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Home Literacy Initiatives of Middle School Families During the 2020 Quarantine Period: Transformation in Education?

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Abstract

The coronavirus pandemic changed everything almost overnight for students and their families. The purpose of this qualitative case study, thus, was to investigate the views of families about the student change in education for their middle school children, particularly literacy practices, during the pandemic. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) theoretical framework of cultural capital, coupled with economic status, funds of knowledge, and crisis management, we conducted interviews with four parents. Using the in vivo coding data analysis method, we identified some key preliminary findings: all-day happy hour, the strange disconnection between teachers and parents, and soft and hard approaches to school-home literacy. Participants revealed very distinctive dispositions to make this "school-home" education work on their own. These parental dispositions and new meaning-making from their children's education developed into what we referred to as *parentagogy*, as they determined for themselves the skills they would need to use to help their children succeed in their new roles as parent and educators. This study confirms the importance of parental value in education.

Keywords: home literacy, parents, quarantine

The COVID-19s pandemic struck the United States in the spring of 2020, forcing public and private education settings to switch to remote online instruction. This sudden shift caused transitional difficulties for students, their families, and educators. Many school systems with both limited resources and preparation for this technological change were stretched to the brink of capacity. Strauss (2020) opined, "...schools are having a hard enough time delivering education that has yet to be reconceived with the pandemic raging in many parts of the country." Families of school-aged children and adolescents were similarly burdened, as the pandemic resulted in lost jobs for parents and closed schools for children (Einhorn, 2020). Everyone's lives were affected in myriad ways. To capture the perspectives of this event from the lived experiences of families, this study explored the impact(s) this unanticipated transition to remote online learning had on students and their families. Educational practices shifted dramatically

during the quarantine and ensuing pandemic. Thus, understanding the view of families in education, particularly views and practices of the ways students and families navigated remote online learning, is critical to study as schools consider similar approaches to distance instruction beyond this crisis moment in history. Because middle level education is pivotal to a successful high school experience (Schaefer et al., 2016), we chose to study parents of middle school aged children. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the lived experiences of families about education for their middle school children during the COVID-19 pandemic. The central research question guiding this study was: How did the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic affect families' views about education for their middle school children?

Theoretical Framework

In attempting to answer our research question, this paper examined specific ways that families engaged with their children in areas of communication with schools, new home literacy practices, and what parents perceive has become the new normal for schooling. To this end, this paper uses Bourdieu's (1984) theoretical framework of cultural capital, along with socioeconomic status, funds of knowledge, and crisis management.

The effects of home literacy upon school success have been well-documented (Heath, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Bhattacharya (2010) conducted an extensive literature review, which investigated home literacy practices of students from families with a low socioeconomic status (SES). In multiple studies, Bhattacharya (2010) discovered that parents wanted to be involved in their students' education regardless of their low SES and ensuing lack of "in-home literacy experiences" (Bhattacharya, 2010, p. 124). In attempting to answer the question posed in this article, "How can we help families overcome the hard realities that are impeding their children's educational progress?" (Bhattacharya, 2010, p. 126), Bhattacharya (2010) suggested a stronger relationship between the cultures of home and school literacy practices was needed and offered recommendations for both teachers and parents to improve student literacy.

According to the Cultural Learning Alliance (2019), and Lee and Bowen (2006), Bourdieu (1984) split cultural capital into three parts: *personal*, in terms of attitude and knowledge; *objects*, in terms of the tangible and habitus; and *institutions*, in terms of the broader picture and agency. Bourdieu (1984) referred to habitus as "a system of dispositions" (p. 2), and Lee and Bowen (2006) further defined habitus "as a characteristic (or a set of characteristics) pertaining to an individual" (p. 197). For families of middle school aged children in this study, cultural capital will be described as the views and principles in relation to the school institution each family has toward their child(ren)'s educational practices, and how those views and principles have changed, if at all, during the pandemic. Habitus will be designated as the resources students and families used before and during the coronavirus pandemic in their students' education and in their home literacy practices.

Bourdieu (1984) argued that the more cultural capital a family already has, the more resources that family has at their disposal (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Therefore, families with a higher socioeconomic status ("Education and Socioeconomic Status," 2020) have more advantages than those of a lower socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status, or SES, is defined by the social class to which a person belongs, with social class determined by the levels of income and education of adults in a home. A lower SES correlates to less wealth in the home, less materials with which students can learn, and increasing rates of attrition for students. Despite

less opportunities for students of a lower SES than their higher counterparts, research has shown that school can and often does make a difference in improving the chances for a student of a lower SES to succeed ("Education and Socioeconomic Status," 2020).

