

Working Title:

**On the Education of Students of Immigrant Backgrounds in Remote Pockets
of the United States of America: A Two-Part Creative Project**

*A capstone project presented to the Yale Education Studies Program in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the program*

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Abstract

This project acts as a fulfillment for the capstone project requirement of the Yale College Education Studies multidisciplinary academic program. This project documents and illustrates the educational narratives of students from immigrant backgrounds who spend all or part of their K-12 education in highly remote and homogenous communities in the United States. The work in its entirety is divided into two components: Part ONE consists of an essay, described below. Part TWO consists of a narrative storytelling comic, intended for distribution as a work of journalism.

In the essay that is Part ONE of the project, I explore positive, strength-based methods of providing information concerning the educational experiences of the students outlined above to youth, parents, teachers, and school administrators in order to share the narratives of students who are underrepresented in both academic educational literature and education media. In doing so, I first outline the existing research on the educational disparities the selected group of students face, though the research existing for their exact demographic of students is slim. Next, I analyze the uses of comics journalism in presenting and disseminating the students' narratives, which is the form the second portion of the project takes. Finally, I perform a review of different epistemologies that lend perspective to responsible, informed methods of storytelling through survivance, strength-based practices, and the centering of lived experience in order to improve my own storytelling.

Part TWO of this project includes the research scope and question, methods, interview practices, and the script for the comic. Finally, the comic itself is inserted, with accompanied alternative accessible text.

Introduction

Traditionally, Eid festivities in Rapid City, South Dakota are hosted by one of the four families, including my own, that act as an anchor to the minuscule Muslim contingent in the city. But for Eid Al-Adha in the summer of 2022, a Pakistani couple new to the community took the gauntlet.

After our plates were piled high, the mother of the family pulled me aside. She told me they were planning to move to the East Coast because her kindergarten-aged daughter had lost ten pounds from the bullying she faced at school. Nightmares of class kept her from sleeping, and she had come home with bruises on her arms multiple times. Teachers had no answers, and instead created the narrative that her daughter was severely behind in her learning, which she knew not to be true. She shared that she had pulled her daughter out of school, and left her work at the hospital to homeschool her. She told me that the treatment of immigrant kids and their families has only worsened since I had been a part of the very same education system.

I grew up attending the same schools in the 2000s. My parents immigrated to South Dakota from Turkey in the early 90s for my father's work. Despite being born in the same hospital as my peers, speaking the same language, and attending all of the same schools, I was foreign and otherized in my own hometown. I experienced similar hardships in my educational environment that created behavioral and learning barriers that others did not face under the same circumstances. However, I also found joy and resilience in my educational experience. I found bravery, love, and dedication where loneliness and isolation were determined to take hold.

This two-part project acts as a small offering of strength for students with stories similar to the one illustrated above. It is intended to bring representation, understanding, and light to a small but present group of students across the United States of America. The first component of

the project is an essay that outlines the current research landscape of students with immigrant backgrounds' educational experiences in different parts of the U.S., though much of the work is deficit-based commentary. The essay then describes ways in which comic-work acts as a useful and accessible medium through which to share the stories of students from immigrant backgrounds who are culturally, racially, and/or ethnically isolated in their schooling. Finally, the essay analyzes means through which to share these stories responsibly, using the epistemologies of survivance, strength-based storytelling/counter-storytelling, and lived experience. The second part of the project puts the fruits of the first part's labor to use and consists of a comic sharing the resilience and strength of some of these students around the country.

Definitions

Two major definitions are important to define in this essay centering on the student and the place. These two categories narrow the project to the slim yet actively present designation the work is intended for.

First, on the topic of the student: these are students who are "of immigrant background," here taken to mean either immigrants themselves or children of immigrants, often grouped together in other academic literature.¹ "Children of immigrants" often receive their own labeling, known as "second-generation" immigrants.² For the purposes of this project, the demographic of children who are either immigrants themselves or second-generation are denoted as "IB" children, or as will be more often written, IB students.

Second, on the topic of the place: the geographic location of the chosen student is dependent on two factors: its homogeneity as *not* part of the IB student's own background, and

¹ A popular example of this is a popular 1997 study conducted by Min Zhou, which is found at the following: Zhou, Min. "Growing up American: The challenge confronting immigrant children and children of immigrants." *Annual review of sociology* (1997): 63-95.

² Bureau, U. C. "Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Foreign Born." *Census.gov*.

its remoteness from centers characterized by larger populations that are likely to contain a community that the IB student identifies with ethnically, racially, religiously, or culturally.

For the purposes of this project, the homogeneity of the community does not rely only on stark population ethnicity demographics, but also on redlining and segregation within the physical space to create homogenized schools or community settings. Because of the qualitative, interview-based nature of this project, this component is largely determined by interviewees. Remoteness is defined as a community that is more than 2.5 hours driving distance from a census-defined “large city,” with a population of 250,000 or more.³ Remoteness is used because it reduces the possibility of including students who live in homogenous communities but attend school in a larger city an hour away, which could drastically change their educational experience as an IB student. Additionally, in these locations which are often (but not always) rural, education and community are weaved into one another; education affects community and vice versa.⁴ Should a student attend school with a homogenous group of students but also belong to an enriching community a mere 45 minutes away, their views on schooling are likely to change as well.

