

Imagined Community of Education: Voices from Refugees and Immigrants

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Introduction

- ▶ Growing number of foreign-born residents in the U.S.
- ▶ Anti-immigrant sentiment
- ▶ The purpose of this study is to share a project that engaged immigrants refugees, and educators in exploring their perspectives on education in the United States.
- ▶ It is part of a larger emergent, qualitative study sponsored by the Coalition for Diverse Language Communities (CDLC).



Theoretical Framework

▶ Imagined Community of Education

- ▶ “a community of the imagination – a desired community that offers possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future” (Norton, 2010, p. 355).

▶ Community Cultural Wealth

- ▶ “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro of oppression” (Yosso, 2005, p.77)
- ▶ Aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital



Methods – Research Questions

- ▶ Original research question focused on learning about the educational experiences of immigrant and refugee community members in their home countries and in the United States
- ▶ Research Questions in this Study:
 - ▶ (1) What are the cultural wealth assets immigrant and refugee families bring into education?
 - ▶ (2) What supports and challenges are identified by immigrant and refugee families based on their perceived reality of education?



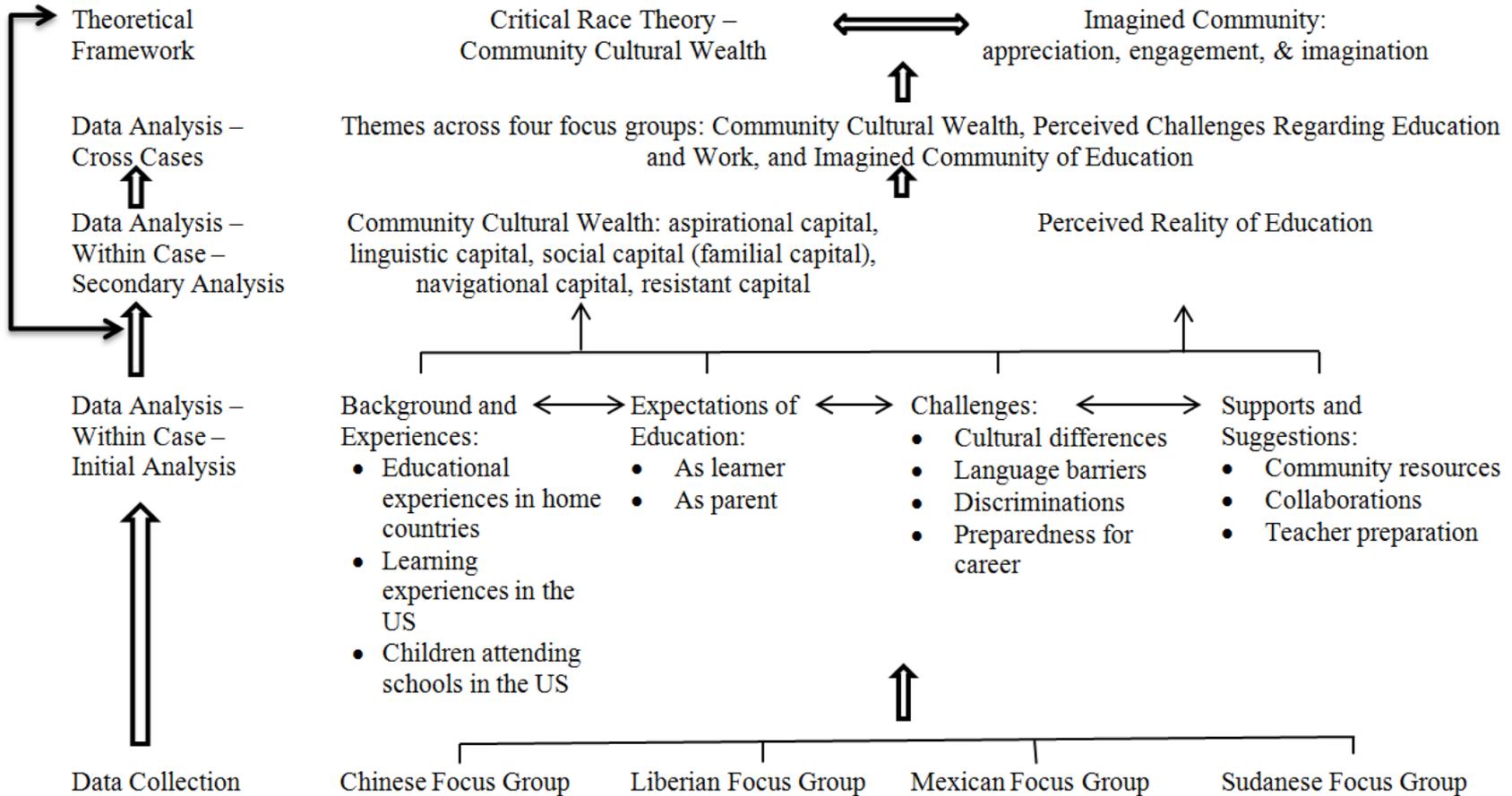
Methods – Participants and Data Collection

