

Cafecitos as a Conduit for Latinx Family Engagement Through Community Cultural Wealth

Katherine Espinoza
Trinity University- San Antonio

Melissa A. Garza
Texas A&M University- San Antonio

This critical ethnography presents findings from a two-year-long study of Latinx family engagement using cafecitos in a dual-language elementary school. Using ethnographic approaches to data collection and analysis, the researchers analyzed how to implement cafecito monthly meetings with parents that focused on engagement approaches and arts integration surrounding a community cultural wealth model. Findings revealed a correlation between positive family and student identity development because of the integration of community members as experts within the cafecitos. We share recommendations for using cafecitos as a tool for parental engagement to create a more inclusive, supportive, and culturally responsive environment that benefits students and their families.

Keywords: Latinx family engagement, cafecitos, community cultural wealth, identity

INTRODUCTION

My Welita lives with us at home. She likes to come to the cafecitos because we do fun art activities together. Today we made papel picado, I already know she (welita) is going to hang it on the refrigerator. When we get the books, I always look at the pictures and tell her what is happening in the story. These days are always fun for us.

—Layla, October 2023

Layla (all names used are pseudonyms) a first grader, shared the words written above with Katherine at a cafecito at Ball Elementary during October of 2023. The picture shows him and his welita (grandmother) working together to make a milagro. The cafecitos at his elementary school were supported by a partnership with a local university grant-funded arts education initiative. Clarke et al. (2016) describe how university-school partnerships should examine their intentions and positionality before engaging into school and university partnerships. Coming from a similar space, Katherine and Melissa have been involved in the school and community partnership at Ball Elementary. They both are intricately involved and dedicated to the school community. Educators continuously seek ways to build bridges between students' home and school to find meaningful connections to support their academic success (López et al., 2001). Often, schools struggle to find authentic ways to incorporate parental engagement into schooling experiences that are reflective of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Coady (2019) reminds us

that educators should “evolve from learning about families to learning with families and learning from families” (p.6).

In this article, we highlight how *cafecitos* are used as a culturally and linguistically sustaining approach to Latinx family engagement by exploring how these monthly meetings have provided an opportunity for building bridges between home and school for this school community when working with Latinx elementary school students. We explore how *cafecitos* can be used to honor and acknowledge the familial and cultural capital Latinx students and their families hold and can share with educational stakeholders. We outline our approach to hosting monthly *cafecitos*, tapping into community members as resources, providing examples of family projects, and describing how Latinx family voices are centered during these experiences. The following questions guided our inquiry:

1. How can schools utilize monthly *cafecitos* as a culturally responsive approach to family engagement?
2. How did students and families respond to the arts-integrated activities presented during the *cafecitos*?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Abuelita Epistemologies: An Avenue for Bridging School and Home

Research has begun to study grandparents in Latinx culture under the lens of ancestral knowledge. Sandoval et al. (2016) contend that ancestral knowledge provides a conceptual framework for decolonizing research that taps into the ways of knowing and being from our elders. They advocate for scholarship that utilizes ancestral knowledge to “push the boundaries of what is considered research in the academy, a place that historically denies the epistemological contributions to knowledge of non-dominant communities” (p. 29). Similarly, Gonzales (2015, 2019) centers learning from grandparents is highly valued in Latino culture through *abuelita* epistemologies. She advocates for utilizing *abuelita* epistemologies to counteract subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) for several reasons, including preserving culture and heritage, learning about wisdom and life experience, building strong familial bonds, language preservation, communication, and understanding cultural values. Learning from *abuelita* epistemologies in Latinx culture enriches individuals’ lives by instilling pride in their heritage, providing practical guidance, and fostering strong familial ties that endure across generations. In this study, we draw from *abuelita* epistemologies and find authentic ways of engaging Latinx families in schooling experiences.