These parameters are set to ensure this qualitative project is focused on IB students who are effectively isolated from others of their own background in the educational and community setting. Together, the definitions of both place and student combine to create the targeted demographic: the IBRH (immigrant background, remote and homogenous-centered) student, which will be denoted as such. Note that the IB student is distinct from the IBRH student, as the IB student refers to any student of immigrant background, discussed often in the following section.

³ Gevertt, Douglas E. "Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates Program (EDGE): Locale Boundaries User's Manual. NCES 2016-012." National Center for Education Statistics (2015).

⁴ McClelland, Jerry. "Knowing and Being Known: Parents' Experiences with Rural Schools." (1996).

Part ONE

Topic Research Landscape

The definitions above in conjunction with current-day context of IBRH students illustrate that the group of students I am talking about is not very large at all. Accordingly, there is not much current, direct research on IBRH students. The project I present acts as a small, qualitative contribution to an already small collection of work.

There is, however, deep and rich academic coverage of different potential components of an IBRH student's background. While not all of the following fields may pertain to every IBRH student in the country or even the students who will be featured in the comic portion of the project, they serve as reflections of some part of the first and second-generation immigrant educational experience in the United States. In this section, I summarize research on the following: 1) general integration of immigrant-background (IB) students into U.S. schooling, 2) immigrant-background student integration into rural education, 3) isolation and otherization in schooling, 4) the importance of acceptance and cultural relevance in education, and 5) family dynamics and schooling for immigrant background students.

1. IB Student Integration into U.S. Schools

IB students now make up more than one-third of the student population in the United States⁵. This portion, being immigrant children of immigrants and immigrant children themselves, serves as, “the fastest-growing and the most ethnically diverse segment of America's child population” since the 1980s⁶. Most of the research on these students is confined to large

⁵ US Department of Education. “Educational Resources for Immigrants, Refugees, Asylees and other New Americans” (2022).

⁶ Zhou, Min. “Growing Up American: The Challenge Confronting Immigrant Children and Children of Immigrants.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997): 63–95.

cities that, following the general understanding of metropolitan characteristics, are already some of the most diverse spaces in the United States.

Even with this diversity, IB students continue to face disproportionate educational challenges in comparison to their peers, especially students who arrive at the educational system with little previous knowledge of English.⁷ Much research continues to revolve around English language learner (ELL) students. These students face greater workloads and learning difficulties, considering the expectation to learn English alongside general class material being taught in English⁸. ELL research is commonly found alongside other research concerning IB students, though it is not always the case that the student is an ELL learner. This is especially true for second-generation immigrant students, who often not only speak, read, and write English fluently, but it can be considered one of if not their only native language(s).

The general summary of research concerning IB students in the American education system assists in providing a background on how the United States education system as a whole interacts with IB students, and highlights the abilities and limits of the federal government in assisting student education. However, since so much of education in the United States is decided by the state the student is living in,⁹ this research can only go so far in describing the experiences of students in places that aren't major cities like New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, or Washington, D.C. This pertains heavily to the differentiated experiences of IBRH students, or the demographic I am concerned with. Some differences between national research and rural research, where many IBRH students are located, are outlined below.

2. IB Student Integration into Rural Education

⁷ Sugarman, Julie, and Melissa Lazarin. "Educating English Learners during the COVID-19 pandemic." Migration Policy Institute (2020).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Cookson, Peter W. School choice: The struggle for the soul of American education. Yale University Press (1995).

In studying IB students who live in rural areas of the U.S., an overwhelming amount of the research concerns ELL students. There is less research on the general achievement of these students, especially second-generation students who speak English fluently. This sentiment is echoed by some of the very researchers who perform studies in large cities: “many studies of immigrants in secondary school use data from large metropolitan areas, which have especially sizable and diverse immigrant populations. Researchers should explore whether the mechanisms that affect immigrants’ educational outcomes in these cities differ from those shaping outcomes in other parts of the country”.¹⁰

Considering the influx of immigrant families to rural America in the past four decades¹¹, I would expect for there to be a larger pool of nuanced topics of study in the field. What research there is largely concentrates on Hispanic immigrant students and families. This is expected, considering Hispanic immigrants make up more than 44% of the total immigrant population in the United States,¹² with a quarter of the total immigrant population coming from Mexico.¹³ Accordingly, contemporary immigrants have been concentrated in the West. In this time, “California accounted for over a third of the total arrivals of legal immigrants ... while New York, the traditional largest receiving state, accounted for only 14%”.¹⁴

Hispanic, mainly Mexican, immigrants also make up most of the rural immigrant population in the US because of occupation upon migrating as well as “herd” migration patterns

¹⁰ Crosnoe, Robert, and Ruth N. López Turley. "K–12 Educational Outcomes of Immigrant Youth." *The Future of children* 21, no. 1 (2011): 129.