- ▶ Four separate focus groups were conducted with people from China (N=4), Liberia (N=10), Mexico (N=3), and Sudan (N=5) who have been living and working in our region for between five and 27 years.
 - ▶ They ranged in age from 16 to 53 years; the average age was 33.
 - ▶ Except for Liberian participants, all but two participants reported speaking both English and their native language at home.
 - ▶ The participants who were parents reported having children between the ages of two and 26 attending local schools, or who had already completed their K-12 education.
 - ▶ All participants were educated in their home country, with some participants in the Chinese and Liberian groups also receiving education in U.S. schools.
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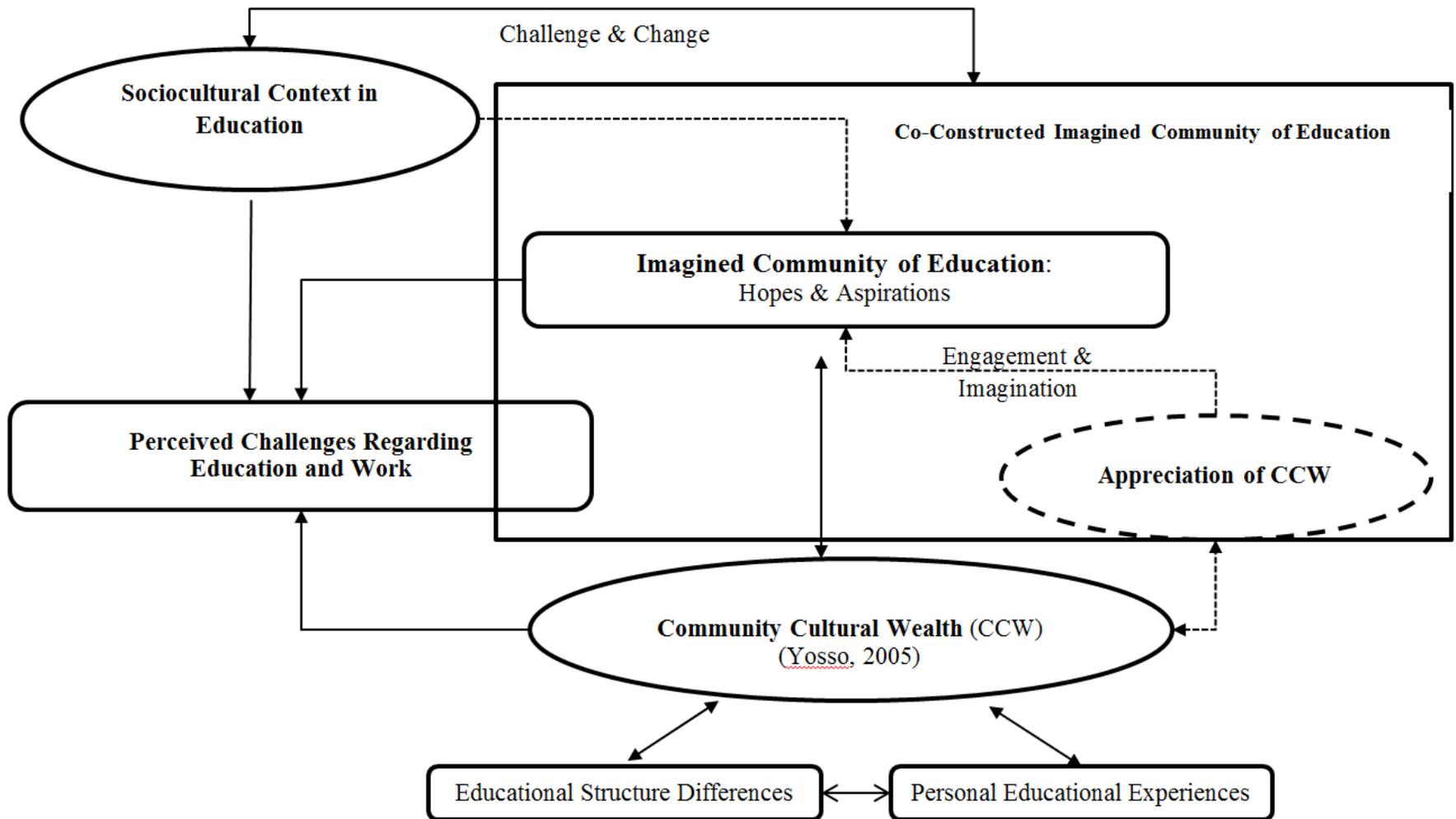


