theory (Delgado Bernal 2002; Foucault 1990; Yosso 2006) and social practice theories (de Certeau 1984; Gee 2004; Gonzáles and Moll 2002; Street 1995), and maintains that human action is situated at the intersection of multiple discourses or practices, each with its own characteristic forms of action and meaning making. This work shares a common focus on the crossing of boundaries between spaces that are

separated, whether physically or in socially significant ways. Similar emphases can be seen in recent work that focuses on “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al. 2005), on “third spaces” (Gutiérrez 2002, 2008; Gutiérrez et al. 1995), and more generally in work that views schools and other developmental contexts as “collective change agent[s] that [work] in partnership with local community organizations . . . workplaces,” and other institutions that are overtly involved in the futures of youth and communities more generally (Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström 2003; cf. O’Connor and Allen 2010; Penuel and O’Connor 2010). Thus, development of both individual and community involves situated and consequential negotiations of the tensions and conflicts that are occasioned by these boundary encounters.

The articles converge on several key points. First, there is a common focus on how, despite the explicit intentions of the organizers, there was a loss of the grassroots source of agency and resident voice over the course of the planning process. The move to change what was termed by participants “business as usual” has roots in earlier interactions, power relations, circulating models of race, ethnicity, language, and the like, which are traced out through the analyses. Second, a major shared focus across the articles is that participants are positioned in multiple ways, and that these multiple positionings lead to tensions. Third, there were clear tendencies to minimize differences of perspective and to dismiss divisions among participants, again counter to the explicit guiding ethos of the reform. Fourth, the explicit commitment to resident participants’ engagement and control of the process became undermined as the process was taken over by institutional structures and people in positions of power. A further point of convergence concerns the question of where schooling fits in this process. Although the analyses reported in these articles do not for the most part touch directly on schools, schooling is implicated in each article, in that an underlying motivation for the reform was to build capacity around schools to support trajectories toward future success for students and families. Given the lack of discussion around the nature and purpose of schooling, success was defined by achievement scores and graduation rates. The problems that CCL was attempting to address not only relate to schools, but also exist in the relations among entities involved in the lives of children and youth and their families; success or failure of such reforms has a direct bearing on the work that schools do, and the significance of school practices in the lives of students.

The Articles

“¿Y Nosotros, Qué?: Moving beyond the Margins in a Community Change Initiative” asks: (1) How were Spanish speakers positioned during the planning process of the CCL? and (2) How did particularities of the Latina/o experience influence power relations and group cohesion between African American and Latino participants within the CCL? Using CRT and LatCrit, Quiñones and colleagues argue that good intentions and targeted efforts combined with competing agendas, lack of understanding of particularities of Latina/os’ experiences and resources, and the pressure of providing a united front to the “powers that be” prevented the Latinas/os from acting as central participants in this community change initiative. Central findings highlight limited uses of the Spanish language and tension between forming a united front as a “collective Other” versus recognizing the cultural and linguistic differences within the CCL. This led to Latinas/os being positioned at the margins of the initiative, rather than participating as authentic, legitimate members of the effort. The initiative was, therefore, limited because this constructive process was lost to Spanish-speaking residents and their contributions were lost to the process as a whole. Despite Latina/os’ strategic resistance to ideologies that perpetuate subordination

of them as culturally or linguistically inferior, they were met with benevolent racism resulting from the intersectionality of race-ethnicity, language, and immigration as a source of oppression.

"Narrating Identities: Schools as Touchstones of Endemic Marginalization" asks, how are race and racialized identity discursively produced in cross-racial communication? Using CRT, Simmons and colleagues argue that schools are places of marginalization for people of color and through those experiences, people of color navigate conversations about race and racialized identity in different ways, which subsequently dictate their relationships to racial designations and positions in their speech with themselves and white participants as either echoers of racial marginalization or teachers. Central findings highlight the role of schools and schooling in inscribing marginalized roles for children of color. By applying the concept of voice from CRT, through the telling and retelling of each participant's initial experiences, race and racialized identity were operationalized in the lives of people of color as significant events that live on their bodies and were experienced personally. This operationalization was not present for the white participants that told stories about "race" or "racism"; whiteness was raceless in their stories as indicated by their inability to produce stories about things that happened to themselves. They were only able to produce stories about race and racism that occurred to people of color. In this process, the initiative was limited in that it did not use the meaningful conversation had about race as a teaching tool as the initiative progressed. There were no provisions set in the community plan that were designed to address how the plan would change the way race was operationalized in schools for the children for whom the community plan was being designed. Race in fact was strategically excluded from all written documents that were designed to be presented to key stakeholders for the project. In essence, race and racism, while living on through the experiential knowledge of people of color and positioned in this activity as a powerful teaching tool, were not later considered important factors to be considered for future groups of students that would attend the revitalized schools that the initiative was purporting to affect. The voices of people of color were not used as expert knowledge and did not drive the initiative's direction regarding the treatment of race and racism for whites and for people of color.