¹¹ Lichter, Daniel T. "Immigration and the new racial diversity in rural America." *Rural sociology* 77, no. 1 (2012): 3-35.

¹² Lopez, Mark Hugo, and Mohamad Moslimani. "Latinos See US as Better Than Place of Family’s Ancestry for Opportunity, Raising Kids, Health Care Access." (2022).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Zhou, Min. “Growing Up American: The Challenge Confronting Immigrant Children and Children of Immigrants.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997): 63–95.

in which multiple/many families from one geographic area of their emigrant country to a rural location where there is already an established contact¹⁵.

While this arrangement makes for a space with IB students, and the community they attend school in can also be remote, these spaces are not homogenous. Or, if they are, the homogeneity serves the IB student. Often, students in these communities grow up next to and attend school with other students who are also IB students with the same ethnicity, race, and language background. Sometimes, they are even family. While many of the hardships of being an IB student are present in these scenarios, the component of isolation and/or otherization is not apparent.

3. Isolation, Otherization in Schooling

One component of IBRH students' educational experiences is the cultural, ethnic, and/or racial isolation they face in the classroom. While there are not many studies on this specific phenomenon for IBRH students in the United States because most rural or remote communities that are studied are Latine rural communities with large numbers of Hispanic populations in the same space, bodies of research that focus on the effects of isolation in schooling, in general, do exist.

Isolation and loneliness in schooling, particularly in kindergarten through elementary school, can have severe effects on not only the schooling and mental well-being of the student but, also their social development¹⁶. Social isolation has risen sharply with the increasing

¹⁵ Delgado-Gaitan, Concha, and Henry Trueba. *Crossing cultural borders: Education for immigrant families in America*. Vol. 6. Taylor & Francis (2022).

¹⁶ Ladd, Gary W., Becky J. Kochenderfer, and Cynthia C. Coleman. "Friendship quality as a predictor of young children's early school adjustment." *Child development* 67, no. 3 (1996): 1103-1118.

presence of technology in the lives of teenagers,¹⁷ and the negative effects on mental health such as the increased likelihood of depression cannot be discounted.

What research has been conducted concerning the isolation of IB students states that not enough work has been done in the first place: “it is surprising that loneliness in immigrant children has received little attention from researchers... The emotional and social adversities experienced by children from immigrant families in their day-to-day school lives have not been adequately examined.”¹⁸

One of the few works done on this topic, which focuses mainly on the “social, cultural, and psychological adaptation of children of immigrants”¹⁹ creates direct connections between lower self-esteem caused by feelings of loneliness and isolation in IB students and poor performance in schools. Instead, students seek acceptance and cultural understanding.²⁰

IB Student and Family Roles in Schooling

The role of the family cannot be understated when examining the education of IB students. In fact, some scholars intertwine family dynamics with student achievement in school: “family factors... tend to be more closely related to educational and cognitive disparities in early childhood and elementary school, reflecting the role of the home as the primary context of children’s lives and their lack of exposure to other institutional settings. Immigrants’ parenting

¹⁷ Best, Paul, Roger Manktelow, and Brian Taylor. "Online communication, social media and adolescent wellbeing: A systematic narrative review." *Children and Youth Services Review* 41 (2014): 27-36.

¹⁸ Kirova, Anna. "Loneliness in Immigrant Children." *Childhood Education* 77, no. 5 (2001): 260. Gale OneFile: Contemporary Women's Issues.

¹⁹ Rumbaut, Ruben G. "Profiles in resilience: Educational achievement and ambition among children of immigrants in Southern California." In *National Invitational Conference on "Resilience Across Contexts: Family, Work, Culture, and Community."*, Mar, 1998, Temple U, Philadelphia, PA, US; This chapter is a revision of a paper presented at the aforementioned conference. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, (2000).

²⁰ Kwon, Yangyi. "Factors affecting international students' transition to higher education institutions in the United States." *College Student Journal* 43, no. 4 (2009).

behaviors, although appropriate to their home culture, do not always align with what is demanded and rewarded by American schools".²¹

Additionally, parents traditionally hold the responsibility to enter the child into extracurricular social activities from a young age. If a parent does not have ties to their child's school and community, which is sometimes the case for immigrant parents, their child has fewer common experiences with their classmates. This can cause social isolation, and even create negative perceptions of the student on the part of their teachers.²²

Parent-child relationships for second-generation immigrant children have also been attributed to specific ethnic/racial IB groups outperforming non-IB children.²³

Before moving to the second section of this essay, it is important to note that much of the research on the topics above, including but not limited to school performance and achievement by ethnic group, ELL student learning, "assimilation" into schooling, isolation effects, and family involvement in IB schooling are commanded by deficit-based narratives that often do more harm than good in their creation, particularly for students of color. This is further discussed in the "Epistemology in Storytelling" section.

