

Knowledge into Action in a Latinx Neighborhood

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Abstract

What are academic obstacles for Mexican-heritage youth? How can we be critical change agents and turn knowledge into action? This longitudinal study explores these research questions through epistemological, axiological, and ontological discussions. Data gathering occurred at an after-school tutorial agency in a Texas neighborhood near Mexico. The 461 co-researchers were 238 children, 91 parents, and 4 tutorial staff (all Latinx), and 128 mostly-Latinx teacher candidates (TCs). Data sources involved field notes, questionnaires, written reflections, interviews, focus groups, children's drawings, a news station's Promesa depictions, and census data. From a social justice framework and grounded theory data analysis, two themes emerged: outsiders' stereotypes of Promesa and academic obstacles. In response, we created a Promesa college scholarship and organized financial aid presentations to improve residents' college graduation rate. Additionally, we launched a technology mentoring program involving TCs and Promesa children as part of community service-learning.

Keywords: social justice, service-learning, college graduation, change agent, Latinx

Low-income immigrant youth are more likely to live in high-poverty neighborhoods and face discrimination than their non-immigrant Latinx peers (Brown, 2015). Where people live can determine their educational outcomes (Brown, 2015; Colter, 2015; Orfield, 2014). Specifically, children at our borderlands site have faced marginalization from their teachers (Bussert-Webb, 2015). This othering in our research site (pseudonym *Promesa*) manifests itself in lower college graduation rates for people 25 and older. *Promesa's* rate was 1.3% in 2010, compared to 16% in the surrounding neighborhood and 24% in Texas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Because of our interest in the marginalization of nondominant youth and neighborhoods, our research questions were: What obstacles do *Promesa* youth face? How can we use our experience and research as change agents? Change agents attempt to achieve social justice (Spencer, Pryce, & Walsh, 2014). Thus, this article's objective is to turn knowledge into action. This article focuses on how we (the after-school tutorial director and a professor) have partnered to change these dismal results in *Promesa*. *Promesa* children attend this tutorial agency voluntarily for homework help. Bussert-Webb has taught community service-learning (CSL) courses to teacher candidates (TCs) at this agency during 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2015, 2016, and 2017 summer sessions. CSL integrates purposeful TC service with course reflections to strengthen communities and enrich the learning experience for those serving and those being served (Maynes, Hatt, & Wideman, 2013). CSL represents a reciprocal social justice pedagogy connected to exploring systemic inequities, such as opportunity gaps (Maynes et al., 2013).

Bussert-Webb attempted to take a similar equal-footing stance with tutorial staff. We planned and implemented CSL projects, consisting of gardening and technology projects; TCs' strengths-based lessons; homework help; and financial aid sessions. For the latter, local university staff presented college information to parents and children. Although youth can provide service for school-based service-learning, this article focuses on TCs' university-based service.

Bussert-Webb began sending her students to *Promesa's* agency in 2003 for CSL. De La O has been the agency's tutorial coordinator since 2013, when she started collaborating with

Bussert-Webb. (Bussert-Webb worked with the previous director from 2003 to 2013.) De La O grew up in *Promesa* and still lives there, which is significant because it gives her an emic (insider) perspective (Pike, Headland, & Harris, 1990). De La O's non-governmental organization (NGO) functions in a colonia, an unannexed Southwestern settlement lacking basic infrastructure (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2017). *Promesa* does have running water and paved streets (a 30-year-struggle for *Promesa* activists), but the surrounding city refuses to annex the colonia. Some residents surmised officials perceive *Promesa* as a tax drain (Bussert-Webb, Díaz, & Yanez, 2017). Nowadays, *Promesa*'s challenges relate mostly to income, education, and marginalization.

Colonialism, the ongoing exploitation of nondominant people, is another way to conceptualize colonias, cut from much governmental assistance (Dolhinow, 2010). "It is not by chance that in the more rural towns of Texas Chicano neighborhoods are called *colonias* rather than *barrios*" (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. 143, original emphasis). Most U.S. colonia residents are Latinx and Spanish-speaking (Dolhinow, 2010). Latinx, a more gender-inclusive term, signifies people who have more affinity to the Americas than Spain.

Our study is important because of multi-factor oppression affecting low-income, nondominant children (Brown, 2015). These factors relate to immigration (Brown, 2015; Timberlake & Williams, 2012); poverty and the opportunity gap (Gorski, 2013); race and language (Brown, 2015; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Gándara & Contreras, 2009); residence (Brown, 2015; Bussert-Webb, 2015; Bussert-Webb et al., 2017; Colter, 2015; Orfield, 2014); and education and linguistic policies vis-à-vis No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (U.S. Department of Education, 2002; U.S. Government Printing Office, 2011). Although the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), Texas continues with the most accountability pressure (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2012). Public school campuses in Texas receive A-F report cards, available online, based on school performance (Texas Education Agency, 2018). These interrelated circumstances influence *Promesa* children in myriad ways, including teacher expectations, technology-based school activities and homework, and schools' discrete skills and testing foci (Bussert-Webb, 2015; Bussert-Webb & Díaz, 2012; Bussert-Webb & Henry, 2016; Bussert-Webb et al., 2017). Where do these educators come from? They hail from teacher education programs and our power structure (Giroux, 1980).

