

“FACILITAR NO ES FÁCIL” LATINO/A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AS INITIATORS OF SPANISH COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING DURING THE PANDEMIC

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Abstract

This article highlights how youth researchers representing two non-profit organizations, ByKids4Kids, and En Nuestra Lengua, share the results of a Youth Participatory Action Research study. In this project, youth draw upon triangulated data to examine community engagement in underrepresented US Latino/a students (ages 13–17) who served as volunteer book club facilitators to young Spanish-heritage language learners in the virtual ‘Kindles4COVID’ project. The research draws on integrated critical social frameworks that center on the Latino adolescent community and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) while taking into greater account language and race (Alim et al., 2016). Outcomes demonstrate the many ways in which Latino teens leverage elements of cultural capital to become empowered as community leaders. Following YPAR tenets, power was shared between youth and senior (adult) co-authors in designing, carrying out, and writing up this study.

Introduction

Students representing two non-profit, grassroots organizations came together in 2020 to support Latino¹ adolescents in SE Michigan. The partnership produced an innovative youth-initiated virtual book club promoting Spanish literacy and student social connections in the era of COVID-19. *ByKids4Kids* (BK4K), founded in 2017, is a youth-led organization with the mission to serve all young people and to inspire change in the world. BK4K community projects include TedX events, ArtKits4Kids, and community gardening. *En Nuestra Lengua* (ENL) (Spanish for “In Our Language”) is a community-based Saturday school founded in 2010 for Spanish-speaking students, ages 4–14. ENL’s mission is to nurture young speakers’ language and literacy in Spanish and to promote cultural pride in US Latino students’ ties to the Spanish-speaking world.

¹ We use the term ‘Latino’ rather than Latinx/Latine or Hispanic to reflect how the youth and their community identify themselves.

Implementing the Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) model (Anderson, 2020), the current study reports on the online Spanish-language-only community service project, ‘Kindles4COVID in Spanish,’ designed and carried out by US midwest Latino/a adolescents (ages 13–17) as book club (Club Lector) facilitators (*‘facilitadores’*) leading younger US Latino/a students whose home language is also Spanish. The project not only centers students of color working within their own community (Ozer & Wright, 2012; Foulis et al., 2024), but also highlights YPAR practices as a means to prioritize the youth voice and normalize the presence of social justice in research (Richards-Schuster et al., 2021). Guided by the YPAR approach, students from BK4K and ENL drew upon their lived realities to (a) create a needed ‘safe’ space in their community for US Latino teens to come together in Spanish during the COVID pandemic and (b) measure the impact of this project in a YPAR context. The high school co-authors of this article met biweekly for two academic years with the mentor/university professor, who provided opportunities for them to leverage their lived knowledge to carry out community-based research. Similar in theoretical underpinnings and general methodologies to González Ybarra’s (2021) use of a critical multimodal analysis framework that privileges Latino youth epistemologies and literacies, the youth researchers in the present study read, discussed, critiqued, and summarized background literature, including introductions to various conceptual frameworks as a way to think about the linguistic, sociocultural, and political effects of Kindles4COVID in Spanish on participants and even on the broader community. The youth researchers brainstormed questions for investigation and, along with the mentoring professor, came together as a research team to form hypotheses based on YPAR principles of equity and shared power in scholarship (Young et al., 2024). In year one, we adapted BK4K materials and designed electronic surveys exclusively in Spanish, as part of a data collection plan. In year two, the analysis of the data centered on the youth researchers’ voices, not only as participants in the community service but also as expert collaborators in generating research findings that answer meaningful, real-world questions. We thus view Ozer’s (2016) YPAR inquiry on underrepresented student research carried out in key developmental settings such as youth-serving organizations as a highly compatible model for the current study. It is in this vein that we provide a context for youth voices to speak to issues impacting Latino students based on experiences that uniquely contribute to the Latino community. The overarching question guiding the research concerns how Latino youth draw upon critical conceptualizations of cultural capital, race, and language to facilitate community engagement in a Spanish-language virtual book club project. As our study will demonstrate, the role of students as practitioners and researchers has allowed for sustained reflection and insightful adjustments at all stages of the project and follows recent tenets for YPAR as laid out in Leman et al. (2025).

In the remainder of the paper, we provide an overview of the relevant theoretical and empirical literature on Latino youth identity, including language, contexts for US Latino youth participation in book clubs, and, importantly, Latino youth mental health. We integrate theoretical frameworks to highlight how adolescent *‘facilitadores’* agilely leverage multiple knowledge bases to lead younger Latino youth and then discuss the YPAR pedagogy in more detail. We follow with a description of the study methodology, providing a rich outline of the participants and their US Midwest Latino community and reporting on data sources and data collection procedures. The paper continues with a discussion and analysis of the findings, centering on Latino youth experiences

and decisions as participants/*facilitadores* and researchers within the critical theoretical frameworks. We conclude with YPAR-based recommendations for community stakeholders to help US-born Spanish-speaking youth maintain their cultural and linguistic identity and increase their academic success by supporting the development of literacy skills in Spanish.