Comics as Communication

The narrative stories described in the second part of this project will be relayed in the form of a comic. I chose to use the medium of comic work to illustrate the stories of the identified students for three reasons. First, I chose to create a comic because of the incredible ability for illustration-based news to spread on online platforms, which is where the vast majority

²¹ Ibid.

²² Lee, Elizabeth M., and Grace Kao. "Less bang for the buck? Cultural capital and immigrant status effects on kindergarten academic outcomes." *Poetics* 37, no. 3 (2009): 201-226.

²³ Kao, Grace. "Parental Influences on the Educational Outcomes of Immigrant Youth1." *International Migration Review*, (2018).

of youth aged 12-18 get their information.²⁴ Next, I selected the medium because of the accessibility a comic can provide to the main target demographic, which are students in primary and secondary education in the United States as well as those around them including parents, teachers, and school administrators. Finally, using comics to convey messages meant for youth works as a mechanism to accomplish solutions-oriented journalism, or journalism that actively works to aid in solving the issue it covers.²⁵

1. The Fast-Paced Dissemination of Illustrative Journalism

Journalism at large has shifted operations to digital platforms,²⁶ and this is largely echoed in the news-gathering habits of youth. In 2019, only 2% of American teens read a newspaper on a regular basis.²⁷ At the same time, the average amount of time a twelfth grader would spend on their phone doubled since 2006, with students averaging approximately six hours a day on social media.²⁸ In 2022, 95% of teens had access to a smartphone.²⁹

In not only the United States but around the world as well, a majority of teens receive their news online.³⁰ In dissecting where they go in the vast expanse of the web, American youth veer sharply towards gathering their news via platforms that are predominantly seen as social media, such as Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Snapchat.³¹

²⁴ Vogels, Emily A., Risa Gelles-Watnick, and Navid Massarat. "Teens, social media and technology 2022." (2022).

²⁵ **I have found personal success with using comics to communicate effectively with youth in past endeavors. In a previous piece, "Since when is being a teenager a crime?" for the Center for Investigative Reporting, the comic was one of the most highly engaged-with posts of the year on the podcast's Instagram account. Additionally, teachers reached out to me of their own accord over email and social media to inform me that their own students brought the comic to them, after which they used the piece in their own civics/social studies lessons.**

²⁶ Newman, Nic, Richard Fletcher, Anne Schulz, Simge Andi, Craig T. Robertson, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen. "Reuters Institute digital news report 2021." Reuters Institute for the study of Journalism (2021).

²⁷ Twenge, Jean M., Gabrielle N. Martin, and Brian H. Spitzberg. "Trends in US Adolescents' media use, 1976–2016: The rise of digital media, the decline of TV, and the (near) demise of print." *Psychology of Popular Media Culture* 8, no. 4 (2019): 329.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Vogels, Emily A., Risa Gelles-Watnick, and Navid Massarat. "Teens, social media and technology 2022." (2022).

³⁰ Schevitz, Tanya, and Sandra Gharib. "New Survey Reveals Teens Get Their News from Social Media and YouTube." *Common Sense Media* (2019).

³¹ Ibid.

And, the picture attached to the news matters. Since the boom of online news that has led to almost every article containing a lede image, digital editors scour data analytics to see what articles are doing best. In trying to further boost a piece, one of the first pieces of the story that is toggled is the image³² – after all, the human brain processes imagery 60,000 times more quickly than text.³³

It is these statistics that allow me to draw the conclusion that one viable method of creating informative, impactful work illuminating the experiences of IBRH students is flexible enough in medium to be able to appear on websites, in print, and on 1028x1028 pixelated square imagery on Instagram.

2. Accessibility

The quick dissemination of comics as journalism and the accessibility of the comic go hand in hand; accessibility indicates the cognitive benefits of comics as a medium for learning. The idea to communicate information through comics is by no means novel; the concept has been considered in educational practices in the United States since at least 1944.³⁴ In the 18th volume of *The Journal of Educational Sociology*, Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg discusses the uses of, “The Comics as an Educational Medium”. She first discusses the pushback against comics at the time, illuminating the cyclical pattern of mistrust the public traditionally holds against new forms of media, eventually arriving at the conclusion of the benefits of comics in providing information to youth:

“It is the very qualities for which the comics have been condemned by critics that give them force and make them socially significant. For it is these qualities that enabled

³² Blanchett Neheli, Nicole. "News by numbers: The evolution of analytics in journalism." *Digital Journalism* 6, no. 8 (2018): 1041-1051.

³³ Walter, Ekaterina, and Jessica Gioglio. *The power of visual storytelling: how to use visuals, videos, and social media to market your brand*. McGraw-Hill Education (2020).

³⁴ Caldwell, Joshua. "Information comics: An overview." In 2012 IEEE International Professional Communication Conference, pp. 1-7. IEEE (2012).

them to catch the attention and hold the interest of the children who form so large a part of their reading public; and it is these qualities that today make them more easily apprehended by people of all ages than political speeches or sermons or the most “popular” of newspapers or fiction.