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Community activists and researchers may know these confounding obstacles that subaltern youth and communities face. However, few non-academics will read our article because news outlets do not report much peer-reviewed and university-based education research (Yettick, 2015). Kristof (2014), a *New York Times* columnist wrote, "SOME of the smartest thinkers on problems at home and around the world are university professors, but most of them just don't matter in today's great debates" (para. 1). Yet, our research can matter to communities. We can take dismal findings about people and places and can partner as change agents. In this section, we discuss how the theoretical framework of social justice influenced our research and community activism. We also weave epistemic, ontological, and axiological discussions in our partnership for justice.

Epistemology relates to one's theory of knowledge and how we create knowledge, while ontology focusses on the nature of reality and being. Axiology connotes our values. As qualitative researchers and critical change agents, we recognize our epistemological and ontological subjectivities in transformation processes (Freire, 2000). Lapie (1902), who started French public schools, referred to axiology as the value researchers place on research. Scientifically-inclined researchers believe researchers should not contaminate the data, while interpretivists believe our biases are inherent in research (Lapie, 1902). Axiology, extending

beyond how we conduct research, also includes our actions once we publish. Transformative change agents are “deliberately striving to achieve social justice through the work produced” (Spencer et al., 2014, p. 83). Critical participatory research, which falls under social justice, by its very nature, advocates for change. This type of research is value-directed, versus value neutral (Spencer et al., 2014).

Due to our stances as change agents, social justice represented our theoretical framework (Freire, 2000). Social justice is an appropriate framework for our research questions related to colonia children’s academic obstacles and ourselves as change agents. Social justice focuses on recognizing and attempting to remedy the interrelated systemic inequities we discussed in the introduction. “To affirm that men and women ... should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce” (Freire, 2000, p. 50). In this fight for equity, critical change agents must reflect on their positionality and privilege and their epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions.

Freire (2000) discussed the epistemology of banking education, in which teachers attempt to bestow sanctioned knowledge on children. This banking education is prominent in low-income Latinx communities (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martínez, 2009), especially in Texas, with the highest accountability pressure, related to NCLB (Nichols et al., 2012). Epistemologically, banking education assumes test preparation and scores are more important than local knowledge (Arroyo-Romano & Benigno, 2016).

However, dialogue can be richer during CSL in non-school settings because TCs have increased time to talk informally with children and to work on team projects with them, such as gardening (Bussert-Webb et al., 2017). Dialogue involves an epistemological and ontological process in which tutors and children become committed to each other’s histories and learn from each other (Freire, 2000). Dialogue proves essential for CSL for social justice (Maynes et al., 2013) because those assisting learn to honor the lived experiences of those being helped (Freire, 2000). Dialogue occurs during the service and course discussions part of CSL.

Freire (2000) discussed how loving dialogue can also create conscientization, in which children realize inequities in their world and the historical process of these inequities. Importantly, conscientization involves one’s fight for freedom. Conscientization can occur for TCs providing service and for professors and agency members who organize and supervise this service. Giroux (1988) discussed how educators can be transformative intellectuals through social imagination, which relates to our positionality in conducting CSL, research, and service. What we do with our knowledge relates to axiology, our values.

From a social justice perspective, educational research should make a positive difference in communities. Based on a five-year research project, Teeters and Jurow (2018) created a formative evaluation tool to assess and plan community-engaged scholarship with non-dominant partners. Although the tool’s focus is equity and social change, professors must be aware that research “can further marginalize populations that have historically been excluded from research and policymaking” (Teeters & Jurow, 2018, p. 28). Thus, academics must be mindful that their social justice research can do more harm than good.

Furthermore, many studies support how CSL research helps communities. In James and Logan (2016), community partners, families, and children participated in a camp on a university campus, which was university students’ service-learning experience. The partners, families, and children reported social and personal benefits and organizational capacity-building from service-learning provided by college students. For capacity-building, service-learning helped to provide organizations with competent adults who could extend the to help extend organizations’ reach (James & Logan, 2016). Miron and Moely (2006) also discussed the benefits of CSL on partners; representatives from 40 agencies reported they gained voice and economic and social benefits, such as goals being met and increased resources, from university-based CSL.

Worrying about whether our research makes a difference in communities is an axiological stance of social justice researchers. We do more than research. We do research to make a difference in neighborhoods. Massingham (2014) discussed his longitudinal community action research involving researchers, practitioners, and consultants working together to create knowledge and affect change. Massingham (2014) described the difficulty of community action research due to fragmentation within the knowledge creating system; he said that many “researchers are disconnected from practical reality” (p. 418). Being connected as a researcher to the site and co-researchers takes time. For example, Day (2011) discussed his dilemmas as a researcher and change agent, e.g., paradigm differences and establishing trust with teachers. Day (2011) stated the goal of educational research should be to help teachers and children in schools. We agree, in part. Yet, from our axiological stance, communities and families are important, too. This next section focuses on our axiological, epistemic, and ontological positionality.

