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OUTSIDE THE REALM: THE COUNTER-NARRATIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENT INVOLVEMENT

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OUTSIDE THE REALM:

THE COUNTER-NARRATIVES OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENT INVOLVEMENT

A Dissertation in Education

with a Concentration in Educational Leadership

by

Deborah Watson-Hill

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Education
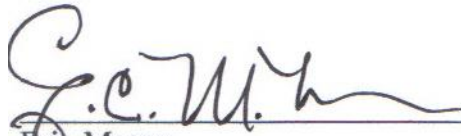
November 26, 2013

We approve the dissertation of Deborah Watson-Hill.

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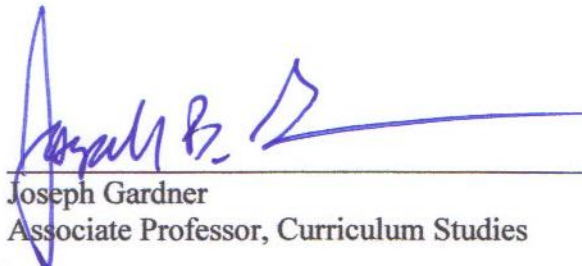Horace Hall   Date
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ABSTRACT

The present study explores the experiences of African American parents and how they support their children's education inside and outside the school realm. More specifically, the study examines African American parents' level of involvement or engagement in their children's education and the impact this has upon their children. In this study, *parent involvement* refers to school-sanctioned, school-authored activities in which parents participate. *Parent engagement* refers to those activities that parents arrange for themselves and their self-directed, relational interactions with school personnel. Moreover, *parent involvement* and *parent engagement* are not used interchangeably but as distinct terms. The participants in this study are African American parents whose children attend a tutoring center in the south suburbs of Chicago; they were selected on the basis of their involvement or engagement in their children's education.

This study employed the ecologies of parental engagement and critical race theory as the theoretical frameworks. The ecology of parental engagement (EPE) offers a way to understand the interconnections between what parents engage in and how they manage to do so. Employing critical race theory (CRT) as a method allowed the use of storytelling; this captured each participant's reality as it related to parent involvement and parent engagement. One-on-one interviews, observations, and a focus group were used to identify the nature of parents' participation in their children's education. Parents in this study predominantly participated in the home and school environment; however, the majority of the families in this study felt they were more engaged than involved in their children's education.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who is the head of my life. If it weren't for God's love and power, this work would not be possible. It is God's grace and mercy that have brought me this far.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my loving husband, James, for his love and support throughout this process. I thank him for the sacrifices he has made to allow me time to truly focus on my paper. I am so blessed that God sent him my way to be my life partner.

I dedicate this work to my special little daughter, Oriah, who believed in me when there were times I didn't believe in myself. Her constant message, "I believe in you, Mommy! You can do it!" motivated me to keep going until this work was complete.

Words cannot express how grateful I am to my parents, Codozar and Ora Watson. Without the many sacrifices they have made for their children, I wouldn't be where I am today. It's no coincidence that my research focuses on parent involvement because I simply learned from the best. Both of them set the bar high on being an involved parent.

I am also grateful to my siblings, Elijah and Mildred, for their constant love and support.

Lastly, I am grateful to my grandmother, Aristine Wilson, who always believed in me.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

My Story

Parents are considered to be their children's first teachers. Their role in their children's lives is of the utmost importance. It is within the home environment that children learn the difference between right and wrong. Parents also provide a foundation of love and support for their children, encouraging the love of learning from the very beginning.

For the reasons stated, I am interested in understanding how involved or engaged African American parents are with their children's education. As a young child, I witnessed firsthand my parents being involved and engaged in my education, despite working full-time jobs. They made it a priority that we received a quality education. Most importantly, they wanted to be involved in this endeavor every step of the way. The level of their involvement and engagement took on many different forms. For example, during my elementary school years, my parents occasionally appeared at the school to do "check-in visits," volunteered at the school, or served on the school board as parent representatives. Additionally, within the home environment, my parents monitored and checked homework. In high school, I recall having difficulty in algebra. Since my parents were unable to assist me themselves, they hired a tutor to help me with this course. At home, they taught us life skills such as moral standards and a strong work ethic. Those lessons taught me how to be a responsible adult.

As a result of our parent's involvement, my husband and I are committed to being actively engaged in our daughter's education. Even though Oriah is only six years old, we are involved in both the school and home domains. For example, we volunteer in the

classroom, attend field trips, and expose her to museums and other educational opportunities that take place outside the school setting. At a very young age, our child already recognizes our level of involvement and engagement; she knows that her parents are there to support her educational endeavors and that we will do whatever is necessary to ensure that she gets a solid education.

When I became a teacher for the public school system, I was surprised that so few parents were actively involved in the school system. The only time parents were present at the school was during parent-teacher conferences. As a result, like many other educators, I assumed that they were not interested or involved in their children's education. However, my assumptions were wrong. After numerous conversations with parents, I realized that they do care about their children's education. In fact, parents shared with me that there were circumstances such as time constraints and heavy workloads that prohibited them from being present at the school; some of them, having had poor school experiences themselves, felt intimidated in an academic environment and therefore stayed away. Even though they were not engaged in the school environment, however, these "absent parents" were engaged in other ways that were invisible to school personnel.

My argument is that African American parents are committed to their children's education, despite the literature suggesting that they are neither interested nor concerned. Additionally, I argue that educators should not equate a lack of parental involvement at school with indifference towards their children's education, for parents are contributing to their children's schooling experiences in other ways. Furthermore, the aspirations

African American parents have for their children need to be articulated so that educators can disregard existing stereotypes and form partnerships with the very people who matter most in their students' lives—the children's parents.

As an educator in the public school system for twelve years, I understand the significant roles parents have in their children's education. When parents are involved, the children do perform better in school. Over the years, I have witnessed the various ways that parents are active that do not fit the traditional definitions of parental involvement. It is the mission of this study to provide insight into what many African American parents are *really* doing to support their children's educational experiences.

Introduction

For several decades, extensive literature has clearly reflected the important roles parents play in their children's educational progress. Research has demonstrated that children whose parents are involved in their education attain higher levels of achievement and exhibit more positive behaviors than children whose parents are not involved (Cole-Henderson, 2000; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000). Henderson and Mapp (2002) state, "The educational benefits to children include higher grades and test scores, better school attendance, higher graduation rates, greater enrollment in postsecondary education, and more positive attitudes about school" (p. 7). According to the Parent Teacher Association, when parents are involved, children have increased motivation, better self-esteem, lower rates of suspension, decreased use of drugs and alcohol, and fewer instances of violent behavior. These positive outcomes appear to hold true regardless of

the socioeconomic status of families and prior student achievement (Oakes & Lipton, 2003). By the time students graduate from high school, they will have spent approximately 76% of their time with parents and 24% of their time with teachers (Cordry & Wilson, 2004). This indicates that the level of engagement from a parent is quite significant.

The importance of parental involvement in children's education has long been established. While schools tend to regard parental involvement as participatory efforts during in-school related activities, for many parents, involvement in their children's education may include a range of meanings. Some parents' participation takes the form of activities within the school setting, such as serving as a teacher's aide, assisting with fundraising activities, and/or attending field trips. Other parental involvement may include monitoring and assisting with homework, reading to their children every night, and providing stimulating experiences that will contribute to student achievement (Thompson, 2003). However, it is also important to recognize parental involvement that does not fit the norm. Some of these practices that do not fit the norm include teaching life lessons, providing tutoring lessons, communicating the importance of receiving an education, and having a strong work ethic. In *They Still Pick Me Up, When I Fall*, Rauner (2000) argues that to support and sustain their value-based aspirations for their children, parents complement the care they provide at home with experiences in the larger world. However, the perspectives and values of African Americans are not always understood nor incorporated into the school's culture (Orozco, 2008).

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Because educators are limited in the information they have about students, parents may offer perspectives that can initiate the development of parent-school partnerships (Calabrese-Barton, Drake, Perez, Louis, & George, 2004). Through partnering with schools, parents can share how they support their children in the home and community. To emphasize this point, African American parents are untapped sources of knowledge and information about how children can be reached more effectively (Jones, 2003).

Schools often take the position that they are the experts in a child's education, discounting the child's culture, background, and home life. While schools may value parent involvement, parent participation is not a true partnership (Gonzalez-Dehass & Willems, 2003). The definition of parent involvement is often controlled and established by the school institution (Carvalho, 2001). For example, the school's assumptions that low-income, African American parents are too lazy, incompetent, or preoccupied to participate seem to arise when parents fail to execute their prescribed role established by the school (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Lawson (2003) argues parental involvement is classified along a "school-centric" continuum. School-centric parent involvement consists of those activities initiated by the school. Several studies show how some African American parents contribute considerably, but not always in ways validated by the school. For instance, Jackson and Remillard (2005) show that even if African American mothers living in low-income neighborhoods do not fit a school-centric definition of parental involvement, they are, nevertheless, highly involved. As advocates for their children's education, they monitor their progress, encouraging them to do their homework, assisting them when they can, or seeking help from friends who may have

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stronger academic skills. Many make a point of sitting with their children while they are completing their assignments. Regardless of the economic, ethnic, and educational backgrounds, there is a strong link between educational benefits to children and the various forms of parental engagement. This research project will prove that African American parents do value their children's education and are committed to providing them with meaningful learning experiences. Therefore, it is necessary to give African American parents an opportunity to shed light on how they support their children's academic development.

Even though researchers have examined the issue of parents and schools, limited research reflects how African Americans support their children's education. James Comer (1988) argues that schools have not attempted to form partnerships with African American parents, thus wasting a valuable asset that could improve the school system. Moreover, researchers who have studied school-family relations that involve African American parents have found that educators typically do not welcome, expect, or cultivate power-sharing practices with students' families (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; DeGaetano, 2007; Noguera, 2001). More specifically, schools accustomed to traditional models of parental involvement do not take into consideration the many ways some African Americans are involved in their children's education.

As a result, fifty years after the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, decision in which the court declared state laws establishing separate public schools for Black and White students unconstitutional, the discourse on parental involvement tends to favor the perspectives of White, middle-income families and to

marginalize the views regarding African American parental involvement. This bias

stemmed from the behavior patterns of middle-class, White mothers in the early-mid

twentieth century, many of whom were not employed and were able to engage in full-

time parenting (Tutwiler, 2005). Today views from many researchers and educators in

reference to African American parents tend to be negative. In fact, both White and Black

teachers often perceive African American parents as uninvolved and disinterested in their

children's education (Fields-Smith, 2005). Webster (2004) states,

> The pessimistic views held by educators and policy makers regarding urban
>
> minority parents are largely informed by the rhetoric, romanticism, and
>
> cultural views surrounding their notions of parental involvement. These
>
> constructed politicized viewpoints often categorize minority and low-
>
> income parents as uninvolved. (p. 117)

Furthermore, critical scholars point out that African American parents, as a whole,

are generally perceived by school personnel as being inactive, disconnected, or uncaring

(Cooper, 2005; Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Edwards, 2004; Koonce & Harper, 2005).

Additionally, they assume that African American parents have little knowledge or capital

with which to advocate on behalf of their children (Reynolds, 2007). Such negative

perceptions disregard historical portraits of African American parents as highly active in

demanding and fighting for education for their children (Anderson, 1988). The landmark

1954 Brown v. Board case was initiated by parents uniting to fight for equality on behalf

of their children. Their fight was based on the fact that African American children were

not treated fairly in the educational system. Even though researchers have examined the

issue of African American parents and schools, limited research has been geared to

focusing on what African American parents are actually doing to support their children's educational experiences (Cooper, 2007; Thompson, 2003; Gutman & McLloyd, 2000).

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to listen to the voices and gain insight into the lives of African American parents, particularly mothers, on how they are involved or engaged in their children's education. In particular, the study explores how larger societal, historical experiences, as well as personal ones, affect the roles African Americans play in their children's educational experiences.

Research Questions

In order to further explore the issue of African American parental involvement in their children's education, this study poses the following questions:

1. In what ways do the African American parents in this study engage in the education of their children in the school and home environment?

2. How do these parents educate their children in ways that teachers cannot see?

3. How do these parents distinguish between "education" and "schooling"?

Significance of the Study

Having had countless conversations with parents over the years, it is evident to me that many African American parents are very concerned about the educational success of their children. In fact, many parents ask how they can support their child at home. Several studies indicate that even parents who have little knowledge of school programs show

interest in their children's schooling and are learning how to help them at home (Smith, Krohn, Chu, & Best, 2005). However, since many do not participate in the traditional forms of parent participation such as open houses, attendance during classroom events and parent- teacher conferences, they are considered uninvolved or unconcerned. While researchers have focused on schools and the various strategies that school personnel can implement to improve parent involvement, there has been less research that takes into account the parents' frame of reference (Lawson, 2003). Although the traditional forms of parent involvement are familiar to most, they should not be considered the only forms (Driessen, Smit, & Sleegers, 2005).

The next chapter is a review of literature. The chapter will recognize and assess the existing literature around African American parent involvement and engagement in their children's education. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodological approaches employed in this study, outlining the research design and presenting the methods that were used to collect data. Chapter 4 will present the responses from the interviews. Chapter 5 will discuss the themes that were derived from the interviews and discuss whether or not the themes are aligned with the chosen frameworks, that is, with ecologies of parental engagement and critical race theory. Lastly, Chapter 6 will revisit the research questions and discuss the implications for practice and future research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Parent Involvement v. Parent Engagement

For many decades, there has been extensive literature regarding the role parents play in

their children's academic development. One element that researchers find essential to

more successful children and schools is parental involvement. Traditionally, parent

involvement has been defined as home-based activities such as monitoring a child's

progress, helping with homework, discussing school issues with a child, and talking on

the telephone with the teacher (Tveit, 2009). School-based activities such as volunteering

at school, going on field trips, joining the Parent Teacher Association and participating in

scheduled conferences are other forms of recognized parental involvement (Jacobi,

Wittreich, & Hogue, 2003). On the other hand, Epstein (2001) frames parent involvement

as schools attempting to involve parents as individuals in activities determined mainly by

educators. The former U.S. Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, states,

> The American family is the rock on which a solid education can be built. I
> have seen examples all over the nation where two-parent families, single
> parents, step parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles are providing strong
> family support for their children to learn. If families teach the love of
> learning, it can make all the difference in the world to their children. (U.S.
> Department of Education, 1998)

The parental involvement section of the *No Child Left Behind Act*[1] (*NCLB*) (2002)

defines parental involvement as

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[1] The *No Child Left Behind Act* (2002) is a federal act signed into law by President Bush that outlines the
steps the federal government should take to close the achievement gap and ensure that all children have a

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The participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring: (a) that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning, (b) that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school, (c) that parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate in decision making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child, (d) and the carrying out of other activities, such as those described in section 1118 of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. (U.S. Department of Education, 2002)

Furthermore, this section of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2002) mandates that parents become involved in school activities including improving the academic quality of schools, identifying barriers to great participation by parents, and designing strategies for more effective parent involvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). In *School-Family Partnerships for Children's Success*, Reynolds and Clements (2005) point out that

Parental involvement is a major element of school-wide reforms such as Schools of the 21st Century, the School Development Program, and the charter school movement, as well as new governance arrangements that give parents greater input in decision making and thereby facilitate school-family partnerships. (p. 109)

Moreover, encouraging parent participation and engagement in children's education may in and of itself provide important sources of support and personal

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fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments.

empowerment; this, in turn, will promote the positive school and community climate so important for learning (Reynolds & Clements, 2005).

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics Parent and Family Involvement Survey (NCES, 2003) was completed by 51, 388 parents of kindergarten through twelfth grade students. Questions were asked about parent and family involvement in their children's school. The data found 88% had parents who attended a general meeting, 77% had parents who attended a scheduled meeting with a teacher, and 70% had parents who attended a school event. Thirty-seven percent of students had parents who participated in activities that required parents' expertise and involvement in schools such as volunteering or serving on a school committee (NCES, 2003).

Data was disaggregated by race and the results indicated that among African Americans, 89% attended a general meeting, 79% attended a scheduled meeting with their child's teacher, 63% attended a school event, and 32% acted as volunteers or served on a committee. Data for Caucasian families indicated 89% attended a general meeting, 76% attended a scheduled meeting with their child's teacher, 74% attended a school event, and 84% acted as volunteers or served on a committee. In reference to Hispanic families, 83% attended a general meeting, 78% attended a scheduled meeting with their child's teacher, 61% attended a school event, and 28% acted as volunteers or served on a committee (NCES, 2003). Given the NCES (2003) findings, parents of all ethnicities appeared to be involved in their children's schools; however, there has been an inclination to question the level of involvement of African American parents in their

children's education. These findings provided an analysis to reveal which parents become involved and the activities that support their involvement.

Today there is a shift from parent involvement to a more transformative change known as parent engagement. Traditionally, adherents of parental involvement assume that school personnel are responsible for parents' roles in schools; ideally, parents comply with sanctioned activities that school officials deem helpful in meeting the overall goals and objectives the school has established (Carvalho, 2001). In contrast, parent engagement focuses on activities linked to children's learning at home, at school, and in the community, reflecting the many different ways in which schools, families, and communities support one another. Macfarlane (2008) states, "Parental engagement in schooling has long been held as a vital component of the successful navigation of the schooling process" (p. 701). Parental engagement is a critical ingredient for children's school success from cradle to career. (Westmoreland, Rosenberg, Lopez, & Weiss, 2009). Moreover, acknowledging the values, beliefs, and ideals of others is essential to creating lasting relationships between school and home (Osher & Huff, 2006).

In *Building Parent Engagement in Schools*, Ferlazzo (2009) distinguishes between parent involvement and parent engagement. The author asserts that parent involvement is based on an invitation coming from the school. He further mentions that schools ask parents to respond to what the schools might perceive as important. However, when teachers attempt to engage parents, the challenge is to invite parents to do what is important to them. He notes that to be considered involved or engaged, there are distinctive roles in which parents participate. For instance, when parents are *involved*,

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schools generally direct them towards completing specific tasks, but when parents are *engaged*, they become the leaders who identify a vision as well as goals (Ferlazzo, 2009).

Parent engagement is not a one-size-fits-all model for parent engagement in schools varies according to cultural and economic status. Bourdieu (1984) contributes to understanding the concept of engagement by regarding human beings as active agents who respond to the environment in terms of what it means to them. By being active agents, parents can communicate to schools what they do to support their children and want on behalf of their children. Additionally, it compels school personnel to listen to parents and be receptive about how they are engaged in their children's educational journey.

Emphasizing this point, The Harvard Family Research Project (2009) defines parent engagement as having the following principles: First, parent engagement is a collaborative effort in which schools and other community agencies and organizations seek families who are dedicated to supporting their children's academic learning. Second, although parent engagement continues throughout the course of a child's life, the parent's role changes as the child matures. Third, effective parent engagement is linked to children's learning in a variety of settings such as in the home, in pre-kindergarten programs, in school, in after-school programs, in faith-based institutions, and in the community.

The above definition of parent engagement points out that children's learning can happen anywhere and not just in the school setting. Although schools are not cognizant of what parents are doing to engage in their children's education, it is important to note that

when parents are engaged, their children reap the benefits. According to the National

Family, School and Community Engagement Working Group (2009), "parent

engagement prepares children for kindergarten, leads to better student achievement,

improved socials skills, behavior and increased likelihood of high school graduation"(p.