Methods – Data Analysis

Co-Constructed Imagined Community of Education that Celebrates Community Cultural Wealth



Findings – Overview



Findings – Community Cultural Wealth

▶ Aspirational Capital –

- ▶ “99.99% of parents came here whichever grades they are, they want their kids in school **to get a better education**, just as much as you can afford, as good school as you can go.”
(Chinese Focus Group)

▶ Social Capital –

- ▶ “**We have a center** for the kids to come do their homework, help them, teach them computer literacy. **We have programs** for the parents and we have Congolese, Montagnard and Vietnamese families, so we have all these things for them **to get together** to understand with Americans and know the different cultures.” (Sudanese Focus Group)



Findings – Community Cultural Wealth

▶ Navigation Capital –

- ▶ And I'm always aware of everything at school. **I go and talk a lot to the teacher.** ...I think that as we went through very difficult situation in the past, children have to go through them as well. ...I always tell her [daughter] that there are always things that could happen to her here or anywhere else and if something happens to her at school, she should look for help at school or she should tell me because **I always have told her that she should have a goal and that she should always fight to reach her goals** that if she has some problems on the way of reaching her goals she should try to go over them and go on to reach her goals. (Mexican Focus Group)



Findings – Community Cultural Wealth

▶ Linguistic Capital –

- ▶ I try my best to **use Chinese at home**. Before six years old, my son couldn't speak Chinese. I know for kids, seven years is the language window. **So I switch my time to bring my child to China**. After one week, miracle, he could speak some words and after one month, he can express himself. Then I came back here, I sent him to the Chinese School. I am so **proud** of him that he can speak Chinese and can write some now. (Chinese Focus Group)
- ▶ And he is also trying to read in Spanish by himself, **nobody's pushing him, he wants to keep his Spanish as well**. And he always says, "I don't, I don't want to be um, want to be dumb. I want to learn both languages, Spanish and English." Yes, I'm very **proud** of him because he really does his best... (Mexican Focus Group)



Findings – Community Cultural Wealth

▶ Resistant Capital –

- ▶ When you come from Africa, **they always put you in an ESL class.** And the thing about it is, because ESL is not bad, but this is a frustrating thing because you know ... we Liberians, **we have an accent and we've got a way of pronunciation [that] might be different,** ... It makes it very difficult because our kids who speak English are sitting there and these are the kids who are struggling. And so they're saying, oh my goodness. This is a joke. You know, this is a joke. So I mean..., yes obviously if you put them in the regular class they're going to have some difficult time because you know they are not up to, you know, the standard with these other kids, so it takes some time before they can catch up. So you've got those kids that are in that gap, that really don't, are **not receiving the help they need to receive and they get frustrated. The teachers get frustrated. The students get frustrated. The parents get frustrated.** (Liberian Focus Group)



Findings – Perceived Challenges

▶ Cultural Transitions

- ▶ ...especially the major issue is dress code, like, for example, when I was here, like, in our Islamic dress code, you don't wear shorts for females, for example. And I remember, like it would be blazing hot outside, and I'm in long sleeves and pants and everybody is looking at me like, "Aren't you hot? It's hot outside. Now why are you wearing this?" (Sudanese Focus Group)

▶ Language and Accents

- ▶ Let me say that I came here, I went to, I did robot, I'm a robot technician... and after I got my certificate, I work in my area, but I will not promote it. Why? Because our accent. That's a big problem right there. ...they just don't give us the respect because of our accent. They don't want to make us boss. They know we do a good job but they don't want to make us boss. Why? Because of our accent. (Liberian Focus Group)
- ▶ Sometimes, the assumption is, that this person doesn't speak that fluent English, definitely is not going to do a good job. (Sudanese Focus Group)

▶ Expectations for Parents



Discussion and Implications