Our Positionality

Bussert-Webb

I explain who I am and why I act in loving relationship with *Promesa*, an immigrant community with which I have collaborated since 2003. My parents’ stories and my experiences shaped my epistemological, ontological, and axiological stances as a scholar. My Hungarian-born mother was an immigrant in Germany and then in America. Her German teachers, not understanding the vast difference between German and Hungarian, said she was too dumb to learn; they expelled her from school in sixth grade. She received her General Education Development (GED) as I completed my Master’s in 1989. My mother shared stories with me of her poverty and marginalization as a foreigner in Germany and Indiana – even with my father’s family. My Indiana-born father grew up working class. He received his GED in the U.S. Army. While stationed in Germany as a U.S. Army truck-driver, he met my mother. Even as a General Motors retiree, he carried his United Automobile Worker (UAW) card proudly.

I experienced marginalization as a second-generation immigrant and working-class child. I crept along in the lowest academic tracks and was a bullying victim. My parents, fearing teachers, did not defend me. However, my parents’ everyday skills and knowledge demonstrated we cannot measure intelligence by one’s job or formal education (Rose, 2009), which relates to epistemology. My mother’s unwavering generosity and respect toward elderly neighbors and my father’s openness have shaped my ontological stances, as my being in the world relates to assisting and learning from others (Freire, 2000). The marginalization my mother, my five siblings, and I experienced propelled me to take an activist stance and to collaborate with a neighborhood. Regarding axiology, I want my research to make a difference in my community and influence readers.

Although I grew up working class, as a white woman I recognize my whiteness has afforded me power and privilege (DiAngelo, 2016). Would my Hungarian history professor (who was also the department chair when I was an undergraduate) have sponsored my summer scholarship to study in Hungary if my mother would have been a gypsy or my father, black? Would I have been accepted into graduate programs and would I have had those jobs and fellowships if I had been of another race? As a full professor now, my power and privilege also relate to social class and status. Yet in liberating memory, I realize I can use power for good to challenge hegemonic (un)truths about a community with which I collaborate. According to Giroux (1988), liberating memories “can develop communities around an alternative horizon of human possibilities ... to develop a better way of life” (p. xxxv).

Ontologically, I value human connections and partnerships. As a social justice researcher, I believe co-researchers and I exist in reciprocal relationship (Paris & Winn, 2014). Although I recognize I have power over co-researchers as a white university professor, they

have power over me. They can refuse to participate at any time. “Refusal in research makes way for other r-words—for resistance, reclaiming, recovery, reciprocity, repatriation, regeneration” (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 244). Yet I endeavor to build and maintain relationships with students and community members. For instance, I have kept in contact with former students and maintain connections with *Promesa* children, parents, and tutorial staff.

De La O’s Positionality

As I reflect on my life, I wonder if, had I grown up in another neighborhood, more opportunities would have opened up for me. I was born and raised in a small house in *Promesa* and have experienced daily struggles, which relate to my epistemological, ontological, and axiological stances as the tutorial director. I remember the feelings endured as a child when people realized I lived in *Promesa*. People had repeated many outrageous claims about my neighborhood, such as, “Oh, you are from *Promesa*? Isn’t that the dangerous neighborhood where there are always shootouts?” and “Isn’t *Promesa* filled with drug addicts and violent gangs and criminals?” Once teachers knew where I grew up, they became distrustful and began thinking negatively about me. Children’s perceptions of discrimination can cause them psychological, social, physical, and academic harm (Brown, 2015).

Our teachers knew which children were from *Promesa* as soon as we walked into a classroom. Because my unincorporated settlement had no paved roads when I was growing up, when it rained, our shoes became muddy as we walked to school or the bus stop. Our shoes were filthy, soiling the floors and leaving dirt under our desks. Even the custodial staff recognized *Promesa* children and would complain about us often.

As *Promesa* children, we lacked school supplies frequently because our families could not find the money. Additionally, we did not complete homework often. Teachers would assume we were apathetic, had no future, and were not worth the effort or time. Teachers cast us aside and focused on other students who had better opportunities.

However, our reality was different from teachers’ assumptions. The educators did not realize why we rarely completed homework, brought school supplies, or showed interest in education. Besides economic obstacles, we struggled as emergent bilinguals. As native Spanish speakers, we had difficulty understanding homework in English. With many of our families knowing only Spanish, few at home could help us understand, practice, or study English.

My parents had little formal education and were limited in how they could help. My mother, although very smart, could only attend elementary school because my grandparents believed education was unnecessary for women. My father had a slightly better education because he was a male. However, he dropped out to earn income for his family. As such, neither parent was fluent in English and could not assist me with school.

However, my parents tried to support me and they imparted their principles to me, for which I am grateful. They taught me to never let others’ judgements influence who I became; they raised me to be well-mannered, honest, and respectful. Growing up with these principles helped me to move forward in life. Their *consejos* [advice] helped me to name my world (Freire, 2000). I have always believed my parents possessed important knowledge that would help me to live a better life. I carry this respect for parents’ knowledge with me as a tutorial director.