Cafecitos and Family Engagement: Utilizing Arts Integration as a Stepping Stone

The English translation of *cafecito* is little coffee or coffee hour. Within research are moments devoted to groups of specific individuals where they collectively gather to discuss and talk about selected topics in a safe and comfortable space (Zavala, et al., 2021). *Cafecitos* are a form of Latinx family engagement. They are important because they allow each person to engage in an environment where they can connect and express themselves freely. These traditional informal discussions represent the histories held within the home and the binding of the cultures and traditions passed on to each generation (Auerbach, 2009; Ostering & Garza, 2004). Lopez & Calderón (2023) reflect on their past by examining their *cafecito* time with their mothers, grandmothers, and *tías*. As children, their *cafecito* time was important to them because those moments specially impacted their upbringing. As adults, they can create a space that allows them to share their collective experiences. The understanding and awareness of being included in a *cafecito* meant more to them than just drinking coffee, it was a time to express their concerns, a trust and bond was established within the *cafecito* group, and a lived experience where they felt included and important was established. Current research suggests the use of *cafecito* during times of emotional support and to collaborate within their community, where each participant has the opportunity to empower and express sentiment regarding their shared experiences (Zavala et al., 2021; Fettig, 2021). Although the direction of the current research focuses primarily on adults, this practice can be applied to Latinx family engagement and the importance of their participation in a school setting. Machado et al., (2017) explains that to truly engage Latinx families in authentic partnerships, and educators should move beyond pedagogies of puppetry and marginalization.

For example, their work highlights the need to reconceptualize Latinx family engagement that centers students' and families' knowledge and positions them as leaders in their students' education. "Understanding what communities and families need will allow parents to participate in schools more and open up the dialogue to allow parents to become fully engaged in school activities" (Machado et al., 2017, p. 33). As mentioned in (Brooks et al., 2019) described their back-to-school night family engagement *cafecito* event as a time for families to come together and build community within the school, "The event started with a *Cafecito* where families were encouraged to participate in a human bingo activity to meet and interact with staff and other families. (p. 24)". Kelty & Wakabayashi (2020), express the importance of family involvement, parent engagement, and participation in meetings to be informed and prepared for the events and happenings within the school and local community. In preparation for our *cafecito* events, we also ensure families can interact with other families as well as engage in conversation with the community member who is also in attendance (Gil, 2018; Zarate, 2007; Pérez et al., 2005; López et al., 2001). This exchange proves familial and linguistic capital Latinx students and their families possess (Bernal, 2002). The *cafecito* at this school is a monthly parent event, required by the district, where families learn about district information and initiatives and drink coffee and eat *pan dulce*. These are typically facilitated by the principal or the school's family liaison. Participation in the school's *cafecito* was not part of the original plan of the arts education initiative, however, we were invited to be part of these events, and in striving to be a culturally responsive program, we were motivated to support the school by increasing parent participation at *cafecitos*. For this research, the students explored using *cafecitos* as an approach to family engagement with emergent bilingual families by providing resources and success to positively impact the dual-language learner (Ortiz & Fránquiz, 2016).

Similarly, Urieta and Young (2024) found that, "Implementing a program that was built on culturally responsive practices and used critical culturally responsive evaluation processes has led to sharing the impact of *Juntos* beyond individual and family-level outcomes and advancing our goals of institutional transformation towards equity" (p.9). Our work mirrors this previous work as it is grounded in culturally responsive approaches to family engagement. For example, the school plans the first portion of the event by inviting a community speaker to share information and resources with the families. The second half of each *cafecito*, is facilitated by the arts education initiative and includes the children being excused from class for a short period so they can attend the *cafecito* and participate with their parents, sometimes grandparents or other family members, on an art-integrated experience.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK- COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH

These *cafecitos* were grounded in the Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) scholarship inspired by Yosso (2005), which identifies six forms of cultural capital each community possesses. CCW is a framework that acknowledges and merits marginalized communities' cultural and ethnic qualities. The six forms of capital are aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant. These unique forms of capital serve as a means for communities of color to legitimize, reclaim, and heal individuals, families, and their communities. These six forms of capital are often overlooked and undervalued, which leads to the neglect of the wealth of knowledge and skills Students of Color (SoC) learn within their homes and communities that reshape the pedagogical experience (Ortiz & Fránquiz, 2016, Yosso, 2005). For SoC, these experiences reflect the teachings and understandings of the epistemic knowledge they attain in their communities. This framework was designed to anchor students' familial knowledge, lived experiences, customs, and traditions within their communities and utilize them to achieve a successful and meaningful schooling experience (Yosso, 2005). These six forms of capital recognize the epistemic knowledge Students of Color acquire within their homes and bring into their classrooms. For SoC, these experiences reflect the teachings, understandings, and epistemic significance learned within these communities and play a significant role in maintaining goals and future achievements.