But insofar as the comics do appeal to a greater multitude and insofar as they do penetrate the thoughts and sentiments of multitudes, and affect attitudes, they constitute a social force that goes beyond differences in “taste”. For better or for worse, they are more potent than many of our other instruments for influencing people's understanding and attitudes. The instrument itself need no longer be judged as good or bad, whether in taste or in morals; it is important because it is potent. We have to judge only the uses to which it is put – like dynamite, or printing, or science itself”.³⁵

More recent research has found that not only do students hold a preference for learning through comics in the same orientation as interest in non-fiction books and narratives,³⁶ but students also gain enhanced “support [in] metacognitive strategies for reading and writing”.³⁷

If students are better able to process and synthesize the information they learn through comics, the information becomes easier to convey to parents, teachers, and administrators, who then have the opportunity to institute change in the classroom or throughout the student’s schooling environment. This change can be anything from personal check-ins between student and teacher to increased care for cultural competence implemented through the administration system. Further instruction for small-scale change is discussed in the “Methods” section.

3. Representation in Journalism

Comics journalism allows for not only a written representation of a group that has little to represent them but also an illustrative opportunity to depict their lives. Not only do IBRH students seldom see a representation of themselves in media,³⁸ but also these students sometimes have no representation in terms of legal documentation of their own existence in the United

³⁵ Gruenberg, Sidonie Matsner. “The Comics as a Social Force.” *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 18, no. 4 (1944): 204–13.

³⁶ Brenna, Beverley. "How graphic novels support reading comprehension strategy development in children." *Literacy* 47, no. 2 (2013): 88-94.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Reichel, Chloe. “Covering rural America: What reporters get wrong and how to get it right.” *The Journalist’s Resource* (2018).

States. Or, there is no space for their family to check on the census – in a literal sense, they do not receive representation in this country. This creates a new type of representation itself, a punitive representation of the “other” that isolates in a semiotic way, signaling deeper otherization³⁹ that intertwines with what students can face in class.

This comic represents IBRH students not as the other, but as the only. It acts as work made for them in its entirety, bringing the added benefits of illustrating IBRH faces and stories that news media would traditionally stereotype, marginalize, or pass over altogether.⁴⁰

4. Solutions Journalism

Comics have the power to act as a vehicle that allows the project to become journalism that is solutions-oriented. While the term, originally coined by the Solutions Journalism Network, is still novel in scenes of journalism, solutions journalism is met with “growing appeal”⁴¹ in the professional world, especially in attempting to combat the pattern of record low trust in the media by the public in the last five years.⁴²

In a 2019 study examining the origins of solutions journalism and comparing the category to civic, peace, and investigative (among others) journalism, the terms solutions journalism was defined as, “news stories contribute to more accurate and balanced news coverage, they are sophisticated and rigorous, and they intend to motivate readers to contribute to societal change”.⁴³

³⁹ Pitkin, Hanna F. *The concept of representation*. Vol. 75. Univ of California Press, 1967.

⁴⁰ Esses, Victoria M., Stelian Medianu, and Andrea S. Lawson. "Uncertainty, threat, and the role of the media in promoting the dehumanization of immigrants and refugees." *Journal of social issues* 69, no. 3 (2013): 518-536.

⁴¹ McIntyre, Karen E., and Kyser Lough. "Toward a clearer conceptualization and operationalization of solutions journalism." *Journalism*, (2019).

⁴² Newman, Nic, Richard Fletcher, Craig T. Robertson, Kirsten Eddy, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen. "Reuters Institute digital news report 2021." Reuters Institute for the study of Journalism (2022).

⁴³ Twenge, Jean M., Gabrielle N. Martin, and Brian H. Spitzberg. "Trends in US Adolescents' media use, 1976–2016: The rise of digital media, the decline of TV, and the (near) demise of print." *Psychology of Popular Media Culture* 8, no. 4 (2019): 329.

In modeling the journalism performed to create the comic and in scripting, illustrating, and editing the work, I will use components of what solutions journalism is to direct my own efforts. However, It is important to note that marking the work as “solutions” journalism does not imply that this comic or project in its entirety will act as a one-stop-shop to cure the United States of its lacking support for IBRH families and immigrants in the country in general. This would likely require a great upheaval of both the education and justice system of the country. Rather, assuming the piece is solutions-oriented, holds the work to the standard that the comic will provide insight and assistance to students, parents, teachers, and administrators on how to approach a solution to the educational issue at hand. There are many more steps to ensuring the comic acts with purpose, discussed in the following section.

Epistemology in Storytelling

This portion of the essay focuses on different methods or epistemologies that are used in storytelling. While not all of these methods are directly applicable to IBRH students and their histories, such as the epistemology of Survivance based on Indigenous narrative and history, discussing their purpose and meaning within the context of my own work aids in informing the perspectives, histories, challenges, and celebrations I include in the second portion of the project.

