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Korina M. Jocson

Stories inspire. And stories instruct. The story that follows may resonate with some parents and educators to potentially open up more conversations. For now, I brace myself in sharing a personal story about parenting, race, and language. I endeavor to tell a story about everyday literacies and related practices present in multilingual and multigenerational households. I do so within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced many families to rely on each other for child-care, elder care, and overall health needs. Before turning to this latter point, it is important to begin the story with a felt moment in my own parenting.

Seeing the World Anew

Ever since becoming a parent, I have gained so much understanding and insight into everyday literacies. Close friends and mentors who are experts in various aspects of education have shared a great deal about parenting and I am grateful. For example, Carol D. Lee’s words have stuck with me, “Every day will be a new terrain as your child sees different parts of the world for the first time.” I imagine many parents would agree. There is tremendous wisdom from that instance of love and care at a professional conference. In addition to Lee’s (2006) scholarship on cultural modeling influencing my work in secondary classrooms, I lean on her sage advice about new terrains and parenting, coincidentally expressed at a mentoring event for scholars of color, to illuminate the youth–adult connections and relationships between families, communities, and education. Indeed, my then-4-month-old child’s impressionable babble has turned what I know about theories and practices of literacies upside down. I am learning every single day and my daughter has become my teacher. And now I am seeing different parts of the world with a different lens for the first time.

On one particular afternoon, months later after that professional conference, I was excited to pick up my

child from daycare and learn about the day’s activities. The daycare is situated near a university campus and a short drive from home. Below is a vivid exchange with a staff member, a white teacher in one of the toddler classrooms:

Me: How did things go?

Teacher: Great! She was looking through the glass door. Then she pointed up and said, “Sun!”

Me: Sun?

Teacher: I’m surprised she knows the concept of the sun.

Me: Yes, she does.

Dumbfounded, I walked away, gripping my child’s hand. I could not quite make out what stirred inside me. I realized there and then that my tamed tongue (Anzaldúa, 1987) could have unleashed a piercing lesson about deficit thinking in that exchange. Instead, I opted for self-preservation and professional courtesy out of respect for the other children. It would have been easy to lose sight of the environment. Perhaps there was another way to handle what might have been explained, again, as unintentional. The white teacher’s comment—“I’m *surprised* she knows the concept of the sun”—may have seemed harmless on the surface, but for many parents of color like myself it is rooted in raciolinguistic ideologies or the co-naturalization of race and language (Flores & Rosa, 2015). It is a form of microaggression. Whatever the case, the exchange is another example of how race and language shape what happens in many classrooms that

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only perpetuate harm on students of color (de los Ríos et al., 2019). The exchange reveals a critical race moment, and sharing it here based on my recollection helps to generate critical perspectives. Some of the contextual details in the exchange have been altered for anonymity. Worth noting from the exchange are the assumptions in the teacher's comment and the responses they signaled.

Assumptions From The Teacher

My child developmentally at almost a year and half old does not (should not yet) know the concept of the sun; my child, often one of two children of color among a group of nine in the toddler classroom, is incapable of understanding abstract concepts; my child is deserving of low expectations and deficit-oriented perspectives; my child comes from a family or household that is deprived of language, does not value education, or possesses limited knowledge to bear on learning processes. Thus, it is a surprise that this particular child is able to identify *that* bright thing in the sky as "sun" and can name it in the English language.

Responses From Me As Parent

My child has known about the concept of the sun for some time now, probably since birth, because we say good morning to it every day, whatever season it may be; my child looks out the window and not only greets the sun but also the trees, birds, and other (non)living things around us; my child at almost a year and a half old, if she could have spoken her mind as she looked through the glass door that day, would probably have uttered the word "sun" in English, "sol" in Spanish, and "araw" in Filipino/Tagalog.