Background Literature and Theoretical Frameworks

Critical theory approaches

Identifying some of the dynamic individual- and community-level processes that impact US Latino youth as participating *facilitadores* in the *Kindles4COVID* experience constitutes the first step in understanding the lived realities of this population across multiple contexts. Here, we draw upon conceptual lenses emerging as critical theories to more precisely assess the complexities of Latino youth identity, with the primary framework being the Community and Cultural Wealth Model (CCW-Yosso, 2005). The CCW model provides an inventory of skills, talents, and lived experiences that serve communities of color at the individual level as protective ‘capital’ to counteract oppressive and racist narratives. A brief description of each CCW category is given below:

Aspirational capital: Focus on hopes for a better life, drive to succeed.

Familial capital: Family is central, family is the core support system.

Linguistic capital: Multi- and bilingualism, in-group communication norms allowing stronger connections and understanding with other Latinos.

Navigational capital: Experiences and wisdom to maneuver in institutions such as schools and universities.

Resistance capital: Resilience and adaptability to overcome racist or otherwise non-supportive scenarios.

Social capital: Emphasis on strong networks, collectivistic rather than individualistic culture.

Following Pérez-Huber (2009), we expand the original CCW attributes to include spirituality as part of the wealth of Latino communities and individuals.

Spiritual capital: Faith and religion as a shared source of hope and guidance.

Yosso’s (2005) application of the CCW model represents young adult university students of color, whereas more recent studies such as Cooper et al. (2010) and Martinez et al. (2020) implement CCW in relation to adolescents. In the current study, we replicate the younger CCW profile since it mirrors our Midwest participant sample. Given that teen Latino identities continue to be under-researched within youth-led community spaces (Heath et al., 2018), this novel perspective is highlighted in our study. The notion of cultural wealth created a space for discussion with the youth researchers on how to identify each element, particularly those such as ‘aspirational and navigational capital’ that seemed to be more internally motivated—or, at best, abstract. We developed a list of exemplary keywords in Spanish that could be associated with each cultural wealth feature.

The CCW configures each asset as an autonomous yet also linked unit of strength and values. We note that while CCW includes linguistic capital as a component of the Latino individual's cultural wealth, it does not explicitly feature 'race.' Thus, as a complement to the CCW, we incorporate the theory of Raciolinguistics (Alim et al., 2016), which develops a consciousness that unifies both language and race, rather than treating them as disparate or unrelated properties. Raciolinguistics as a framework advances critical inspections across linguistic and ethnic/racial contexts in order to gain insights into language's role in the formation of racialized identities and ideologies. This issue is highly relevant since a large portion of young US-born Latinos profile as racialized children, are bilingual (at least to some degree), and are raised hearing and often speaking Spanish in the home (Satterfield & Benki, in press). US public schools do not typically support continued instruction of Spanish for young Spanish speakers or do so only until the child has acquired sufficient English to be mainstreamed into an English immersion classroom (García, 2009). Suárez-Orozco et al. (2008), and Menken & Kley (2009) emphasize the negative academic effects caused when Latino students' language and culture are not valued in the US education system. Similarly, Stewart's (2014) single-case study findings link negative psychological effects to the largely White school system that treated the student's Spanish skills and Latino culture as a deficit rather than an asset. This situation is often the norm, and it is the reason why the majority of children of immigrants in the US typically become monolingual English speakers over time and lose the valuable resource of knowing both English and the home language. Given the standard US education policies and the ensuing challenges that many young US Spanish speakers face, Raciolinguistics is a central component of ENL's philosophy and mission to counteract language discrimination, prevent Spanish language loss, support mentorship, and parental programs to help reduce societal inequities (García-Galindo, 2023; Mendez & Satterfield, 2024). Following Aldana, Richards-Schuster, et al. (2021) with respect to the youth researcher experience, we link YPAR methods to the Raciolinguistics and CCW approaches, both of which are highly compatible with YPAR in terms of developing critical consciousness and promoting social change.

Book Clubs and other Latino youth engagement contexts

Research dedicated to diverse student-led literacy modes or book club facilitation for Spanish-speaking US Latino youth is limited. During the pandemic, McNamara (2020) designed a year-long course using a variety of reading modes to improve English literacy skills in 138 Latino and White middle-class freshmen in a rural California high school. The outcomes were positive, with students reading four times as much as their reading habits before the study and expressing positive attitudes towards multiple modes of reading. However, Merga (2014) questions the popularity of digital readers for American and Australian teens, showing that print books were the overall preference. Merga & Roni (2017) surveyed 997 fourteen-year-olds in Western Australia and found that students' reading frequency actually declined with greater access to e-readers and smartphones. Loh & Sun (2022) find that while the COVID-19 pandemic brought in greater overall access to online reading materials and improvements in technology, the majority of secondary school students still prefer physical books, even though the main factor for increasing literacy was having access to interesting literature, no matter what the platform or device.