Funds of knowledge, another important factor of cultural capital, is present in all families notwithstanding their SES. According to González et al. (2005), "the concept of *funds of knowledge* … is based on a premise: People are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences give them that knowledge" (pp. ix-x). Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (2005) further clarified funds of knowledge as "the strategic and cultural resources … that households contain" (p. 47). These resources can, and should be, transferred to schools for usage in the classroom for the success of all students at all times. According to Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg, the difference between home and school causes connections amongst all stakeholders to be an absolute need (p. 48). Relationships between teachers and families are of the utmost importance in determining student success, success which aids in determining cultural capital for families in education. González et al. (2005) recommended using this prior knowledge "to use that as a basis for pushing their learning" (p. 8).

However, in times of crisis, the opportunity to gain/earn cultural capital for students and their families has the distinct possibility of becoming disrupted. Per the Institute for Public Relations (2007), a crisis is "a significant threat to operations that can have negative consequences if not handled properly." The COVID-19 pandemic would certainly be considered a crisis to the United States and the world alike, especially with the sudden switch to at-home, remote learning resulting from the closure of schools. This change in the level of familiarity with educational practices and consistency will determine the benefits, or lack thereof, for literacy development during the coronavirus pandemic. This change may also reveal a potential disparity in educational practices for students, especially with differences in levels of accessibility to instruction and availability of needed technologies.

The importance of home literacy practices, along with cultural capital and funds of knowledge, cannot be understated in education, regardless of SES and a global crisis. Sénéchal et al. (2017) cited Teale and Sulzby (1988) in defining home literacy as "experiences in which children can observe, explore, and learn about print" (p. 385). Examples of home literacy, aside from only reading and writing, include "…the frequency of shared reading [and] parental interactions and responsiveness" (Curry et al., 2016, p. 69). We found considerable research over home literacy in general, but very little inclusive of middle school aged children (Schaefer et al., 2016).

However, what we did find fit in well with our topic. For example, to assess levels of success based upon racial demographics, parental levels of education, parental levels of involvement, and socioeconomic status, Lee and Bowen (2006) asked 415 elementary school students to complete the Elementary Success School Profile. The authors discovered noteworthy differences in student success, particularly "significantly higher academic achievement among students not living in poverty, European American students, and students with more educated parents" (p. 209). This discovery aids Bourdieu's (1984) argument of the impact of cultural capital upon families, particularly SES.

Wang (2008), like Lee and Bowen (2006), determined that cultural capital has a major impact in determining student success. Wang discovered that six families highly valued education for their children, and they considered their funds of knowledge as an important factor

for their students' success despite their move to a new country, immersion in a new culture, and their lower levels of involvement in school, especially in relationships with teachers. It was interesting to point out that these international parents, all six Chinese in Wang's study, thought that the U.S.'s education was relatively easy in comparison with their homeland country, so they believed their children would succeed if they helped them at home as much as they could.

Ryan et al. (2010) studied Latino and White parents of elementary-aged children and found these parents considered funds of knowledge and involvement in children's education as the most important factor to increase their students' success in school. Gillanders et al. (2012) held focus groups with Latina and African American mothers of low SES to determine these mothers' educational goals for their children in hopes of bettering the relationship between home and school to increase student success, goals determined by SES and funds of knowledge.

Method

We conducted a qualitative case study defined by Baxter and Jack (2008) as "an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources" (p. 544). The bounded system of our case study was the school-home literacy experience of parents with middle school aged children in this unprecedented pandemic. Because this case was focused on a particular phenomenon, this was an instrumental case (Stake, 1995). We utilized a snowball sampling strategy where our participants referred us to other participants. We completed four interviews guided by a protocol of 27 questions. We held one to two interviews with each participant that lasted 50 to 90 minutes each, along with follow-up emails for clarification (Seidman, 2013). Interview questions were focused on the role of the parent/guardian in their child(ren)'s education at home, interactions with teachers, and how views of education have changed since the pandemic began. All interviews were conducted via a virtual meeting (Please see their profiles in Table 1) and were transcribed for further analysis. All names are pseudonyms. This interview protocol is located at the end of this document as Appendix A.

Table 1
Case Study Participants

Name	Age	Occupation	SES	Grade Level of Student	Region of the USA
Mary	Mid-40s	University Staff	Upper-Middle Class	7th	Southwest
April	Mid-40s	University Instructor	Upper-Middle Class	8th	Southwest
Tiffany	Mid-30s	University Instructor	Middle Class	8th	East Coast
Lucia	Early-40s	University Staff	Upper-Middle Class	6th	Southwest

Description of Participants

Ultimately, we had four participants who agreed to be a part of this study. Three of our four participants live in the Southwest region of the United States, and our fourth participant lives on the East Coast. Tiffany, our East Coast participant, is a university instructor and mother of two children. According to the income chart provided by Snider (2020), Tiffany and her family fall into the "middle class" category. Tiffany has a master's degree in English with the aim of eventually pursuing a Ph.D.

Mary and Lucia are both staff members at a university in the Southwest, and their families both fall into the "upper-middle class" category (Snider, 2020). Mary holds a Ph. D., as does April, a university instructor, and her family. April and her family are also a part of the "upper-middle class" category (Snider, 2020).