Through these *cafecito* events, students can employ various forms of capital through the activities presented to them (DeNicolo et al., 2015). Similar to their children, parents and family members engage in the activities as well. They can demonstrate these forms of capital through the familial teachings that were

instilled in them based on their experiences throughout their life (Barton et al., 2004). Parent and family engagement is critical to developing the students' linguistic and cultural identity (Lynch, 2018). CCW provides SoC with the opportunities that safeguard them from ever feeling as though they are denied access to or cannot communicate within their respective institutions (Acevedo & Solorzano, 2023). For this *cafecito* activity, we highlighted aspirational and familial capital. Aspirational capital denotes the potential to preserve one's visions and desired expectations, regardless if they are faced with obstacles or roadblocks along the way (Yosso, 2005). During the presentation, attendees were introduced to *Día de los Muertos* activities. They were asked to remember a loved one who impacted them or a memory they were willing to share with the group. The students participated in a demonstration of an activity where they completed *papel picado*, followed by our special guest's instruction on two dances. With these events, we focused on exploring how families could be exposed to and engaged in activities that specifically surround aspirational, familial, and cultural capital.

METHODS

This critical ethnography (Palmer & Caldas, 2015) extends from the work of a grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Palmer and Caldas (2015) conclude that "Critical ethnography continually works to bring marginalized communities to the center as agents of change, supporting them to be principal actors of their own experiences" (p.10). Funded in 2022, this project drew from a Community Cultural Wealth perspective (Yosso, 2005) to uplift the voices of Latinx students, families and their community through arts integration. In our third year in 2024, this study aligns with other critical ethnographic work as it aims to work with the Latinx community (Palmer & Caldas, 2015). This study shares the experiences of students and family members who attended monthly *cafecitos* at their local elementary school. Similar to previous ethnographic work, we present a move toward action for creating family engagement opportunities that are reflective of cultural sustaining practices and sensitivity.

CONTEXT

Ball Elementary School was selected to partner with the local university on the grant in the fall of 2021. When writing the grant, Katherine and the other faculty members involved in the grant writing conducted a needs assessment to examine the need for providing arts-integration to the school. Within this assessment, it was noted that if an arts-integrated approach was to be implemented, it also needed to reflect the linguistic and cultural background of the school, composed of predominantly Latinx students. Demographically, Ball Elementary serves 400 students from pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The adult participants in this study signed consent forms and volunteered to participate. The parents/guardians of the students in this study provided the signed consent and were also present for all of the activities used as part of the data collected.

Participants

The participants from this study included students, their family members, and a local community member who danced *baile folklórico* for a neighborhood community center in San Antonio. The students and their parents were selected based on their attendance and participation in the *cafecitos* and who had been a part of these throughout the two years (Creswell and Creswell 2017). Family members signed consent forms for themselves and their children. The other participant in this study is a woman who is 83 years old and who has danced *baile folklórico* as a child. She grew up in the Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Positionality

Katherine was a university professor and co-principal investigator for the grant. In her role, she focused on developing an integrated curriculum that reflects the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of Latinx students. Katherine was previously a dual language teacher in a Title 1 district. She grew up in a bilingual

and bicultural household and identifies as Latina. Being bilingual allowed her to engage with students and family members at Ball Elementary in Spanish and English.

Melissa is a first-generation college graduate. She was born and raised on the Westside of San Antonio in a predominantly Latinx community. She graduated with a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from a local university where she received an award for her thesis in 2023. Currently she works as an intern for this grant funded by the Department of Education. Her roles within the grant include event planning, family engagement, and collaborates on curriculum writing and presentations.