1. Survivance

Survivance is a term used most often in discussions of Indigenous history, culture, art, and other methods of narrative sharing. First repurposed for its current and most popular use by Gerald Vizenor in *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*, the Anishinaabe writer defines survivance as the following: "Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry".⁴⁴ Survivance was popularized

⁴⁴ Vizenor, Gerald Robert. *Manifest manners: Narratives on postindian survivance*. U of Nebraska Press (1999).

by Vizenor in contexts of Indigenous genocide in North America, a continued history distinct from any other. Including this epistemology and discussing survivance in the context of youth from immigrant backgrounds in the current U.S. education system is not a conflation of circumstance, nor are the circumstances comparable. Rather, it is a connection to the importance of story and themes of denouncing victimry for both, as I discuss further below.

Since Vizenor's first uses of survivance in the early 1990s, its message and meaning in understandings of Native American past and history as far more than survival and far more than just the past have proliferated.⁴⁵ Survivance is indelibly intertwined with story and power in storytelling: Vizenor writes that "The practice of survivance create an active presence, more than the instincts of survival, function, or subsistence. Native stories are the sources of survivance, the comprehension and empathies of natural reason, tragic wisdom, and the provenance of new literary studies".⁴⁶

Drawing on how survivance connects the saving, recounting, sharing, and valuing of story to active presence and existence, I tell the stories of young students from different locations around the country to continue to affirm their active presence and the existence of others like them.

Survivance also denotes the renunciation of "dominance, tragedy, and victimry",⁴⁷ which, in the context of Vizenor's writings, refers to the rejection of settler-colonial instilled concepts of the lives Indigenous people today as "a shadow of something from the past, something that came before...".⁴⁸ Survivance is a rejection of the victimry of the settler-colonial past in the very

⁴⁵ Weaver, Jace. *Critical Theory for Political Theology 2.0: Survivance*. Political Theology Network (2022).

⁴⁶ Vizenor, Gerald, ed. *Survivance: Narratives of native presence*. U of Nebraska Press (2008).

⁴⁷ Schevitz, Tanya, and Sandra Gharib. "New Survey Reveals Teens Get Their News from Social Media and YouTube." *Common Sense Media* (2019).

⁴⁸ Madsen, Deborah Lea. "Preface: Tragic wisdom and survivance." *Conversations with Remarkable Native Americans* (2013).

meanings of Native American identity that Vizenor puts forward; a self that remains its own regardless of the comings and goings around it.⁴⁹

I draw on this theme of rejecting victimry and tragedy in my storytelling. The stories I present are not centered on tragic circumstances that lead families to flee to the United States as refugees, their children left isolated, alone, and otherized in an uncaring school system far from any culture like their own. The narratives I pose are not of loss and harm. They are stories of continued, active presence, of culture and knowledge inherent to the students of immigrant backgrounds in the United States no matter their location.

2. Strength/Deficit-based Narratives

Considering the influences of survivance in storytelling I discuss above, the narratives I illustrate in the comic portion of this project will avoid the common trap in storytelling of basing experiences on deficits, rather than strengths. Deficit narratives are commonly criticized today, most often in conjunction with literature discussing race, ethnicity, and identity.⁵⁰ In introducing the harms that deficit narratives can impose in their 2002 article “Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research”, Solórzano and Yosso write that deficit-based writing can “silence and distort the experiences of people of color and instead focuses on their racialized, gendered, and classed experiences as sources of strength”.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Brenna, Beverley. "How graphic novels support reading comprehension strategy development in children." *Literacy* 47, no. 2 (2013): 88-94.

⁵⁰ For examples of critiques on deficit narratives, see the following:

Fogarty, William, Melissa Lovell, Juleigh Langenberg, and Mary-Jane Heron. "Deficit discourse and strengths-based approaches." *Changing the Narrative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Wellbeing*. Melbourne: The Lowitja Institute (2018).

Hyett, Sarah Louise, Chelsea Gabel, Stacey Marjerrison, and Lisa Schwartz. "Deficit-based indigenous health research and the stereotyping of indigenous peoples." *Canadian Journal of Bioethics/Revue canadienne de bioéthique* 2, no. 2 (2019): 102-109.

Goings, Ramon B. "(Re) Defining the narrative: High-achieving nontraditional Black male undergraduates at a historically Black college and university." *Adult Education Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2016): 237-253.

⁵¹ Solórzano, Daniel G., and Tara J. Yosso. "Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research." *Qualitative inquiry* 8, no. 1 (2002): 23-44.

Much of the research in the “Topic Research Landscape” section above is constituted of narratives that are deficit-based. While at times data itself presents a deficit, and raw data itself does not represent a reflection of the student(s) the data is describing, the surrounding research, contexts, and literature reviews that accompany the data are overly deficit-based. In the grand scheme, the research performed to outline deficits of IB students as well as many other students of color or of different ethnic/cultural/religious backgrounds vastly outweighs any strength-based pieces on the same groups. These narratives perpetuate existing stereotypes, often racial, that marginalize the lived experience of these groups rather than honor them.⁵²

In response, critical race theorists have begun the practice of “counter-storytelling,” used heavily in both the Solórzano and Yosso as well as the Ellison et al. pieces cited above. Counter-storytelling is defined by the former in an earlier work as, “a method of telling a story that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority”.⁵³ Counter-storytelling is often incorporated into critiques on commonly accepted narratives and dialogues that perpetuate the stereotypes discussed above.