1). Arne Duncan (2010), the present Secretary of Education, is in favor of parent

engagement. In his 2010 speech to the Congress Moms, Duncan (2010) stated,

> My vision for family engagement is ambitious. As I said earlier, I want
> President Lee's problem. I want to have too many parents demanding
> excellence in their schools. I want all parents to be real partners in education
> with their child's teacher from cradle to career. In this partnership, students
> and parents should feel connected and teachers should feel supported. When
> parents demand change and better options for their children, they become
> the real accountability backstop for the educational system. (p. 2)

Because of his strong support for parent engagement, Duncan (2010) provided $270

million to support more parent engagement programs in communities across the United

States.

Barriers to Parental Involvement and Engagement

African American parental involvement has been the subject of several research studies

(Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Diamond, 2000; Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Jarrett &

Burton, 1999, Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Smith & Fleming, 2006). Although it is well-

established that parental involvement in school is linked to positive outcomes for

children, there are myriad issues that make it challenging for some African American

families to engage school personnel in collaborative problem solving (Hill & Craft,

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2003). Abrams and Gibbs (2002) noted that African American parents reported being ignored, dismissed, or insulted by parents, teachers, or administrators. Many feel anger and frustration at being treated like second-class citizens. The current situation is a call for educators to evaluate and understand the "sometimes idiosyncratic historical relationship between a particular school or school district and its parents, as well as how it relates to parents' existing involvement or noninvolvement" (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999, p. 454).

Despite the urgent need for partnerships, most schools continue to keep parents at a distance. Formidable barriers such as culture, parents' past experiences, parental work load and time constraints are inhibiting parents from being fully involved. In order to understand parents' involvement, it is important to take these issues into consideration.

Cultural Barriers to Involvement and Engagement

For many African American parents, participating in their children's school has been difficult because of a number of historical, institutional, and cultural factors (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). African American parents and their children, whose home culture is different from the culture found within the school, may experience a cultural disconnect that might in some circumstances portray the home culture as either deficient or different from the culture at school (Laosa, 2005). Reynolds (2010) offers this view and says that the cultural disconnect may occur when individuals from different cultures interact, specifically when the cultural backgrounds of teachers differ from students and parents in the school because of racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious, or economic reasons.

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When the background of African American parents differs from that of teachers, parents may not feel that their culture is understood or accepted by their child's teacher (Carlisle, Stanley, & Kemple, 2005). Some parents from African American backgrounds may not get involved in their children schooling experiences due to not feeling comfortable in the school environment (Mapp, 2002). A study conducted by Gay & Howard (2000) found that a critical factor in the education of African American students was their interaction with staff members who often had little understanding of the experiences of African American families that sometimes resulted in exclusion and negation of African American parents and their children at these schools. Researchers have found that with such dissimilarities, it is easy for African American parents and teachers to develop misperceptions that lead to poor communication and lack of respect (Cairney, 2000; O'Connor, 2001; Ogbu, 1993). Additionally, many African American parents are reluctant to participate because many school-sanctioned activities do not take into consideration the cultural backgrounds and interests of African American parents. As a result, many African American parents engage in their children's education by employing meaningful activities in the home environment.

For that reason, cultural competency is critical to developing meaningful relationships with parents. In their book, *Cultural Competence: A Primer for Educators*, Diller and Moule offer this definition: Cultural competence is the ability to successfully teach students who come from cultures other than our own. It entails developing certain personal and interpersonal awarenesses and sensitivities. Additionally, cultural competence preserves and enhances the interests, dignity, and integrity of children,

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families, and the diverse cultural communities in which they live. School professionals will need to be well-versed in the customs and practices of cultures that are different from their own if they are to form effective relationships with children and their families.

Overall, African American families come from a long line of strong African American ancestors who have conquered unbelievable obstacles, including slavery, discrimination, and segregation. Enduring in the face of such obstacles has established sources of strengths and resilience within African American families and communities (Hill, 1997). According to Henderson, Davies, Johnson, and Mapp (2007), in order for schools to address the cultural disconnect that exists between schools and African American parents, schools should bridge cultural differences by recognizing families' home cultures, identifying their strengths and assets, and ensuring that African American families have opportunities to contribute.

Parents' Past Experiences

Research suggests that many African American parents have had a long history of unsuccessful experiences with schools and that these negative experiences have influenced their level of participation in their children's education (Williams & Baber, 2007). Due to having negative experiences in school, they may have already established a negative view of their children's school. As a result, many of these parents view schools as intimidating environments. Also, if the school's policy is to contact parents only to discuss problems, many African American parents may feel defensive and unwilling to become actively involved. Prater (2002) states,

When some African American parents are confronted with their own

unpleasant memories of school, they are often viewed as not being

interested in their children's education, and left with few resources to

receive parity in educational opportunities. (p.154)

When parents feel welcomed and valued within the institution of the school, they are

more likely to become involved in their children's schooling (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000).

Workload/Time Constraints

Although parents recognize that participation in their children's education is necessary,

many parents experience difficulty in finding the necessary time. Parents' work schedules

and the degree of flexibility that is built into their jobs are important factors in shaping

the extent to which they are able to be involved with their children's education, both at

home and at school (Diamond, 2000; Diamond & Gomez, 2004). According to the 1998

National Center for Education statistical report entitled *Parent Involvement in Children's*

Education Efforts, 87% of schools perceived parents' lack of time as a major impediment

to their involvement. As a result, teachers, parents, and parental involvement

organizations are partnering to find creative ways for busy parents to contribute to school

activities and participate in home activities with their children.

Positive Areas of Parental Involvement and Engagement

Parental involvement has been identified by some researchers as a significant factor in

students' academic achievement and has become a priority in American education (Cole-

Henderson, 2000; Sheridan & Gutnik, 2000). In the first place, when parents are involved

they send a message to their children that education is important. Secondly, involved

parents get to know other parents, teachers, and administrators. Finally, involved parents

are privy to information about their children and are therefore in a better position to

intervene, should this be necessary (Domina, 2005). The Southwest Educational

Development Laboratory (SEDL, 2002) found that students with involved parents, no

matter their income or background, are more likely to earn higher grades, have better

social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well in school. Additionally, research

has found that when parents are involved, their confidence in their ability to help their

children with classroom assignments increases (Nistler & Maiers, 2000). Furthermore,

students attain greater academic success when schools and families work together to

motivate, socialize, and educate students (Caplan, 2000).

Henderson & Mapp (2002) analyzed 80 studies of parental involvement in K–12

schools. The following represent key findings from their work: Family involvement is the

main contributing factor to student achievement; learning that takes place in the home has

a significant impact on student success; families from diverse cultures and socioeconomic

levels can have a significant influence on children's learning; schools that recognize

cultural differences, address the needs of families, and build on families' strengths,

effectively engage diverse families.

In another study, Lee and Bowen (2006) reported that student achievement

increased when parents' provided a supportive home learning environment where

questions were answered, materials and resources were made available to complete

homework, and the parent had a positive attitude toward their child's learning.

Given the expansive body of research supporting the merits of parent involvement, educators and administrators need to create successful partnerships with families.

Education v. Schooling

In many African American conversations, the phrases "getting an education" and "going to school" are typically used in ways that imply "education" and "schooling" are overlapping processes (Shujaa, 1998). Even though "education" and "schooling" are used interchangeably, there are distinct differences between the two. The belief that education only takes place in the school has undermined collaboration between schools and parents, specifically African American parents. Many schools fail to recognize that education can happen anywhere. Shujaa (2003) stated that education is "[o]ur means of providing for the inter-generational transmission of values, beliefs, traditions, customs, rituals and sensibilities, along with the knowledge of why these things must be sustained. This definition speaks to the importance of African American parents participating in the educational journey of their children by teaching the above-mentioned practices in the home environment. Furthermore, this paradigm recognizes that education not only takes place inside the school walls but is a lifelong process of continuous learning. Many educators, assuming they are the experts, fail to recognize the significant role parents play in supporting their children's academic careers.

In contrast, Stone (2009) emphasizes schooling is everything that takes place in the school environment, whether that learning is intended or not. Moreover, Shujaa (2003) defines schooling as a "process intended to perpetuate and maintain society's

existing power relations and the institutional structures that support those arrangements"

(p. 246). This definition speaks to the structural limitations that were historically placed

upon African Americans in the classroom environment to learn the culture of the

dominant group.

When African American parents differentiate education from schooling, they

recognize the significant role they play in their children's educational journey. Moreover,

African Americans have such a unique history that it is necessary to pass that knowledge

down to their children. Furthermore, by African American parents engaging in their

children's education, they are not solely dependent on schools to educate their children.

Lastly, when African American parents accept responsibility of their children's

education, rather than their schooling, students will achieve greater academic success.

A Brief History of African American Parent Involvement

Historically, African Americans have prioritized education as one way to ensure a

successful future for their children (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). Historical research

has demonstrated the countless ways African American parents contributed to their

children's education, particularly during the era of slavery when learning was prohibited

by law and during the post-Abolition years when segregated schooling was a reality.

Over the years, African American parents have been activists within school systems,

thereby benefitting their children and as well as those of other families (Cooper, 2005;

Noguera, 2004).

In the *Education of Blacks in the South*, Anderson (1988) describes how African American parents were committed to the pursuit of education during slavery. Perry (2003) writes that, "Laws made it a crime for enslaved men and women to learn or teach others to read or write" (p. 13). They endured severe penalties—even death—because of their desire for literacy. According to the testimony of one slave, "The first time you was caught trying to read or write you was whipped with a cow-hide the next time with cat-o-nine and the third time they cut the first joint of your forefinger" (Cornelius, 1991). Slaves believed that learning how to read was their way of attaining freedom. They were motivated to do all they could to help their children go further in school than they had been able to go themselves.

Frederick Douglass, one of the greatest abolitionists of all times, shares his accounts on his quest for literacy. In the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas* (1845), he shared that his master's wife started the process of teaching him how to read. Douglass writes that she was a religious woman who believed it was important for him to learn how to read the Bible. She continued teaching Douglass how to read until she was caught by her husband. Later, Douglas taught himself to read and write while he worked as an apprentice at the shipyards in Baltimore. When he returned to the eastern shore of Maryland, members of the ministry found out that he knew how to read and encouraged him to manage the Sabbath School. The Sabbath School was a secret meeting of slaves that Douglass organized to teach slaves how to read. The school met on Sundays. Douglass considered the teaching of slaves as the most rewarding time of his life.

When African Americans who had been enslaved were finally able to go to school and receive a formal education, due to the enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation, key African Americans acted as teachers to educate their young. After the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution formally abolished slavery, African American parents continued their quest for literacy, both for themselves and their children, even though White leaders did not believe in educational equality and ignored the issue of educating African American children. Because they were denied resources, former slaves donated lumber and labor to build schools for their children. A survey of the literature of African American parental involvement from 1866 to 1930 reveals at least seven forms of involvement. These include finding new schools, providing financial and other support to existing schools, organizing institutions, using existing institutions to support education, petitioning governmental agencies, convening conventions, participating in demonstrations and school boycotts, and using lawsuits to achieve educational equity (Siddle-Walker, 1998).

Furthermore, W. E. B. DuBois (1938), one of the most influential Black intellectuals of the twentieth century and one of America's first African American historians, indicated that, in his era, African American parents played a significant role in their children's education. In their direct role, parents trained children in character and social skills, both necessary as a precondition for formal education and for social interaction (DuBois, 1938). Indirectly, African American parents reinforced the need for education through their attitudes about schooling. For example, in the *Souls of Black*

Folk, Dubois (1903a) wrote of his experiences while teaching at a rural Tennessee school house. He noted his praise for parents who valued education for their children:

> They know that intelligence and self development are the only means by which the Negro is to win his way in the modern world. They persist in pushing their children on through the highest courses. May they always continue to do so (Dubois, 1915a, p. 122)

During the 1950s and 1960s the Civil Rights movement, a movement largely by African Americans, attempted to achieve civil rights equal to those of Whites. Some of the rights they fought for included education, equal opportunities in employment, the right to vote, equal access to public facilities, and the right to be free of racial discrimination. Ogletree's *All Deliberate Speed* (2004) highlights numerous accounts when parents were highly engaged in their children's education. The Briggs v. Elliott (1954) case involved thirty parents from Clarendon County, Georgia, who sued the school district to improve the educational conditions for their children. The parents were not satisfied with the quality of the buildings, the lack of adequate transportation, and inadequate teacher salaries.

In the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education parents sued to desegregate the Topeka school system. Oliver Brown, the father of Linda Brown, wanted to eliminate the segregation laws that required his nine-year old daughter to attend an inferior school at considerable distance from their home. The inferior school had old textbooks, a limited curriculum, and grossly inadequate school facilities. Linda had to walk one mile through a railroad switchyard to get to her Black elementary school, even though a White

elementary school was only a few blocks away. Brown tried to enroll his daughter in the White school near his home, but the principal denied his request. African American parents rallied around the cause, approaching the NAACP to sue the Topeka Board of Education.

In another case, Dorothy Davis, a ninth grade Black student had to pursue her education in the harsh conditions of the all Black high school that was in her area. In Davis v. County School Board, plaintiffs argued that Virginia's segregated school system violated the federal Constitution and that the White community in Prince Edward County, Virginia, refused to spend money to upgrade the inferior Black high school. The students who attended the inferior school conducted a two-week protest and called on the NAACP to help them. In turn, the NAACP filed a lawsuit on their behalf. Moreover, in Gebhart v. Belton, plaintiffs argued that Ethel Belton and the other Black students living in her area had to commute eighteen miles to attend Howard High School in Wilmington, Delaware. This segregated school, like many cited earlier, was an inferior school with very high pupil-to-teacher ratio and a curriculum that did not prepare them for higher education.

These cases drew attention to African American parents' determination to secure quality education for their children. They knew they had to fight against unjust laws and institutions to ensure that their children had access to equal educational opportunities. Ogletree in *All Deliberate Speed* (2004) states,

> Most importantly, my grandparents' and parents' generations made sure that
> their children went to school every day. In their own childhood, school had
> been a less desirable option than work, and so they worked. By the 1950's,

when it appeared that education provided the vehicle for crossing the

railroad tracks into the land of opportunity, we were encouraged to learn.

Despite my parents' less than modest circumstances, they were typical of

our community in placing a high value on education. (p. 54)

The Brown v. Board of Education (1954) was significant because it declared that

segregation in the school system was unconstitutional. More importantly, this case

essentially overturned the Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) decision of separate-but-equal

clause, which was legislation from nearly sixty years earlier that declared separate

facilities for Blacks and Whites were constitutional as long as they were equal. The

separate-but-equal doctrine had covered many areas of public life such as restaurants,

theaters, restrooms and public schools (163 U.S. 537).

In *Freedom's Children* Levine (1993) narrated stories about the Black students

who were the first to integrate all-White high schools. He writes that with every attempt

at integration, there was resistance from segregationists. He shared this story: In the fall

of 1957 in Birmingham, Alabama, less than a year after their church parsonage had been

bombed, Reverend and Mrs. Shuttlesworth tried to enroll their two oldest children in an

all White high school. The school they were trying to attend was closer to their home, and

the facility offered better educational opportunities than the school they attended. The

Shuttlesworth enrolled their children as an effort to break down segregation but it is

important to realize they suffered a great deal in the process. Their son, Ricky, recounts

what happened on his first day of school:

I didn't expect the mob that was there. It's not that I expected a positive

reception either. They hadn't been positive for the other things we did, like

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the bus rides or sit-ins. But even before we pulled out, when we turned up the street, we saw this tremendous number of people. All whites. Everywhere. I don't remember any of the dialogue that went on. I just thought, are we going in there? I could not believe that Daddy got out of the car. The crowd started to beat him. (p. 37)

Similarly, in 1957, the Board of Education from Little Rock, Arkansas, selected nine Black students to attend Arkansas's Central High School, a segregated school. These students were known as the Little Rock Nine. These students were attacked by angry mobs of Whites when they were attempting to enroll for classes. President Dwight Eisenhower had to send in troops to enforce the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown*, confirming the right of the students to attend the school. Ernest Green, who was part of the Little Rock Nine, offers the following reflection, "Our parents were willing to put their careers and their homes on the line and to me that says a lot" (Levine, 1993, p. 43) Additionally, in 1962, when James Meredith attempted to enroll at the University of Mississippi, President John Kennedy also sent in federal military troops to uphold desegregation.

Ultimately, the Brown decision offered the promise and hope of better educational opportunities for African American children. However, since the implementation of desegregation, many African American parents and leaders questioned whether desegregation was the best for their children. As a result of desegregation, many schools were forced to close, and African American children were removed from the safety and nurturing environment of African American principals and teachers. Additionally, many African American principals and teachers lost their jobs or were demoted or given

meaningless titles. For this reason, former educators often questioned whether or not

Brown was best for the African American community. In *Silent Trumpets of Justice*:

Integration's Failure in Prince Edward County, the authors share candid interviews with

teachers and students who lived during the school closings in Prince Edward County

during the '50s and '60s (Foster & Foster, 1993). A former teacher from Prince Edward

County, Virginia, offered this view, "if we had stayed separate, but equal, our children

would have been better off educationally" (Foster & Foster, 1993, p. 44). Many African

American parents valued the cultural form of teaching and learning that developed in the

segregated schools (Siddle-Walker, 2000). Horace Tate, the former head of Georgia

Teachers and Education Association, offered this view: during the time of segregated

schooling, students benefited from having a close relationship with their teachers and

being educated about the African American community. He further believed that African

American teachers should have been left alone to teach their own children (personal

communication, 1977). For many African Americans, integration left a void in the

community because African American schools held a place of importance in the

community.

Since the implementation of desegregation, African American parents have

contended with language barriers, issues of sociocultural incongruence between home

and school, and teachers' low expectations for their children (Edwards, 1993). Today,

racial biases within schools have, however, dissuaded many African American parents

from fully participating in their children's academic experiences. Lareau and Horvat

(1999) argue that school personnel view African American parents as uneducated, and as

a result, interact with them in a negative manner. They further suggest that racism undermines African American parents' ability to comply with institutional standards for participation. More specifically, they argue that because of the history of racial discrimination, African American parents have an adversarial attitude towards schools rather than one of support and deference. This, in turn, leads teachers to rebuff African American parental involvement (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel (2001) claim, "schools' assumptions . . . that low-income, minority parents are too lazy, incompetent, or preoccupied to participate seem to arise when parents fail to execute their prescribed role established by the school" (p. 97).

Research also suggests families, including inner city, low-income African American parents, have a profound impact on children's cognitive, social, and emotional development (Benson & Martin, 2003; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005). Slavin and Madden (2001) argue that parental involvement is one of the most crucial factors necessary to raising the achievement of minority and disadvantaged children. Gutman and Lloyd (2000) assert,

> African American parents of high achieving students used a range of methods to support their children's schooling experiences. These methods included tutoring, additional academic work, and close monitoring of their children's homework schedule. They also held high expectations for their children's academic performance, supported their academic goals, were engaged in their children's schooling, and communicated with school personnel. (p. 18)

Researchers have focused on the presumed incongruence between African American parents and their non-African American peers. Although these studies provided some insight into African American parental involvement, limited research has focused on the ways in which African American parents are involved in their children's education. Research suggests that, typically, African American parents are less engaged in their children's academic experiences than their White counterparts (Abdul-Abdil & Farmer, 2006). Some research has stated that urban African American parents' low involvement in their children's education has contributed to their children's lower academic achievement (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005; Roth & McCaul, 1993). Additionally, society and the media often blame urban lower income African American families for their children's academic difficulties, portraying them as low achieving, illiterate, uninvolved, uninterested, and indifferent to their children's educational success (Compton-Lilly, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 1996).