Data Sources

Critical ethnographic research methods were employed to address the research questions, including field notes and observations, family interviews, and artifact analysis (Carspecken 1996; Creswell and Creswell 2018; Fetterman 2019; Madison 2019; Miles and Huberman 1994). Monthly *cafecito* gatherings that occurred at Ball Elementary provided the location for where all forms of data were collected. Traditionally, in the Latinx *cafecitos* have been defined in research as small gatherings where individuals talk and drink coffee (Conde, 2021). At the *cafecitos* at Ball Elementary, students, their family members, school administrators, community members, and university professors come together to engage in a family arts activity funded by the grant. This article focuses on three specific *cafecitos* that occurred during the fall of 2023. Katherine and Melissa attended the *cafecito* events along with other grant-funded opportunities. They have built relationships with the students, family, and community members at Ball Elementary. During the *cafecitos*, Katherine and Melissa took field notes on their electronic devices of dialogue exchanges they heard between students and parents. During the *cafecitos*, families also completed arts-integrated activities. In this study, we use examples of the artistic representations students and their family members made to construct the altar and two dances that the students and their families learned.

Method of Analysis

Data sources collected in written form, including field notes and conversational exchanges, were coded using document analysis methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For data sources that included photographs and student work samples, we employed Saldaña's (2016) approach, which included the initial pre-coding of data into categories, leading us to identify emerging themes.

FINDINGS

During the fall of 2022, Ball Elementary chose to participate in a school-wide project for DDLM. The city hosts one of the largest DDLM celebrations downtown and Ball Elementary applied to construct a school community *ofrenda*. Their altar honored loved ones from their families and community. In preparation for the city event, the grant supported the construction of the *ofrenda* by providing support during *cafecitos*. In this study, we focus on three findings illustrated through the different forms of data collected. The first finding highlights the ancestral knowledge that family members shared. The second finding depicts how a community member is centered as a producer of knowledge, specifically drawing on *abuelita* epistemologies. Our final finding reveals how students, their families, and community members came together to share in the production of knowledge through learning dances to honor their loved ones.

Cafecitos and Family Memories

During August through October of 2023, the Ball Elementary *cafecito* focused on DDLM. The school's families and staff members chose the topic based on an interest survey from the year before. In the previous year, through the work of the grant, Ball Elementary students and family members participated in the building of an altar together. For this year, with the continued support of the university partnership, the school dedicated itself to constructing an altar to display at a local city-wide event, *Muertos Fest*. The exchange documented below was a field note taken during a *cafecito* in September of 2023 between Layla, a first-grade student, her mother, and Katherine at a *cafecito* where students, families, and community members created items for the altar.

Layla's mom: This entire project has meant so much to our family. We chose to honor my Dad, who passed away from COVID two years ago. It was so unexpected, and it was like we really didn't get to say a proper goodbye.

Layla: Can I put more blue glitter?

Layla's mom: I really think Welito would love all of the blue glitter; that was his favorite color. Welito was in the Army and when he was away he would always tell Wela that no matter where you are at, you are always looking at the same blue sky. Ms., all of these activities are bringing us together. Even my mom helped us make the little star and other decorations for the altar.

Layla: And I get to learn how to dance too, like a little skeleton with the abuelitas.

Layla's mom: Before we started doing these art activities, these cafecitos were more like meetings. We would just sit and listen. But now, we actually get to do things together. Our whole family knows about what we are doing here at the cafecitos for Día de los Muertos.

The field note written by Katherine describes a conversation that occurred during the cafecito between Layla and her mother. In this exchange, Layla's mother tells her a story about her grandfather who passed away a few years ago. Together, they are pictured at the cafecito working on a papel picado calavera that was then used in decorating the altar. In this particular cafecito, Layla learned ancestral knowledge through abuelita/o epistemologies from her mother when she shared a story about Layla's grandfather (Sandoval & Lagunas, 2016). Additionally, Layla's mother describes how the DDLM cafecito activities provided a space for not only honoring a loved one but healing from such an immense loss. At the beginning of the field note, she reflects on losing her father during the pandemic and not truly having the opportunity to give a "proper goodbye". By engaging the entire school community in the construction of an altar, students and families could center their familial knowledge and honor their loved ones. Layla's mother describes the impact of this approach to cafecitos by sharing that before the arts-integrated cafecitos, the meetings previously felt like information sessions. She shared, "Before we started doing these art activities, these cafecitos were more like meetings. We would just sit and listen." Finally, Layla's mother describes how this new approach to cafecitos has engaged her entire family. In addition to the students and family members at Ball Elementary, a group of women known as "las abuelitas" who dance in the community attend the cafecitos. For the September cafecito, they helped students create Catrina dolls that would be used to create the altar.