Data Analysis

We collected and analyzed data through a divergent, triangulated, and confirmatory process, consisting of four phases with a summer interlude. In Phase I, we began our research at the end of May 2020. This imposed many challenges due to the sudden shutdown of society that had remanded school to 100% online education. Plus, it was not easy to recruit our research participants, particularly middle school parents, even by spreading the word to the best of our ability. Many parents turned down our invitation after receiving the IRB document and the interview protocol via email, due to their nervousness over sharing family life, so we were only able to recruit four participants during the spring of 2020. Three of our participants were local to us in the Southwest United States, and one resided on the East Coast of the United States. We considered this recruitment *divergent* because of the fact that we could learn about two different regions in the US (Southwest and East Coast).

In Phase II, we analyzed four interview data during the summer of 2020 to identify general patterns within participants and between the two regions. In Phase III, upon completion of data analysis of the three cases, we analyzed a fourth case and engaged in "data triangulation [different time, space, and person]" (Denzin, 1978, p. 295) in terms of the dis/continuity between the Spring and Fall experiences with the ongoing pandemic: (1) triangulate the two participants in the spring with the new participant in the fall in terms of person and space, all of three are in the Southwest region of the United States, and (2) revisit the participant in the East Coast of the United States to make a time triangulation. And lastly, Phase IV was a confirmatory and reflective process in which we conducted final analysis and interpretation of the view of middle school parents on the turbulent context of education during the late Spring and Fall 2020 timeframe. (Please see Figure 1).
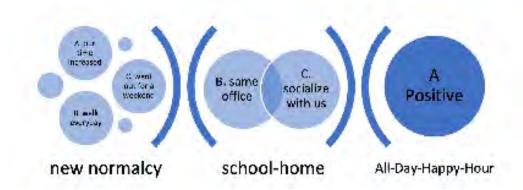
Figure 1

A Divergent, Triangulated, and Confirmatory Data Collection/Analysis Process

As soon as each virtual interview conducted in Phase I was completed, we transcribed all four of the interviews for further analysis. The researcher who conducted the interview kept notes or memos relative to key expressions she or he learned during the interview and shared them with the rest of the research team later. In doing so, we were able to generate initial impressions of what our participants experienced about changes to their children's education. In Phase 2, which was the summer of 2020, we conducted the comprehensive data analysis using Saldaña's (2013) in vivo coding method for these four participants. According to Manning (2017), "in vivo coding is a form of qualitative data analysis that places emphasis on the actual spoken words of participants" (p. 1). By "prioritiz[ing] and honor[ing] the participant's voice" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 106), we identified direct quotes from participants that became our codes, which later became our categories of patterns and themes. The following is an example of how themes were generated using the in vivo coding process in this study.

Table 2

Generating Themes

To elaborate, Mary's ("our time increased"), April's ("walk everyday"), and Tiffany's ("went out for a weekend") initial divergent in vivo codes had in common that what they

experienced at the beginning of the Spring pandemic was *new normalcy* that needed to be accepted as it was. These initial codes were merged into April's (same office) and Tiffany's (socialize with us) broad, in vivo codes where home serves as a newly emerging learning and socialization place in the pandemic. Metaphorically, these in vivo codes are convergent with a newly constructed image of home school because parents were unsure about what role they have to play. For this reason, we coined a new term, *school home*, as opposed to a typical meaning of "homeschool," to highlight this emerging parental role and responsibility for their children at home. Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007) cited Basham (2001) in describing homeschool as instruction taking place inside the student's place of residence (p. 264). Lastly, we brought this school home disposition to Mary's strong exclamation ("That's been a positive!") that is a sign of parental satisfaction with working with their children at home. "A positive" capitalizes the outcome of a new phenomenon where parents and their children were working side by side at home under the everyday-like-Spring-break-mode of the 2020 pandemic, which we thematized as "All-Day-Happy Hour!" By doing the same analysis methods, we developed two other themes: "The Strange Disconnection Between Teachers and Parents" and "Soft and Hard Approaches to School-Home Literacy."

Findings

> How did the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic affect families' views about education for their middle school children?

This section presents three themes that emerged from the data collected throughout the year of 2020: (1) all-day-happy hour, (2) the strange disconnection between teachers and parents, and (3) soft and hard approaches to school-home literacy. We also present a new term, *parent + pedagogy = parentagogy*, to indicate parental dispositions and new meaning-making from their children's education.

All-Day-Happy Hour

All four families expressed very positive experiences with their children's education during the pandemic. Mary's family lives in the Southwest, and they decided to make the most out of the pandemic. The mother of a seventh-grade daughter, Mary described her family as adhering to stay-at-home orders, and she was focused upon her only daughter's mental health due to the lack of face-to-face interactions with her teachers and her friends. Her daughter was "just not her same outgoing self." As a result, this mother set out to make her home as more of a fun place to be for her daughter, including the addition of a trampoline and a pool in the builders' plans for their new home. Mary listed riding bikes, movie days, and board games as among their fun family activities during the time of the stay-at-home orders. Exercise was another family pastime:

> … we don't love to exercise, but we try to be active. And so I feel like we were a little healthier that way. Um, because we went on so many more walks and for my sanity, I had to exercise every day. We didn't get to go to the gym, but we had a little machine and then we would run and such. So [my daughter] joined us quite a few times on those as well.