"Community Coauthoring: Whose Voice Remains?" investigates the use of the term *wordsmithing* during the drafting phase of the Community Plan. Using a social practice theory of literacy the authors ask: (1) How are texts collaboratively produced in community development work when coauthors come from multiple racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds as well as business and other work experiences? (2) How do social, cultural, historical, and political power relations among diverse groups impact their authorship roles in the construction of the written Community Plan? Larson and colleagues investigate how the role of external funders and the state Department of Education as audiences complicated the writing of the Community Plan, which was initially both drawn from and intended for members of the community. "Wordsmithing" became a discursive tool used by one participant in particular both to limit resident input and to shape the plan toward the expectations of external audiences. This participant, Julie, negotiated a complex role as intermediary between the external audiences' desire for accountability and the residents' desire to enact real and immediate change in their neighborhoods. Given that the goal of the initiative was to change the future for children and youth in the community, schooling is implicated in the conclusions of this study. The authors argue that the pressures faced by the Subcommittee as they created the Community Plan are the same pressures felt by schools and teachers in an atmosphere of increased educational standardization and discourses of accountability.

"Doing 'Business as Usual': Dynamics of Voice in Community Organizing Talk" explores tensions in the discourse of CCL participants with respect to an explicit, central,

and widely shared commitment of participants in the CCL process: a commitment to working against “business as usual.” This included outsiders to the community attempting to “fix” the community’s problems, with little recognition of community strengths and little attempt to involve residents in community development processes in any meaningful way. Against this, participants in the CCL were explicitly committed to privileging resident voice in the community planning process. Through an analysis of the microdynamics of interaction in one meeting of the Subcommittee we show how participants who were working together to accomplish these central aims of the CCL process also worked together at the very same time to undermine those aims. Specifically, O’Connor and colleagues show that, despite commitments to recognizing community “voice,” participants’ orientation to powerful “centering institutions” (Blommaert 2005) transformed and overrode community residents’ contributions, partly as a result of their discursive enactment of different social identities entailing different obligations and responsibilities. Through the bureaucratic work of producing a text, participants collaboratively worked to minimize the impact of potential critiques of the process by residents, thus realizing microinteractionally one of the recurring patterns of the CCL process.

Concluding Thoughts

We note a paradox when considering how local definitions of school, achievement, and curriculum were underspecified given the asset-based lens that identifies a community’s “funds of knowledge” (González et al. 1995) as important resources for schooling. The paradox is this: community members were involved in a process rich in practices needed to sustain a “living democracy” (Lappé 2006; Shannon 2007), that is, according to Lappé, “active listening and reading, creative and sensitive speaking and writing, negotiation, mediation, conflict use and resolution, and mentoring” (Shannon 2007:216). These “arts of democracy” can be taken to be essential practices for organizing efforts that can make a community sustainable. Nevertheless, while these practices could have been drawn on as part of the community’s funds of knowledge in order to transform schooling practices, this possibility was rarely considered.

Although many researchers have argued for the importance of transforming schooling practices, particularly in communities with populations that are predominantly comprised of members of nondominant racial and language groups, our work in this special issue shows that schooling, curriculum, and pedagogy were not closely examined and were largely not addressed in documents and discourse beyond such phrases as “increase achievement and graduation rates.” Such phrases had the effect of “black boxing” the processes involved, and therefore might potentially lead to a failure to address them in a transformational way. We challenge “business as usual” in the kinds of curricula and reforms adopted in urban community–school change initiatives to facilitate the process of opening the black box of school. We locate the black boxing of school in the context of the community organizing efforts as an unacknowledged site of powerful teaching and learning. Even though this was a rich process by which residents, together with powerful others, attempted to produce a sustainable community future, schooling practices were not touched (for various reasons, e.g., fossilized practices in the city school district, broader discourses of schooling, and standardization). Connecting community revitalization with school change requires that purposes of schooling and definitions of curriculum and achievement be directly linked to existing practices that sustain productive family and community activity, as well as the kinds of broader networks of practices in out-of-school contexts envisioned as central to the future of the revitalized community.

Up to now, our research has revealed that race and language proved to be at the forefront of conversations and slowed individual and institutional trust building, as documented in the following ways: (1) material consequences for the ways that race and language were included and excluded in documents, (2) evolving power dynamics among participants, and (3) inviting or unwelcoming the participation of community members. These claims also represent some of what we feel this ethnography can offer participants and researchers, for example, we can document this process and bring our analytic lenses to the data to inform the process itself and call attention to barriers and enablers that affected the initiative's success. Further, this work can support participants' reflexive practice currently and in the future as they consider the analyses and insights we provide. Finally, we can tell important stories that often do not get told, both of the process and of individuals' and groups' histories, contributions, and participation in constructing social futures for children, youth, and communities in urban areas. We continue to try to understand how ethnography can authentically and meaningfully contribute to such large-scale community initiatives. We find the responsibility to get the story right and to honor the trust the community has placed in us both daunting and exhilarating.

Notes

Acknowledgments. The authors of this article and other contributors to this special issue thank the members of the CCL Subcommittee and participants in the CCL as a whole for their generosity in granting extensive access to our research team throughout the planning process. We also thank Kris Gutiérrez for commentary on previous drafts of the articles, and Nancy Hornberger and the AEQ anonymous reviewers for their extensive and insightful reviews. The research on which the articles in this issue were based was supported by a grant from the Margaret Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development. Parts of this introduction were presented previously in papers at the American Educational Research Association (Ares et al. 2008; Ares et al. 2007).

1. Here and throughout the special issue, all names of peoples and places are pseudonyms.

2. These are pseudonyms, but have been chosen to capture the tone and emphases of the actual names. The change in names coincided with an attempt to move a major part of control of the initiative from the LCSD to the community.

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