Adding on social aspects to digital literacy, Colwell et al. (2018) looks into how adolescents participate in an online book club with minimal structure from adults. The book club was part of an eight-week program through a local public library. The format consisted of twelve voluntary participants, students ages 13–17, who read a book for ten days and had five days for discussion. Students were only allowed to choose one book from each of the five genres per each reading-discussion cycle. Colwell et al. (2018) analyzes the quality of each discussion and finds that participants used formal literary skills and were able to produce thoughtful discussions about the various books. The study suggests that “minimal teacher involvement in online discussion spaces can yield thoughtful discussion about literature” (Colwell et al., 2018, p. 20). Schreuder & Savitz (2020) question how multiple elements in a book club influence adolescents’ reading motivation through a case study where fifteen students (grade 12) participate in an online book club. The students were allowed to choose one out of six young adult books to read and discuss. Participants were then placed with fellow peers who had read the same book. These groups had weekly discussions and answered questions from college students (these questions were recorded on an online video-sharing platform). Participants in the study answered pre/post assessments to determine how and why their motivation to read increased/decreased, using the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile. The majority of students’ motivation to read increased, as 73% of students had more total reading motivation as a result of the book club. About 67% reported that their interactions with college students increased their reading motivation. At the end of the book club, 58% of the participants reported that they were more likely to read another young adult book. This study suggests that many factors in a book club can positively influence an adolescent’s reading motivation, including book choice and interactions with older, role-model peers. A recent study (Fincher, 2022) analyzes the outcomes of a summer book club for Latino students led by a non-Latino adult. Fincher’s (2022) book club functions in English with the purpose of constructing a “second language identity,” where the facilitator’s role is to enhance Latino/a English Language Learners’ connection to their cultural heritage and self-efficacy via English.

The above geographies, methods, and objectives differ in significant ways from the ENL Club Lector model, which extends the Midwest US ENL community-based Spanish immersion curriculum to adolescent Spanish-language speakers ages 10–14. Club Lector’s objectives are to maintain advanced Spanish reading, writing, and rhetorical skills while creating opportunities for weekly interactions between young Latino peers. In Southeast Michigan, where only 4.6% of the population is Latino, Club Lector participants feel that they have a safe space to engage in discussions that are meaningful to them as minoritized individuals and to also make connections with students who share their age, cultural identity, and language (Pandey et al., 2023).

Latino youth and mental health

It is crucial to recognize that the virtual Kindles4COVID in Spanish project emerged as a youth-driven plan of action during the COVID crisis. Marques de Miranda et al. (2020) report on youth mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and stress linked to the COVID-19 crisis. Even prior to the pandemic, mental health issues—particularly depression and feelings of isolation—were on the rise among adolescent Latinos (SAMSHA, 2020), and the reverberations of COVID-19 continue to disproportionately affect Latino youth

(López et al., 2020; Cortés-García et al., 2022). Skogrand et al. (2008) examine Latino youth mental health and participation in community activities indirectly through interviews with twelve Latino parents. The study concludes that while Latino adolescents are attracted to activities that they enjoy and find productive, they also are content to involve their families. We return to these points in the discussion section of this study.

This synthesis of the existing literature provides important background information and a strong foundation for the present research. Whereas earlier investigations were conducted with English and/or mixed Spanish-English in spaces with a traditional/established Latino community and frequently with oversight from adults who are not Latino, the present study centers Spanish as the exclusive language of literacy and acknowledges Latino cultural values in the social activities for the project. Moreover, this study has the added benefit of a YPAR structure, where Latino youth play a central role in the documentation and analysis of their Kindles4COVID project, which allows for a finer-grained understanding of their decision-making paths and processes of inquiry (González Ybarra, 2021).

Present Study

In this investigation, we ask: how do Latino youth draw upon critical conceptualizations of cultural capital (CCW), race, and language (Raciolinguistics) to facilitate community engagement in a Spanish-language virtual book club project? We hypothesize that if Latino student facilitators utilize community and cultural capital, these aspects of wealth will be identifiable in the general facilitator group meeting notes, individual surveys, and collaborative teaching forms of each *facilitador*.

Positionality Statements

Ángel Ben-Kí: I am an Afro-Latino high school student from Southeastern Michigan. I grew up in a middle-class Spanish-speaking household and attended public schools. I attended En Nuestra Lengua as a child, was a *facilitador* and creator of Spanish materials in the Kindles4COVID in Spanish program, and have continued volunteering at ENL. Throughout, I have conducted research on many public issues, including equity in the Latino community and discriminatory policies against people of color in my own high school.

Meera Pandey: I am an Indian-American feminist student. I was raised in a second-generation Indian family with roots in the northeastern part of India-Uttar Pradesh. I grew up in an Indian-American bilingual home and attended a predominantly wealthy private school in Ann Arbor, MI. I am a founder of the nonprofit organization, ByKids4Kids. I helped create several programs and their materials, including Kindles4COVID, Soleful, and Kindle Kingdom. I participated in a TedxYouth event at Skyline High School and presented about the increase in social connectedness and reading levels during the pandemic through the online reading buddy program.

Teresa Satterfield: I am an Afrodescendiente cisgender female, and I grew up multilingual. My current position in the world is as a Spanish-English-speaking adult, a stakeholder in the Latino community, community volunteer, and senior academic. I collaborated as a researcher-educator in an informal, non-classroom context with the young people in the current study. Here, it is important to specify that the youth research process of

developing questions and hypotheses, collecting data, carrying out analyses, and subsequently producing and disseminating results did not diverge from my own activities in the investigation, although the inner workings of the YPAR structure and my documentation of it, required a separate analysis in which I did not collaborate with students.

As part of the YPAR methodological approach of this study, the research team reflected on how our personal backgrounds, as well as our educational and professional experiences, provide us with deeper insights and perspectives on possible interpretations of the data and study outcomes. Those reflections are incorporated in the following sections.