FIGURE 1
DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS LEARNING



Cafecitos and Sharing Familial Capital

At the following cafecito in October, Gloria, one of the abuelitas, was invited to be a keynote speaker where she shared her knowledge of DDLM and lifetime experiences dancing. She told her story of growing up dancing and explained that she has been dancing since she was three years old and was raised in McAllen, TX. She has danced with many dance groups and performed at Carnegie Hall in New York City. She always aspired to become a famous dancer, but her parents wished her to attend college and begin her career. When sharing this story at the cafecito, she connected this back to Yosso's (2005) work and aspirational capital, encouraging students to dream big. Over the years she stayed active in the dance community and continues dancing at eighty-three. Gloria was excited to play an integral role in the October cafecito and lead the families in a DDLM lesson and dance activity. The conversation below was a field note taken at the October 2023 cafecito at Ball Elementary between Gloria and the students at the cafecito taken by Melissa:

Gloria: Mommy and Daddy loved that I had a passion for dance, but they also wanted the best for their children, so they told me to always do well in school and earn a college degree. After I graduated from college, I was a classroom teacher. They made sure I had the best instructors and even let me go to New York to earn more experience. I am happy my love for dancing has led me to teach at the cafecito. I think this is the perfect time for children to learn this art form and to understand the importance of our culture. DDLM has always been an important celebration and holiday for me and my family. I am honored to share some of my stories along with explaining symbols and words that are important for the families to remember.

Diego: Do you think we can grow up to be famous dancers like you?

Gloria: I think we all have things that we are really good at. I know you all are working on aspirations. To me that is like a wish, and if you work hard you can make your aspirations or wishes come true.

Through this dialogue exchange, Gloria is positioned as a community member with a wealth of knowledge and because of that, she will be able to impart the information needed to conduct a successful and nurturing cafecito. Like many elders, she has a story to tell and is dedicated to taking part in her role as the provider of ancestral knowledge during the October cafecito. Her classroom teaching experience allowed her to create connections with the students and allow parents to be a part of the experiences she shared with them. She is exciting and has been alive to see the many changes in the world during her lifetime. At this cafecito, Gloria goes on to use pictures to tell students and families about her experiences with dancing, recorded in the field note below:

Gloria: Boys and girls, today I am going to share four pictures with you of me when I was Child dancing. (Gloria shows first picture of her with hand on head).

Jose: Wow, Miss! You look really young there!

Gloria: Yes, mijito I was only about 3 or 4 years old. Even at that age I knew I wanted to dance. My parents did not have a lot of money, so they would take me to dance classes at our church.

Jose: That's kind of like us, we don't take dance classes at other studios, but we do here at school.

Gloria: Exactly! Look at me in the second picture. Here I'm a little bit older and I am performing at my school dance recital.

Alyssa: Your dresses almost look like the ones you still wear today!

Gloria: Yes, because ballet folkloriko dresses tell history of the dance so they don't really change. And you're right, this does look like the dress we wear when we dance Chiapanecas.

After this exchange in dialogue, Gloria goes on to tell students more about her experiences with dancing. She ends by telling them her experience about dancing at Carnegie Hall in the 1950s and connects this back to her form of aspirational capital. In the example with Jose, Gloria draws a connection between how students at Ball Elementary may need more financial capital to understand professional dance classes.

Jose demonstrates how, through this grant he has been allowed to learn ballet folklórico from instructors within the community like Gloria. Alyssa draws on her memory of seeing Gloria and the other abuelitas dance Chiapanecas the year before and compares the similarities between the dresses. Gloria uses this opportunity to share the significance of the baile folklórico dresses and how many are specific to each song.

FIGURE 2
GLORIA AS A CHILD



Gloria at age 3



Gloria at age 10

The following is a field note collected by Melissa during Gloria's discussion on DDLM with the families.