There are other studies that challenge the negative images of African American parental involvement. Researchers have found that African American parents value the educational success of their children (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Trotman, 2001). Several studies indicate that even parents who had little knowledge of school programs showed interest in their child's schooling and learned ways how to help them at home (Chu-Best, 2005; Nistler & Maiers, 1999; Krohn, 2005). In a study conducted by Fields-Smith (2005), nineteen African American parents from five different schools in the same southeastern school district valued the education of their children and made it a priority in their lives. She found that contemporary African American parents continued the legacy

of collective advocacy. According to her study, the majority of the parents bonded together at the district and state levels on behalf of all children. Also, like their historical counterparts, these parents willingly supported the needs of the school (Fields-Smith, 2005).

DeMoss and Vaughn (2000) conducted a phenomenological study of 26 "actively involved" African American parents who participated in school-related activities. These parents participated in multiple ways, both inside and outside schools, as for example, by attending events and monitoring homework. The researchers concluded that involved parents in predominantly inner-city African American communities have more frequent rates and diverse types of participation than are commonly acknowledged in the mainstream research.

Notably, James Comer (1986) argues that schools have failed to tap the interests of African American parents and have ignored their potential to improve the school system and increase school performance (Bowen & Bowen, 1998a, 1998b; Hango, 2007). Furthermore, children of parents who talk with their children about school generally score higher on reading and mathematics tests (Bracey, 1996; Jeynes, 2005). Moreover, studies have also shown that African American parents value the educational success of their children (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Trotman, 2001). Nieto (1996) and Compton-Lilly (1996) identified many ways in which some African Americans support their children in their schooling. They found that many African American parents value children's education, cared about their children's success in learning to read, actively sought ways to support their children, helped their children to maneuver the challenges that lie ahead,

and set high expectations for their children. For the most part, urban African Americans parents were recognized "players" in narrowing the achievement gap associated with their children (Nieto & Compton-Lilly, 1996).

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2007) found that 98% of African American students in grades K through 8 had an adult in the household check whether their homework was done. Additionally, this report found that 83% of African American students in grades 9 through 12 had an adult check whether their homework was done. According to the Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey (2003), parents were asked whether they had engaged in a series of activities with their child within the previous month. For this report, activities included visiting a library; going to a play, concert, or other live show; visiting an art gallery, museum, or historical site and going to the zoo. Specifically, 80% of students whose parents reported participating in 3 or 4 types of educational activities with them and 78% of students whose parents reported participating in 2 types of activities, had parents who expected them to finish college. These findings highlight the reality that African Americans value education and view themselves as important resources in their child's educational experiences, despite their limited involvement in their children's schools.

Models of Parent Involvement

There have been many emerging parent involvement frameworks. Joyce Epstein, a leading researcher in the field of parental involvement developed Epstein's Typology of Parental Involvement; this typology fosters collaboration and partnerships by overlapping

schools' and families' goals, resources, and practices to influence children's learning and development. The framework focuses on teaching parents about engaging in the work of the school, while integrating community resources to improve schools, strengthen families, and help students to succeed in school and life. Epstein's work also describes the challenges inherent in fostering each type of parent involvement as well as the expected results for students, parents, and teachers. While Epstein's collaborative model promotes partnering with families and the community, critics claim that it casts schools and agencies in the roles of experts (Bauch, 1994).

According to Epstein (1995), her typology consists of six fundamental, parent involvement practices:

Type 1: Parenting: The basic obligations of parents, such as establishing positive home conditions to encourage school success.

Type 2: Communicating: The communication between the home and school that facilitates the flow of information regarding the child's progress.

Type 3: Volunteering: The recruitment of parents to act as volunteers in order to support school initiatives and functions.

Type 4: Learning at Home: Parental involvement at home, such as helping children with homework and other learning activities, based on the information schools provide.

Type 5: Decision Making: Active parent involvement in school decisions and in advocacy for school improvements.

Type 6:   Collaborating with the Community: The identification and dissemination of a

network of available resources and services in the community in order to assist

parents and schools in their efforts to better their children's education.

Best practices of this model entail participating in child-rearing workshops, assisting

children with homework, reviewing and responding to report cards and teacher requests,

and serving on school site councils.

Dr. James P. Comer, founder of the Comer's School Development Program in

1980 (SDP), developed a parent involvement model aimed at engaging African American

and Hispanic parents. The framework focuses on changing the hierarchical structure of

the school (expert/non-expert) to a more participatory approach by promoting an

environment where staff and parents work together. The SDP model places relationships

among staff and parents at the center of parental involvement programming. Previous

models and/or programs fostering parent involvement focused primarily on managing

parents at the expense of developing relationships between staff and parents. The SDP

model works to reduce inequalities between staff and parents by having parents serve as

partners on a School Planning and Management Team, and creating a board solely for

parents. Comer's model supports a three-tiered program of parent involvement. Level

One consists of a group of parents who are elected to the School Planning and

Management Team, thereby enabling them to have a stake in the outcome of the school.

The best practices of Level One include the team developing a Comprehensive School

Plan that sets academic, social, and community goals and coordinates all school

activities. Level Two forms of involvement consist of parents participating in day-to-day

classroom and school activities and joining parent organizations. The best practices of Level Two include actively uniting the whole school community in order to promote the overall well-being of all the students. Level Three involvement consists of the parents' attendance and participation at general school activities (Comer, 1980). The best practices of Level Three include school personnel and families working together to contribute to student achievement. Although Comer's model provides parents an opportunity to contribute, it fails to address those parents who are not willing to participate in the school setting. Also, it does not address what parents are doing outside the realm of school to support their children with navigating through the educational system.

Joyce Epstein's model and Comer's school development program have taken key steps in changing the nature of parental involvement by involving families in all aspects of the school environment. Both models view parents as knowledgeable individuals in their children's education. However, while Epstein and Comer have developed very successful parental involvement models, both fail to address those parents who are reluctant to engage in their children's schools. Also, both models fail to address what parents are doing to assist their children with navigating through the schooling process outside the school walls.

Even though Epstein's Typology of Parental Involvement and Comer's School Development Program are widely used, the model that will be guiding this study is the ecology of parental engagement framework (Calabrese-Barton & Drake, 2002). This marks a shift in how educators understand parents' involvement in their children's

education. It focuses primarily on what parents do to engage with their children's schools, exploring how parents understand why they are engaged, and how this engagement relates to parents' experiences and actions both inside and out of the school community (Calabrese-Barton & Drake, 2002). This model suggests that both parental involvement and parental engagement goes beyond a parent's participation at a school event. Moreover, knowing how and why some African American parents are involved or engaged, and researching what they do during their involvement and engagement, especially with the barriers they face, can significantly improve our understanding of African American parent involvement.

Summary

This review has discussed literature regarding African American parent involvement and parent engagement. Unlike the negative images that describe African American parents as disinterested and uninvolved, history sheds a different light. Historical studies depict the countless ways that African American parents were engaged in their children's educational journey. African American parents are concerned about the educational well-being of their children and want the very best for them. They have great aspirations for their children and are involved in ways that schools cannot see. It is important for schools to recognize the contributions that African American parents make to their children's education.

In general, schools must be sensitive to the needs of the parents and children being served. Educators need to remember that parents are their child's first teacher.

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Most importantly, they need to understand that they are not the only individuals

contributing to the educational development of the students they serve. In turn, African

American parents must put forth effort to reach out to the schools and share what they are

doing to help their children. By doing this, schools and parents will be able to form

meaningful partnerships that will, in turn, benefit all students.

CHAPTER THREE: STUDY & METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Study

This study relies on qualitative inquiry as a philosophical approach to the topic. As a research method, qualitative inquiry typically explores a human or social problem in a natural setting where the researcher collects data and interprets individual experiences inductively by focusing on participants' perspectives and meaning (Creswell, 2004). Conducted by researchers who "are intrigued with the complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings the participants themselves attribute to these interactions," it is "pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experience of people" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p.2).

According to Merriam (2002), qualitative research:

- Attempts to recognize how people make sense of their experiences

- Uses the researcher as the primary tool for data collection and analysis

- Is richly descriptive

Merriam (2002) further states that qualitative research seeks, "to understand the perspectives of those involved, uncover the complexity of human behavior in context, and present a holistic interpretation of what is happening" (p.25).

My rationale for employing qualitative inquiry in this study is that there has been limited research that looks deeply into the how's and why's of African American parent involvement and engagement in and outside the boundaries of schools. Currently, in the literature on African American parent involvement and parent engagement, the voices of

these parents are missing. Instead, the current literature is dominated by the voices of educational professionals and administrators. For this reason, this study provides a forum for African American parents' voices to be heard. In particular, it concentrates on the ways in which larger societal, historical, and personal experiences affect the roles parents play in their children's education. It is my hope that this study will contribute to the body of research that values the voices of African American parents as well as the ways in which these parents are involved in the educational journey of their children. To this end, I posed the following questions:

1. What ways do African American parents in this research engage in the education of their child in the school and home environment?

2. How do these parents educate their children in ways that teachers cannot see?

3. How do these parents distinguish between education and schooling?

Theoretical Frameworks

Two key frameworks help guide and shape this inquiry: The ecologies of parental engagement framework (EPE) and critical race theory (CRT). EPE introduces the view of parent engagement instead of parent involvement to represent the relationship that should exist between schools and families. The authors of this framework expanded previous ecological models by integrating perspectives from the cultural–historical activity theory and CRT and combining them with Bourdieu's (1977) concepts focusing on the mediation between space (location) and capital (resources). This framework provides educators with a set of concepts that are useful in understanding the multiple interactions

and changing contexts in schools and classrooms that frame parent engagement (Cole & Engestrom, 1993, 2001 & Vygotsky, 1978). Furthermore, EPE interprets engagement as both a school and a community phenomenon. Aligned with the objectives of my study, EPE explains the phenomenon of parent engagement beyond schools and classrooms, describing how it plays out more broadly in- and outside of the school community. The social analysis of EPE, in terms of cultural and historical activity, focuses on what people actually do, the objects that motivate their activity, the tools they use, the community to which they belong, the rules that pattern their actions, and the division of labor that characterizes their activity (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004). Additionally, Barton, et al., (2004) argue that parent engagement ought to be thought of as the mediation between space, which they define as areas "constituted by underlying structures and resources . . . and are sites of contestation within which culture is produced" (p. 5), and capital which they define as "human, social, and material resources one has access to and can activate for their own desired purposes" (p. 5).

There are precedents for employing the EPE as a guiding framework. Barton and Drake (2002) conducted a study in a mid-sized southwestern city using the EPE framework to examine parental participation in high-poverty urban elementary schools undertaking science education reform. This study examined the roles, relationships, activities, and beliefs that define parental engagement in science education. Another study conducted by Barton and Drake (2005) analyzing immigrant parents' interactions and relationships in schools in high poverty urban settings also employed EPE as a framework. Barton and Drake (2005) claim that on the basis of the EPE framework,

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successful engagement experiences are not related to personality traits (i.e., some parents can do it and some parents cannot); instead, they are the result of a process in which parents and schools interact in particular spaces, using specific forms of capital, to create a level of engagement that truly benefits a child's school experiences.

Although, there are not many studies that include EPE as a lens for looking at parent engagement, there are a number of studies dealing with issues of power, race, and capital, all of which are themes of EPE. Those studies have examined the factors that motivate parents to participate in schools (Benson & Nelson, 2003). EPE is relevant for this study because it offers a new way to conceptualize parent involvement that frames parents as both authors and agents in their children's schools. Furthermore, EPE situates parent engagement as a dynamic and interactive process in which parents rely on their multiple experiences and resources to describe their interactions with schools and school personnel. Moreover, this framework allows for discussion that dictates the participatory actions some African Americans parents choose to engage in.

The CRT framework was employed for this study since it provides marginalized groups, specifically African Americans, an opportunity to articulate their experiences as they relate to parent involvement and parent engagement. Furthermore, CRT "offers an analysis of the ways in which race and language intersect with culture and social institutions" (Barton, et al., 2004, p. 5). CRT draws together premises and a strategy derived largely from the field of law as well critical theory, but related directly to racism, and is being increasingly used by scholars to analyze education (Dixson & Rousseau 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In *Faces at the Bottom of*

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the Well (1992), Derrick Bell, the "father" of CRT, combines allegories with legal findings to sketch the outlines of an American Society in which liberalism is a façade and where racial inequalities will only be addressed to the extent that Whites see themselves as threatened by the status quo. Taylor (1998) further notes that CRT, by grounding its conceptual framework in the distinctive experiences of people of color, challenges the experiences of Whites as the normative standard. He further mentions that context "is crucial for understanding racial dynamics, particularly the way that current inequalities are connected to earlier, more overt, practices of racial exclusion" (pg. 122). For his part, Tate argues that stories of persons of color come from a different frame of reference and therefore present voices that, different from those of the dominant culture, deserve to be heard (Tate, 1996).

There are many studies that employed CRT as a framework. Howards and Reynolds (2008) examined parental involvement in reversing the underachievement of African-American students in middle-class schools. The authors examined the school experiences of middle-class parents and students using CRT as a conceptual framework to examine parental involvement as it related to African-American parents. CRT utilized counter-storytelling as a methodological tool that included parent voice. The authors attempted to account for an explicit intersection of race and class to be used in their analysis. The findings from the data concluded that race and class complicated the roles parents play and the degree to which they become involved.

Reynolds (2010) conducted a qualitative study with African American parents and their involvement and engagement practices. The study utilized CRT as a tool for

examination. The findings concluded that the parents in this study participated in their children's educational processes in ways that were not validated or valued by schools. Rather than participating in traditional forms of involvement such as volunteering in the classroom, parents consumed their time and resources supplementing their children's education in the home. Solorzano and Yosso (2001) used CRT as a framework, utilizing "counter-storytelling" to examine the different forms of racial and gender discrimination experienced by Chicano and Chicana graduate students. Additionally, a study conducted by Denson, Avery, and Schell (2007) utilized CRT as a framework to examine the perceptions that African American students have in regards to engineering and the cornerstone courses associated with the field. CRT has been widely used as an instrument of critique and framework for examining legal issues of political, economic, and social inequality (Stovall, 2006).

Methodology

As more than a theoretical lens, CRT also provides a method of investigation. It encourages the use of stories and narratives that bring voice to marginalized groups while exposing the irony that many laws and policies intended to address racial inequality do not bring about the racial justice they promised (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Ladson-Billings (1999) also argues that to appreciate someone's perspective, that individual's voice must be both heard and understood. Solorzano and Yosso (2000) assert, "A critical race methodology provides a tool to counter deficit storytelling. Specifically, a critical race methodology offers space to conduct and present research grounded in the experiences

and knowledge of people of color along the educational pipeline" (p. 23). Counter-storytelling is a tool that CRT scholars employ to challenge racist characterizations of social life. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) define counter-storytelling as "a method of telling stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (p. 26). According to Delgado and Stefanic (2001), counter storytelling can serve to redeem the voices and validate the experiences of those who have been the targets of racial discrimination. They state,

> Many victims of racial discrimination suffer in silence, or blame themselves
> for their predicament. Stories can give them voice and reveal that others
> have similar experiences. Stories can name a type of discrimination; once
> named, it can be combated. If race is not real or objective, but constructed,
> racism and prejudice should be capable of deconstruction. (p. 43)

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest such a methodology generates knowledge by looking at those who have been marginalized, silenced, and disempowered. The primary reason for using CRT as a method is due to its characteristic use of storytelling. In this regard, Love (2004) positions CRT as an unorthodox methodological move that "represents a paradigm shift in discourse about race and racism . . . by challenging existing methods of conducting research on race and inequality" (p. 228). Storytelling can help expose dominant racial forces that materialize through lived experiences (Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stephanic, 2001). Consequently, this study provides an opportunity for adult participants to speak their reality while bringing voice to an understudied ethnic group in regard to parent engagement.

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Participants

Five participants were selected from African American families whose children were

enrolled in Advanced Learning Tutoring Center during the 2010-2011 school year. A

tutoring center located in the south suburb of Chicago, Advanced Learning Tutoring

Center assists students who are struggling in reading and math. In an effort to help their

children achieve academic success, many parents seek out community resources, such as

tutoring, for their children. The parents who enrolled their children at this center cared

deeply about their children's education and saw tutoring as a way to reinforce what they

were learning in school. Many of the parents received financial assistance from the state

to pay for the tutoring services, while others worked part-time jobs to cover the expense.

This study will only include a small sample of possible subjects because my goal is to

capture the stories of African American mothers and their experiences. Participants in

this study were identified by pseudonyms: Harriet, a divorced mom, presently employed,

with one child; Josselyn, a single mom, presently working part time, with one child;

Sarah, a single mom, presently an entrepreneur, with three children; Tracy, married and

presently employed, with two children; and Tamera, married and presently employed,

with one child. The participants' portraits will be provided in Chapter 4.

Recruitment

With the permission of the tutoring service supervisor, African American mothers were

recruited for this study if they had children attending the center during the 2010-2011

school year. To protect the privacy of students and their families, the supervisor from the

tutoring center mailed recruitment flyers outlining the details of the research (Appendix C) to 25 parents. I provided the stamped envelopes and interested participants were directed to contact me by phone if they wanted to participate in the study.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews

The primary data collection methods employed for this study were semi-structured interviews, informal observations, and a focus group. In semi-structured interviewing, a guide is used, with questions and topics that must be covered. The interviewer has some discretion about the order in which questions are asked, but the questions are standardized, and probes may be provided to ensure that the researcher covers the correct material. This kind of interview collects detailed information in a style that is somewhat conversational (Harell & Bradley, 2009) and allows for narratives to unfold. Beardsworth and Keil (1992) assert that these forms of interviews are guided by a list of issues that are to be covered in each session. As the interview progresses, interviewees themselves will raise additional or complementary issues, and these form a vital component of the study's findings.

The first phase of the study consisted of semi-structured interviews which I designed (Appendix D) so as to examine African American parent involvement and to understand thoroughly the responses my subjects provided. These were conducted during the fall of the 2012-2013 school year, taking place in each participant's home. The interviews lasted no longer than 45 minutes. Prior to the interviews, I informed parents

that the interviews would be confidential and that their participation was entirely

voluntary. I also explained that they could withdraw from the study at any time without

penalty. In order to establish rapport and trust, I scheduled a conversation by phone with

the research participants on an earlier date before the interview took place. Throughout

each interview, I recorded questions and responses; when the interview was over, I wrote

a reflective summary to capture a complete picture of the participant's responses. All the

semi-structured interviews were transcribed by MedEase Transcription. From there, I

coded and analyzed the data.

Informal Observations

The second phase of the study consisted of informal observations conducted following

the semi-structured interviews. Lasting no longer than 20 minutes, these observations

took place in each participant's home to observe the interaction between the parent and

the child who received tutoring. The age ranges of the children being observed were from

9 years old to 17 years old. An observation protocol was utilized to record the

observations and document descriptive notes that included the dialogue and the activities

of the participants (Cresswell, 2003). The observations were not audiotaped.