Methods

Participants (Facilitadores)

The Latino youth volunteers serving as book club *facilitadores* in the Kindles4COVID project were US-born native Spanish-speaking junior high and high school students (N = 13, 6 females and 7 males, ages 13–17, M = 14.5 years, SD = 1.126 yrs). All *facilitadores* lived in Southeast Michigan and attended English-language secondary schools in SE Michigan. They represented a range of SES and living situations. Four attended private or charter schools. Ten of the *facilitadores* were second-generation Latino/s, being children of at least one immigrant parent. Three *facilitadores* were first-generation immigrants with older ages of arrival to the US between 7 and 13 years. The *facilitadores* represented a broad swath of Spanish-speaking language varieties from family heritages linked to Spain, Colombia, Cuba, Venezuela, Perú, and several states in Mexico. Nine of the participating Generation 2 *facilitadores* were ENL alumni and had participated in Saturday Spanish classes as children from grades pre-K to 5. The same nine *facilitadores* had participated in the three iterations of En Nuestra Lengua *Club Lector*. Another Generation 2 student participated in two iterations of *Club Lector*. Nine of the thirteen *facilitadores* had been serving as volunteer teacher’s aides in ENL Saturday pre-K to 5 classrooms prior to the COVID-19 shutdown, and seven continued to be present as aides in ENL’s virtual Saturday classes during the pandemic. The teacher’s aide volunteer experience was not considered formal community service learning. The information is summarized in Table 1 (names have been de-identified for confidentiality):

Table 1.
De-identified demographic data on facilitadores 2020 – 2021

<i>Facilitador</i>	Gender	Age	Generation	Country (Family link)	School + Grade	ENL Alumni	Club Lector (Years)	Teacher’s Aide (ENL)
A	M	13	2	Cuba	Public, 8	Pre-K – 5	3	Y
B	M	14	1	Mexico	Public, 8	4 – 5	2	N
C	M	14	2	Mexico	Public, 9	2 – 5	3	Y

(Contd.)

<i>Facilitador</i>	Gender	Age	Generation	Country (Family link)	School + Grade	ENL Alumni	Club Lector (Years)	Teacher's Aide (ENL)
D	F	14	2	Mexico	Public, 9	2 – 5	3	Y
E	F	14	2	Spain	Public, 10	K – 5	3	Y
F	M	14	2	Mexico	Public, 10	4 – 5	0	N
G	F	14	2	Mexico	Private, 10	1 – 5	3	Y
H	F	14	2	Peru	Public, 10	K – 5	3	Y
I	M	15	2	Cuba	Public, 11	K – 5	3	Y
J	F	15	2	Mexico	Private, 11	K – 5	3	Y
K	M	16	1	Spain	Private, 11	0	0	N
L	M	16	2	Colombia	Public, 11	K – 5	3	Y
M	F	17	1	Venezuela	Public, 11	0	0	N

Thirteen of the fifteen students initially recruited accepted ENL-BK4K's invitation to organize and lead weekly virtual Spanish discussions and community-building activities as *facilitadores*. It is important to note that *facilitadores* were recruited through a process that uplifted Latino-community values such as *personalismo* (emphasis on interpersonal relationships; contacting and conversing with each student individually rather than sending out a mass email announcement) and *familismo* (keeping parents informed and involved at each step of the project).

Procedures Kindles4COVID

This study was approved by the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board. All interactions within the ENL Kindles4COVID project occurred exclusively in Spanish community service learning and YPAR protocols were used at every phase of the collaboration with BK4K. *Facilitadores* discussed their roles and expectations for the project in an initial online group meeting. It bears mentioning that since nine of the thirteen participating *facilitadores* were ENL alumni who had participated in Saturday Spanish classes as children, from grades pre-K to 5, they had a level of *confianza* and familiarity with each other that made them comfortable in speaking, disagreeing, and letting their opinions be known. This aspect was both advantageous and detrimental to community-building among the facilitators. The consensus was reached, and a subsequent agreement form of 'norms' was created in Spanish and signed by *facilitadores* concerning volunteer expectations and commitments, ENL's mission and commitment to the volunteers, collegiality with fellow *facilitadores*, and, by popular vote, mental health "check-ins."

BK4K provided fifty Kindle Fire 7 Readers and ten-dollar Amazon gift cards to obtain digital books in Spanish. BK4K facilitator orientation materials in English, including a list of recommended Kindle book titles for different age groups, had been adapted for Spanish-language readers and translated to Spanish jointly by ENL teachers' aides and a youth researcher. At the request of the adolescent volunteers, general *facilitador* group meetings were coordinated by a trusted Latina adult member of the ENL community, Señora Wendy, who served as a

liaison between the *facilitadores* and the Club Lector families. Sra. Wendy also had expertise in language pedagogy and thus volunteered to serve in an advisory capacity for the *facilitadores*. She observed the virtual book club sessions and provided one-on-one feedback as requested or as needed, per *facilitador* preference.

Each Spanish-language Club Lector reading group contained three to four Club Lector *amiguitos* (buddies). The reading groups were formed by Sra. Wendy in direct consultation with a *facilitador*, who considered preferences for scheduling, along with the number, age, gender, and reading level of the *amiguitos*. The trimester reading group periods were scheduled in 10-week blocks: September–December, January–March, and April–June. The Club Lector sessions were eight weeks, plus *facilitadores* spent two weeks independently curating books and preparing materials in Spanish to align with their *amiguitos*' reading levels, cultural backgrounds, and personal experiences.