In fact, Sol happens to be the name of her great grandmother. It is also one of the first words she learned from Innosanto Nagara's (2013) *A is for Activist* which we began reading at the age of 6 months after attending a children's book fair in Oakland, CA, featuring projects by local Bay Area artists and writers. It was also there where we received a personally signed copy from the author-illustrator himself. The book is an alphabet board book; the letter S is marked for "Sun, Sol, Solar! Super Star! Stellar power! Fuels all life, not just flowers." The book is still a favorite in our household, especially for tongue-twisting bedtime reading. In a similar vein, the word "araw" reflects an early experience visiting the Philippines and witnessing families stroll the grounds of the city of Manila's Luneta Park. It is where the statue of national hero and revolutionary poet José P. Rizal is located as part reminder of a layered history,

including insurgent acts against Spain's colonization of the Philippines for over 300 years and U.S. imperialism that followed throughout the 20th century. The latter as another form of colonial rule has resulted in labor migration and diasporic communities in the United States (see Baldoz, 2011; Choy, 2003; Mabalon, 2013). Such is a glimpse of historic relations yet to be explored in weighty exchanges that lie ahead. Nevertheless, our experience in Manila at that time led us to a set of Filipino-English bilingual picture books, one of which is Yvette Fernandez's (2019) *Good Night, Manila! (Magandang Gabi, Maynila!)* that incorporates an image of the sun setting over the Manila Bay, an exquisite view from a bustling boardwalk. The relevance of "good night" also echoes an already familiar phrase from another favorite book, *Goodnight Moon* (Brown, 2007). So, the concept of the sun in relation to fueling life, sunset, night, and moon had been evolving.

It is how language works. It is embedded within cultures and everyday activities. For me, what has become more evident is how as a parent I, too, must see and respond to the world differently. Critical race scholarship offers a helpful lens.

Critical Race Perspectives on Parenting

Critical race scholarship provides a frame for the illusory functions of race. First, I consider Delgado Bernal's (2018) critical race feminista parenting in bridging "theory and practice in everyday activities" toward a praxis that is "guided by tenets of critical race theory especially the awareness of permanent, indestructible racism (Bell, 1992)" and living through in-betweenness, conflict and frustration (p. 26). That in-betweenness also emerges through language (Anzaldúa, 1987). Such an approach offers a way to "forefront and affirm the Brown body while simultaneously understanding how the Brown body is 'othered,' regulated, and governed in schools and society" (Delgado Bernal, 2018, p. 26). In other words, part of critical race feminista parenting is to disrupt colonial structures and hegemonic practices shaped by raciolinguistic ideologies.

As a Pinay (Filipinx) parent and educator, I am emboldened by critical race feminista parenting and draw on the colonial histories of the Philippines and racialization of the "Brown body" in the United States to engage in the necessary pedagogical work. This pedagogical work is contoured by immigrant stories and settler colonial relations that make in/visible the always already constituted foreign "Brown body." I accentuate these stories and believe that any critical praxis starts at/from home. Accordingly, pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001) can contribute transformative ruptures or "those moments in our

parenting when we see hope for change and the possibility that a younger generation can engage in self-love and challenge normative constructions of race, gender, and sexuality” (Delgado Bernal, 2018, p. 27), and, as I might add, language. This kind (of) parenting acknowledges numerous forms of microaggression (as noted above) in order to further equip the younger generation as early as possible with tools to create an alternative future for themselves and those who will come after. It points to a critical race perspective on parenting that engages systems of oppression with knowledge from lived experiences of families and communities of color. It is an educational praxis that Matias (2016) refers to as ParentCrit or critical race parenting; it builds on the relationship between parents and children to extend pedagogies of the home, including teaching and learning about race, talking about raciolinguistic ideologies, and sharing stories about the many facets of race that appear in literature, media, and the like.

Moreover, ParentCrit considers parenting as part of broader justice movements to eliminate all forms of oppression. An understanding of intersectionality is crucial because what may appear personal and intimate is often contextualized within relations of power. An intersectional lens reminds us that “ParentCrit is more than a discussion of how to parent in discrete familial units; it connects these intimate relations of power, ways of being, and ways of knowing to an educational praxis” (DePouw, 2018, p. 56). Building on the use of *kuwento* or story (Jocson, forthcoming) and counter-storytelling in critical race methodology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), two examples are highlighted below.