Mary also mentioned an atypical pastime for a middle-school-aged daughter: teaching her how to drive a car. This mother enjoyed the extra time with her daughter, especially at lunchtime, and noted the lack of time to commute to work made this possible.

Lucia, the mother of a sixth-grade daughter whose family also lives in the Southwest, also saw her daughter making the most of the pandemic, including the extra free time her daughter had to ride four wheelers around their neighborhood with her friends. Her daughter also enjoyed the extra time with friends while completing homework together:

> … they would release assignments and her and her little friends would literally stay up all that Saturday and get all their, most of their homework done. And she might have a little bit on Sunday or Monday, like the whole week free…

April, a mother of an eighth-grade son whose family also lives in the Southwest, had the same mentality as Mary and Lucia. She held her son to a strict schedule for school, but she made time for other things she considered to be equally important as classwork, including evening exercise and discussion of current events. April used this time to also communicate with her son in discovering what mattered most to him. In conversing with her son, April stated:

> … we talk about things together in which we have a shared activity. So that's really been official to me that we, as a parent of the teenager, knowing that I can have a conversation with him, I can engage with him. That's a good thing for me.

Tiffany, the mother of an eighth-grade daughter whose family lives on the East Coast, was also very happy with the increased familial interactions with her daughter at home during the pandemic. As a result, Tiffany would agree that good events are bound to follow bad events, as engaging and conversing with her daughter was just as important to her as it was for April with her son. As did April, Tiffany referred to teenagers and their typical decrease in engagement with families, so she saw more family engagement, which included walks and games. She stated about her daughter that,

> She's more willing to help around the house. We went away for a weekend two weeks ago, just the family and, you know, she was just a little bit more happy to play games with us and to socialize with us. Yeah, so that was kind of nice.

Tiffany also mentioned her daughter having "... more freedom to explore things that are outside of what the school deems…" necessary, including an exploration of different genres of books and short story writing, while stressing and maintaining the importance of her classes. She was grateful her daughter had more time to further look into her interests, and she alluded to her hope that this would become more frequent in future educational practices resulting from the pandemic.

The Strange Disconnection Between Teachers and Parents

April was especially unhappy with remote learning at her son's school during the pandemic, as she was concerned about the quality of education her son received. Internet issues played a factor in the lack of instructional organization, and she referred to more than one instance where her son's classes were cancelled right before they were supposed to start on Zoom. One teacher also emailed April to tell her that her son had failed to submit an assignment, when she knew he had turned in his work, and this teacher actually told her son "not to lie" and to "shut up" about the so-called missing assignment. As a fellow educator, April fully understood the pressures that teachers faced, especially when virtual learning first began in March 2020, but

she did not appreciate a teacher speaking to her son in that way. April spoke of her displeasure with her son's school, stating that "they could have done a better job, especially with communicating with the students and family."

In the meantime, Tiffany stated about her daughter that "she could have maybe learned better with a little bit more interactive ... lesson plan … being an educator myself was kind of looking at some missed opportunities ... that I felt like could have been handled differently." As a fellow educator, and unlike April, Tiffany was reticent to criticize another teacher, but she stated that in some of her daughter's classes that lessons seemed to come to a halt, specifically noting her daughter's drama class. She also referred to technology as a possible factor in these "missed opportunities," questioning a level of comfort that teachers and students may or may not have had pre-pandemic.

Tiffany went on to make it clear that "overall, my husband and I have been very happy with our daughter's school," despite no contact from all of her daughter's teachers except one or two. She noted that her daughter had sent emails to teachers on behalf of her mother as the teachers were not responding to her own emails. Thankfully, they did answer student emails, so Tiffany was comforted by the communication of teachers with her daughter despite her annoyance at a lack of response to emails from her own account as a parent. Despite this annoyance, she remained reluctant to criticize, as "my interactions with teachers have always been positive."

Mary was also concerned about the quality of assignments given to her daughter during the quarantine. She indicated that "I don't know that [my daughter] was probably challenged or given any kind of corrective feedback" during this time. She believed that teachers were only grading for completion, especially given her daughter's record of always turning in assignments on time. She stated that before the pandemic, her daughter's work was graded on correction, whereas during the pandemic, she believed that her daughter's work was graded on completion. Mary did not blame teachers for this as teachers were given an increase in duties during the pandemic, and she hoped for a full return to face-to face instruction for teachers and students in the fall. Like Tiffany, she has always thought positively of teachers, stating that:

> I've always said like parents are really the first teachers...but then I just felt like our role [as parents] was to support what happened in the school system and then ever to fill in any cracks because we're all human and no teacher is perfect and nor do I expect them to be...thankfully though she's had great teachers...