Gloria: How many of you are familiar with the Día de los Muertos celebration?

Alyssa's Mom: I buy flowers for my abuelita and tías and me and my family take them to the cemetery and lay them on their graves. I want my kids to learn what it means to honor those who have passed away.

Alyssa: We have an altar in my house and my mom lets me put food for my grandpa. I didn't know him because he died before I was born. I am happy when she lets me light a candle for him too, and then we pray.

Gloria: Those are all beautiful ways to remember your loved ones. There are specific vocabulary words I'd like to teach you all that have to do with DDLM. Some of you already mentioned these words when you shared the ways you celebrate the dead. *El cementerio* is the cemetery, a *tumba* is a grave, *vela* or *candelerio* is a candle or candlestick, the flowers you take to the cemetery are called marigolds, but in the Nahuatl language we say

cempasúchil, *calavera de azucar* is a sugar skull, and an *ofrenda* is the altar where we display pictures, candles, and food for our loved ones.

Jaime: What about papel picado? We made that at a cafecito once.

Gloria: Yes, that is one of the decorations we make in our culture. When my husband was alive we would sit at the table and make papel picado with our children. We would dance and be together and celebrate as a family to honor our parents. My husband passed away twelve years ago, so now me and my children celebrate their dad's life and I continue to celebrate my parents too. My children and I still dance together and will always share these DDLM rituals together by remembering their father and other family members and friends who have passed on.

The field note collected by Melissa explores Gloria's dance experience and the ancestral knowledge she shared about DDLM. The information she shared with the families made her an asset at the cafecito that day. The students and parents could engage in dialogue, which was the grant's goal once the cafecito event became a culturally sustaining and arts-integrated experience. The pictures above of Gloria throughout the years demonstrate her evolution as a dancer and the impact she can make at the cafecito by sharing the knowledge she acquired through these lived experiences. The cafecito offers a safe space for families to communicate with the facilitators. It was no longer a monthly meeting, it was a time for parents, grandparents, and caregivers to contribute to their student's schooling experience actively.

Dancing and Highlighting Linguistic Capital

At this cafecito, Gloria introduced the group to two songs and each student who attended was allowed to perform the dances she taught them in front of a live audience at the local university. The songs and background information she informed the students of was in preparation for the DDLM event a few weeks away. For some, it was the first time being introduced to this occasion and for others, they were thrilled to speak of the memories and moments they had of a loved one who passed on, along with the cultural importance of the celebration. The students were familiar with *Tumbas* and *Calaverita de Azucar* because Gloria explained their importance because they were also the titles of the songs she would be instructing them how to dance and linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005). The dances are forms of rituals used to celebrate and remember the loved ones who have passed on.

The following field note collected is a conversation recorded by Melissa during Gloria and the students' learning the two dances.

Beto: Ms. Gloria, what does *tumbas* mean again?

Gloria: Mijito, *tumbas* means graves. Remember, the graves are at the cemetery. The song is saying there are graves everywhere because they are in the cemetery and that is where we go when we visit our loved ones. Also remember to put your hands together over your head when you are dancing to *tumbas*. To dance is to show we are celebrating the lives they once lived with us.

Gloria: The next song we will dance together is *Calaverita de Azucar*. It translates to little sugar skull. The skull is a symbol made to represent those who have gone before us, those who have passed away. During DDLM we make sugar skulls and we can either eat them or use them to decorate the *ofrenda* or altar.

Maria: The sugar skull dance is fun and is making me happy because I don't like to be sad. My Grandma used to take care of me after school, but she was sick and now I

go to after school care. She died a few months ago and lived with me and my mom. I miss her so much. It feels like we are alone.

Gloria: Mijita, this is what Día de los Muertos is, remember? We all continue to live on without our loved ones, but our memories and love will never go away. Celebrating life is a gift we are able to share with one another in our culture. You said the dance made you happy, so now that will be a memory you have of a time you felt happy.