Furthermore, the observations assisted in developing a clear picture of the participant's

interaction with their child in the home environment.

Focus Group

The third phase of the study consisted of a focus group. The focus group took place at

Advanced Learning Tutoring Center on a specified date determined by the research

participants. It lasted about 50 minutes. Focus group questions were the same as the interview questions (Appendix D). When the participants were involved in a group setting, the group dynamics generated new ideas and more in-depth discussion. Also, the setting provided an opportunity for participants to bring up other issues that had not been mentioned in the semi-structured interview. The focus group was audiotaped. All focus group audio was transcribed by Med Ease Transcription and coded and analyzed.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of this study, I employed Creswell's (2003) analysis strategies. First, I organized and prepared the data for analysis. Next, I reviewed the data in order to gain a sense of what was collected and to look for any similarities and differences among the participants. Following the above mentioned strategies, I identified major themes or patterns obtained from the interviews and analyzed how the themes were aligned to the chosen frameworks, the ecologies of parental engagement (EPE) and critical race theory (CRT). Finally, I listened to the audiotapes, simultaneously reading the transcripts to ensure no mistakes had been made during the transcription process.

Ethical Issues

As a researcher, it was important that I took into account the potential risks to the participants in this study and any other ethical issues. This section will provide a brief synopsis of the ethical issues I took into consideration for this study; they include the researcher's role, informed consent, data storage, and verification of data.

Researcher's Role

As an educator and parent, I bring to this study a thorough understanding of both roles as they relate to African American parent involvement. Familiar with many of the challenges associated with African American parent involvement, I needed to leave behind my prior assumptions and personal experiences when I conducted my research. Failure to have done so would, of course, have invalidated my findings. As a principal, I have learned over the years to be as objective as is humanly possible when dealing with faculty, students, and parents. It is my professional practice *to listen* without imposing *my* interpretations and biases upon what is being said; only when I have weighed the "evidence" or "data" do I draw conclusions. This practice was invaluable when I approached the participants of this study not as an educator and parent but solely as a researcher. Additionally, I informed participants that the information they shared during the interview would not be communicated with anyone except my faculty chair, Dr. Horace Hall.

Informed Consent

Interested participants contacted me individually by phone to arrange a meeting in their home or at another location. During the initial phone conversation, I re-explained the research study. At the time of the meeting, each participant received an informed consent form (Appendix A) to review and sign. For purposes of clarity, I read the informed consent out loud to each participant, answering any of their questions or concerns. Parents were informed that the interview was confidential and their participation was voluntary. Additionally, they were told they could withdraw from the study at any time

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without penalty. Once the consent forms were signed, each participant enclosed her consent form in a sealed envelope.

Pseudonyms

Following Ortiz's (2003) suggestions regarding confidentiality, I used pseudonyms for all personal identities and locations, including the tutoring center. In this research, I did not disclose any information that would reveal identity.

Verification of Data

In ensuring the accuracy of the data, triangulation and member checking were employed for this study. Triangulation is the procedure that entails gathering and analyzing data in more than one way (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). Data may be collected from different people or groups, at different times, and from different places. The premise is that if researchers can validate these various data sets with each other, the understandings and conclusions drawn from these sources are more than likely to be trustworthy. For the purpose of this study, data was collected by way of semi-structured interviews, informal observations and a focus group.

Member checks were also completed for credibility and data trustworthiness. Member checks are used to solicit the participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Drieser, 2006). Five member checks were completed after the interviews were transcribed. Each participant received a copy of the transcription for review. This provided participants an opportunity to review their responses for accuracy, offering them the chance to revise their responses or expand what they previously

mentioned in the interview. Harriet and Tracy reviewed their transcripts and were satisfied with their responses; however, Josselyn, Sarah, and Tamera revised some of their responses and included additional data.

After the member checks were completed, I re-listened to the tapes while reading the transcribed narratives for accuracy and clarity. Careful attention to both tone of voice and the emphasis on certain words helped me interpret the perspective of the interviewee.

Summary

In summary, this chapter provided a description of the methodology utilized for this study regarding the ways African American parents are involved or engaged in their children's schooling process. Employing CRT as a method allowed the use of storytelling that captured each participant's reality as it related to parent engagement/parent involvement. The EPE provided African American parents a platform for discussing their level of engagement inside and outside the school realm. The primary methods of data collection for this study included semi-structured interviews, observations, and a focus group. The primary methods of analysis included the reduction of data into relevant statements and the coding and comparing of the transcribed data so as to identify common themes. These methods and analysis strategies yielded the data needed to answer my research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of African American parents who are involved in their children's education. The data analysis for the study was conducted using methods described by Creswell (2009); it incorporated individual interviews with and observations of a sample of five African American parents of students aged 9-17 and a focus group that consisted of the participating parents. It is important to provide a profile of each participant. This profile includes information pertaining to family structure and employment, as well as their level of education and the aspirations they have for their children. Additionally, Chapter 4 documents the analysis process and its results. The data coding and analysis procedures identified and compared key statements in the data; from these statements, thematic categories relevant to the research questions emerged. In turn, the thematic categories revealed overarching themes that are central to the study.

Participant Portraits

Harriet

Harriet is a 43-year-old, middle-class African American woman. A divorced mother of a 9-year-old child, she graduated from high school and went on to the armed services. Harriet's child's father is not active in his life. After serving time in the military, she came home and pursued her bachelor's degree at a local university. Currently, she is pursuing her master's degree. At the time of the study, she was working full time for General Services Administration.

As a child, Harriet had an unpleasant experience with her classroom teacher, who was a Caucasian woman. She remembered constantly being chastised because she didn't know how to hold a pencil. Harriet said that if she hadn't had the support of her parents, she would have given up. She shared that her parents promoted her sense of confidence and convinced her to stay focused on her studies. Her father took an active role in the school setting, while her mom was more involved at home.

Because of her childhood experiences, Harriet is very passionate about being involved in her son's life, especially since he has some health challenges. A leukemia survivor, he has difficulty retaining information because the cancer affected his central nervous system. During the interview, Harriet became quite emotional. She shared with me how blessed she feels because her son is alive and well. Her son attends a public elementary school where the student body population is approximately 95% African American and 5% Caucasian. However, the teaching body population at her son's school does not reflect the student body population; the teaching body population is approximately 80% Caucasian and 20% non-Caucasian. She considers herself very involved in her son's schooling experiences, serving as an advocate for him to receive support services from his school. Over the years, she has had issues with school personnel in terms of how they respond to her son. She openly admitted that she finds herself constantly having to convey to school personnel that even though her son has health challenges, he is capable of learning. She also calls the school periodically to check on her son. As a supportive mom, she has high hopes for her son's future. Most importantly, she believes that there is nothing that he cannot accomplish in life.

Josselyn

Josselyn is a 31-year-old, working-class African American woman. She is a single mom with a 13-year-old biracial daughter (Caucasian and African American). Josselyn's daughter's father is present in her life. However, I spoke only to mom, due to non-availability of dad. She graduated from high school and is currently taking classes online to pursue her bachelor's degree. At the time of the study, she was working part time as a medical biller.

Josselyn admitted that when she was a child, her mom was unable to attend school functions. She shared that her mom worked multiple jobs to ensure that her son and daughter had a roof over their heads and food on the table. However, even though her mom was working all the time, she did care about her children's education. She made a point of picking up their report cards, monitoring their homework, and providing the resources they needed to be successful in school.

As a child, Josselyn noticed that those who were close to her had a very different home life. Their homes had more structure, with education being the central focus. She noticed over the years that structure had a beneficial impact on her friends and relatives, for they went on to pursue degrees and are doing well in their careers. This has encouraged her to create the same level of structure in her home for her child.

Josselyn is determined to be involved in her daughter's education. She keeps in constant communication with her teachers, visiting the school quite often to advocate on her daughter's behalf. During her childhood years, she herself did not experience any racially based problems with her teachers. However, her daughter, one of two minority

students in a predominately Caucasian school, is going through some rather uncomfortable experiences. There are times when her teacher expects her to respond to questions simply because she is African American; this upsets her daughter who feels she is being made to speak for all African Americans. At such times, Josselyn contacts her daughter's teacher or the principal.

Josselyn is a concerned parent who wants the very best for her daughter. She believes that if her daughter recognizes how much her mother cares about her education, this will encourage her to continue to do well in school. Her daughter has aspirations to become a doctor, so Josselyn feels that it is important to communicate every day to her daughter how proud she is of her and the high hopes she has for her future.

Sarah

Sarah is a 34-year-old, working-class African American woman. She is single and has three children, ages 18, 15, and 13. Her children's father is not involved in their life. Having graduated from high school, she went on to pursue her bachelor's and master's degrees. At the time of the study, she was working as a beauty consultant.

Sarah was a teenage mom. She remembers one of her high school teachers making her feel "lower than dirt." When Sarah was pregnant, she had aspirations of going away to college and so went to her school counselor to acquire more information about potential choices. The counselor told her that there was no way she was going to get accepted into any school. This bothered Sarah tremendously since she was in the top 10% of her graduating class and was also a member of the National Honor Society. The

teacher did not acknowledge any of her accomplishments; instead she saw another

pregnant Black teen that was not going to succeed. Sarah could not believe that an

educator could say, "You cannot and you will not attend school because of your current

condition." She remembers feeling hurt by the counselor's harsh words; her mom,

however, told her "you can do anything you set your mind to."

Sarah's mom was very supportive when she was in school. Her dad, on the other

hand, was not involved in her schooling experiences. Her mom made sure that she and

her sisters maintained good grades. If her children brought home bad grades for an

assignment she could not do, she would get them out of bed early the next day to get help

from the classroom teacher. Additionally, her mom attended every activity that took place

inside the school boundaries. She attended conferences, plays, musicals and, on many

occasions, volunteered in the classroom. Her mother's level of involvement motivated

Sarah to be involved in every aspect of her own children's schooling experiences.

While Sarah's mom's level of involvement was appreciated by school staff,

Sarah's involvement is not embraced at her children's school. Her eldest son attended a

public high school where the student body population was approximately 70% African

American and 30% Hispanic Americans. However, the teaching body population did not

reflect the student population. The teaching body population was approximately 80%

Caucasian and 20% non-Caucasian. Sarah explains that her children's school supposedly

encourages parent involvement, but when parents put forth the effort to participate,

teachers subject them to meaningless subordinate duties such as making copies. Some

parents have even been asked, "What are you doing here?" What Sarah wants is to be

afforded the opportunity to visit the classroom to observe the teaching practices so that she can provide assistance to her children at home.

Sarah wants her children's school to know that as a parent she takes her role very seriously. She believes it is her responsibility to be involved in her children's education to ensure that they have a great future. She is seeking cooperation from her children's school to support her efforts.

Tracy

Tracy is a married 39-year-old, working-class African American woman with two daughters, ages 12 and 17. Tracy's husband is also active in their children's education, but I only spoke to mom, due to non-availability of dad. Tracy graduated from high school but while she pursued higher education she did not complete her bachelor's degree. Years later, she went back to school and received a certificate to become a surgical technician. At the time of this study, she worked as a surgical technician at a local hospital.

As a child, Tracy's parents were involved in her education, and this has motivated her to be involved with her children's education as well. Her oldest daughter attended a predominantly White public high school where the student body population was approximately 80% Caucasian and 20% non-Caucasian. Additionally, the teaching body population was 90% Caucasian and 10% non-Caucasian. Tracy's oldest daughter struggled in school during her primary years and was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. Due to her daughter's diagnosis, she has had to advocate on her daughter's

behalf in order for her to receive support services in school. Initially, her daughter's school refused to provide the services, maintaining that attention deficit disorder did not qualify for support. After the school's rejection, Tracy did thorough research on her child's diagnosis. Once her research was completed, she shared her findings with school personnel, proving that since her daughter's grades were adversely affected by her attention deficit disorder, she was eligible to receive support services. She even brought in documentation from the Illinois State Board of Education to support why her daughter was eligible for services. From there on, the school provided the additional support for her child. As a result of this experience, Tracy really understands the importance of being involved in every aspect of her children's schooling; she therefore makes a conscious effort to stay involved and be present at her children's school.

Tracy has great aspirations for her children. She wants them to do well in school and to pursue higher education. Furthermore, she wants her children to have better experiences in school than she did. Her hope is that they will be able to go away to college, earn their degrees, and have opportunities that she was unable to have.

Tamera

Tamera is a 42-year-old, married, middle-class African American woman who is the mother of a 15-year-old son. Her husband is very active in their child's life, but I only spoke to mom due to non-availability of dad. Tamera graduated from high school and went on to receive her bachelor's and master's degrees. At the time of the study, she was working as a teacher for a local school in Chicago.

Tamera is from a single-parent household. Her mother was unable to participate in school-sanctioned activities because she worked a full-time job. Even though her parents were separated, however, they provided all the resources she needed to be successful. Due to her mother's lack of involvement in her schooling, Tamera goes out of her way to be involved in her son's education. She is very appreciative to her mother for providing that moral support to her son.

Tamera's son is an only child. He attended a predominantly African American public high school where the student body population was approximately 100% African American. However, the teaching body population was approximately 80% African American and 20% White. He struggles socially with other teens his age because he is an only child. As his mom, she feels that it is important to provide him with many opportunities to interact with her children who are his age. She is so concerned about his social well-being that she seeks advice from his counselor at school. Because she takes her role as a parent very seriously, Tamera is motivated to be involved in her child's education. She recognizes that even though she is an educator, she does not have all the answers; therefore, she seeks out support from other educational professionals to provide tutoring for her child when he is having difficulty in school.

Since she is an educator, Tamera recognizes that many of her students' parents are unable to come to the school during working hours. She realizes that education is important to them but also understands that their primary concern is providing a roof over their child's head. Aware that this puts her students at a disadvantage, she is all the more determined to be present at her child's school. She wants school personnel to see her and

know that she cares about what is going on with her child. Fortunately, the school collaborates with her to meet the social and academic needs of her child. She has high hopes for her son's future and knows that as long as she continues the partnership with her child's teacher, he will be successful.

Findings

Interview Findings

Through the interview process and detailed discussion, the participants revealed their perceptions and experiences pertaining to various aspects of the education of their children. In order to maintain the integrity of the interview, all quotations from the participants are presented verbatim. Since this is an authentic document, I did not correct the grammar in their quotes. If there are quotations that are incoherent or confusing, I will clarify for the reader what the participants intended to say or how I have interpreted the quotes. The findings from the interview revealed five thematic categories. The five themes are the following:

    1:   Parents' perceived support;

    2:   Parents' style of involvement;

    3:   Education is the future;

    4:   Schools as caring and challenging;

    5:   Racism in the school environment.

These themes will be discussed later in Chapter Five in the discussion section.

Additionally, analysis of the themes applicable to EPE and CRT will also be discussed in

Chapter Five.

How parents support their child's educational progress

Participants were asked how they support their children's education. There were

eight different responses, three of which demonstrated commonality between interview

participants. These common occurrences included reinforcing skills learned at school and

assisting with homework; maintaining open communication with the teacher(s); and

monitoring homework progress, grades, and study skills. These commonalities formed

the first thematic category regarding the ways in which African American parents support

their children's educational progress. Table 1 provides the various responses and the

frequency of occurrence.

Table 1

How Participants Support Child's Education

Response	# of participants to offer this response
Reinforce skills learned at school/assist with work	2/5
Open communication with teachers	2/5
Monitor homework progress, grades, and study skills	2/5
Teaching life skills	1/5
Attending open houses or other school functions	1/5
Use of a tutor when necessary	5/5
Facilitate the child's involvement with other children or students	1/5
Support the child's extra-curricular interests	1/5

Participants expressed the various ways they offer educational support to their

children; their precise words, quoted from the transcribed texts, are as follows:

1. Harriet described teaching life skills, and assisting with homework:

I actually teach my son a lot of things from home. I teach him about being

responsible. I show him how to do chores, from washing his clothes to

cooking him eggs for breakfast, and I've been doing that since he was five

years old and he's nine now. So I do a lot of things. I reinforce what he has

learned at school. I teach him a lot of things. I go over a lot of things with

him, from doing math to reading. (Harriet, personal communication,

October 6, 2012)

2. Similarly, Sarah discussed attending school events, helping with class work and

tutoring as specific ways to help. This participant stated:

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To support my child's education I go to anything that they have at the

school as far as open house, parent teacher conference, senior night or

whatever they have. I've also helped him with class work, tutored him in

whatever he needed or if he needed a tutor to help him with anything that he

has and offer suggestions of if he's not understanding something., If I can't

help him, have him talk to a teacher, or if the teacher can't help, find

someone else in the school that can help him. (Sarah, personal

communication, October 12, 2012)

Communication with teachers surfaced as an important topic throughout the

interviews. Josselyn stated: "I communicate with the teachers often. I make sure she does

her homework and keeps up her study habits." As a final example, Tracy described

several forms of involvement, from monitoring her child's progress, to communications

with teachers:

I stay involved by constantly checking grades, making sure that all

assignments are turned in, being in contact with the teachers with any

concerns I have for the kids' educational process . . . So that's how I stay

involved.

Perceived involvement in child's school

The second thematic category revealed in the analysis represented the parents'

perceptions of their involvement in the school. During the beginning of the interview, I

shared with the participants the difference between involvement and engagement. It was

discussed during the interview that parent involvement entailed participating in school-

sanctioned activities while engagement entailed being active in their children's education

outside the school environment. The interviewees felt involved in their children's school,

but differed as to whether they were more involved than engaged. From the data, it was evident that for some parents, being involved with the school can be difficult due to daytime work schedules or other commitments, but they remain engaged by communicating with teachers via email. The participants expressed the importance of communication with teachers, especially if they wish to be effective advocates for their children. Table 2 provides the variety of responses and the associated frequencies of occurrence among the five interview participants.

Table 2

Perceived Involvement

Response	# of participants to offer this response
Involved, always participate when needed	2/5
More engaged than involved; can be difficult to be involved and easier to stay engaged	2/5
Participate where allowed; feel involved with going to events planned for parents	1/5
Parents have a responsibility to educate their children, not just the school	1/5
Importance of communication between teachers and parents	1/5
Parents need to be advocates for child; know their rights and understand their needs	1/5

In order to fully understand the perceived involvement of the participants, the following two examples demonstrate the high level of involvement in their children's schools.