I made a significant decision years ago, thanks to the values taught by my parents. The Catholic church had asked my spouse and me for land in *Promesa*, which we had planned on using to build a house. The church wanted to use our property to expand within *Promesa*. We were reluctant to give up building our home, but knew the church needed the property. Once my husband and I had agreed, we gave the church our property. In turn, the church gave us another piece of land so we could build a home in another part of *Promesa*. We were pleased to stay in *Promesa* because it is where my family lived and where I grew up. Staying put relates to my ontology and emic perspective (Pike et al., 1990). My nature of being is connection to family

and place (Freire, 2000). Many white Americans leave high-poverty neighborhoods once they become wealthier (Rothstein, 2014; Sharkey, 2013). However, many colonia residents prefer to stay put because we feel connected to neighbors (Coronado, 2003). And so, we created a home in the exchanged property, while the church established a building that became a tutoring program. This program later granted me the opportunity to become the tutorial director, 20 years after the property swapping.

We decided to give our property to the church out of kindness and connection to the community. If I did not possess the values instilled by my parents, I would not have the opportunity to help *Promesa's* church and children. Axiologically, I value making a difference and assisting others. I am thrilled to offer children from *Promesa* the school opportunity I never had. For instance, as the tutorial director, I can give children the supplies, support, and help they need to succeed in school and life. I can help them understand and finish their homework in English and provide them with a place to feel safe. Epistemologically, I know through struggles, from listening to my parents' *consejos*, and from the viewpoint of two languages and cultures.

I also offer tutorial children a chance to collaborate with university students to help children realize they can continue studying after high school. I let children know that, although they come from a low-income community, it cannot stop them from pursuing a career and having a better life. I try to prove this to children and parents.

If I had not had the determination to deviate from the low standards set by my teachers, and to choose to continue my education, I would not have been able to overcome obstacles and improve myself. I graduated high school and received a degree in education. I understand the children's frustrations, as I was once in their place. Thus, I try to encourage them and help them understand that the best opportunity to have a better life is with education and a love of learning. I can also show children to respect one another and their education, and to help each other.

Furthermore, I hope the children will follow my example and give back to the community and lend a helping hand. I remember when I was young, volunteers at *Promesa's* community center would give beverages, food, and sometimes dishes to needy families. *Promesa* residents would line up for necessities for hours. I recall some people would ridicule those waiting in line, but I recognized the people who gave the donations were taking the time to help others. I am thankful to those people and am glad I can help the children and their parents in a similar way. The children's parents do not know how school districts work, nor what the rules and policies are, but the tutoring program gives information sessions and resources if they are struggling. If the children show signs of learning disabilities or speech disabilities, we refer parents to specialists to evaluate and support the children with assistance and therapy.

It was a difficult life to grow up as a resident of *Promesa*, and I believe that, had destiny led my family to a different neighborhood, I would have had different outcomes. I am grateful for the opportunities that have presented themselves to me, despite hardships.

Materials and Methods

Our positionalities relate to our methods. This long-term study has received institutional review board (IRB) approval since 2006. Bussert-Webb taught CSL courses and has gathered data at this tutorial agency in *Promesa* in May 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2015, 2016, and 2017. De La O began working at the tutorial agency in 2013, when she became the director. This section focuses on the site, co-researchers, data sources and procedures, and data analysis.

Site

Promesa, a census-designated place (CDP) with 7,000 residents and .6 square miles (1.6 km²), is about six miles from the Mexico border. With a \$4,000 per capita income and less than \$17,000 per household (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), *Promesa* sits inside of a Texas city of about 200,000 residents, but the city has not annexed it. Despite obstacles, including no city services because of its unincorporated status, *Promesa* exudes strengths, including shared Spanish language and Mexican-heritage, unity, support, and stability. Looking after each other represents collective agency in neighborhoods (Colter, 2015). Although staying put is a community strength rarely discussed in the literature (Coronado, 2003), *Promesa* is significantly above the Texas average for staying put (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This study took place in *Promesa*'s tutorial agency, which *Promesa* children attend after school for homework help.

The NGO offering tutorial services for *Promesa* children receives funds from United Way, donors, and fundraisers. As per Teeters' and Jurow's (2018) recommendations, our partnership has been: a) reciprocal and fieldwork-based, b) trustful, c) affirming of linguistic diversity, d) based on listening and planning for action, and e) focused on sustainability and yearly team projects (gardening and electronic newsletters). This NGO helps colonia residents to fight for justice, different from Dolhinow's (2010) findings of NGOs in New Mexico colonias.

Co-researchers

Promesa children and Bussert-Webb's TCs gardened, created newsletters, engaged in lessons, and wrote learning logs for about two hours each weekday. Authors 1 and 2 have implemented CSL projects involving TCs, tutorial children, and parent volunteers. The 461 co-researchers were 238 children, 91 parents, 4 tutorial staff members (all Latinx), and 128 mostly-Latinx teacher candidates (TCs). Children ranged from ages 6 to 17, grades first through tenth, and participated at the tutorial center where Bussert-Webb's students tutored them in academic subjects, helped them with school homework, and engaged them in projects. Most of the children attended local public schools; five attended local charter schools. All children and parent co-researchers spoke Spanish as a mother tongue, were Latinx, and lived in the *Promesa* neighborhood. Staff were Mexican-heritage females and native Spanish speakers. De La O (the co-author of this article and the tutorial director) is from *Promesa*; other staff members were from nearby communities. About 97% of the TCs were Latinx, mostly of Mexican origin, and mostly native Spanish speakers. TCs represented different content areas and grade level certifications, but most were preparing to teach secondary English, math, and science. All TCs grew up in our region, which is about 92% Latinx (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Procedures and Data Sources