FIGURE 3 PRACTICING DANCING AND PERFORMANCE



Gloria at the October cafecito



Students and ladies dancing

Melissa's field note exhibits the students' vulnerability during their dance lesson at the cafecito. Maria draws on her sadness and connects the feeling with the song Gloria is teaching her to dance. Maria explains how listening and dancing to the song makes her happy, because she is mourning the loss of her grandma and can then connect this back to her own familial capital. This example illustrates how centering a community member as a producer of knowledge benefits students with Latinx backgrounds. Maria's example also centers abuelita epistemologies within schools as it gives her the opportunity to reflect on the pinnacle role that her grandmother played in her family as her care taker. Gloria was able to engage with each student and deliver her teachings in a sensitive manner while providing the support and trust each student needed. She demonstrated and shared her ways of knowing through dance by connecting the movements to the DDLM celebration, along with the symbols represented within our culture adeptly and compassionately. The pictures above are of the students at the cafecito and the local university, where they could showcase their talents after learning the two songs Gloria introduced them to.

Furthermore, each student understood their culture and learned the movements for two new dances. They are now carriers of the new knowledge Gloria has shared with them, and it is our hope they will one day pass this to future generations as well. The example of the two dances also centers the linguistic capital these students are learning in English and Spanish as it highlights the academic vocabulary associated with the DDLM because it connects the songs to movements. For example, for the word *tumbas*, students position their hands over their heads in a praying manner to reflect the significance of the word. This provides a visual queue for the students to remember the academic vocabulary they learned.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As Gonzales (2015) explains, "Abuelita epistemologies push us to re-envision new curricular itineraries. They push us to go beyond our current content areas or educational activities, to go beyond the

discourse of what can be assessed, graded, quantified, or commodified (p.53). In sharing their experiences, Layla, her mother, and Gloria exemplify how we can serve to learn from our abuelitas/os. Their voices push us to re-envision parental engagement in a way sensitive to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse Latinx students, by engaging students and families in *cafecitos* that center around the production of knowledge that comes from parents and community members. Layla's mother asserted herself in the process of knowledge production and honored the ancestral knowledge of her family by using her voice to share the story of her father (Yosso, 2005). Gloria also centers herself as a community member who can contribute to school knowledge production by sharing her experiences with dance throughout her life. In the telling of her story, students are also exposed to the different forms of capital she possesses including familial through the sharing of her own family history, aspirational with her experiences dancing professionally, and linguistically when she shared vocabulary terms for students in Spanish and English (Yosso, 2005). This study encourages us to shift our mindsets from traditional notions of family engagement, where family members are presented with information to an approach that centers families as knowledge producers. This shift is especially necessary in education for Latinx students and their families as it decenters monolithic representations of family engagement that mirror white- middle-class families. The participants in this study utilize their voices and stories to showcase their own epistemological experiences that are not usually explored or honored in traditional notions of schooling.

In this study, we sought to better understand approaches to family engagement for Latinx students through using *cafecitos* in elementary school. We found that students, their families, and community members possess a wealth of knowledge that schools could utilize to create authentic moments of family engagement. This study revealed how bringing together schools and community members provides a positive space for the creation of knowledge that reflects the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of Latinx students. Importantly, this study notes the commitment needed to cultivate these authentic opportunities. We echo Gonzales' (2015), who reminds us that "abuelita epistemologies cannot be confined to a school building or defined by a cookie-cutter curriculum or taught in a 1-hr lesson plan" (p.80). We agree and extend that when considering family engagement opportunities for Latinx students, schools must commit to fostering relationships that are not built during a singular event or activity. Edwards (2022) reminds us, "Our grandmothers continue to remind us that teaching includes nurturing ourselves, our families, and our communities no matter the circumstances. Those who work with preparing educators and educational leaders must be given opportunities within their preparation coursework to learn with families and about the families they will service". Through this study, we hope that elementary school stakeholders can envision new ways to embrace parental involvement initiatives that are attuned to their community's distinct cultural and linguistic needs. Developing these reciprocal relationships takes time and is embedded in a humanizing approach to family engagement, especially with working with Latinx families. Moreover, we offer an approach to social justice education that derives from a community cultural wealth perspective. We see them as interconnected concepts that emphasize recognizing and valuing the diverse strengths and resources present in communities, particularly marginalized ones. When working with community cultural wealth, social justice education seeks to address inequalities and empower individuals by leveraging the unique cultural assets they bring.

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