In my own work, I use the stories that are shared with me to honor challenge and hardship, but to counter the narrative that hardship is the only thing notable about IBRH students. This work is meant to add to the existing body of research on IB and IBRH students not in that it aligns with the dominant deficit-based narratives, but in that it acts as a display of strength.

⁵² Ellison, Tisha Lewis, and Marva Solomon. "Counter-storytelling vs. deficit thinking around African American children and families, digital literacies, race, and the digital divide." *Research in the Teaching of English* 53, no. 3 (2019): 223-244.

⁵³ Solórzano, Daniel G., and Tara J. Yosso. "Critical race and LatCrit theory and method: Counter-storytelling." *International journal of qualitative studies in education* 14, no. 4 (2001): 471-495.

3. The Value of Storytelling as Epistemology

It is important to ascribe importance to the story itself in building my analysis of informed storytelling. As explained by Black feminist, theorist, and philosopher Patricia Hill Collins, the dominant epistemology, or way of thinking, is steered by the white man, and the structures in place that validate knowledge are equally controlled by this group.⁵⁴ Collins explains this further: “In the United States, this means that a scholar making a knowledge claim typically must convince a scholarly community controlled by elite White avowedly heterosexual men holding U.S. citizenship that a given claim is justified”.⁵⁵ Collins goes on to explain that in order for claims to be justified and not countered, they must fall in line with White male epistemologies. These epistemologies do not accept lived experience as evidence, or truth, to the same caliber they do empirics of tools such as data collection. As a result, the epistemologies of Black women, as defined by Collins, and other people of color, which value lived experience, storytelling, and generational wisdom, are not accepted as valid knowledge in the dominant narrative.⁵⁶

The stories I present through this project subvert the dominant narrative. They show that stories, narratives, storytelling, and qualitative information are valuable – valuable outside of the structures built only to support quantitative evidence. These stories are written and illustrated to be seen, heard, understood, and felt by others who also exist outside of the white knowledge validation structure. Using these stories, immigrant parents can better understand the struggles of their children in the classroom, and work with their children to feel celebrated. The illumination of stories shown to teachers can help them identify ways to support their students, with even

⁵⁴ Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Routledge (2002).

⁵⁵ Madsen, Deborah Lea. "Preface: Tragic wisdom and survivance." *Conversations with Remarkable Native Americans* (2013).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

short interventions like brief individual check-ins working to help. These narratives, which are just as valuable as statistics and large-scale surveys that feed the dominant epistemology, can show administrators the importance of culturally competent teaching to implement in their schools. These stories are meant for exactly the kind of students in the United States who need them.

Conclusion

Though the changes outlined in the previous section are small, they are meaningful to students who need them. In this essay, by summarizing the current research landscape on the subject of IBRH students and the fields adjacent to them, identifying methods of reaching said students through comics journalism, and analyzing informed methods of responsible storytelling, I have established the importance of highlighting stories that illuminate resilience, hope, and bravery in the face of challenge and strife. The telling of these narratives, informed by survivance, strength-based practices, and lived experience epistemologies provides students from immigrant backgrounds who live in even the most remote stretches of the United States of America with much-needed support in their own educational journeys by students they can identify with, perhaps for the first time.

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Part TWO

Note: Before 1/17/23, the beginning of the Spring 2023 semester for Yale College, only preliminary interviews with selected participants have been conducted, and some information in the following sections is subject to change. Future tenses are used where interviews have not yet been conducted, or comic components have not been created.

Comic Research Question

The research question for the comic portion of this project matches that of the essay portion, though it is not stated in Part ONE, and is the following:

What would a journalistic comic about students from immigrant backgrounds living in remote, homogenous areas of the United States look like that would be informed by survivance, strength-based practices, and lived-experience epistemology look like?

Comic Scope of Research

In this comic, I will illustrate the experiences of three to four students I have defined as my focus demographic in remote, homogenous locations in the United States of America, defined in Part ONE as “IBRH” students. I will couple these examples of lived experience with expert opinion on the education of such students to outline the suggested changes in their educational environments to better the conditions of their learning.

I do not possess the expertise to insert my own perspective for what ought to change in classrooms for IBRH students to improve their experiences, nor would two academic terms suffice to conduct such longitudinally based empirical research. However, I do possess the ability to connect the experiences of these youth to the voices of experts advocating for the types of changes students are asking for by creating a comic that will inform students as well as their parents, teachers, and administrators of the experiences outlined in the comic.

Comic Methodology

The bulk of the comic’s content will stem from the experiences of the students who are interviewed. These interviews serve as the basis to tell the stories of their lived experiences,

which will detail experiences that formed their education. Provided permission, I will interview those closest to the individual's education, such as teachers, school administration, parents and siblings, though I predict some difficulty in endeavors to speak on-the-record with school staff. These peripheral interviews will aid in creating accurate depictions of the student's experiences.