Bussert-Webb started sending her TC students to *Promesa*'s tutorial agency in 2003 for CSL, but TCs served outside of class and Bussert-Webb conducted no CSL research until 2006. Data gathering occurred from 2006 to 2017, when Bussert-Webb taught CSL courses focused on literacy at *Promesa*'s agency. Authors 1 and 2 and other tutorial staff supervised the CSL at *Promesa* starting at 3:30 p.m. After children and staff left at 6 p.m., Bussert-Webb and TCs held class sessions focused on educational applications to social justice. Co-researchers in these IRB-approved studies completed informed assents and consents before data gathering. De La O assisted in writing this manuscript, yet did not collect or see data.

Data sources from our nine-year project involved field notes, questionnaires (all participants), child interviews, written child and TC reflections, child and TC focus group discussions, children's drawings of *Promesa*, and photos taken by tutorial staff. Public-domain

sources included U.S. Census data and a TV station's photos and articles about *Promesa*. Bussert-Webb wrote field notes of key moments observed; she co-supervised the CSL, served as the TCs' university instructor, and engaged in literacy and language research.

Children, parents, TCs, and tutorial staff completed open-ended questionnaires. Each questionnaire had 8 to 12 questions and took about 10 minutes to complete. The program-evaluation questionnaire, administered the last week of our once-a-year program, focused on impact of the program on children. Parents could choose Spanish or English questionnaires; all but one chose Spanish. A parent question was, *¿Cuáles son cosas que Ud. valora de [Promesa]?* (What are things you value about [Promesa]?) The college questionnaire involved child and parent college and career goals. Parents and children completed this immediately after listening to admission and financial aid presentations from university and community college staff members. We organized these information sessions.

Bussert-Webb and other IRB-approved personnel conducted more than 100 child interviews from 2006 to 2017. Research assistants and Bussert-Webb took turns interviewing the children for 20 to 30 minutes during each academic term in which Bussert-Webb taught CSL classes at *Promesa's* agency. Child interview questions focused on the children's CSL participation and their perceptions of *Promesa*. A sample interview question was, "Tell me about this neighborhood." Most interviews were in English, although children could choose Spanish or English. Bussert-Webb conducted practice interviews before assistants interviewed the children, and she heard parts of interviews being conducted as she walked around the center co-supervising the tutorials. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed, except when children requested no recordings. In all instances, the researcher would type as a child spoke; although we had no audio-recordings for some youth, we did have these automatic transcriptions. For member-checking, Bussert-Webb and research assistants read aloud what we had typed after each interview and we asked children to make any changes, deletions, or additions.

Written reflections consisted of child and TC daily 5-minute learning logs. Each child spent about 10 minutes completing an end-of-program reflection regarding their opinions of the CSL program. TCs answered prompts for pre- and post-written reflections, which took up to two hours to complete. A sample post-prompt was, "How did you help your tutee?"

The child art prompt was, "Draw a picture of [Promesa]." Children spent up to 30 minutes hand-drawing. Other visual data include photos tutorial staff took of children working with TCs, parents helping at the agency, and child and parent participation during college presentations. These multimodal data sources were to determine *Promesa* residents' perceptions of their tutorial center and neighborhood.

Bussert-Webb and IRB-approved researchers engaged children and TCs in audio-taped focus group discussions. Children co-researchers in the CSL engaged in two focus groups (2015 and 2016). TC co-researchers in the CSL engaged in nine focus groups (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2015, 2016, and 2017). Each focus group lasted about 25 minutes. Sample questions were (for children): "Can you speak about your drawing of your neighborhood?" and (for TCs): "Can you speak about the community?" Researchers typed as people spoke; after each discussion, researchers reread the instantaneous transcription and asked for corrections. Additionally, Bussert-Webb emailed transcriptions from the focus-group recordings to TCs and asked them for input. For peer debriefing, Bussert-Webb shared her insights (with de-identified data) with De La O, other tutorial staff, research assistants, and university colleagues to elicit their interpretations.

Public-domain sources have included census information and a news station's depictions of *Promesa*. Bussert-Webb (2015) examined data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) to compare the child and parent college goals with *Promesa's* actual college graduation rates. She chose a local TV station randomly and analyzed its visual and written depictions of

Promesa for six consecutive months in 2013, three months before our May program and three months after it. Bussert-Webb compared the station's images and words to the children's drawings of *Promesa* and photos tutorial staff shot. She chose a television station because TV was America's main news source during data gathering (Saad, 2013). Ironically, the American public receives information from the media and government experts and reports, but little from educational researchers (Yettick, 2015).