I'm involved because even when he was at the public schools, anything that I could do, I would come up there. I would try to get involved with different activities or whatever they had, if they needed extra parents for this or that, I did that. But there were a lot of parents who didn't come when I was there. Even now, at this school I plan to be involved like I've been before. (Harriet, personal communication, October 6, 2012)

The principal knows me by first name, like I'm very involved. I email teachers every single day. If I see a grade slip or anything, I'm on the phone with them. I'm on the email with them. I'm on the email with the principal. I need to know when Spirit Week is. I need to know when this is, this dance. I need to know how much is this? I go on trips. Any and everything I need to do I do to make sure that they know that there's a parent there for their child. So that's something that I just do every day. It's like that's like my goal for the day to make sure she's on point. The school knows I'm still there every day.(Josselyn, personal communication, October, 11, 2012)

Participants' responses also reflected the difference between engagement and involvement. This was explained well by Tamera, who pointed out that involvement, especially for African American single parents, can be very difficult due to job limitations:

Right now, I think I feel engaged. Engaged in terms of having a dialogue with them via email or a phone call. Involvement to me would mean me being on a PTA or in some type of committee whereby I am able, but I find that, that's only open to those parents who do not have a 9-to-5. I do not see where there are any programs or any—what can I say—any mechanisms whereby there is something open in the evening, in terms of parents who do work during the day to be able to be on some type of a club or organization

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in order to help the school further, but maybe that is something that I need to look into. Just that I think that it is so hard for African-American, I am going to say single parents, to be able to be involved as much as they would like to. Sometimes the phone calls just do not do it. Sometimes, the interaction of being face-to-face is what you need. I just do wish that we have more mechanisms whereby we could and can get the single parent a little bit more involved into their children's education, but I think that is a dialogue that needs to be ongoing, not that it is not happening. (November 11, 2012)

This theme of engagement versus involvement was echoed by Tracy, who suggested that being engaged takes a bit more effort:

I think there's a difference between involvement and engagement. I think I'm fully engaged with my kids' school. You know, I think that's important because, once again, if they don't see you then they don't care. I have a strong belief in that. . . . I believe I'm more engaged than just involved. (Tracy, personal communication, November 5, 2012)

Despite the perceived importance of both involvement and engagement, Sarah noted the obstacles she faces in trying to be involved in the school during the day:

The only way I feel involved is going to the other things that they have at school because when you go during school hours, you can't get involved in what they're doing. And I'm not trying to take over any classroom or trying to tell the teacher what you're doing is wrong and this is how you should do it. I just want to be there to see what I can do at home to help. And as far as engage, I can get engaged in conversation with his teacher about his work or the work that he's doing there, but I would like to be there during the day when I go and say, okay, well, before students come in or while students is there, you can just go ahead and briefly tell me what it is that you're doing

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for the day and I can sit back and look and help in whatever capacity that
you need. (Sarah, personal communication, October 12, 2012)

Sarah also talked about the responsibility parents have for educating their children, noting

that it is not solely the task of the school and teachers.

I honestly believe how the saying goes, "it takes a village to raise a child,"
because you need everybody. You can't just put your kids in the school and
say that's your job to teach them. You, as a parent, need to know and to
teach them as well because your kids . . . I mean, you're basically saying
you're not doing anything for your child if you say it has to be put off on the
teacher. It's not only the teacher's responsibility and also the parents, all
educators, because where one fails the other one picks up the slack. (Sarah,
personal communication, October 12, 2012)

Finally, the words of Tracy shed light on several of these points, including the

importance of communication between school personnel and the parents, and of parents

being advocates for their children's education:

I think parents need to understand that they need to look into the rights of
their kids and communicate with the schools and let them know, you know,
you see issues with your child so there has got to be something going on.
And demand that their rights are implemented because they didn't want to
give her services. I had to come in there and fight for her. You have to fight
for your child's rights and communicate with the teachers. One of her
teachers in grammar school, you know, she asked for an assistant to be hired
personally for her, to be in class with her, to help her. I think if it wasn't for
communicating with that teacher and that teacher communicating with me
and we were in the fight together to help her, she wouldn't have gotten the
help that she needed. . . . So, yeah. Communication is very important and

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parents need to look into the laws, look into the rights of their kids, to know

they don't have to accept anything if they fight for their kids. . . .

Communication to parents is really important. Without that connection

between the parent and the educator, I think that a lot of kids fall off to the

side and they suffer from it. (Tracy, personal communication, November 5,

2012)

Motivation for and perceived effect of engagement

Participants were also asked about their motivation for being engaged in their

children's education and schooling and how their involvement affects their children.

Participant responses to this inquiry formed the basis of the third thematic category. The

key noted elements within this thematic category were the importance placed on

education in terms of its impact on the children's future (three of five participants) and

the perception that the children are aware that their parents are supportive (three of five

participants) Additionally, the responses serve to reaffirm the importance of education for

their child. Participants also gave very similar responses in terms of expressing concern

for their children's well-being and their awareness of the impact a teacher can have on a

student. The other responses given by only one participant involved personal

commitment to the child, teaching values, and motivating the child to excel. Table 3

illustrates the frequencies of these responses.

Table 3

Motivation for Engagement and Perceived Effect of Engagement

Response	# of participants to offer this response
The importance of education to child's future; ensure a good future	3/5
Personal commitment – love	1/5
Knowledge of the impact the teacher can have on your child	1/5
Concern for my child's well-being	1/5
Knows I am supportive; can see that I care and want him to do his best and affirms the importance of education to the child	3/5
I am teaching him values and morals	1/5
Motivating her to continue to excel academically	1/5

Three of the interviewees specifically discussed the importance of education for their children's future as a motivation for their involvement/engagement. Josselyn stated, "Because without education you have no future; so therefore, I am very motivated because I want to make sure she has a good future." Similarly, Tracy stated: "Wanting them to have a better experience than I did in school, wanting them to go further than I did in school, to be able to go away to school for college and having those experiences, getting their degrees."

Sarah highlighted the importance of education to her children's future success and financial well-being:

Well, what motivates me? The most I can say right now is with the limited education, if he doesn't have at least his high school diploma, there's no way that he can get any type of job that would help him succeed in life. I

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prefer him. . . And I've always told him and his sisters that don't only stop at your high school diploma. I need you to go further because without the degree, no matter what degree it is, you will get a job but it will be a minimum wage job. Not saying that they are bad, but if you notice, $8.25 an hour for rent what they are charging now and you can only work 40 hours a week is not going to help you make it anywhere. (Sarah, personal communication, October 12, 2012)

Harriet, however, focused on her commitment and love for her child as her primary motivation for involvement/engagement:

What motivates me is he's mine and I love him. So when it comes down to anything that he's indulged or involved in, I'm involved. And that's what's the bottom line, he's mine and I love him, so I'm going to push and help him in every way I can. (Harriet, personal communication, October 6, 2012)

Resources used

The fourth thematic category was formed from descriptions of the resources participants used to support their children's educational progress. Key occurrences in this category included the use of tutoring (five of five participants), internet resources (three of five participants), and materials bought from an educational bookstore, such as learning books, and materials (two of five participants). Table 4 provides the full variety of responses and associated frequencies among the five participants.

Table 4

Resources Used

Response	# of participants to offer this response
Tutoring	5/5
Internet resources	3/5
Educational bookstore; learning books etc.	2/5
Friends and family	1/5
Constant communication with school and teachers	1/5
Constant communication with the child	1/5
Brush up on own skills to help	1/5

Each participant mentioned several resources. For example, consider responses by

Harriet, Josselyn, and Sarah:

I use various resources. I use tutoring centers, I use friends, family. I have

friends that are teachers, I have friends that are principals, I have friends that

are in different fields and sometimes they give me. . . we network it; I use

some of their resources. I use. . . I go to the internet, I use that to try to help

my son with different activities that he might need to do at school. I use the

book store, the educational bookstore in the community, go pick up books,

tapes, all kinds of stuff. (Harriet, personal communication, October 6, 2012)

Let's see, tutoring, constant communication with the school, with the

teachers, constant communication with my child, being able to answer any

questions openly and honestly to assist with anything she needs. (Josselyn,

personal communication, October 11, 2012)

I've also helped him with class work, tutored him in whatever he needed or

if he needed a tutor to help him with anything that he has and offer

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suggestions of if he's not understanding something, if I can't help him, have

him talk to a teacher, or if the teacher can't help, find someone else in the

school that can help him. . . . In the high school the teachers have given us

different web sites that we can go to. They've also let us know that we can

come talk to them. And recently we received information that they'll be

having . . . different people coming in to the school with different tutoring

and other things where we can choose one of those companies that will help

them for whatever they need tutoring in, and also, I've tried to brush up on

whatever skills because when we're at home, I can't just call up somebody

and ask them well how do you do this or how do you do that? (Sarah,

personal communication, October 12, 2012)

Experience with school personnel

The fifth thematic category was formed from participant responses related to their

experiences with school personnel. Key themes within this category included (a)

reporting both positive and negative experiences with school staff, highlighting the

impact of teaching staff, and (b) reporting difficulties with counselors and other staff who

failed to support the students or provide for their needs. Individual participants gave a

variety of other responses related to their experiences with school staff. Table 5 provides

these responses as well as the common responses.

Table 5

Experience with School Personnel

Response	# of participants to offer this response
Both positive and negative	3/5
Difficulties with counselor not helping	2/5
Some schools do not provide for academic needs	1/5
Some school teachers seem to be concerned and committed	1/5
Favoritism	1/5
Racial issues	1/5
Involvement of principals to ensure quality education for all	1/5
The teachers love him	1/5
Difficulties with system holding child back	1/5
We are partners (school and parent) in ensuring success of the child	1/5
Teacher responses to parent involvement	
Some very responsive; others do not respond	1/5
Teachers do not want you involved in classroom/ difficult to help in the classroom, the teachers don't like you there when teaching	1/5

Participants described having both positive and negative experiences with school staff. For example, Josselyn noted,

> I have had some interesting experiences. Let's see, I have had experiences with favoritism, teachers favoring certain kids over other kids. I've had experiences with racial issues, teachers saying things out of context based off of kids' racial background. I've had some good experiences with personnel as well, though, principals being very involved in the children's

education, making sure the faculty stays on point doing everything that they need to do as well too, so I have had both sides of it. (Josselyn, personal communication, October 11, 2012)

Two participants also described school or curriculum-related difficulties in which the counselors were not as helpful as they could have been and the parent had to become involved. For example, Tracy's description:

Well, with my oldest daughter, she was transferring in as a junior, but they were only going to let her be classified as a sophomore because the school district she came from, they didn't . . . the freshmen took world history; sophomores didn't take a history. . . . So, she was transferring in as a junior and her new district's freshmen took freshman history and sophomores took world history so it was like she was missing a class, even though she had the 12 credits to classify her as a junior. Because she was missing that class, they didn't want to classify her as a junior. So, I contacted the superintendent because her counselor was like, "Well, we'll have to classify her as a sophomore." And, in a way, I kind of understood what they were saying, but because they were outwardly classifying her this way on her ID and everything, I had a problem with it. Because school being as social as it is, it made her feel like, you know, like she failed her sophomore year. So, I had a problem with that. If they had kept it in the background that it was classified this way until this class was made up, then maybe it wouldn't have been as big of a deal for me, but because they were outwardly displaying it, you know, I didn't agree with that. (Tracy, personal communication, November 5, 2012)

In terms of the teachers' responses to parental involvement, one participant noted that teachers are not necessarily interested in parents being in the classroom, despite the

fact that the school claims to encourage parent involvement. This participant's description:

They have nothing but good things to say about him even when I go in just to volunteer or anything. Now, that's kind of hard getting in the classroom to volunteer, but as long as you come in they are okay, but they don't like you really in the classroom while they're teaching. . . . You get a little teed off because it's, like, first you say you want us to come in to help, but then when we come in to go in the classroom you don't want us nowhere near your classroom. I remember not with him but with his sister in junior high trying to go in the classroom, the teacher looked . . . the office . . . First of all, the office said, "Well, let me see what I can have you do around the office." Then after I did everything, because I'm quick, she said, "Well, let me see what teacher will want you in their classroom." What you mean what teacher would want me in their classroom? The teacher allowed me in the classroom, but as I was helping a student write her paper because I was going a little bit too in-depth, she didn't like that. And then when I was trying to help her to edit the paper, she was like, "Oh, no, you just sit there. Just watch the classroom for me. You don't have to do anything. I don't want you to touch or do anything." I'm here to help not just to look for behavior problems. If that was the case, I'll walk the hallways to make sure no students was in the hallway because as a teacher, I think by now because it was already middle of the school year you should already have your classroom where you know each student and they know what they expect of you. Why would you not want someone in there helping you even if it was just grading papers? I went to three different teachers, the same thing. It was only the fourth teacher, she said, "Well, if you don't mind, can you grade these papers?" And she gave me the key to grade her tests. But all the other

teachers, they did not want you in the classroom. (Sarah, personal

communication, October 12, 2012)

Parents' school experiences and experiences of parental support for education

The interviewees offered insight into their past personal school experiences and

their own parents' support or failure to support their academic progress. Key common

elements of this sixth thematic category included (a) that the participants did not report

racial issues in their own childhood schooling experiences, perhaps because they attended

predominantly Black or racially diverse schools; (b) experiences of their parents'

involvement in their education; and (c) their mothers not being able to be involved in

school due to work. Table 6 provides the variety of responses of participants and the

associated frequencies.

Table 6

Parental Personal Experiences of School, Parental Support,

and Preparation for Involvement

Response	# of participants to offer this response
Parental experiences in school:	
Did not deal with racial issues growing up; attending predominantly Black school or racially diverse school	3/5
Memories of racial abuse and maltreatment	1/5
Black teachers empowered the Black students	1/5
Very positive experiences w/ caring teachers & involved parents	1/5
How their parents supported participants own schooling:	
Parents were involved	2/5
Not very involved or not able to be involved	2/5
Mother always supportive; father not involved	1/5
Did whatever I needed to succeed	1/5
Personal experiences that prepared parent for involvement	
Personal experience seeing that you need certain knowledge to achieve or just get by	2/5
Personal educational attainment of higher degrees	1/5
Structure and knowing the value of education	1/5
Growing up & watching own mother support & value education	1/5
Watching son grow and listening to teachers in terms of what he needs or is good at	1/5
Just a strong desire to be part of what they are doing; involved since they were little	1/5
Being an educator	1/5

The interviewees did not encounter racial issues in school owing to the fact that

they attended either predominantly Black or very racially mixed schools when they were

growing up. For example:

> Well, I didn't really deal with that because I went to a predominantly Black
> school. I didn't have to . . . I wasn't interacting with other races that much
> when I was younger. When I was in high school, I guess because it was so
> diverse that I didn't really have to deal with that there either, because it was
> so mixed and everybody was like we're all one color. It wasn't. . . With my
> child, she goes to a school that's 99.9% White, so it's like one Black kid or
> two in every class, so she's dealing with something different than I would
> have because mine was mixed so much that it wasn't. . . It was even
> throughout, so I didn't have to deal with that. (Josselyn, personal
> communication, October 11, 2012)

However, one participant described having experienced racial abuse and

maltreatment in school.

> I remember all the way back to kindergarten when I had a teacher who was a
> Caucasian instructor, and I remember her abusing me because I didn't
> specifically hold my pencil the way the students were taught to hold their
> pencil. I held my pencil differently. Meaning it was good penmanship, but
> because I didn't hold my pencil the way she thought I should hold my
> pencil, she used to hit me. So I didn't like that. And she was Caucasian. I
> didn't like her, and I'm always conscious of who I have my child in care,
> who's teaching my child, because they can break or make your child and to
> me, if I didn't have my parents who let me know that I was so much bigger
> and kept my self-esteem and different things like that, I probably would

have stopped writing. I probably would have scribbled. I didn't like that. (Harriet, personal communication, October 6, 2012)

Another participant, expanding on her high school experience, described how the Black teachers served to empower Black students.

As I got older and went into the fourth through the eighth grade, I remember having Black instructors. I remember them empowering us. Math, I remember when we would have drama and you would say, "I'm not 'Hey, Black child, do choo know…" I cannot say it because they would say "do choo" instead of "do you." She said, "Sit down, child." So she cared about how we spoke and what kind of language we used. They were more involved and they really loved to teach, so I believe at that time I was very eager to learn . . . because of the strength and what they were giving us as a Black teacher. (Josselyn, personal communication, October 11, 2012)

As far as parental support and involvement, the participants were split, some commenting that their parents had been involved in their education while other parents were not. Two participants described parental involvement:

My parents were involved. From an educational side to the schooling side I remember my dad being more the one to come up to the school more. My mom worked with me at home with my reading and made me read a story before I could even go outside. But my dad was the one who was more involved when it came to the school and he would come up there on a regular. . . and maybe because he worked nights and Mom worked days. So he would come and check to see how each one of us were doing in school. (Harriet, personal communication, October 6, 2012)

They were involved with the school all the time, stayed in contact with the teachers, I think, and the difference between then and now is the different

ways of communication with social media and internet and everything that we didn't have when I was growing up. We have more ways of being in contact with our kids' education and the educators now than they did back then. But, you know, they were always on the phone or in contact with the teachers if there were any concerns or anything like that. (Tracy, personal communication, November 5, 2012)

Another two participants explained their parents had not been involved in their school, but this was primarily because of work schedules:

Well, my mother worked four or five jobs, like she worked a lot. . . . She just worked a lot, so it wasn't more or less that she wasn't involved because she didn't want to be. She wasn't involved because she couldn't be. She had so much. . . She was working constantly, so I feel that she wanted to make sure that I did everything in school but she, I mean, she looked at our report cards and she did all of those things, but she couldn't, like, join a PTA or go on all the field trips or any of that. She couldn't do any of that because she was always at work 12 hours a day. She's still working 30 years later so many hours a day. . . . Yeah, she wanted to just make sure we had food on the table, a roof over our head, so she worked. That's what her thing was. She worked. She wanted to make sure we were straight in every way. (Josselyn, personal communication, October 11, 2012)

No, they were not involved. I find though now that my mother realizing that she was not as involved as she could have been because, again, she was a single parent, and my dad was in and out, so she did not have the opportunity to go up to the school as much as she would have liked to, but now that she is retired, I find that she puts that energy that she should have probably put into me, into my son. So I think that is great whereby I have a supportive team, in terms of having her on board. The fact that she worked

during the day, and it is so hard for African-American parents, especially with single parents, given the opportunity to be able to go up to the school during the day, we do not have that luxury. Or should I say when I was coming along, we did not have that luxury. (Tamera, personal communication, November 11, 2012)

For the participants, certain aspects of their life experiences showed them the importance of education in achieving one's goals and this prepared them to be supportive in terms of their own children's education.

I think my personal experiences growing up I saw the difference between how people were raised in the households, and I've always thought that. . . Part of me always thought that, wow, they were really structured or really disciplined or really this, and then I was more free and this, that, and the third, and there's a difference between how we were raised different, but this was more about education. This was more about fun and being you look at your. . . You know, you look at your future, you look at your life and you go, "Well, hmm, maybe I should have my child do the more education more or less and her focus will be different versus having fun and kicking it all the time because it's not about that." And then you look at your life as an adult and you go, "Well, hmm, had I honed in on this, this would be this," you know. So, I think that my personal experiences as a child growing up just kind of watching everybody around me and then watching them as adults and stuff just to kind of see like, okay, this is what I wanted to have when I was younger as a kid but I didn't know any better. . . . So now that I know as an adult, I want to make sure that my child has that same structure and things like that, so that she'll grow up and understand how good and important education is. (Josselyn, personal communication, October 11, 2012)

Growing up, just noticing what all my mother did to make sure that we, me and my sister, made sure that our grades were good, that we passed. If she noticed that we brought home a paper and it had an F on it if it was something she couldn't do, she would take us right back up there to the school with the teacher early the next day to see what it was we needed to do or how can she help if there was no way that the teacher would let us do it over. What is it that she could do at home to get us to understand the subject more? (Sarah, personal communication, October 12, 2012)

Other experiences that prepared interviewees to be involved in their children's education included their own educational attainment, being an educator, and simply wanting to be a part of their children's lives. Tamera explained the influence of being an educator on her involvement in her son's education:

Well, the fact that, as an educator, I see where I do not get a chance to see a lot of my students' parents, and I know it is because of them having to work during the day, so it just makes me more aware of the things that I need to do and not let them fall by the wayside, and not to say that those parents are letting them fall by the wayside, but right now the primary concern that I am sure they have is to keep a roof over their children's head. So it is not like education is not important to them, it is just in terms of prioritizing. It just seems to fall by the wayside sometime. So the fact that I see that on a daily basis just gives me more incentive to want to do that, in terms of being there for mine. (Tamera, personal communication, November 11, 2012)

Another participant, Tracy, discussed her satisfaction at being involved in her children's education:

I guess ever since they started school, even in preschool, it was just really important for me to be part of it. You know, I want to be part of everything

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that they do. It's just something, I guess being brought up with my parents being involved, it's just something that I wanted to continue with my kids. To be even more involved if at all possible, just be more involved in their education and social, you know, aspects of their lives. It's just enriching to be able to be part of it and watch them grow. It's like a satisfaction to see them get to another milestone and surpass. So, it's just something that I've always wanted to do, when I had kids, was to be more and more involved in their school and in their home stuff. You know, cheerleading and softball and t-ball and all those things. I've always been deeply involved in that with them. With my oldest daughter's ROTC, being involved in that and it was a whole different thing for her to be involved in, definitely out of her comfort zone, that she really embraced and liked so much. And just being involved in that was a great experience. (Tracy, personal communication, November 5, 2012)

Expressed needs or wants from school

The seventh thematic category was formed from participants' expressed needs and wants from their child's school. However, responses of participants were varied; they included **a desire for** an academically challenging school environment; more male and particularly Black male teachers; Black history/Black education; honesty from the school in terms of desired parental involvement; communication; care and attentiveness given to students. Table 7 illustrates the responses with frequency counts.