Mary was pleased with the school's utilization of the iPads pre-pandemic and during the pandemic, and she stated that "technology was wonderful to get the content to [my daughter], but not having the interaction with the teacher is where I think she missed out." She and her daughter did have a weekly check-in with a teacher in a Zoom meeting, but Mary did not mention any other interactions that neither she nor her daughter had with her teachers.

Lucia shared Mary's feelings towards teachers, as "...last year was like survival mode for teachers. Like what can we throw at them?" She was grateful for her daughter's school district calling the usage of technology with iPads and Google Classroom prior to the pandemic "a blessing," as she stated that students had been given instruction in technology prior to the pandemic. Lucia felt the only real change for her daughter was completing schoolwork at home rather than at school, thanks to technology.

Unlike the other mothers, Lucia referred to multiple specific examples of the constant communication from both her daughter's teachers and the school principal during the pandemic. Her daughter's principal sent weekly newsletters to parents, and the principal also constantly asked parents and guardians about any technology needs they might have at home with their children. Teachers frequently utilized messages from the Remind app and emails from the Skyward online grading system to stay in touch with parents and guardians, particularly about grades. Overall, Lucia was content with education during the pandemic, as she stated "I mean nothing against teaching, nothing against education at all. It is what it is."

Soft and Hard Approaches to School-Home Literacy

The following is a snapshot of our third theme, "soft and hard approaches to school-home literacy." Mary, April, Tiffany, and Lucia each varied in their approaches to school-home literacy during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic with their children. Mary took a "soft" approach with her daughter and stated that reading is not something her daughter particularly enjoys; she admitted that reading with her daughter is "not an area we're the strongest."

Before the pandemic, Mary felt like she rarely had to ask her daughter about grades and homework. She mentioned that her daughter never once forgot to bring her lunch to school pre-pandemic. During the pandemic, and while at home, Mary spoke of her relief about her daughter's excellent academic habits, which gives mixed messages that are important for this research. It is likely that this pandemic has given this mother the opportunity to know more about her daughter's academic standing and habits. Conversely, this incident implies there might be a lack of communication about a student's learning progress between school and home, especially between parents and children. In other words, the daily events of school were largely invisible to parents pre-pandemic. While speaking of her daughter's enjoyment of writing, Mary jokingly shared an episode that she encountered when offering a helping hand to her daughter. Simply, her daughter refused to allow her mother to check her essays for admission to student organizations at school: "She wants it to be HER work and HER writing," Mary shouted, half proud and half baffled. Mary reflected on this episode, her daughter's love of independence and writing in school, while also determining ways to change her daughter's overall dislike of reading:

> I just need to probably be more, I guess, proactive, but [I] also don't want to push her away … I have the resources of how to find good things to read. I just need to make it more of a priority. Probably. There's not really concerns … I just don't want to push her away from it either, 'cause you don't want to be that. I don't want to make reading sound like it's not fun. Like, look, my mom's almost having to make me do it. It isn't fun, like I've been saying.

The quarantine has created a school-home environment where children are exposed to parents like Mary as their new teachers, and parents are thrown into an unexpected educator's role, particularly in the context of home literacy with their own children. As mentioned previously and seen here as well, such a new role that parents are naturally forced to take may produce a predicament in terms of the extent to which they need to get involved. This predicament was indirect, and thus soft, because Mary had not set a structured system like the one in the school building, but she was flexible and approached her daughter when necessary. For Mary, this predicament was instrumental in forming part of her *parentagogy*.

In contrast, April's family took a practical approach to the pandemic, and she emphatically stated about the pandemic and ensuing quarantine that "it is what it is … we can make the most out of it." She and her son worked side by side in their home office, engaging with conversations about all sorts of things all day long. April has enjoyed helping her son by "brainstorm[ing] together" with his assignments, but she had to reprimand him about his usage of the social media gaming platform Discord when he should have been giving his full attention to his classes on Zoom. Her son was still expected to work just as hard on schoolwork and additional educational activities as he did before the pandemic, a "harder" approach to home literacy than the one Mary took with her daughter. Supplemental activities included those found on the Khan Academy and the ReadingtheWorld.org websites, and piano and violin lessons. April and her son also conversed about their differing tastes in music each evening, as another way to connect.

"A business-as-usual approach" was the focus of April's family despite the changes to education during the coronavirus pandemic. April told her son "that becoming mediocre is not an option," particularly in his education and despite the disruptions in his education during the pandemic. April also expressed a desire for her son to read and write more, hence the extra supplementary activities. In particular, she used the novel *The Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954) to teach her son about the complexities of male relationships, because he was having issues with some boys in his group of friends. April realized that boys do not share their feelings with one another the same way girls typically do, so she thought the novel would be a good guide for him.