Multilingual Lives and ParentCrit

In the first two years of my child’s life, we had the privilege of accessing a range of resources for growing everyday literacies. These resources were land, water, media technology, public libraries and museums, among others. We also had the privilege to be lifted up by blood kin and chosen family across geographic locations. In our little household, there are tons of books: theory books, method books, children’s books, young adult literature books, cooking books, art books, travel books, all kinds of books that an academic-reading enthusiast may accumulate over time. One day, I find my toddler on the couch, next to a wooden bookshelf, flipping through the pages of Derrick Bell’s (1992) *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*. It was an eye-opening moment to hint at what pedagogies of the home might entail when books are passed on from one generation to the next, perhaps even a future CRT scholar in the making, I thought. While words inside the text might have been indecipherable, I realized that

encounters with books like these especially in witnessing parents/adults engage them are important to emergent literacies of children. A child’s knowledge of reading and writing, as it relates to knowledge of one’s self, grows along with language through a range of interactions. It is the first stories in early childhood prior to the onset of formal reading and writing instruction that happens in classrooms or school-like environments. It is the mundane routine activities, inclusive of everyday literacies such as playing outside, being among plants and trees, scooping up dirt to populate seeds or check in on roly-polies hiding under rocks, doodling on paper what feels good about colorful books and repeating rhymes within them, recalling characters like George on random adventures while seesawing at the park, singing and dancing to *Moana* tunes, jumping across letters from B to H on an alphabet mat, enacting each word that each letter stands for, making up stories about small and big fishes in the ocean, imagining new ends to those stories, and getting through many more picture books in a nightly bedtime ritual, only to be curious again the next day.

Pedagogies of the home unfold in distinctive ways. One evening, in the tub during bath time, my daughter and I were chatting when she proceeded to share her favorite books. Without prompt, she blurted out, “Llama llama red pajama, a for activist, nasaan po sila, fierce!” We had been reading the first two books for over a year. Upon hearing these titles, I realized she had also identified Jomike Tejido’s (2018) *Nasaan Po Sila* (loosely translated as “where are they,” a series of books we picked up from our visit in the Philippines) and Bea Birdsong’s (2019) *I Will Be Fierce* (a story about facing the world each day). Additional books she mentioned later while still wading in the water were Paul Goble’s (1978) *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses*, Junot Diaz’s (2018) *Islandborn*, and Grace Carroll’s (2015) *Akira’s Animal Alphabet Alliterations*, an absolute treasure because of familial connections. The stories offered a range of windows, mirrors, and doors, yet also opened up questions about ParentCrit and intersectionality, including race and language.

Critical encounters such as this routine activity in the bathtub is key to learning. The spurious conversation about books maintains the centrality of language in purposeful engagements, and created possibilities for understanding, being, and becoming in the world. Drawing on human and more-than-human relations such as listening to water or storying about forests is fundamental to early childhood education (Nxumalo, 2019) and can lead to relational openings in learning. Such openings deepen the interactions we have with one another, with the books and the stories within them, as well as where/when/what we do with them to blur

boundaries in shaping the not-yet in everyday literacies and parenting, which in our case also includes grandparents in the same household.

Multigenerational ParentCrit

The COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020 has revealed more complexities about pedagogies of the home in immigrant, multilingual, and multigenerational households. During this time, anti-blackness, racial injustice, and anti-Asian sentiments surged. Not only did families and health become a priority, but finding means to negotiate historically rooted forms of racism and nativism in the United States also became essential. The impact on our mind, body, and spirit is real. Transformative ruptures are necessary for life and survival.