I will also interview experts in fields of immigrant and immigrant-background K-12 education and advocates of educational support in the United States for groups like refugee students and English language learners. Additionally, I will interview teachers and administrators from schools that have seen success in supporting IBRH students, as they are experts in their own fields of work. This aids in striving for journalism that is solutions-based, as well as provides a fuel in the comic for implementing strength-based practices in focusing on what teachers and school administrators can do for IBRH students.

Because there is a strong likelihood that most of the subjects of the comic will be minors, I will take steps to ensure their anonymity. I will use pseudonyms for each student picked either by them or their parents or guardian. Their hometown will remain anonymous, with descriptions loose enough so as not to self-identify but still capture the nature of the regions I am focused on. I will name the state the student is in.

I will use the research conducted for the essay portion of the project to bolster the comic and provide pertinent information such as descriptive statistics. However, I will ensure that all of the information remains accessible to youth, the target demographic of the comic.

Sample Questions for Interview

1. IBRH Children not yet in Middle/High School

- What are some things you like about school right now?
- What are some things that you don't like as much?
- Do other kids at school ever point out stuff that's different about you?

- Do you ever feel different than other kids at your school?
- Tell me some exciting things that you get to share with your friends about yourself.
- Tell me some exciting things that you get to share with your friends about your family.
- Does your teacher make you feel good?
- Do you like your classes? Is learning more fun in school, or outside of it?

2. IBRH Children in Middle/High School

- What are some things you like about school right now?
- What are some things that you don't like as much?
- Do you think about yourself in the context of your background often when you're at school?
- Do others (teachers, classmates) ever point out your culture, ethnicity, or race?
- What are some ways you like to celebrate your culture/background? Are there times you get to show that at school?
- What are some things in school that make you feel strong?
- What are some things that you face in class that are harder?
- Do you feel tokenized at school, ever? What are some ways you combat that, or others around you help you out?
- What makes you feel supported?
- What could your school be doing better? Is there anything that might help fix any problems, if you've been experiencing them?

3. IBRH Students after K-12 Education

- Growing up, how did you connect to others? Did you notice a difference between you and others yourself, or was it ever pointed out to you?
- How often did you leave [hometown]? What were your reasons for leaving when you did? Would you go with family to a city that had any representation of your own background?
- What role did your parents play in your education? How involved were they in your learning whether at school or at home?
- How did your family interact with your community? Were there events that you would often attend together? Do you attend any together now? Has your community grown around your family, or vice versa?
- How often did you feel alone when you were in K-12? Did that change when you left?
- Can you remember instances in K-12 where you felt included, whether it was by a classmate, friend, or teacher? Tell me more about that.
- In hindsight, what could your school have done better, or differently?

4. Parents

- Can you tell me a little about your relationship with your child's school(s) in their K-12 education?
- Do you feel like your child is adequately supported in school in general?

- How about in comparison to other students? Do you think your child is treated any differently?
- How do you navigate your/your child's background in their schooling? Do you ever talk with them about their ethnicity/race/identity in conjunction with classes?
- How do you feel in your own community?
- Where do you receive support? Where do you give it?
- Tell me if/how you/your family/your child celebrates your background. If there are barriers from you doing that, what are they?
- What can your child's school do better? Is there change you would like to see?

5. Teachers

- How do you promote inclusivity in your classroom?
- Have you ever worked with [student] through a particular issue?⁵⁷
- What are ways in which you allow for, and promote, students celebrating their backgrounds?
- Tell me more about your own relationship with [student]. Do you feel they trust you?

6. Administrators/Guidance Counselors

- What are some ways you or the school works to make [student] feel welcomed?
- What does inclusivity mean to your school?
- Have you ever worked with [student] through a particular issue?
- How do administrators work with students, particularly IBRH students? What are those dynamics?

7. Field Experts

- What are best practices under these circumstances?
- How can teachers best support IBRH students? How about administrators?
- What role do parents play in these students' educational lives? How can teachers and administrators aid the whole family?
- How about when teachers themselves are overwhelmed and overworked, as they often are in rural educational settings? How feasible are these best practices?
- What are some things that are important for teachers and administrators to know or watch out for?
- What are essential pieces of information for IBRH students? What would you tell them if you were talking to them now?
- How can I keep this story strength-based, using your knowledge of the topic?

⁵⁷ For any questions directed towards a teacher or administrator concerning sensitive information about the student, ensure the student approves, and reiterate the student's anonymity.

Comic Script

This portion is to be completed in the Spring 2023 semester in EDST 410.

Instructor: Talya Zemach-Bersin

Advisor: Mira Debs

Second Reader: Tennessee Watson

Comic Panels and Accessible Alternative Text

This portion is to be completed in the Spring 2023 semester in EDST 410.

Instructor: Talya Zemach-Bersin

Advisor: Mira Debs

Second Reader: Tennessee Watson