Data Analysis

Bussert-Webb analyzed verbal and visual data using grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Verbal data consisted of interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, Bussert-Webb's field notes, written child and TC reflections, children's drawings of *Promesa*, and photos by *Promesa* staff. Data analysis began by Bussert-Webb's examination of all verbal and visual data in which she jotted down insights and possible themes. Bussert-Webb reread the data many times and drew lines between words and images to show relationships. In this stage, she identified and categorized data by looking for similarities and dissimilarities vis-à-vis the research questions, theoretical framework, and extant literature (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). For example, Bussert-Webb grouped a local TV station's Internet photos and articles about *Promesa* and examined these to determine the station's most common themes. Next, she compared these themes to children's drawings, tutorial staff's photos, and written data. Third, Bussert-Webb delimited the theory. When she saw the same themes appear repeatedly, she realized she had saturated a theme. Emerging themes became the major headings in the following findings section. Bussert-Webb selected representative quotes from the data.

Results

Stereotypes

The first finding (Table 1) relates to the media's pathologization and educators' stereotypes of *Promesa*. Some TCs, citing the media and rumors, believed the children would be unruly and people would mug TCs and steal their vehicles. However, TCs' perceptions changed after CSL, which relates to lived experiences. One TC stated, "[*Promesa*] wasn't as bad as I thought or people made it seem" (Bussert-Webb, 2015, p. 55). Next, public-school teachers' lower expectations were exemplified in discrete-skill homework or no homework at all.

Table 1

Stereotypes

Finding	Key Quote	Knowledge to Action
The media pathologize <i>Promesa</i> .	A TC wrote, “Both tutees live in [<i>Promesa</i>] and when I first came in, I did already stereotype the environment ... This is what happens when you see the news and how it portrays the area.”	We have invited local reporters and photographers to visit our program, resulting in published positive press. Bussert-Webb wrote editorials to refute negative <i>Promesa</i> portrayals, also. Next, the newspaper will publish the essay of <i>Promesa</i> scholarship winners.
Educators stereotype <i>Promesa</i> children.	A TC wrote, “When teachers hear a student is from [<i>Promesa</i>] they automatically have lower expectations of them. That is not fair. Why should they be treated differently just because of where they live or how much income their parents make?”	The CSL projects have been raising up TCs who recognize systemic inequities and who advocate for nondominant children and families (Bussert-Webb, 2015; Bussert-Webb et al., 2017). Bussert-Webb will give principals of schools servicing <i>Promesa</i> children her research findings.

College Barriers

The next major finding (Table 2) included these sub-themes: immigration, poverty, parents’ inadequate college schemata, myths about nontraditional students, few college-going *Promesa* residents, and inadequate preparation for college-related digital demands.

Table 2

College Barriers

Finding	Key Quote	Knowledge to Action
Immigration is a college barrier.	A tutorial staff member wrote, “ <i>Una presentación no es suficiente para quitar el miedo ... No son documentados</i> ” (A presentation is insufficient for them to lose their fear. They are undocumented) (Bussert-Webb et al., 2017, pp. 183-184).	In response to the staff member’s questionnaire response, we decided to continue the college presentations. Local college recruitment and financial aid staff give yearly presentations in Spanish to <i>Promesa</i> children and families.
Poverty is a college barrier.	A 10-year-old responded to a question about why few <i>Promesa</i> residents attended college, “Because, like, they don’t have money and the parents are poor.”	The financial aid presentations we organize in <i>Promesa</i> address local and state financial aid for those without U.S. documentation. Also, we created a scholarship for <i>Promesa</i> residents.
Parents’ limited college schemata is a college barrier.	A tutorial staff member wrote, “Many families do not feel college is something available for them. There are so many misconceptions about the admission requirements and the financial aid opportunities.”	A university administrator and we have discussed coordinating a field trip for <i>Promesa</i> children and families to take a tour of our university’s campus and to learn about an early college high school located on our campus.
Myths about nontraditional students are a college barrier.	An 11-year-old said college was not for nontraditional students: “They didn’t complete their school career. They got out of school. You can get out at 16. They become parents.”	To target older people, the scholarship we founded is open to high school graduates and GED recipients and any person 17 years old and older.
Seeing few college students was an obstacle.	Few children knew college students and graduates. When asked whether she knew any college students, an 11-year old replied, “Yes, my tutor from last year.”	TCs (mostly Latinx) motivated children to have college aspirations by being their friends. Since we have continued CSL, child-TC interactions can influence the children.
Scant academic digital practice is an obstacle.	A TC wrote, “Teachers do not inquire if [<i>Promesa</i> children] have access to technology and assume the children are unable to complete complex research projects.”	Our scholarship applicants help children at <i>Promesa</i> for 12 hours in academic technology, which assists scholarship applicants in college. Also, in 2016, we changed from gardening to digital literacy projects, based on child interview data related to their academic technology needs.

Discussion

Stereotypes

The first finding related to stereotypes about *Promesa*. Stereotypes can harm children in multiple ways and can affect children's educational attainment (Brown, 2015). As Author 2's teachers perceived her differently once they discovered she lived in *Promesa*, TCs also revealed initial biases about *Promesa*. Although TCs hailed from the city surrounding *Promesa*, many had never entered *Promesa* due to the media's pathologization of *Promesa* as festooned with negligent parents, illegal immigrants, and crime (Bussert-Webb, 2015). Because of limited contact, myths continued, thus resulting in fewer children receiving college-student tutoring.

