*Just Schools* by Ann M. Ishimaru

Book Discussion Guide

# Introduction:

1. Ishimaru names several problems with current family engagement efforts. What are these? Do you agree that these are problems? Do you recognize any of these in your work?
2. How have Ishimaru’s personal experiences shaped her family and community engagement research?

# Chapter 1:

1. In the chapter, what barriers do nondominant parents/caregivers say prevent them from engaging in their children’s education? Do you think these also exist in schools in your area?
2. Why might schools prioritize White parents/caregivers’ concerns and demands? Have you seen this happen? How?
3. At the end of the chapter, Ishimaru asks, “How might our educational systems operate differently if we were to build a ‘new relationship’ in which the expertise of educators and policymakers were combined with the knowledge and brilliance of young people and their families and communities, especially those who have been marginalized by the conventional school-centric model?” (p. 34). What are your ideas about this?

# Chapter 2:

1. On p. 38, Dr. Ishimaru asks readers to think about how schools control “what counts, what doesn’t, what matters, and what doesn’t. Think about all the times you have heard certain students labeled as ‘disengaged,’ ‘disruptive,’ or ‘defiant.’ And certain parents as ‘uninvolved,’ ‘uncaring,’ or perhaps even as ‘scary.’” Do any of these sound familiar, or have you heard other common stereotypes about families and students? Do you agree these stereotypes are used to control what counts and what doesn’t? Why or why not?
2. On p. 50, Dr. Ishimaru presents a table that contrasts the conventional partnerships with her model of equitable collaborations. Have you seen examples of equitable collaborations in schools in your area? Share an example and how it demonstrates an equitable collaboration.

# Chapter 3

1. On p. 63, Mary describes her interpretation of the principal, Barbara, sidelining Binh, the parent. “Parents’ ‘lay[ing] out their truth’ can often be uncomfortable for educators.” Assuming this is correct, how can we win over uncomfortable, or even defensive, educators to buy into the idea of equitable collaborations?
2. On p. 71: “This chapter sought to draw on the ‘specific revealing wisdom’…of nondominant families to glean insights about the complexities and compounding dynamics of racial inequities at multiple scales in educational systems.” What new insights did you have about the dynamics between families and schools when reading this chapter?

# Chapter 4

1. In this chapter, Dr. Ishimaru introduces the idea of *collabetition* and the top-down power hierarchies that she says hinder educational reform. Does this ring true to you? Why or why not? If it does seem true, how does it hamper reform? Finally, if you see *collabetition* as helpful to reform, explain how it might be so.
2. Dr. Ishimaru also examines cultural brokers and culture brokering. What is the distinction she makes? What suggestions does she have for this practice to promote equitable collaborations?

# Chapter 5

1. One assumption in this text that Dr. Ishimaru appears to hold is that school professionals are actively working against families (e.g., school personnel weaponizing data against families, on p. 97). Do you agree with this assumption? To what extent does this ring true for you with the schools and families where you work? How can we move schools and families away from an antagonistic relationship and toward an equitable relationship?
2. Dr. Ishimaru presents a model for data inquiry for equitable collaboration in this chapter. How can you see applications for this model in your work with schools and families? Are there any barriers to its use, and how might you address those?

# Chapter 6

1. How do “granular-level” daily practices and strategies catalyze or constrain family agency and collaboration with educators in everyday interactions within schools? How do systems-level forces shape these?
2. How can the four guiding principles of equitable collaborations co-design practices to re-write the current ways we interact? What will you commit to trying?

# Chapter 7

1. In this chapter, Ishimaru explores the idea of “both/and.” What does she mean by this? Do you have experience with “either/or” scenarios or ways of thinking, and how might you embrace the idea of “both/and” in your work?
2. Ishimaru ends with these lines: “Community well-being and educational justice call us to the ‘strenuous’ work of collaborating *with* families and communities to build solidarities across difference and enact transformative change that reimagines what education might become. *Kodomo no tame ni.* For our shared children and future” (p. 164). What are you inspired to stop, and what are you inspired to start by reading this book? – for our shared children and our future.