Table 7

Needs or Wants from Child's School

Response	# of participants to offer this response
To make certain that he is challenged	1/5
Males, specifically Black male teachers	1/5
Black education; Black history	1/5
Honesty from the school in terms of desired parent involvement	1/5
Increased communication; up to date use of communication tools and electronic grading	1/5
To see that they care and that they care about the whole child	1/5
Are attentive to his needs and meet him where he is	1/5

Participants identified that their children had many different educational needs the school and staff had failed to satisfy. Although Table 7 offers a list of these elements, the following examples provide insight into the different responses. Harriet first reported the need to make sure the children are challenged, stating, "I need my son's school to make certain that he's challenged and right now, he's getting challenged!" Then, Harriet discussed the need for more male, and specifically, Black male, teachers:

> So the fact that he's in front of the male teachers now, you know, they're not babying him. And the teachers that were at the public schools, which is predominantly 90% Caucasian, maybe 2% Hispanic and probably 1%, you know, there's only two males at the school he was at. Black males. My goodness. Well, at this school it's all males, with the exception of two females. That's huge, so, he's being pushed in a different way. (Harriet, personal communication, October 6, 2012)

Josselyn called for the need for Black education and the teaching of Black history.

> Well, one big thing for me that I've been discussing with her is they should focus some, not all, on Black education. They don't learn about like Thurgood Marshall and stuff like that. They don't have all of that, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. They don't have that; whereas, if you had all Black school, Black history month, they really go hard about everything. At her school, I think because they don't want to touch that too much, but I think all kids should learn about slavery, learn about different stuff that Black people had to go through and endure so they'll have a better understanding and a better respect for other cultures. They're not taught that. They're like when it's time for education, they talk about the Aztecs, the Indians, the natives; and I'm like what does that have to do with cultures around you right now? And I think that's like a really big thing. I would love for her school to delve into that, but they won't. (Josselyn, personal communication, October 11, 2012)

As noted previously in the discussion of the findings, the participants described that although the school asked for parent volunteers, the teachers and staff did not seem to truly want parental involvement in the school. Stemming from this impression, one participant asked for honesty from the school staff with regard to parent volunteerism and involvement:

> The school says that they want more parent involvement. I'd like them to be a little more honest with that. Do you want parent. . . Do you really want the parents in the classroom seeing what's going on, or is it just that you want to run your classroom the way you want and you don't want anybody to see what you're doing just in case there's something wrong? Now, I know each teacher can run their classroom their own way. It's not the parents'

responsibility or their job to tell you how to run your classroom. That is you. They can offer suggestions, but however you do it, that's on you. I just want to be able to come in there and help if there's any way I can or to see what you're doing, if there's something that I can implement at home not only for him but for his sisters. (Sarah, personal communication, October 12, 2012)

Also, one parent discussed the need for more communication from the teachers; she felt this should be easy given today's technology:

I think communication just needs to be utilized. There are so many ways for teachers to communicate now that weren't there when our parents were dealing with us in school, that there's no excuse for communication between a parent and teacher or principal to not be there. There's no excuse. (Tracy, personal communication, November 5, 2012)

Finally, Tamera expressed how she wanted to see that the teachers are caring and that they would provide for the needs of her son:

I want to see that they care. I want to see that they are going to do everything possible to make sure that he is successful, and again, the fact that they contacted me about his social lets me know that they do. They could let that go by the wayside and not . . . because you figure a school, nine times out of ten, most schools are concerned about only the academic, but I am a firm believer that we must treat the whole child. . . . And, again, the social, to me, is a big part. So I am definitely going to make sure that they are attentive to his needs and to meet him where he is. (Tamera, personal communication, November 11, 2012)

Perceptions of education versus schooling

The eighth and final thematic category within the interview data provided insight into the perceived differences between the terms "education" and "schooling." Key

common responses included that education is learning for life (five of five participants), that schooling is limited to within the school building or being at school (five of five participants), that both education and schooling are important (three of five participants), and that education includes real world experiences (two of five participants). Table 8 illustrates the various responses related to this thematic category and the associated frequencies of occurrence.

Table 8

Perceptions of Education versus Schooling

Response	# of participants to offer this response
Education is for life; education is learning, always learning, never stops and is anywhere	5/5
Schooling is limited to within the school building or being at school	5/5
Importance of both schooling and education; need both	4/5
Education includes real world/life experiences	2/5
Importance of role models to support understanding the value of education	1/5
Importance of education in children's future	1/5

All five participants noted a difference between education and schooling, primarily in terms of seeing education as lifelong learning that is accomplished in various forms and in various locations; schooling, on the other hand, is limited to the school setting. The following examples demonstrate this notion:

I think education is for life. I think schooling is you just go to school, like you just, literally, you're there because you have to be, not because you want to be. You're not trying to learn. You're not trying to be educated. You're there because your momma said, "Go to school," and I think that the big difference is if a child is in school learning, they are receiving education, that's going to help them in their future versus just going to school because you have to go to school, you know; and a lot of kids get that mixed up, so they're not going to learn anything when they are there. You know, education, that's every day all day brought up, so that's why it gets a 10 because that's like utmost in my house. (Josselyn, personal communication, October 11, 2012)

Schooling is just what he gets while he's in those four walls. Education is something that he's going to have and take with him throughout his whole life. He's not necessarily learning everything that he needs to know in school. He gets his education from me, from whatever he's learning out on the streets. I'm not saying that he's out there like that, but book knowledge only takes you so far. Common sense takes you farther, too. And you can know everything in the book, but when you get to a job, if you don't. . . if you can't read facial expressions or read people's body language, there's no way that your schooling is going to help you educate yourself on people. (Sarah, personal communication, October 12, 2012)

School is the building; education comes from all forms. You learn something every day. When you get up in the morning, you're learning something. If you ain't learning something you're not doing something right. You're constantly learning, every day. So school is the building; education, you learn from every aspect of your life. (Tracy, personal communication, November 5, 2012)

Regardless of the differences that they perceived between education and schooling, participants generally felt both were important. As Harriet put it, "I think schooling is important, just as well as education. The two are needed." Similarly, Tamera stated, "I think of it as a partnership between the both of us [school and parent]." Sarah and Tracy mirrored these notions, stating: "School and education go hand in hand. You need to really apply yourself in school to get the education and the knowledge that the teachers are teaching you (Sarah); and "I think there needs to be structure to learn, so schooling is important" (Tracy).

Harriet also agreed that education can be gained through real life experiences: This is just one way I was educating my son. I would go to the store and he would ask for something and when he asked I would say, "when you get home, you need to give me my $10 back that you're asking me to loan you because you have $10 for this toy that you really don't need but, you know, I'll allow you to spend the 10 bucks the way you want," and I would loan it to him. So when we would get in the door, he would have a problem with the fact that he has to give Mommy the $10 back. So now I require him to "Take your little wallet with you, baby, because you can see it leave your wallet versus me charge it on my card, and you'll have a different appreciation and you'll have a different value." Because he's got to learn it on his own, but I have to give him that experience through the way I choose to educate him. Or how I educate him. And that's the kind of stuff that I do here. Real world education, it is what it is. Because what you give, your life experiences, what you do, how you live, where you do what you do, all of that plays an important. That to me is better than getting to school or

education—academia, an education. Going to just sit behind a door and get

the schooling. (Harriet, personal communication, October 6, 2012)

Included in this thematic category, participants offered a rating on a scale of 1-10

of the value/importance of schooling and of education. Participant responses suggested

that they overwhelmingly perceived the importance of education, with responses of 10 or

"more than 10"; in contrast, responses to the value of schooling ranged from 3 (because it

is "just going" to school) to 10 (an important piece of education). The previous comments

explain the variety of ratings for schooling, and the consistent ratings of educational

value given in Table 9.

Table 9

Participant Ratings for Importance of Education and Schooling

Response	# of participants to offer this response
Rating of schooling	
3, because just going	1/5
5	1/5
7, only includes education in school, only one part of the partnership	1/5
8, learning needs structure, so schooling is important	1/5
10, is an important piece of education	1/5
Rating of education	
10, because you are nothing without it	2/5
10 is not high enough	2/5

For example, Josselyn offered an explanation for the score of 3 she gave to

schooling:

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It depends on how you look at it. With my definition versus education and schooling, I would say with schooling I would give it a 3 because schooling you're just going because you have to go, so I mean, they have to go regardless. So I think. . . Like I said, education is definitely a 10, but with schooling it's like a 3 because they. . . In my house school is not an option, so I wouldn't. . . I can't really say zero through one through ten with that because school is not an option, like you can't just decide to go to school one day or don't go to school because I don't feel like it. That's nonsense, so that's not even an option in my house. That's not even brought up. (Josselyn)

Additional examples for the ratings related to education were reflected in the words of Tracy and Sarah. Tracy stated, "Ten is the highest? That ain't high enough—that's how much I value education." Similarly, Sarah responded as follows:

Education is top. It's ten for me. I just look at it like without your education, where are you really going to go in life? You can have, education can take you so far, not necessarily schooling but education. Yeah, you have your schooling and education and that will take you even further, but you need to be educated on everything. I'm not saying that you have to be overeducated but when. . . If he's looking at somebody and they're saying one thing to his face and he can't really read what they're looking at or how their body language is, how is he going to be educated to know anything to get him further where he needs to go? And just like how is anybody going to know what that education is doing for them? You have to apply everything that you learn. (Sarah, personal communication, October 12, 2012)

Focus Group Findings

Focus group discussions with parent volunteers were also used to validate the findings and provide additional depth to the data obtained. The focus group findings supported many of the findings of the individual interviews while providing additional insight into the experiences and perceptions of participants with regard to education and schooling.

How parents support child's educational progress and their perceived involvement

The parents in the focus group were in agreement that they supported their children's education through active involvement (six references within the group); they also referred to the importance of being advocates for their children. For example, participants made comments such as, "I'm actively involved. I help by helping the teachers, helping my son, so that we communicate so that I can help them help him learn," and "I'm actively involved by constant communication with the school, my child, and just pretty much making sure she's focused."

Another participant described her personal role in supporting her child and serving as his advocate:

> I've had teachers that made a difference in my life, but I am his biggest advocate, and I am his real teacher. Because what he gets from me he'll be able to use throughout his entire life. They've given him just the guides that he needs or the educational basics, but I'm going to make sure he learns how to apply everything that he needs. (Harriet, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

The group also discussed being involved and engaged in their children's school and, similar to the results of the individual interviews, noted a difference between the terms "involvement" and "engagement." However, group participants described engagement as a step higher than involvement. For example, during discussions, one participant stated,

> I think a lot of parents are involved at school. I think there is a difference between involvement and engagement, and I think to an extent everyone is involved. But to be engaged is a step deeper. I mean going to parent/teacher conference, that's involvement. Getting an email, that's involvement, but really advocating for your child, I think that's more engagement. (Tracy, personal communication, November 17, 2012)

This statement was followed by a comment from Josselyn, who added in agreement:

> To piggyback what she was saying, I understand what she's saying, the involvement and engagement, like one of you guys said earlier, I don't remember which one, every kid needs something different, so some kids only need involvement, whereas some kids you need to be engaged in everything because you want to make sure they don't miss anything. So I think that the level that I'm at with her is involvement because I mean if I need to jump in there deeper in the engagement I would, but I do understand what you're saying. (Josselyn, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

Motivation for and perceived effect of involvement

The focus group participants were asked if they felt their involvement made a difference for their children. The responses indicated similar results to the interview data,

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in that participants felt their support was critical to each child's learning and achievement in school; they also believed their involvement showed both the students and the school that they cared about their children's education. For example, one focus group participant added this to the discussion:

> I think them knowing that I support them is a big influence in how they do in school. Them knowing that they can come home and say, "Mom, you know what I got on my test today?" You know knowing that it's important to me gives them a push to do better, and then it makes them feel good to get those good grades and to be able to come home and say, "Oh, look what I got." So I think that that helps, that helps them in school. (Tracy, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

The following examples from focus group comments also demonstrate the importance of student and school perceptions regarding parents' investment in their children's education:

> I believe my involvement shows him that I care, especially with this being his senior year; he's done great so far. And then now that his classes that he doesn't understand and that I'm trying to help him with and come to school and talk to the teachers or whatever tools I can get for him. He understands that it's not only just him being at school, learning in school that he can use whatever that he's getting as he gets older. And with me coming he feels that I'm supporting him more and more now. (Sarah, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

> I think my involvement makes a difference because my child knows no matter what I have her back. Like I said, I'm constantly communicating with the school, the principal, the teachers. They have this thing called PowerSchool so I'm always, I love that portal. Like a lot of parents know

nothing about it, it's crazy. And I think because she knows I'm going to look at PowerSchool every week, before I even say what's this C about, she'll be like, "Oh, nope, I changed it, I did it again, I got an A." So she knows before. . . She fixes it before I even get to it because she knows I'm on it. So I think because she knows how involved I am and how I am about education, she makes sure. And she also, I think the school knows how involved I am. They all know me by name and that's bad, but they all know me really well because they know how I am about my child. So I think that that's important that if the school knows you care, they care more about your child as well because they know you're involved. (Josselyn, personal communication, November 17, 2012)

The motivation for this involvement stemmed from understanding that their children's future success was tied to their education. For example, one participant stated, "Wanting them to get further than I did, that's a big motivation. To push them further so that they can get their college degree, which is something I don't have, so just that's a big motivation." Another parent expressed a similar view:

My motivation for my son's education is the fact that I realize in today's society you have to have an education in order to make it. It used to be just to work at McDonald's that a high school diploma was good enough. In the 21st century, employers are now looking at people with college degrees, not even taking an opportunity by looking at people with high school degrees. So it's just been stepped up a notch, so just to make sure that he realizes that how important education is in order for him to achieve his goals. (Tamera, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

Resources used

The focus group participants also discussed the resources they used to support

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their children's education and development. Most often mentioned were tutoring services

(five references within the discussion) and using colleagues, family, and friends as

educational resources and support (three references within the discussion). Other

resources mentioned also aligned with the interview results and included internet or

online resources, constant communication with teachers via email, and the parents

themselves serving as resources. For example, the focus group transcript recorded several

of these resources:

> Well, my resources are tutoring, email constantly with the teachers, and I
> also have family that are part of the education system, hello, so I use them
> for resources as well just to make sure that the school is not trying to get
> over for any reason because my daughter is in a predominately White school
> district so I need to make sure that everything is on the straight and narrow.
> (Josselyn, personal communication, November 17, 2012)

> Definitely tutoring, and I felt as if that I'm his number one resource in terms
> of, and as an educator, in terms of educating him. I do rely on colleagues
> because I realize that I don't know everything, so I do rely on my colleagues
> as well in terms of if he's needing help in a specific area that I'm unable to
> help him in. (Tamera, personal communication, November 17, 2012)

Experience with school personnel

Focus group participants discussed their perceptions of the school staff, noting that some

teachers failed to recognize the different learning styles of students (four references

within the discussion). They identified both positive and negative experiences with

school staff (two references), pointing out that teachers were not always open to

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providing what a child needed and deserved (two references). The discussion included

the following comments:

> I think it's also a problem when teachers think that all kids learn the same. You know we have some educators who feel that I'm going to teach this one way and that's how you're going to get your answer, instead of trying to see how different children learn, because not all kids learn the same way. I have a problem with that because it's, you know, especially in the subject of math, not all children learn math the same way. And I talk to another educator who actually teaches potential teachers, and they say that one of the main problems that she sees in these potential teachers are in teaching math is that they don't want to learn different ways of coming up with an answer. You know I've dealt with that a lot with my child's teachers. (Tracy, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

> There should definitely be a different modality in terms of how the content is brought across to every child because what's the saying that, "One size does not fit all." And as a teacher, I'm going to say that sometimes we struggle in terms of, in the course of the day with wearing so many hats, that I know I can only speak for myself that I tried my best not to let that fall by the wayside in terms of knowing the different styles. Because again, with 30 kids, you can have 30 different styles, and in terms of teaching the subject of math, you might have a 50-60 minute time slot whereby if you got 30 different styles, something is not going to get covered but you just have to plan your day accordingly. If you did not cover the skill that day, you make sure it is covered the next day. (Tamera, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

The discussion also focused on the advocacy needs of the child in terms of the staff not always open to providing your child what they need. For example, the discussion went as follows:

My experience is that if you don't know your child's rights, that often times school personnel tend to not really give you that information, so I've had experiences where school personnel say, "Well, your child doesn't qualify for certain services." But because I knew that she did, they would re-step and be like, "Oh, well we can do. . ." So it's a lot of having to know what your child's rights are because they, a lot of educators try and get over and not offer services that are there for your child. (Tracy, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

Also noted during the focus group was the need for Black male teachers and for schools to be aware of and more sensitive to racial issues and teachers treating the child differently when it discovered that the parent is also a teacher. Josselyn described racial issues in terms of the teacher's lack of understanding and sensitivity:

For the most part, the experience has been positive. I have had just a couple of teachers, because her school, like I said it, before is predominately White, so I have had experiences where there has been like, I don't necessarily want to say racial from the children, but from the teacher, they're not conscious that there's Black children in the classroom. I guess I should say that. So what you can say in front of a predominately White class, you probably shouldn't say it even if there's one Black kid in his class. So, I just had an issue or two with something like that from a teacher, but mainly just a specific teacher, not necessarily all of them. For the most part she doesn't even have any Black teachers in her school at all, period. Now there are a mix of men and women, but there aren't any Black teachers that I know of. But like I said, so I haven't had to really deal with that racial issue, but I had

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to deal with it just with one teacher in particular because she doesn't realize that she has to be conscious of other kids of other races in the classrooms.