Although Bussert-Webb's students got to know *Promesa* children and families through CSL and changed their stereotypes, many local teachers may not. Several TCs and children mentioned teachers discriminated against *Promesa* children and expected less of the latter (Bussert-Webb, 2015; Bussert-Webb et al., 2017). Children who perceive school discrimination are likely to "perform worse academically, be at greater risk for dropping out, and believe that doing well in school is unimportant or not useful" (Brown, 2015, p. 10). Hernández (2003) found *Promesa* parents cared about their children's education; however, the children's teachers perceived parents to be uninvolved. Myths of uninvolved minoritized parents abound (Bussert-Webb & Díaz, 2019b).

Children have brought scant higher-level homework to the tutorials after school; homework has consisted of having children read aloud for 60 seconds and counting correct words per minute; test-preparation; low-level, discrete-skills worksheets from publishers; teacher requests for children to write spelling words five times each (with no definitions or visuals); and end-of-course exams focused on high school youth memorizing names of countries. A relationship exists between youth's academic achievement and teacher expectations (Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2016; Haycock, 2001; Rubie-Davies, 2010; Sorhagen, 2013). Low expectations relate to many educators' deficit beliefs about low-income children (Biles, Mphande-Finn, & Stroud, 2012; Bussert-Webb, 2015; Gorski, 2008, 2013).

College Barriers

Co-researchers cited college barriers related to immigration, poverty, college schemata, nontraditional student myths, knowing few college-going *Promesa* residents, and limited academic digital experiences. Regarding immigration, about 38% of *Promesa* residents do not possess U.S. residency status (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Immigration concerns impede U.S. college completion (King & Puntí, 2012), especially for darker-skin immigrants (Ortiz & Telles, 2012).

Regarding poverty, some youth believed *Promesa*'s 2010 college graduation rate of 1.3% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) was so low because *Promesa* residents did not have enough money to attend college. Indeed, low-income youth enroll in universities at a much lower rate than high-income youth (Strick, 2012; Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiIulio, 2007).

Regarding college knowledge, co-researchers' limited college schemata propelled us to coordinate college information sessions at the tutorial agency. We have held these sessions every year since 2008. Presenting in Spanish, local Latinx university and community college representatives discuss their personal college struggles, institution resources, and Texas state laws related to immigration. For example, Senate Bill 1819 allows undocumented people to receive in-state Texas tuition (Rangel, 2015). These financial aid and admissions staff members emphasize confidentiality in college records. Nora and Crisp (2009) and Bussert-Webb and Díaz (2019b) found that Latinx parents care about their children's education and college, but lack college schemata and networks. Thus, providing college information sessions to children and parents and inviting the same Latinx presenters help *Promesa* parents and youth to form

college knowledge and networks. Furthermore, we have been collaborating with a university administrator for an upcoming field trip for *Promesa* children and families to tour one of our university's campuses; the purpose is to learn about an early college high school there.

Regarding myths of nontraditional college students, some youth stated parents were too old to attend college. Youth believed dropping out of secondary school prohibited eventual college attendance; they did not consider the GED as a path for eventual college attendance (Bussert-Webb et al., 2017). To target older people, the scholarship we founded is open to high school graduates and GED recipients (in Spanish or English) and anyone 17 and older.

As per seeing few college-going residents and graduates in *Promesa*, we are attempting to change the landscape through CSL, which provides the children with Latinx college role models (Bussert-Webb et al., 2017). Seeing other Latinx college students is important for youth to feel they are not alone and that they, too, can attend college and graduate (Nora & Crisp, 2009). TCs (mostly Latinx) motivated the children to have college aspirations by becoming their friends. Bussert-Webb has continued in the same site so these child-TC interactions can embed themselves in the children's hearts and minds. Regarding impact on *Promesa* children, children who engaged in our program improved in their academic knowledge and skills (Bussert-Webb, 2009, 2011; Bussert-Webb & Díaz, 2019a).

Next, children reported inadequate technology-related homework. We observed sparse technology-infused school work (less than 10% of all homework brought to the tutorial center) over the years. Inadequate preparation for college-related digital demands harms non-dominant children, as the digital divide relates to access, practices, and skills (Bussert-Webb & Henry, 2016). We noticed these digital inequities and thus decided to forgo our gardening projects for CSL, in favor of electronic newsletters, complete with child stories and visuals. Furthermore, we have attempted to give applicants of the *Promesa* scholarship experience in tutoring children for higher-level, inquiry-based technology. By tutoring children in technology for 12 documented hours, scholarship applicants will learn academic digital skills, which will help them in college.

Conclusions and Implications

Several limitations came to light. First, Bussert-Webb and other IRB-approved researchers interviewed children in open areas until about 2015, which may have caused children to alter what they wanted to say, in fear that others might think differently of them. Next, TCs were Bussert-Webb's students and they may have said or written things to please us. Similarly, the children may have written learning logs and final reflections to please their tutors and us.

Only about 2,800 (40%) of *Promesa*'s 7,000 residents are children. Due to funding limits, the tutorial agency services less than 60 children yearly, 2% of *Promesa*'s population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Thus, the CSL courses in *Promesa* have not reached enough youth. Next, we have not determined systematic long-term impact on former tutorial children, many of whom are now adults. However, we have stayed in touch with tutorial children and their families. Despite these limitations, 12 years of research with diverse data and co-researchers, member-checking, peer-debriefing, and the extant literature help to establish trustworthiness of the findings. In short, this study relates to higher education as a social justice issue.