Unlike Mary and April, Tiffany admitted that she felt "overwhelmed" as a mother and as a college instructor during the pandemic. As a college instructor, she paid close attention to how online instruction unfolded. She was very pleased to say that:

> She brings me a homework assignment she wrote and say, can you look this over for me? It has been kind of neat to see her, curiosity spark like, oh, maybe push her mom in a new way! [laughter] She says, oh, my mom actually does know something!

This mother thought of this new cozy interaction with her daughter for the academic purpose as "a double-edged sword" in which so many pros and cons were intertwined in her daughter's academic, socioemotional, and personal lives during this pandemic. This urgent concern, however, strategically forced Tiffany to create her home where her daughter is given more opportunities to "explore all kinds of things" needed for her to grow as "a well-rounded person." Prior to the pandemic, her husband took charge of checking with their daughter on assignments and grades.

During the pandemic, Tiffany took charge and helped her daughter in planning her assignments. She clarified that before the pandemic she and her husband wanted to give their daughter more "independence," but she felt that opportunity was taken away with the stay-at-home orders. Tiffany also referenced the need to aid her daughter with schoolwork given her daughter's occasional difficulty with assignments. She stated, "I would have to sit with her and almost re-explain the directions, and she counted herself as very fortunate to be able to help her daughter in this way given her profession. The way Tiffany approached her daughter's home literacy, her *parentagogy*, was to wait at first, and, when the moment came, to provide a comprehensive learning package for her daughter's continued growth. This strategy used by Tiffany was neither soft nor hard but was just as mindful and active to help her daughter improve her learning habits as April and Mary with their children.

Lastly, Lucia explained a previous need for more involvement in her daughter's education than the other three mothers, as her daughter is dyslexic. She explained her own background in special education, and she detailed the frustration of her daughter's elementary years, spent in obtaining a diagnosis. Thanks to the diagnosis found "finally … at the end of fourth grade" and accompanying aid, her daughter was ready to begin her seventh-grade year enrolled in all advanced classes. However, like Mary's daughter, Lucia's daughter does not enjoy reading, and often mother and daughter "have to get the same book … we make each other read."

Lucia also gave her daughter a schedule at home during lockdown for the pandemic, as she and her friends would get the entirety of their school work done for the week on the weekends, and Lucia did not want her daughter to "lay around and be on [her] phone all day." That schedule included something for her daughter to read, and Lucia frequently asked her daughter how school was going for her. Expectations for grades remained high during the pandemic, especially with Lucia's daughter's school district allowing for a "reteach and retake" if a student scored below a 70 on an assignment. Her daughter did have to take advantage of this policy once, for a quiz on punctuation. However, overall, Lucia made it clear that she does not care about grades as much as she does about her daughter's growth, and she mentioned state testing as one area to view growth. She wholeheartedly emphasized that her daughter puts "a lot of pressure on herself to do her best." This meant a lot to Lucia because self-motivation and continuous efforts are all she was looking for in her daughter's growth. Lucia's role in school-home literacy was to step back and support only if necessary.

Discussion

parentagogy (parent + pedagogy) Our new term, *parentagogy*, indicates parental dispositions and new meaning-making from their children's education. In this study, parents initially decided on different approaches that they would take to their children's education, and they determined for themselves the skills they would need and use to help their children succeed in their new roles as parent and educator. These decisions and skills formed the basis for new knowledge and became part of each family's own *personal* cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984).

Bourdieu's (1984) cultural capital theory was apparent in the everyday lives of these four chosen families since spring break of 2020. As with their middle-class status, these mothers of middle-school aged children have been capable of maintaining a stable system of dispositions where they are doing their normal duties for work at their new home-offices. None of these families have experienced any financial hardship, and they have come to rethink a new view of education for their children under the circumstance of the everyday-is-like-a-spring-break-mode at home. The way in which these four career women have redefined their view of education is one of a stronger and positive sense of togetherness while feeling alone and isolated from school and society. What they have done throughout the year for their children at home has been extraordinarily focused on the continuous mental and academic growth of their children (Lee & Brown, 2006). In the remainder of this section, we discuss what a new set of their new normalcy is like for these middle-class four families during this pandemic under Bourdieu's (1984) cultural capital theory, along with funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 2005) and crisis management (Institute for Public Relations, 2007).

Firstly, overall, families noted the quarantine was strangely a blessing. All of these middle-class homes experienced a minimum sense of crisis (the Institute for Public Relations,

2007), and instead all appeared to take this crisis as a new opportunity to explore something fun as well as foster a sense of family togetherness, a "we-can-do-more-at-home every day" disposition from Bourdieu (1984). This personal and collective emotional, cognitive, behavioral capital intended to help their children feel safe and comfortable at home was overwhelmingly explicit in that these parents knew they could handle this unprecedented crisis without any problem. Mary noted that she never worried for both her daughter's education and their family's safety, as her daughter is "self-driven and self-regulated," and they are all "rule followers" who "follow[ed] the rules and stay[ed] pretty secluded" during the lockdown.