Any book title with a price of ten dollars or less was available for Kindle use (although children's and young adult Spanish language books may cost up to triple the price of the English-language version), provided that the book was written solely in Spanish. The *facilitadores* all agreed with the democratic process of finalizing the reading choice by presenting the *amiguitos* with three Spanish book options and allowing them to make the final selection.

Besides reading the book themselves, *facilitadores* prepared for the weekly forty-five-minute Club Lector meetings by crafting essay questions and discussion prompts based on the assigned reading. Similarly, they created group discussion questions designed to stimulate conversation. For example, a question asked by one *facilitador* to their *amiguitos*: “Si pudieras ser un personaje de Harry Potter, ¿quién serías y por qué? [If you could be one Harry Potter character, who would you be and why?].” *Facilitadores* also identified significant passages within the assigned reading that warranted closer examination, whether for literary analysis or cultural relevance, such as common themes about families, as in *El crossover*: “Mamá dice, tu papá es de otra época, como un antiguo Chevette, tú eres nuevo y fresco, como un rojo Corvette.” [The Crossover: “Mama says, your dad is from another age, like an old Chevette. You are new and fresh, like a red Corvette.”]

In most cases, *facilitadores* maintained the same *amiguitos* throughout the academic year. Outside the weekly Club Lector, *facilitadores* documented that they often assumed the roles of mentors and advocates for their *amiguitos*, offering encouragement and guidance to navigate the challenges of reading and academic writing. This support extended to providing constructive feedback on written essays and working through different types of COVID-related stumbling blocks. *Facilitadores* reported some stress in trying to keep open lines of communication with *amiguitos*, parents, and other program stakeholders, given the barrage of emails, but the *facilitadores* also grasped the significance of the responsibility being placed on them to ensure transparency and accountability in the Kindles4COVID Spanish project. We return to this point in the Discussion section.

Measures

Moving through the YPAR process, youth researchers for the current study carried out data collection, utilizing multiple data sources and tokens. During data collection, the research team continued to discuss cultural wealth and to consider possible examples that may represent types of capital. Since the *facilitadores* regularly

documented and reflected on the Kindles4COVID experience through general *facilitador* meetings, individual surveys, and collaborative documents, the research team was able to employ content analyses to pinpoint many overarching themes and link the data to the theoretical frameworks that they had earlier discussed, critiqued and summarized.

Data collection and analysis procedures

All materials for this project were produced exclusively in Spanish. Data triangulation was employed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Latino youth *facilitadores*. First, *facilitador* demographic data (Table 1) was analyzed for descriptive measures and general comparisons. The research team analyzed the volunteer facilitators across gender, age, race, and time in ENL. The youth researchers noted that two *facilitadores* who had not participated in ENL as students both had family members who were currently active in the program. Due to long-time affiliations with ENL, the majority of *facilitadores* were not only knowledgeable of the program's raciolinguistic-based mission and values, but they were also former members of Club Lector. Crucially, they were closely acquainted with each other, having passed through the different ENL programs together since grade school.

The online surveys consisted of multiple-choice and open-ended questions pertaining to technological issues (e.g., ¿Surgió algún problema con la tecnología durante la sesión? [Did any technology problems come up during the session?]), Club Lector meeting details (e.g., Cuéntanos un poco sobre las actividades que hiciste con tu grupo [Tell us a bit about the activities you did with your group.]), group dynamics including possible conflict resolution (e.g., ...cuéntanos cómo lo resolviste o cómo te podemos ayudar a resolverlo [If a problem came up, tell us how you resolved it or how we can help you resolve it.]) and general reflections (e.g., ¿Por lo general cómo estuvo la sesión con tu grupo? Elige todas las respuestas que aplican. [Generally, how was your group's session? Choose all replies that apply.]). Survey responses completed during the 2020–2021 academic year were coded and scored for occurrences of each cultural capital element according to Yosso's (2005) Cultural and Community Wealth model. Specifically, structured survey content denoting CCW capital, such as resilience or familial strengths, was gathered and discussed for analysis (see Figure 1).

The collaborative documents were group-shared Google files where *facilitadores* supplied lesson plans with comments on successes and areas for improvement to both inform future sessions and serve as a clearinghouse of ideas for all. For instance, a *facilitador* shared “un sitio web con un sinfín de juegos de palabras en español [a website with endless word games in Spanish].” This “find” received congratulations and thanks from other *facilitadores* who were anxious to access fun activities to begin their Club Lector sessions. Collaborative documents completed during the 2020–2021 academic year and containing unstructured comments and observations were coded and scored for occurrences of each cultural capital element according to Yosso's (2005) Cultural and Community Wealth model (Figure 2). Additionally, each selected book was also scored for thematic content (based on *facilitadores'* summaries in the collaborative documents) that corresponded to CCW elements (Table 2).

Sra. Wendy kept notes during general *facilitador* meetings, where all facilitators came together virtually to discuss their respective reading groups. A thematic analysis was carried out, yielding a range of themes such as teaching tips for mental health ‘check-ins.’ An example of the topics in the November 2020 meeting: the *facilitadores* discussed incentives and ways to motivate students not to give up. In that particular conversation, BK4K provided coupons for pizza for every student who had finished reading their group’s book by a given date.

Sra. Wendy also documented one-to-one consultations; however, the consultation data do not form part of the current project’s analysis.