Another participant in the group described how her child is treated differently once the teacher discovers that the parent is an educator:

> There have been some positives and negatives with school personnel. I do find that when they know that I'm a teacher they tend to want to treat my son differently in the classroom. And I feel like he's just like everyone else, so I go in telling him don't let them know that I'm a teacher. We want to keep it on an even playing field. I never want them to put the onus off on me that since I'm a teacher that I need to teach my child. I don't want to be. . . I want to hold them accountable for them doing exactly what they're supposed to do like I do on my job. (Tamera, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

Interestingly, just as the individual interviews revealed, focus group participants maintained that although the schools ask for parental involvement, they do not want parents in the classroom. The participant in the group that mentioned this stated,

> With me going into the classroom they say that you can come in. Well, when you get in there, the teachers, they do not like you in their room. I have been switched to so many different classrooms because they don't want you in there, and then when you get in there and they do give you something to do, they come watching over your shoulder and then, "Oh no, you don't have to do that, just look at what they're doing." (Sarah, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

Parents' school experiences and experiences of parental support for education

The focus group participants reported attending predominantly Black schools themselves as children (five references within the focus group), with a good number of

Black instructors available to them, particularly within the elementary schools (two references). One participant noted that these teachers at the predominantly Black school were very involved with the students. The following example from the text of the focus group (multiple speakers) demonstrates these sentiments:

> I went to predominately Black schools. Grammar school was in the inner-city and high school was in the suburbs, but it was a predominately Black school, which we had a mix of Black teachers and White teachers. But I think there was, in high school there was a lot more White teachers than in Black school, I mean, in grammar school it was more Black teachers. So I had both sides of the cultural rainbow I guess when I was in school. (Tracy, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

> In elementary school we had a mixture of teachers, men and women. As far as the students go, it was predominately Black. We had maybe say two, like two or three White students and then all Black, but we all worked together. It wasn't until high school that you really get a mixture of all students, and I didn't have any type of problem. (Sarah, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

> In elementary school I recall had a more Black African American instructors, definitely more. . . I can appreciate having more Black instructors. And back then, I believe that the instructors were more focused, they were involved. It was different because I think that they got a different kind of education than what the children get today. Then in high school it was a mixture of cultural facilitators, but I remember having the best of the instructors, so I think that I got a little bit more back then than I think that it is today. (Harriet, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

> For both grammar school and high school I went to inner city schools

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predominately Black, however, in grammar school I found that the teachers were very involved in our education and they treated us like we were actually their children. I think I stated before about I went down south with one of my teachers. I used to go to church, my cousin and I, with her on Sunday mornings sometimes to special programs. So we had a relationship, and I think that that's what we're missing today, and that's why I try my best when I do an interest survey in class with my own students to find out the things that they're interested in. I make it my business to attend something, some type of extracurricular activity that they're involved in. Because I do find that we need to treat the whole child. It's more than just academic, it's social as well, and if I can reach that child socially, the academic piece will come because they'll find out that I'm interested in something they're interested in. And I've just. . . I've taken their practice from how I was taught in grammar school. (Tamera, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

The parents in the focus group recognized their own parents' support for their education in the following ways: they maintained contact with teachers by meeting with them (three references in the focus group text); they encouraged all school activities and extra-curricular activities; they praised their children, thereby reinforcing their confidence; they volunteered at the school; and, finally, they took advantage of extended family support. These elements are noted in the following excerpts from the discussion:

Being in contact with the teachers, trying to come to activities after school, allowing me to be involved as much as I could be, especially in high school. They encouraged me to be involved in anything I wanted to be involved in, which I think is really important, to really encourage, as I do with my kids to get involved in as much as they can and still keep their academics up. (Tracy, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

My parents were involved in my schooling, which I believe that is why I am the person I am today, I guess, because of the kudos they gave me for . . . when they would come up to the school and they would meet with my instructor and they would say, "Oh she's doing a fabulous job, blah, blah, blah." And they look at me and be like, "Give me a high-five"...And I do the same thing. It was like those, that awesome or the compliments helped me and made me want to do more. So with them coming up there just taking a peek, and I didn't even know they were coming, they just pop up, that played, that was major to me. (Harriet, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

However, two participants in the focus group noted that their own mothers were unable to become involved very much because they were at work during the day, another similarity noted by both interview and focus group participants.

My mother worked a lot so her involvement mainly was making sure go do your homework. She didn't know the answers so she couldn't check it, but she made sure I did it. And then she sent me to my cousins to make them check it, which wasn't fun because then they made me do extra. But so, my mother basically kind of made it a family thing because she worked so much. So she was like, oh, if my sister's got kids they're going to help, they're older. So that's pretty much, we were all in the same household and that's pretty much what my mother did. She did go to parent-teacher conferences; she did call the school and get in contact with the teachers. There wasn't email back then so they were always on the phone making sure everything was fine with my grades, so that was her way of being involved. I mean she made sure we were in activities and everything, but like I said, she worked three, four jobs at a time easy, and that's what the cousins were for. (Josselyn, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

I do think that my mother—well I don't think, I *know* it—she could not come

up to the school because she worked a full-time nine-to-five job. And

because she had to work, she did not have the flexibility to come up to the

school to see how I was doing, so that's why I believe the emphasis was

placed on you have to do well, you know you have no other choice because I

don't have the time to come up there. However, she did attend parent-teacher

conferences and things of that nature, but I can't remember like I was. . .

extracurricular activities like outside of the school I never did, but during the

day I was involved. But for any of that, like assemblies and things of that

nature, I can't remember her being there at all. And it's not that she didn't

want to. (Tamera, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

Expressed needs or wants from school

As with the individual interviews, the focus group participants were asked to

detail what they wanted from their children's school. Specific needs and wants included

more communication, a curriculum encompassing diverse backgrounds (e.g., Black

history), and special training for parents to allow them to be more involved in the school.

Participants called for a special focus on educating kids with politics aside. The

participants in this study wanted schools to focus on the business of educating children

and not catering to individuals seeking political gain. They also stressed the importance

of being advocates for their children and of ongoing communication with

schools/teachers. During the discussion related to the curricular inclusion of Black

history, one participant noted:

During parent teacher conferences, I shared with the Social Science teacher,

"I understand this is a predominantly White school. But why don't you

teach about Black leaders?", "I don't think it's fair that in a Black school

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you learn about Black leaders and in a White school you learn about White, that's crazy to me." I said, "These kids are so diverse." I said, "You don't know what kid has in them." And I told the teacher, I said, "You don't even know. My child is mixed so she learned about these White people, but she wants to learn about her Black heritage, too. Why aren't you all teaching that?" And they were kind of stuck like, "Oh, well we'll get to it." No you're not, she already made the grade, you didn't get to it, and you probably won't. But that's a problem because they need to learn where they're from just like they learn about the Native Indians and Americans, and all these other people that we don't really care about, we want to learn about where we're from and what we went through. And that's the reason why there's a lot of racism in these school because the kids don't know what people went through. They don't even know none of the history because they're not educated on it. So, I told. . . I even told the principal that they need to definitely put that as a curriculum to teach about all backgrounds, not just one. So I definitely will love that. (Josselyn, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

Another participant endorsed a program already in place at her child's school that was designed to teach parents how to become involved effectively:

With the school, what I like what they're doing now is they're doing a parent ambassador training for parents that want to become more involved in the school and help other parents to know what it is that you need to know once your child gets to high school how to go about getting your point across to the administration. And so far that class has been really good because they are letting you have your own input to say what's going on for you to help them with whatever rules. Because this school year they've, the whole school district has lost more than 100 teachers because the funding was gone, it went to the charter school. But now they had a specific grant for

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this training itself to get the parents more involved. So what do you want to

see happen, not just we're putting this in place and you have to deal with it.

They're showing you how to come in to really get your point across to say,

this is what needs to be done to help my child, not what you're saying, this

does. And I like that the school is now doing that where I can come in and

feel that you are listening to me. Not if I said it before you'd be like, "Oh,

I'm going to write it down and tell somebody." But you are listening to what

I'm saying now. (Sarah, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

Finally, Tracy expressed the importance of communication, particularly between

parents and teachers:

I just think that communication between the parent and the educational

system is important. I think it's important for you to let your child's

educators know what's important for you and your child. Because it's all

good to say all kids need this and all kids need that, but what's most impor-

tant to you is that what your child needs is what your child gets. So unless

you communicate that and talk to your kids' teachers and to the educators,

you know often times they're not getting what they need, so I think

communication is huge. (Tracy, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

Perceptions of education versus schooling.

Aligning with the results of the individual interviews, focus group participants

described education as learning, both within school as well as outside of school, whereas

they regarded the school itself as merely a building. One participant described how, if the

student is educated, then he/she is able to take material learned in school and apply it to

real world settings. In terms of the content being taught in school, the focus group

discussed at length (seven references within the focus group text) the problem of students

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being taught to take a test rather than for life; this problem seems to be becoming more prevalent with the increased testing associated with accountability measures. Participants rated both education and schooling very high in importance (ten or "more than ten" on a scale from one to ten). The following is an example of the discussion between several participants:

> Yeah, I think it goes back to involvement and engagement, too. You know school is the building; school is the building, that's all a school is. Education is what they learn within that building. And if they're not, if a teacher just teaches then that's school. You know what I'm saying? But if a teacher really goes back to the engagement, if a teacher really engages with her classroom or his classroom, then that's an education. (Harriet, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

> And I agree with you wholeheartedly. And it's so. . . Every parent that I come into contact with is not able to do that, or should I say don't know how. Schooling, again as you stated, is truly the building. Education, when I tell my students when they come in, I need to teach you more than what's going on inside that book because education happens not only inside the school, but on the outside of school as well. And that's why I'm big with projects. My parents constantly tell me, "If you send home one more project!" But I'm allowing you to think. That book can't tell me everything. (Tamera, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

> And I think that's part of the problem with our education system right now is that even when I was in school I felt that we were taught to take a test and I think that that's still going on. You're taught to take these tests, but you're not really learning anything, and that's a problem for me. The standardized testing, you know teachers have this schedule they have to go by so that by

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the time it's time to take SATs they're at this point. And I'm sorry, that's
not how kids should learn. (Tracy, focus group interview, November 17,
2012)

You know they're learning to take a test, but have they really learned
anything? That's a big problem, and I think that's why we are failing as. . .
when you look at different cultures and their education and where they are
in China and what have you, I think that's the problem that we have in the
United States with these testing because they want to have some type of
record to say where we are. But truly we ain't there, and there's a reason
why we're not there. (Josselyn, focus group interview, November 17, 2012)

Observation Findings

After the interview process, observations were conducted with each of the five interview

participants in a home setting and with the child who was enrolled at the tutoring center.

When I arrived in the participant's home, I found a comfortable location to sit and

observed the interaction between the parent and their child. Observations were analyzed

in the same manner as the interviews. First, I took observation notes based on what I

observed. Next, I reviewed the observational data in order to gain a sense of what was

collected. From there, I looked for any similarities or differences among the participants

and their responses from the interviews. Following the above-mentioned strategies, I

identified major themes or patterns.

During this time, I witnessed the level of involvement from the parents in ways

that teachers cannot see. For example, Harriet taught her son how to be self-sufficient,

teaching him how to do chores in the home and maintain personal hygiene; she also

assisted him with his homework. Josselyn had lengthy conversations with her daughter about the events of the day at school. Their conversations focused on her daughter updating her about upcoming school events and marking those activities on the calendar. Additionally, they discussed issues that impacted her daughter at school, allowing Josselyn to provide her with directives on how to resolve those issues. Josselyn shared with her daughter that if she could not resolve the issues on her own, she would pay a visit to the school to have a conference with her child's teacher.

Like Harriet, Tracy taught her child how to be self-sufficient, expecting her to do chores such as washing dishes and straightening up her room. Tracy also had conversations with her daughter about the importance of being involved in extra-curricular activities. Additionally, she shared with her daughter on many occasions that "hard work pays off." Tamera, on the other hand, recognized that her son had difficulty interacting with others in a social setting, so she sought out programs where her child would be provided an opportunity to interact with students his age. During the observation, she was assisting her son with a monologue for an upcoming audition. She shared with her son the importance of having a positive attitude and a strong stage presence. She constantly reiterated how proud she was of him because he was selected out 1600 applicants to be a member of the city children's choir.

Overview of Themes

Collectively, the interviews, observational data, and focus group provided insight into the participants' perceptions and experiences both with their child's education and

their own educational experiences. These insights facilitate reflection on African

American students' experiences with schooling and the role of their parents in the

educational process. From the thematic categories listed in the previous sections and

common responses given by participants within those categories, several overarching

themes emerged that represent the perceptions and reported experiences of the group as a

whole.

Theme 1: Parents' Perceived Support

Parents expressed a difference between parental engagement and involvement in school

and the activities that support engagement and involvement. As stated earlier,

engagement represented actions taken at home to support the student while involvement

represented in school activities or participation by the parent.

Theme 2: Parents' Style of Involvement

African American parent participants felt more engaged than involved, often due to

daytime work responsibilities that hinder school involvement; however, they were able to

maintain engagement through communication with teachers and their children.

Theme 3: Education Is the Future

African American parent involvement/engagement is motivated by the perceived

importance of education to a child's future. It stems from understanding the necessity of

an education if one is to achieve in life; it is also motivated by the belief that children

appreciate their parents' support and that this, in turn, motivates their desire to do well in

school.

Theme 4: Schools as Caring and Challenging

Parental expressed needs and/or wants included having a caring, but challenging school environment; having more male teachers and, specifically, Black male teachers; the addition of Black history/Black education to the curriculum; and increased communication and honesty with parents regarding parental school involvement and engagement.

Theme 5: Racism in the School Environment

Parental childhood school experiences with a perception of notably less racial tensions/abuse due to attending either a predominantly Black or mixed race school with a more ethnically diverse teaching staff.

Summary

This chapter presented the results obtained from five one-on-one interviews, observation notes and a focus group, revealing the aforementioned five overarching themes. These themes will be further discussed in Chapter 5, which will also discuss whether or not the themes are aligned to the chosen frameworks, the ecologies of parental engagement and critical race theory.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The results of this qualitative study provide insight into how African American parents are engaged in their children's schooling experiences. Collectively, the participants in this study emphasized the importance of their children's education and recognized their role in helping their children succeed in school. Most importantly, they had great expectations for their children and were committed to ensuring they were successful in school because they wanted them to have a great future. Harvey (2005) found that parental expectations of a child's educational attainment made the strongest unique prediction of academic achievement. Parents in this study viewed their level of involvement or engagement as an essential component of their children's academic, moral, and social development; they were highly engaged in the schooling process. Additionally, they discussed the activities that support the educational experiences of their children.

This chapter will discuss the five themes that emerged from the data collected from interviews, observations, and focus group: 1: Parents' Perceived Support; 2: Parents' Style of Involvement; 3: Education Is the Future; 4: Schools as Caring and Challenging; 5: Racism in the School Environment. My goal is to assess the extent to which the themes were aligned, and to what degree, with the following frameworks—the ecologies of parental engagement (EPE) and critical race theory (CRT). The EPE framework provides an ecological outlook of parent engagement that focuses on what parents do with and for their children to support their education. Both of these

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frameworks were discussed extensively in Chapter 3. CRT affords a framework that challenges the assumption that the experiences of Whites should be the normative standard; instead, it grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive experiences of people of color. Moreover, CRT encourages the use of stories and narratives that bring voice to marginalized groups, exposing the irony that many laws and policies intended to address racial inequality do not bring about the racial justice they promised (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Theme 1: Parents' Perceived Support

The parents in this study conceptualized parent involvement and parent engagement based on their experiences with their children's schools. They distinguished between parental involvement and engagement in schools and the participatory activities that support involvement and engagement. Collectively, the parents defined involvement as parents participating in school sanctioned activities inside their child's schools; however, they defined engagement as those actions taken at home to support their children. In this study, I attempted to make sense of their experiences.

The stories told by the five African American parents interviewed for this study reflected their current realities as they related to involvement and engagement in their children's schools. School personnel were unaware of the many of the ways these parents participated in their children's schooling process. During the interviews and focus group, participants shared the activities that supported both involvement and engagement. This finding is consistent with that of DeMoss & Vaughn (2000), who found that although

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parents with young school children agreed that parental presence at school is considered parental involvement, they also acknowledged other ways that parents are involved that are rarely discussed by researchers and school personnel.

Educators often assume that African American parents' culture and values are not aligned to the culture of education (Noguera, 2001; Yan, 2000); thus many educators believe that African American parents are a detriment to their children's educational attainment. As stated previously, scholars suggest that African American parents, as a whole, are generally framed as being inactive, disconnected, aggressive, or confrontational (Koonce & Harper, 2005). Moreover, representations of African American mothers as being "deviant" from the world's social and moral standard mirror stereotypical beliefs of Black women that are widespread in U.S. society at large (Hart, 2002). The notion that African American parents "don't care" about their children's education was challenged by the stories told by the participants in this study; these stories reflected their desire to do what they could to help their children succeed academically. One participant stated,

> I think being involved makes a huge difference because they know that it's important. They feel the support from their parents. If the parents don't care, then they're not going to care. So being involved, it really gives them the structure to know that this is really important and they have to do this. I think it's real important for them to see that you support them and that you would bend over backwards to make sure they're getting the proper education they need. (Tracy, personal communication, November, 5, 2012)

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Parents in this study reiterated the importance of supporting their children and stressed the significant role they play in their education and future. Additionally, the parents' perspective endorses what researchers have emphasized. Parental involvement is crucial to children's successful educational experiences at all grade levels (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Hango, 2007).

The majority of studies on parental involvement have often negatively compared African American parents' contributions to those of other races, specifically focusing on risk factors rather than the positive benefits of involvement from these families. As a result, school personnel (consciously or unconsciously) filter African American families through mainstream cultural lenses and treat these families as deficient, not taking into consideration the behaviors or actions these families engage in to assist their children with the schooling process. Parent involvement is most often examined from the institution's point of view. When parent's efforts are not aligned with the school's notion of parent involvement, parents are often considered to be uninvolved and unsupportive of their children's educational attainment.

CRT should be used as an analytical lens to assess African American parent involvement and parent engagement. Critical race theorists would argue that the typical parental involvement standard stems from a Eurocentric model; this establishes middle-class, White mothers' involvement patterns as the paradigm for all parents' level of involvement (Tutwiler, 2005). Today, regardless of the fact that a considerable number of U.S. mothers of all racial and cultural backgrounds work outside the home, traditional norms of parental involvement in schools are upheld (Cooper, 2009). As mentioned

previously, Taylor (1998) further notes that CRT challenges the experiences of Whites as the normative standard and grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive experiences of people of color. "White privilege" excludes African American parents' patterns of involvement and fails to validate the ways in which they support their children's education.

When parents are not involved in school-sanctioned activities, schools should not assume that they are disinterested in their children's education but should instead provide them opportunities to expand on the supplemental educational activities they implement in the home. Unfortunately, it is not easy being a minority parent in schools. In many instances, these parents are already branded as "liabilities" before their children enter the school door. For many school administrators and teachers, minority parents wear the imprint of a dysfunctional family, caring neither about their children nor their future.

The above theme runs parallel with the EPE framework. This framework considers the hows and whys of parent engagement, and how the process of engagement relates broadly to parents' experiences and actions both in and out of the school community (Barton, et al., 2004). Additionally, this framework focuses on activity networks and the critical importance that space and capital play when parents are engaged in the child's schooling. Barton, et al., (2004) define space as areas "constituted by underlying structures and resources . . . and are sites of contestation within which culture is produced" (p. 5); they define capital as "human, social, and material resources one has access to and can activate for their own desired purposes" (p. 5). This framework is applicable to this theme since it recognizes that parent engagement practices are not

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just limited to the school boundaries. Parents in this study utilized their access of capital to supplement their children's education at home. The parents in this study have demonstrated the nontraditional approaches they engage in to support their children's education; this engagement has a direct impact on their children's schooling experiences.