Such personal capital that these parents have newly established at home has played a key role in increasing the level of trust with, and support from, their children. The newly established cultural capital where formal education is suddenly situated at home, rather than at school, made the mothers serve as educational translators who must fill in the gap between school learning expectations and home knowledge. From Bourdieu's (1984) habitus concept, these parents have seen themselves as authentic educators on a divine mission that they are entitled to in this pandemic crisis. The key disposition that middle-class parents have developed in this study is that they were happier and more excited about this unexpected transition of education than their children were. Mary stated, "I love it...I feel like our time together has increased." April asserted, "I don't know how much he's enjoying [this]...[activities together are] my attempt to continue and establish some kind of new things that I can share with [my son]."

The favorable or detrimental circumstances that students face in middle school are "...likely to predict different levels of emotional and behavioral adjustment" (Way et al., 2007, p. 196). All of the parents of this study as emerging educators felt blessed with the opportunity to spend a great deal of time with their middle-school aged children who are still behaving well. What they took for granted about their new role and active interaction with their children is precious capital that would not be enjoyed otherwise, particularly for those who have a low SES. As with unlimited family time at home, the responsibility they take for becoming emerging educators was enjoyable, tangible, and sustainable. Tiffany explained, "...the benefit is that for [my daughter] specifically is that she's home with me and that I have the literacy component."

Time availability and flexible time adjustment resulted in new traits, like a more positive mindset, more consistent support for daily schoolwork, or higher learning capacities, all of which are related to the funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) for these middle-class families with middle school-aged children. These funds of knowledge are exponentially increasing as these parents become more competent in putting the education of their children under their control, including a new plethora of life experiences inside and out of their stable home environments. The quarantine as a blessing may sound awkward but has an educational value that needs to be known to understand what happened during the first year of the pandemic.

Secondly, two of the mothers were instructors at the college level, both of whose view of education during this pandemic was distinctively related to the theory of Bourdieu (1984) exclusively adopted in Wang's study (2008). Both parents attempted to help their children not only secure the level of feeling comfortable at home, but also increase the ownership of learning. April, who comes from an Asian cultural background, spent time with her child 24/7 and directly assisted him in getting his schoolwork done. Although she did not think of school curriculum as easy as Wang's (2008) participants, she was trying to provide her son with as many useful tools and resources as she could. The difference is that Wang's (2008) participants were not college instructors, but they overly generalized in seeing American education as easy, compared to their

homeland's educational practices. But, our participant was more concrete and pragmatic in bringing broader resources or schemes to her child's learning, which is also regarded as a unique habitus his mother created that transmitted to school and beyond. By doing so, she hoped her son felt more responsible for engaging in quality learning that goes beyond the limit of virtual learning during this pandemic.

In the meantime, Tiffany's patience and hands-off approach to her child was drastically different from Wang's (2008) study. The difference is that her daughter gradually acknowledged her mother's social and professional status and became pleasantly motivated to work with her mother. This new habitus her daughter discovered has very naturally been perpetuating into her mindset, identity, and competence that accelerated herself to turn to be an active learner at home. Tiffany noted, "She's home. So she sees me teaching. She hears me teaching. She sees me tutoring students along Zoom, of course. She has developed more interest and I've seen her ask more questions." With 24/7 accessibility and availability in mind, both families redeveloped an explicit link from home to school in terms of the strong possibility of success in the future (Ryan et al. 2010).

Lastly, this emerging mindset of feeling alone but together at home is one of the striking aspects of the four participants in this study. Creative and authentic literacy activities that emerged during this quarantine in the spring of 2020 and the early fall of 2020 were idealistic in some ways, in which teachers would have wished to hold classes in their busy and crowded classrooms, (e.g., more reading times, active listening, prolonged and ongoing dialogues, more engagement about various topics, and direct support for inquiry projects or writing assignments, which amount to "the frequency of shared reading [and] parental interactions and responsiveness" (Curry et al., 2016, p. 69). These are tangible and objectified forms of capital that parents naturally came up with as they self-committed to reinforcing their values and beliefs for their children on a daily basis. Aloneness became a utopian sense of literacy development for middle-class families through togetherness during this pandemic. That said, such utopian home literacy practices identified in this study are also characterized as uncertain. What these families did at home through a new normalcy of togetherness is a continuous construction of what to do next without really knowing where they are specifically headed. The utopian home literacy curriculum these families engaged in is not fixed, but emerging, or a continuous shift from a "we can do more at home" disposition toward a "we will do better at home" one.