Results and Discussion

As part of the YPAR process, the research team investigated the question of how Latino youth draw upon critical conceptualizations of cultural capital (CCW), race, and language (Raciolinguistics) to facilitate community engagement in a Spanish-language virtual book club project. The preliminary answer is that the Club Lector experience allowed the *facilitadores* to uniquely showcase their Latino identity, along with the values and strengths that they brought to the Kindles4COVID project through their diverse experiences as US Spanish-speakers, students of color, and as past participants in ‘protective’ spaces such as the Saturday school, En Nuestra Lengua. To delve into this question further, we hypothesized that if Latino student facilitators utilize community and cultural capital, these aspects of wealth will be identifiable in the general facilitator group meeting notes, individual surveys, and collaborative teaching forms of each *facilitador*.

As evidence in support of our hypothesis, Figure 1 shows the results of a thematic-based analysis of the online surveys:

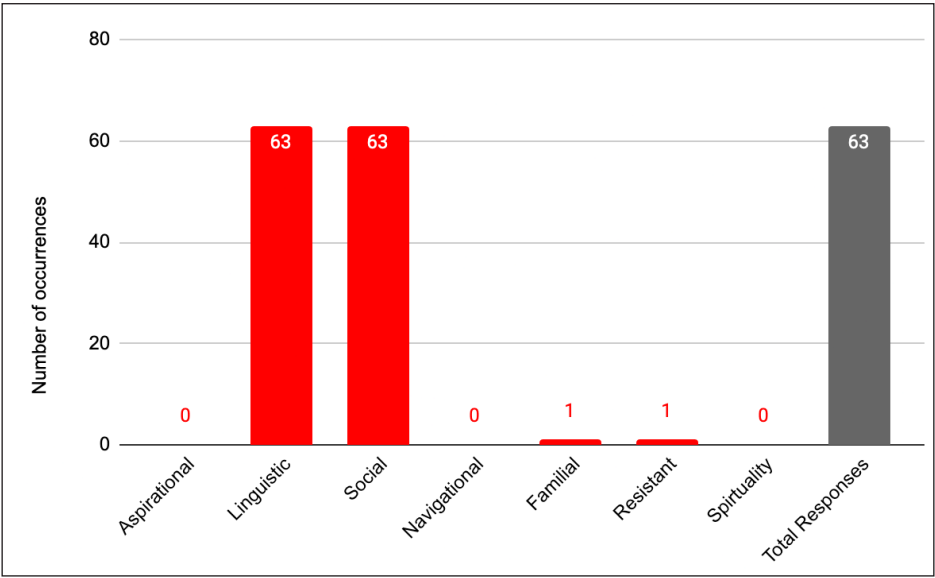


Figure 1 Number of occurrences of each Capital (Community and Cultural Wealth Model, Yosso (2005)) expressed the post-meeting survey responses completed by the *facilitadores*. Each *facilitador* completed between 1 and 12 surveys.

As we predicted, given the dual importance of linguistic wealth and its complementary Raciolinguistic consciousness, all survey responses showed strong evidence of linguistic capital. Linguistic wealth was demonstrated in several contexts: as recognition of improved communication skills, better attention to detail, and even as part of the Club Lector policy when facilitators affirmed that all interactions in the meeting were done in Spanish, both encouraging *amiguitos* to become more comfortable interacting in Spanish in Zoom contexts, and also helping them to increase their skills in using Spanish in a virtual intellectual environment. The added importance of modeling this CCW attribute to younger Latinos is highlighted when a *facilitador* related in an initial survey, “El [amiguito] estaba usando inglés con casi cada palabra pero le dije que cambiara sus palabras al español ya que estamos en la clase de español (He was using English every other word, but I told him to change his words to Spanish, now that we are in Spanish class).”

Survey responses also demonstrate the prominence of social wealth. Yosso defines social wealth as stemming from “peers and other social contacts.” We found the *facilitador* reports to consistently focus on the interpersonal interactions both within and outside the weekly Club Lector meetings. *Facilitadores* repeatedly mentioned serving as a “*guía* (guide)” to their *amiguitos*, and demonstrated a sense of responsibility and accountability for their *amiguitos*’ academic progress and well-being. We categorize this attribute as part of the social capital and culture of collectivism that the Latino youth facilitators possess. For example, one *facilitador* commented that to ensure reading comprehension for all, some meetings would consist of a shared group reading of “unas cuantas páginas y luego me preguntaron sobre las palabras que no conocían (...a few pages and they [the reading buddies] would ask me about words they did not know)”. Here, the youth researcher who also participated as a *facilitador* noted the close link between social capital and familial capital, since the Club Lector context was a ‘safe’ space, like an extended family, for *amiguitos* to work on their Spanish vocabulary and learn with peers and older Latino teens. Thus, familial capital includes the expanding community network while also honoring the notion of ‘*familismo*.’ We categorized any comments referring to social justice as a form of resistance capital; thus, a facilitator’s comments on confronting racism in schools during a reading of “El crossover.”

While data for aspirational, navigational, and spiritual capital were not evident in the survey responses, we have two possibly overlapping hypotheses for these outcomes: (i) as these attributes were precisely those that seemed more ‘abstract’ or internally motivated, it is possible that the survey questions did not lend themselves to responses discussing ‘deeper’ themes; and/or (ii) the *facilitadores* did not have any need to tap into a larger portion of cultural capital due to their long-time familiarity with ENL and the supportive nature of the project.