Knowledge to action (in Tables 1 and 2) focused on our partnership in getting *Promesa*'s positive frames in the local media and to change outsiders' stereotypes (Waymer 2009). Additionally, the CSL projects have helped future teachers to recognize social injustices and advocate for nondominant children and families. One of Bussert-Webb's former students who tutored in our program now teaches children across the street from *Promesa* (Bussert-Webb et al., 2017). Through solidarity with children, educators can recognize the need to fight for

change (Freire, 2000). Bussert-Webb struggled to get university administrators to approve site-based CSL. Thus, Bussert-Webb constantly communicated with administrators to show them the benefits of CSL for our TCs and institution; see Bussert-Webb et al. (2017) regarding how she overcame these obstacles. We also collaborated before each CSL program to create tutoring dyads; we matched child academic needs with TCs' content areas.

Following our partnership experience and Teeters' and Jurow's (2018) recommendations, community-university partnerships should benefit all parties, be based on college students' fieldwork (e.g., community service-learning and writing connected to course content), be trustful, and affirm community members' languages and dialects. Other considerations involve reciprocal listening; dedicated time for feedback and planning for action; sustainability; and team projects. Our projects have focused on creating and maintaining community gardens and walking paths, children's electronic newsletters, celebrations involving families (such as Mother's Day and Day of the Child), and presentations by college financial aid and admissions staff.

Thus, knowledge to action related to us organizing yearly college information sessions in Spanish to children and parents, setting up the local college scholarship for *Promesa* residents, and improving *Promesa* children's college motivation, digital knowledge and skills through CSL. As Freire (2000) stated, our findings and subjectivities, our passions join to produce "knowledge in solidarity with action" (p. 38). Moreover, Freire argued we must reflect and act in the world to transform it. Thus, besides reporting findings, we assist the community from whence the findings came. We work to change the inequities we report. This is our axiological stance toward research connected to social justice (Spencer et al., 2014).

Those interested in having college staff give presentations may coordinate faculty, TC, child, and agency tasks beforehand. For instance, Bussert-Webb contacted financial aid and admission staff, donated refreshment money, assisted in obtaining raffle prizes, and set up the projector and laptop. De La O and her staff made refreshments, wrapped raffle items, and set up the room. First and second graders expressed disinterest in the presentations, so they and their tutors play educational games in another room during these presentations. Regarding parents, we experienced low parent attendance for the first few years. Thus, we enticed them to attend by engaging them in raffles with many prizes at the end of an institution's college presentation. Based on child and parent questionnaires and child interview responses, these financial aid and college presentations improved children's college schemata and motivation.

We collaborated as well in creating the college scholarship for *Promesa* residents. We revised and edited the scholarship criteria several times and communicated with the community college for feedback. Initially, we created the scholarship with \$10,000 in funds, which has grown from funding appeals we made to community civic organizations, such as the Rotary Club. Others may choose Facebook's "Go Fund Me" option.

Our collaboration comes from community knowledge and research. De La O, who lives in *Promesa*, embodies tutoring and emic perspectives. Although Bussert-Webb has engaged with *Promesa*, she has researcher and etic (outsider) viewpoints (Pike et al., 1990). De La O supervises the children for many hours yearly, while Bussert-Webb focuses on data. We have sought to combine our perspectives when designing team projects for CSL. For example, we realized the children received scant academic technology homework; thus, we changed our CSL project from gardening to creating electronic newsletters and PowerPoint presentations, and teaching children digital literacy skills. Data show that this CSL focus on academic technology has improved the children's college motivation and digital knowledge and skills.

Hopefully our knowledge into action may inspire researchers to co-create scholarships where they conduct research, engage in CSL projects, and invite university recruiters to present in neighborhoods where they work. Our relationships with co-researchers (ontological stances) and what we do with our findings (axiological stances) relate to our theories of being in

the world and what we value. Ontologically, we can work with and in communities and schools in interconnected webs. As Freire (2000) stated, “The essence of consciousness is being with the world” (p. 69). Furthermore, commitment to others relates to dialogue and love (Freire, 2000).

Axiologically, we can use research to make a local difference (Hostetler, 2005). Epistemologically, we can read portrayals of communities and people with critical lenses; we can question how writers or speakers privilege certain knowledge. We, like Freire (2000) must ask, “Whose knowledge?” Freire treated learners as co-creators of knowledge with important things to teach. Related to epistemology, we can realize residence (and confounding factors) influence the opportunity gap (Gorski, 2013). Considering out-of-school contexts can help us to develop collective agency to move beyond unidimensional educational policies (Colter, 2015). For example, positive student outcomes relate to neighborhoods’ collective efficacy and relationships with private, public, and NGO entities (Colter).

Next, we can find ways to share our findings in the local media to affect change at a local level (Yettick, 2015) and we must help marginalized communities to get their positive frames in the local media (Waymer 2009). Furthermore, we can serve on commissions, boards, assist state educational agencies, and inform policymakers and agencies of issues (Badgett, 2015).

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