In our multilingual and multigenerational household in this time of pandemic, grandparents have played an active role. It did not take long for Filipino/Tagalog and Spanish languages to surface. Initial words have been quite fun to learn such as *utot* and *bantot* (fart, stinks), *sugat* (wound, boo boo, ouchie), and *kalokohan* (otherwise known to us as nonsense from raced and gendered ads on the tablet or television). Also, some phrases have become integrated in our conversations. For example, *magandang umaga* (good morning), *kain na tayo* (let's eat), *tayo na* (let's go), *buenas noches* (good night), *sueños dulces* (sweet dreams), and *cierran los ojos* (close your eyes) have been part of purposeful engagements. By association, *sueños* and *ojos* have given rise to "*me despierto...me elevo*" (I wake up...I rise) in rhyming occasions with books like Maya Christina Gonzalez's (2014) *Call Me Tree / Llámame Arbol*. Gradually, over time, we have talked more and read more together to underscore the relationship between land/islands, languages, and cultures in the Philippines through a series of books that features folk songs musically edited by Felicidad Prudente (2019) such as *Ed-Eddoy* (Ifugao), *Pakitong-Kitong* (Cebuano), and *Kaisa-Isa Niyan* (Maguindanon). Each story tells of regional customs and traditions in the Philippines. Each story also extends a popular book, *Bahay Kubo*, meaning nipa hut, which is based on a song of the same name. The song version in Filipino/Tagalog has been hummed in our household many times. In fact, while on a long drive on the northern island and through mountainous provinces of Luzon, my mother began to teach her grandchild lyrics and to sing them with conviction. Today, my daughter knows the song in its entirety and can identify many of the vegetables named in the *Bahay Kubo* lyrics that coincidentally are growing in her grandfather's garden, where she has dug in the dirt and insistently participated in harvesting produce.

Learning language is tied to seeing, being with, and learning about different parts of the world, for the first time and in the experiences beyond that. Such are relational and purposeful engagements of parenting, so it should not be a *surprise* that many young children understand concepts and could connect with them in multiple ways. Within the stories braided here, linguistic dexterity and self-love are further shaped by everyday talk, reading books, and human/more-than-human relations in the world. So, when my child prompts with "Mama, let's read!," it is with pleasure and purpose that I surrender to another chance at wonderment.

Implications for Practice and Everyday Literacies

There is still much to learn. I am reminded that many more lessons will unfold from the new terrains of learning with/from children as they grow up. Critical race feminist parenting and intersectionality in ParentCrit (Delgado Bernal, 2018; DePouw, 2018; Matias, 2016) have been helpful to unravel pedagogies of the home. A significant aspect of pedagogies of the home is equipping children with tools through language and racial identity development (Tatum, 1997). Specifically, the centrality of language in our household draws on lived experiences shaped by raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa, 2019), and our family's collective desire to sustain multilingual literacies in connection to global citizenship (Alvarez & Wan, 2019; Guerra, 2019). The ongoing health and racial pandemics, along with climate change, poverty, and imperialism, continue to impact people's lives, particularly the lives of multiply-marginalized populations and kin around the world. Rather than offer prescriptions, I am thinking through implications for practice in several ways.

One way is to ask questions about race and language directly: What raciolinguistic ideologies have emerged in each of our particular contexts? In what manner have they sketched ideas about teaching and learning? What critical encounters about race and language might unfold at home, in school, and many places in between? Another way to think through implications is to ask about critical race theories and how they can potentially transform practice: How might critical race feminist parenting or intersectionality in ParentCrit inform our work as parents and educators? How might those necessary conversations push routine activities? What books and other resources might one consider in the process, in addition to the ones referenced here?

Lastly, engaging in collaborative inquiry might also prove useful. Perhaps exploring these questions together

or coming up with new ones can invigorate what we do to further demonstrate the need for critical perspectives: How might parents and educators as partners in education contribute to bridging home-community-classroom practices? How might we integrate different knowledges, relationships, and connections to land into everyday literacies? How might stories and lessons from parenting in multilingual and multigenerational households, inclusive of transnational experiences, help to generate more relevant and exciting ideas about learning?

Pedagogical possibilities are all around us. The recent attack on critical race theory in the United States goes to show the need for critical race perspectives on parenting and education, and what it asks of us as parents and educators. The permanence of racism demands that we (continue to) take part in pedagogies of the home. The lives of our children, and future generations, demand that we do.

Conflict of Interest

None

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