Similarly, all entries in the collaborative documents include linguistic and social wealth and thus support our hypothesis. Like the survey responses, *facilitadores* wrote about strategies that helped them foster an atmosphere conducive to the growth of the *amiguitos*’ Spanish language ability and confidence, as well as promoting a ‘safe’ environment where they are able to connect and learn from each other as Latino youth. *Facilitadores* would use the documents to share ‘problematic’ vocabulary that their *amiguitos* did not know or to suggest types of “icebreakers” to start meetings. In addition, Sra. Wendy periodically used the collaborative documents to add a constructive tips for *facilitadores*. She would also praise *facilitadores* for an action, such as maintaining email communication with *amiguitos* and parents. When analyzing this data, the youth researchers noted a correlation between Sra. Wendy’s input and the facilitators’ increased expressions of linguistic and social CCW when they

contributed to the collaborative document in subsequent sessions. Given the completely unstructured nature of the collaborative documents, small quantities of other strengths such as aspirational, navigational, familial, and resistance are present in this data. We note that these attributes emerge particularly in terms of collegiality and encouraging remarks shared between *facilitadores*. Figure 2 shows the results of the theme-based analysis utilizing the shared collaborative documents:

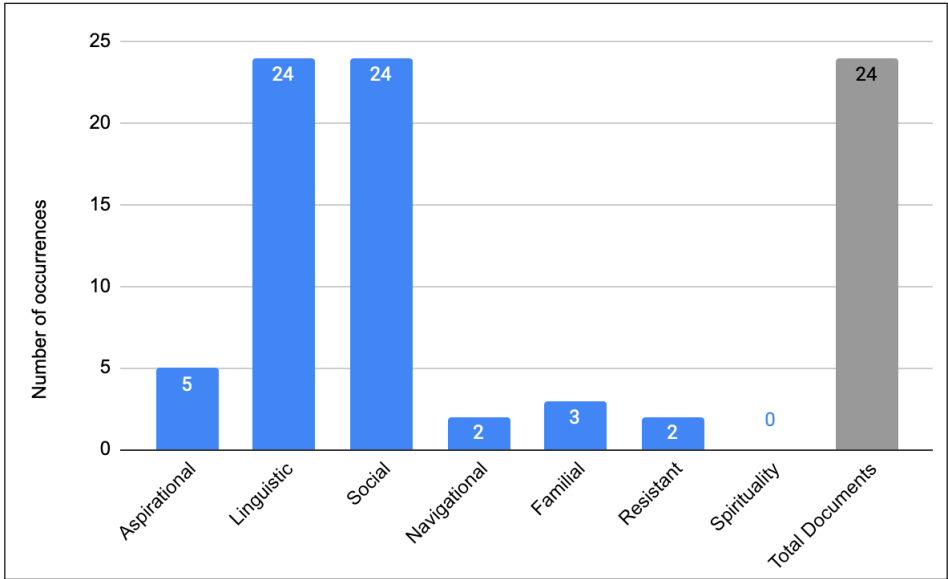


Figure 2 Number of occurrences of each Capital (Community and Cultural Wealth Model, Yosso (2005)) expressed in the text of the Collaborative Documents written by the *facilitadores*.

Table 2 displays book themes related to critical conceptualizations of cultural capital (CCW), race, and language (Raciolinguistics):

Table 2.
Analysis of Community and Cultural Wealth in facilitador-selected books. Titles that appear 2 or 3 times were selected and read by the indicated quantity of reading groups

Book Title	Aspirational	Linguistic	Social	Navigational	Familial	Resistant	Spirituality	Total
Coraline		X		X	X			3
Nate el Grande: En la cima del mundo		X	X					2
El crossover	X	X	X	X	X	X		6
A través del espejo, Alicia		X	X	X				3
Harry Potter y la piedra filosofal		X	X					2
Harry Potter y la piedra filosofal		X	X					2
Charlie y la fábrica de chocolate		X	X		X			3
El único e incomparable Iván		X	X			X		3
Esperanza renace	X	X	X	X	X	X		6

(Contd.)

Book Title	Aspirational	Linguistic	Social	Navigational	Familial	Resistant	Spirituality	Total
De cómo la tía Lila vino a visitar (a quedarse)	X	X	X	X	X	X		6
De cómo la tía Lila vino a visitar (a quedarse)	X	X	X	X	X	X		6
De cómo la tía Lila vino a visitar (a quedarse)	X	X	X	X	X	X		6
Harry Potter y la cámara secreta		X	X					2
El Jardín Secreto		X	X		X	X		4
El Jardín Secreto		X	X		X	X		4
Diario de Greg: Tocado y hundido		X	X					2
El rancho del misterio		X	X		X			3
El monstruo del Palacio Buckingham		X	X		X			3
Nate el Grande: En la cima del mundo		X	X					2
De cómo la tía Lola aprendió a enseñar	X	X	X	X	X	X		6
La guerra de la limonada		X	X					2
Mi abuela, la loca		X	X		X			3
Mi tío Pachunga	X	X	X	X	X	X		6
Un regalo singular		X	X		X			3
Como pez en el árbol		X	X			X		3
El té de tornillo del Profesor Zíper		X	X					2
TOTAL	7	26	25	9	15	11	0	93