Limitations and Implications

Everyone worldwide was completely caught off-guard by both the strength of the virus and its rapid spread, both of which abruptly led to a shutdown of schools and extended stay-at-home orders. Middle school is a time of dramatic social, cognitive, and physical change for children, a sometimes tumultuous transition from elementary/dependent to high school/independent learners/habitus in schooling, and one that was further disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic. Middle school parents in this research, producing different kinds of new cultural capitals, seemed to take advantage of this new normalcy for/with their still-upper-elementary-like-children. Newfound agency due to cultural capital was delivered to parents and was newly exercised at home under the circumstance of the transformation of education, resulting in parents emerging as the most important stakeholder in their middle school aged children's education.

Limitations for this study were present. We realize that the sample size for this study could potentially be a limitation, as we only had four mothers participate in this study. As all

these mothers are in the education field, they have a knowledge that other middle-class parents may not have to be those educational translators. These mothers are not worried about their children falling behind because they believe in their abilities to provide the support their children need. We question if the same thing could be said to most mothers who are in different fields. Another limitation in our study is that these four mothers successfully transitioned from working at work to working at home. They were able to have time for this increased interaction with their children, so we question what happened to those parents who still had to go to work or lost their jobs.

As education continues to change as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, one implication for this study is our recommendation that schools become more involved with the parents and guardians during stay-at-home orders. Three of the four mothers in this study noted a decrease or a lack of communication from the schools, but as previously stated, these mothers all work within the field of education and were not concerned with their children's continued educational growth. Perhaps if schools had communicated with parents and guardians more, an increase in cultural capital would be present in students of all ages regardless of SES.

Cultural capital increased for these middle-class and upper-middle-class parents during the pandemic, but we wonder about families of both a lower and a higher SES, and those students with parents who still had to work outside of the home. We asked ourselves whether the students in these families accelerated their literacy development or not through the added parental attention to their reading and writing practices. We have also reflected upon the main question of what truly changed during the pandemic and what did not change as an avenue for further research.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Introduction: Thank you, for taking the time to meet with me. I would like your permission to record this interview. If not, I will take notes. I also want to let you know that your privacy is important to me. If you do not feel comfortable answering any questions, you do not have to answer, and please feel free to stop this interview at any time. Are we ready to begin?

 I do not plan to take up the full hour as I know how precious your time is. Please let me know if you need a break from the questions and please take your time answering these questions. If you need me to explain any of the questions further, I am happy to do so.

 I would like to ask you just a couple of brief questions if you don't mind.

1. What type of school district do(es) your child(ren) attend?
        Rural   Suburban   Urban
2. What is your and your spouse's level of education?
        High School   College   Master   Doctoral
3. What is your job(s) and combined annual income?
        Low, Low-Middle, Middle, Upper Middle

Alright, now I have some introductory questions.
4. What emotions are you feeling as a result of the pandemic?
 5. Tell me about your child before the pandemic (e.g., personality traits, interests, attitude toward learning in school, extracurricular activities, friends).
 6. Tell me about your child now in the midst of the pandemic.

 Now I have four questions about reading, writing, and technology integration before and after this pandemic.
7. Tell me about writing, reading, and technology integration in your child's lessons before the pandemic.

8. Tell me about writing, reading, and technology integration in your child's lessons in the midst of the pandemic.

9. What specific activities were you doing with your child(ren) to help with reading and writing before the pandemic began?

10. What specific activities are you doing now with your child(ren) to help with reading and writing since the pandemic began?

Now I have just a few questions about your typical day during the pandemic.

1) Tell me what you have learned about your child as a learner since moving to online instruction.

2) Would you describe what your family's typical working day is like at home (Mon – Fri)?

3) Would you describe what your family's typical day is like at home (Sat – Sun)?

4) How often do you all do anything centered around cultural expectation or family's value and belief?

5) How much are you enjoying this extra involvement in your child(ren)'s education?

6) What benefits do you feel that are you gaining from this extra involvement in your child(ren)'s home literacy?

Now I have a few questions about your collaboration with your child(ren)'s school before and during the pandemic.

1) Tell me how you viewed your role in your child's education before the pandemic.

2) Tell me about your interactions with your child's teachers before the pandemic.

3) Tell me how you view your role in your child's education in the midst of the pandemic.

4) Tell me about your interactions with your child's teachers in the midst of the pandemic.

5) Tell me how, if at all, your views of your child's education have changed since moving to online instruction.

Finally, I have a few questions about your interactions with your engagement with your child(ren).

1) Tell me about how you interacted with your child over their school assignments before the pandemic.

2) Tell me about how you are interacting with your child over their school assignments in the midst of the pandemic. 3) Tell me how, if at all, your goals for your child as a reader, writer, learner have changed since moving to online instruction.

4) What concern do you have with your child(ren)'s socio-emotional development and how to specifically engage with them? Give me a couple of examples.

5) Drawing on your cultural background (family's value and belief), what concern(s) do you have with your child(ren) about how to specifically engage with them? Give me a couple of examples.

6) What do you hope your child's schooling experiences will look like when their school returns to face-to-face instruction?

Closing statement: Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and answering these questions. I hope you have a great rest of your week!