Not only do the elicited responses in surveys, group meetings, and collaborative documents suggest that adolescent Latino students draw upon identifiable and unique cultural strengths in community engagement contexts, but we also find that cultural wealth (CCW), race, and language (Raciolinguistics) attributes are clearly present in the preferred reading selections of each group, in support of our hypothesis. We do not have data on why certain books were chosen since *facilitadores* presented their respective groups with three books, and each group voted on their book for that trimester. However, the *facilitadores* provided a summary of the selected book. The research team coded and analyzed the facilitators' summaries to determine which themes resonated with Latino youth. The books represented a range of genres, from graphic novels to magic realism, with no strong tendencies in terms of topics. Due to this diversity, all cultural capitals/strengths other than spirituality are covered within the summaries of books. As we claim, it is possible that the expression of spiritual capital is more internally motivated and personal or simply requires more in-depth information. In every case, linguistic capital is markedly present since the readings were exclusively in Spanish, with the added value of strengthening literary skills. All

summaries also demonstrate at least one other form of CCW in addition to linguistic wealth. Four of the selected books significantly treat familial cultural wealth. Summaries on the *Tía Lola* series, *Esperanza renace*, *Mi abuela la loca*, and *Mi tío Pachunga* include themes and conflicts specifically relating to (US) Latino families that are integral to its discussion. Furthermore, four groups chose books that include significant navigational wealth, as the summaries relate how the main character manages the stress of living in two or more cultural/ethnic environments. Resistance capital, where the summary shows examples of characters of marginalized groups overcoming societal obstacles, describes classics such as *El jardín secreto* (The Secret Garden) and *Charlie y la fábrica de chocolate* (Charlie and the Chocolate Factory). Finally, several groups selected stories such as *El “crossover”* that not only clearly resonate with race and language, but also demonstrate aspirational wealth, showing examples of youth of color aspiring towards ambitions that are often difficult due to structural barriers.

As with any research, there are limitations to this study. It is necessary to acknowledge the unique effects of COVID-19 on *facilitador* participation in the project. As noted, several of the *facilitadores* had been serving as teacher aides in the Saturday ENL classrooms prior to the pandemic. That said, the dynamic was very different, and Sra. Wendy worked hard to provide a safe space for *facilitadores* to express their emotions and concerns openly. Although mental and physical health “check-ins” were prioritized in the project, four of the five eleventh-grade *facilitadores* decided to leave the project after the fall trimester, largely due to anxiety and struggles with time management to finish high school tasks. For winter and spring trimesters, a new *facilitador* came on board (male, grade 10). The remaining *facilitadores* completed three consecutive ten-week *Club Lector* periods during the academic year, but there was a decrease in lesson creativity and documentation across all *facilitadores*.

Additionally, the online survey questions simply could not touch upon each form of CCW and Raciolinguistics in a structured manner. Also, rates of survey completion declined significantly after the first trimester. The collaborative documents also received reduced input after the first ten weeks but remained an active reference site during the school year. Despite these shortcomings, the project fulfilled its objectives (Pandey et al., 2023) and made a meaningful contribution to the Latino community.

Conclusions

We implemented the Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) methodology to investigate how Latino youth draw upon critical conceptualizations of cultural capital (CCW), race, and language (Raciolinguistics) to facilitate community engagement in a Spanish-language virtual book club project. The study was carried out through the Spanish-language community project, Kindles4COVID. Our research findings suggest that by leveraging the unique cultural assets, particularly social and linguistic wealth, with the race and language consciousness that young Latinos brought to the community-based project, it was possible to generate quality learning experiences that resonate with Latino youth and families.

The YPAR methodology demonstrates the power of privileging youth knowledge and voices and engaging young researchers of color in opportunities to take up critical questions in the spaces that they navigate. The role of high school students as both participants and researchers in this study has provided crucial insights that

otherwise would not have been obtained. In turn, the youth researchers commented that experiences that center young Latino students and allow them to make a difference in their own community are the best sources of engagement.

BK4K was able to jumpstart the Kindles4COVID in Spanish project by providing initial resources and an established structure for the program. However, the youth researchers noted many ways in which the *facilitadores* modified the originally designed project and made it something completely their own, thus ensuring success for younger Latino students in ways that BK4K simply could not have foreseen. Among the notable innovations, the *facilitadores* added more stimulating questions about their books during the meetings, as well as delving into character profiles and assigning homework to model academic success for their *amiguitos*.

In sum, the BK4K-ENL partnership serves as an accessible model for how organizations whose missions are in alignment can successfully collaborate. Even so, the most productive collaborations came not at the organizational level but rather through the impact that the youths had on the project and on each other. *Facilitador* comments affirm that the project allowed them to have “*una verdadera experiencia de ser líder* (a real leadership experience),” “*gracias por creer en mí* (thank you for believing in me),” and that the work was fulfilling (“*me encanta estar con mi grupito cada semana* (I love being with my little group every week)).”

Finally, the youth researchers offer their YPAR-based recommendations for stakeholders in helping US-born Spanish-speaking youth maintain their cultural identity and capital:

- Support the development of US Latino youth literacy skills in Spanish to increase overall academic success.
- Incorporate race/ethnicity-consciousness into your projects, along with linguistic capital.
- Guide students in carrying out their research and teach them to disseminate and publish their findings to advance social change.
- Listen. Let students show their thought processes and expertise.
- Invite power brokers/those who affect policy to interact with your students.

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