Social class has a strong influence on African American parental involvement or engagement in their children's school experiences. As mentioned earlier, research suggests that middle-class and working-class African American parents "often navigate very different educational environments" (Diamond & Gomez, 2004, p. 387). In general, working-class families reside in more economically and socially challenging neighborhoods with lower quality schools than middle-class working parents. As a result, some working-class families must navigate their children's schooling experiences with fewer "valued resources" (Diamond & Gomez, 2004, p. 387). Overall, social class significantly impacts the academic choices African American parents make for their children (Crosnoe & Huston, 2007).

The parents in this research supported their children's education by the following involvement and engagement practices: reinforcing the skills their children learned in school; providing assistance with homework; monitoring the process of their children's work through open communication with teachers; providing their children support by way of tutoring and support from colleagues, friends, and family; utilizing internet and other educational resources when necessary. The parents' level of involvement included participating in the school environment when needed. Additionally, the parents' level of

engagement at home included teaching life skills**,** taking responsibility for their children's education and advocating for their educational rights.

In reference to parental engagement, the participants recognized that this consists of any activities that support the schooling process outside the school realm. Harriet, Josselyn, Sarah, Tracy, and Tamera were engaged in the following activities: monitoring and assisting with homework, providing tutoring, and seeking support from families and friends. These parental engagement activities represent the numerous ways that African American parents in this study supported their children. This reinforces Howard and Reynolds's (2008) point that parental engagement includes helping students with homework, expressing their expectations of school performance, and creating emotionally supportive learning environments in the home. However, most of what parents do to engage in their children's schooling experiences is invisible to the schools. Parents should be provided an opportunity to discuss their nontraditional forms of engagement and their ensuing benefits. Providing parents a platform to share their contributions would 1) help dispel the negative associations educators tend to have of African American parents and 2) set the stage for developing successful partnerships between parents and school personnel.

Moreover, Lareau (2003) emphasizes multiple facets of parental engagement within the home that may ultimately provide an advantage in terms of school performance and status attainment. Such facets include educational resources available in the home, the number of structured activities children are encouraged to participate in, and the amount of time parents spend interacting with them in cognitively stimulating

ways. Furthermore, Lareau (2003) finds middle-class parents feel obligated to provide such opportunities to their children.

It is significant to note that the parents in this study communicated the desire to help their children with homework assignments. Some of the parents did acknowledge that if they themselves were unable to help their children with homework assignments, they sought out such resources as tutoring or asking family or friends for assistance. Sarah shared,

> To support my children's education I go to anything that they have at the school as far as open houses, parent teacher conferences. I've also helped him with class work, tutored him in whatever he needed or if he needed a tutor to help him with anything.

Cooper (2007) emphasizes that

> traditional parent involvement models rarely account for the many ways that low income and working class African American parents participate in their children's education. These traditional models, instead, privilege white, middle-class behavior norms. (p. 381)

When I was speaking with Harriet, she explained that her form of engagement focused on instilling values and lessons that are relevant to school and life, for example, teaching her son how to be self-sufficient. She shared,

> I teach him about being responsible. I show him how to do chores, from washing his clothes to cooking eggs for breakfast. I reinforce what he has learned at school. I go over a lot of things with him, from doing math to reading.

Moreover, the parents taught their children how to navigate inside and outside the school realm.

In addition to the participants providing tutoring and assisting their children with homework, Tracy also had to advocate on behalf of her child. During the interviews, Tracy demonstrated the necessary steps she had to pursue in order to ensure that her child was treated fairly in the school environment. Tracy, a mother of a special needs child, recalled when she had to be an advocate on her daughter's behalf to receive special services. Tracy shared,

> In second grade, she started struggling really hard and I was like, I want her
> tested. . . . When they came back that she has attention deficit disorder. . .
> the school was like, well, she's not learning disabled. I said, "According to
> the state and according to the rules and regulations and laws for students,
> her grades are adversely affected. . . . She needs services."

Tracy advocating for her child by challenging an educational system she felt was unfair suggests how much she cares about her child's education. Similarly, other parents in this study also described how they served as advocates for their children.

African American parents have a history of advocating on their children's behalf. Their history of advocacy is rarely acknowledged by educators or by academic discourse. Their practice of advocacy is rooted in the cultural ideal of resistance to oppression that has allowed African American parents to engender a multitude of educational reforms such as the Brown v. Board of Education, which desegregated schools in 1954 (Cooper, 2005; Noguera, 2004). Cooper (2009) asserts, "African American parents' traditional involvement practices have been led by their care, advocacy and desire to empower

themselves and their children in educational systems that have historically oppressed them" (p. 382).

At present, African American parents' levels of involvement have been understood in terms of whether their actions are aligned to the school's objectives. Viewed from a deficit perspective, African American parents are not expected to advocate on their children's behalf. In fact, school personnel assume that African American parents are neither knowledgeable of the laws and practices of the school system, nor possess the cultural and social capital to engage in advocacy. Moreover, educators assume that a family's racial background and disadvantaged economic status mean they lack the ability and desire to meaningfully contribute to their children's education (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001). On the contrary, African American parents should be recognized as knowledgeable sources of information rather than receivers of knowledge. Jeynes (2003) highlighted the fact that communication is the most important aspect of parental involvement. He further mentioned that "when parents get involved in their children's education, they offer not only information specific to the classroom but likely help in giving children a broader level of academic information" (p. 214). The African American parents in this study had the ability to communicate to school personnel what they wanted on behalf of their children. Furthermore, when African American parents advocate on behalf of their children, they feel a sense of empowerment because they can become the voice for their children. Consequently, it is time for school personnel to take note and be open to the conversation.

This data supports the EPE framework since it highlights what parents are doing to support their children and the actions they choose on their behalf. As mentioned previously, Barton & Drake (2005) claim that on the basis of the EPE framework, successful engagement experiences are not related to personality traits; instead they are the result of a process in which parents and schools interact in particular spaces, using specific forms of capital, to create a level of engagement that truly benefits a child's school experiences. Furthermore, since schools are limited in the information they have about students, parents may offer views that can initiate the development of parent-school partnerships and the provision of needed services (Barton, et al., 2004).

CRT also recognizes that the traditional view of cultural capital is not applicable to marginalized groups, specifically African Americans. Yosso (2005) asserts a traditional view of cultural capital is narrowly defined by White, middle-class values, and is more limited than wealth—one's accumulated assets and resources. The CRT lens created categories for marginalized groups that are not in the dominant group. Moreover, a CRT lens can foster cultural wealth through the following forms of capital: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). Navigational capital and social capital are the forms of capital from a CRT lens that are aligned to this theme.

Navigational capital refers to the skills of maneuvering through social institutions (Yosso, 2005). The parents in this study on multiple occasions shared their accounts on how they had to be an advocate for their children in order for them to receive select

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services. They were very adamant about playing a significant role in their children's schooling experiences. Additionally, they felt they had to be the voice for their children.

Social capital is understood as networks of people and community resources. The participants in this study believed that failure was not an option. They knew they had to step outside the boundaries of schools at times in order to get the support their child needed to be successful in school. As they navigated the educational system, African American parents in this study sought out multiple avenues to support their children such as tutoring and assistance from family and friends. These parents took matters into their own hands and did not allow the negative perceptions of them to limit their involvement in their children's educational process.

The parents in this study understood the critical importance of education as a life-long learning process that includes schooling and life experiences. They saw schooling as a necessary structural element of learning. However, they recognized that schooling is limited to learning within the school building. When asked, "Do you see a difference between education and schooling?" Tamara shared this response:

> Schooling is something you get in the building when you go to a school house building. Education is. . . can happen anywhere and I do believe that education does not begin and end inside a school building; it should also be implemented in the home, as well.

Similarly, Sarah shared this response: "Schooling is just what he gets while he's in those four walls. Education is something that he's going to have and take with him throughout his whole life." Tamera and Sarah recognized that their contribution to their child's

education was quite significant. They believed that the learning experiences that took place in the home were as important as the learning experiences the children received in school. As mentioned earlier in Chapter Two, Shujaa (2003) stated that education is, "Our means of providing for the inter-generational transmission of values, beliefs, traditions, customs, rituals and sensibilities, along with the knowledge of why these things must be sustained." Moreover, he defines schooling as "a process intended to perpetuate and maintain the society's existing power relations and the institutional structures that support those arrangements" (p. 246).

The parents in this study recognized that they were their children's first teachers. The family is a critical institution in this regard, and parents are teachers of their children (Fields-Smith, 2005). Furthermore, they understood that learning just doesn't happen in the school setting; it can happen anywhere. Schools are not the only institutions in society in which teaching and learning occur. Most importantly, the activities the parents engaged in the home environment and the life lessons they taught their children will have a significant impact in the futures of their children.

The EPE should be used as an analytical lens to assess parents' perceptions about education and schooling. As mentioned earlier, this framework recognizes how parents and schools interact in particular spaces. More specifically, EPE shifts parent involvement to a more equitable framework in which the power to define parent participation lies in both parents and schools, rather than in one or the other (Barton et al., 2004).

Theme 2: Parents' Style of Involvement

African American parent participants felt more engaged than involved, often due to daytime work responsibilities that hindered school involvement; however, they were able to maintain engagement through communication with teachers and their children.

School personnel have their own prescription as to what constitutes parent involvement. They want parents to participate in school-sanctioned activities that they believe support the school's goals and mission. School personnel arrange workshops based on the information they feel parents need to know, providing them with literature to support the workshops. If parents follow the prescription by participating in school-sanctioned activities and attending workshops, they are considered to be involved parents. When parents do not participate during school hours, educators assume they are neither involved nor concerned about their children. The involvement efforts prescribed by the school exclude those parents who possess either full-time or part-time employment. When asked, "How did your parents support your schooling?" Josselyn responded,

> My mother worked four or five jobs. . . . She just worked a lot, so it wasn't more or less that she wasn't involved because she didn't want to be. She wasn't involved because she couldn't be. She wanted to just make sure we had food on the table, a roof over our head.

In a sense, Josselyn's mom was an involved parent. Even though she was unable to participate in school activities, she assumed responsibility for her children by securing a job and providing shelter for her children. Similarly, Tamera shared these sentiments:

"The fact that she worked during the day. It is so hard for African American parents, especially with single parents, given the opportunity to be able to go up to the school during the day, we do not have that luxury."

Essentially, the stories shared by the parents also focused on the fact they wanted to have a relationship with their children's school. The results from the study indicate that a partnership is needed in order to benefit their children. Tamera stated: "I want to see that they are going to do everything possible to make sure that he is successful, and again, the fact they contacted me about his social skills lets me know that they do." Tracy shared these thoughts: "Just to have increased communication. I think it's a problem when you fill out all these papers in the first few weeks of school about communication . . . and then not to have them communicate when there's an issue."

Educators traditionally have equated parent involvement with the way a parent values education; they assume that low parent involvement reflects a lack of interest in their children's education (Thompson, 2003b; Trotman, 2001). Harriet, Tamera, and Tracy worked full-time jobs, thus making it difficult for them to be involved in the school setting. The parents in this study made it clear that they value education; however, they had to prioritize their responsibilities by providing shelter, food, and clothes for their children. Results from Lawson's (2003) study with parents of elementary school students revealed that educators often used a "school-centric" definition that involved parents assisting the school in reaching goals delineated by school personnel, such as volunteering in classrooms, attending meetings, and helping with homework. Conversely, the parents in my study supported a "community-centric" view of involvement in which

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their main responsibility was to provide the basic necessities for their families and to protect their children from the negative influences of the neighborhood after school (Lawson, 2003). Due to their work constraints, they felt more engaged in their children's lives by supporting their children's education outside the school boundaries.

Inquiries of space and capital as they relate to the experiences of African American parents cannot be discussed without bearing in mind the issue of race. Without acknowledging race, the conversation about parent involvement and parent engagement among African American parent is filled with misrepresentations. Delpit (1988) argues that the one of the tragedies of the field of education is how people of color have been silenced. As a result, African American parents have been unfairly measured against the involvement and engagement practices of a Eurocentric middle class. CRT has allowed me to share the experiences of African American parents and provide them with a voice to explain their reality as it relates to parental involvement and parent engagement. Their reality is that they are employed and even though they want to be present at their children's schools, they have to meet the basic needs of their families. The parents in this study believed that by working and being able to provide their children with resources, they are able to provide them with the tools they need to be successful.

African American parents want to be welcomed in their children's schools and to be valued and respected for their contributions. The parents in this study were willing participants in the educational process of their children and were eager to form partnerships with their children's schools. To this end, schools should focus on what African American parents have to offer rather than on what they lack. This would be the

starting point for building a successful partnership that will ensure that students graduate from high school, ready for success in college, career, and life.

Theme 3: Education Is the Future

As mentioned previously, African Americans have historically prioritized educational attainment as one way to ensure a successful future for their children (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). The participants in this study were motivated to do all they could to help their children go further in school and pursue higher education, which they considered to be the pathway to a productive future. Their level of motivation stemmed both from their personal experiences and from their knowledge of the value of education. Most importantly, the parents were motivated by the belief that their children, recognizing their support, knew that that their parents cared about them. This, in turn, would motivate their children to achieve at high levels.

When I was talking to Tracy, about what motivates her to be engaged in her child's education, she responded, "Wanting them to have a better experience that I did in school, wanting them to go further than I did in school, getting off to be able to go away to school for college and having those experiences, getting their degree." For her part, Josselyn made general comments regarding her child's future: "Without education, you have no future, so therefore, I am very motivated because I want to make sure she has a good future." Sarah also explained the basis for her motivation:

> The most I can say right now is with the limited education, if he doesn't
> have at least his high school diploma, there's no way that he can get any
> type of job that would help him succeed in life. I prefer him . . . and I've

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always told him and his sisters that don't stop at your high school diploma. I

need you to go further. (Sarah, personal communication, October 12, 2012)

A participant in the focus group stated the following:

My motivation is making sure my daughter succeeds and she's . . . into

school and very focused on that on her own, so I just back her. And as long

as she's whatever she's into, whatever she's trying to do, as long as she does

her best and tries to succeed, that's my motivation. (Josselyn, focus group

interview, November 17, 2012)

The parents in this study understood that if they conveyed the importance of

education to their children, they would have a better life. Smith (2009) found that low-

income African American parents often used narratives of struggle to motivate their

children. These narratives of struggle emphasized what many African Americans had to

face on their quest to receive an education. Historically, African American children were

considered the hope for the future.

The African American parents in this study hoped that their level of engagement

in their children's education would guarantee them a better future. Josselyn spoke openly

about how her level of engagement would make a difference in her child's educational

future: "I really motivate her every day to say, 'Hey, you want to be doctor, you want be

a lawyer, you want to be a judge, this is what you need to do to get there.'" These

sentiments reflected the feelings shared by all the parents I interviewed.

The parents in this study felt it was their responsibility to be involved in their

child's education. Perry (2003) states,

For African Americans, from slavery to the modern Civil Rights movement,

you pursued learning because this is how you assimilate yourself as a free

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person, how you claimed your humanity. You pursued learning so you could work for the racial uplift, for the liberation of your people. You pursued education so you could prepare yourself to lead your people. (p. 11)

Furthermore, Perry (2003) argues that the African American philosophy of education was significant in motivating African Americans across generations to enthusiastically pursue education.

The participants in this study made it certain that they expected their children to do well in elementary school, high school, college, and life. Moreover, most of them acknowledged that meeting this goal would require them to play a significant role in their children's lives. It is interesting to note that research suggests that parental involvement tends to decline, for several reasons, in students' later middle school and high school years (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Simon, 2004). However, the findings from this study demonstrated that high school students continued to benefit from their parents' level of involvement. In this study, Sarah, Tracy and Tamera—all parents of high school students—were very active in their children's education. Based on the stories they shared, it is very likely that Harriet and Josselyn it will also be involved during their children's high school years. Slaughter-Defoe and Rubin (2001) explained that despite the decreasing need for adolescents to rely on parents for their school outcomes, parents continue to be an important source in influencing their high school student's future. Tracy, for example, described her involvement: "I stay involved by constantly checking grades, making sure that all assignments are turned in, being in contact with the teachers with any concerns I have."

The ambitions that the parents expressed were not restricted to success in the school environment. All of the parents in the study were clear about their roles raising their children. Additionally, they specified the importance of teaching them how to have a work ethic. The motivation these parents had for their children's future led them to be actively engaged in their education. While only a few parents were able to participate in school-sanctioned activities, all five parents found ways to support their children's progress in school by seeking out resources when needed. This underscores the EPE framework as it highlights what parents are doing to support their children and the actions they choose on behalf of their children. Engagement is most often parent authored and parent initiated (Barton, et al., 2004). Those African American parents who take the initiative to be advocates for their children make decisions that will ultimately benefit their children.

Examining this theme from a CRT lens, these parents acquired aspirational capital that referred to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future (Yosso, 2005). This was evident in this study because the parents envisioned a life for their children to aspire to great things beyond their current conditions. Sarah shared, "The most I can say right now is with limited education, if he doesn't have at least his high school diploma, there's no way that he can get any type of job that would help him succeed in life." Harriet shared these sentiments,

> What motivates me is he's mine and I love him. So when it comes down to anything that he's indulged in or involved in, I'm involved. And that's what's the bottom line, if he's mine and I love him, so I'm going to push

and help him in every way I can. (Harriet, personal communication, October

6, 2012)

This finding is consistent with Compton-Lilly (2000), who identified the many ways in

which African American parents support their children academically. The study indicated

that African American parents value their children's education, care about their success,

sought ways to support them and had high expectations for their futures.

The parents in this study wanted their children to do well in school and they had

great aspirations to support their children academically and socially. Their stories

strongly support the research stating that the majority of parents, regardless of race,

ethnicity, or socioeconomic status are concerned about their children's education

(Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Theme 4: Schools as Caring and Challenging

Participant parents' expressed needs/wants included having a caring, but challenging

school environment as well as more male teachers—specifically, Black male teachers.

Also, the participants in this study wanted Black history/Black education added to the

curriculum, together with increased communication and transparency with schools

regarding parental school involvement and engagement.

When I asked the participants what they wanted from their children's schools,

Harriet spoke about the positive force of having African American male teachers while

Josselyn shared her frustration that that there is a lack of cultural and ethnic diversity in

the curriculum. She expressed this sentiment:

They don't learn about, like, Thurgood Marshall and stuff like that. They don't have all of that, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. At her school I think because they don't want to touch that too much, but I think all kids should learn about slavery, learn about different stuff that Black people had to go through and endure so they'll have a better understanding and better respect for other cultures. (Josselyn, personal communication, October 11, 2012).

Similarly, Harriet shared, "I'm glad to have him in the presence of a Black man because he can believe in a different way." When Harriet made this comment, she was stating that by her son being in the presence of a Black man provides him the opportunity to learn about the history of African Americans from the perspective of an African American man. Additionally, being in the presence of an African American man teaches him that anything in life worth having is worth fighting for.

According to Solorzano & Yosso (2002), a tenet of CRT focuses on the centrality of experiential knowledge. They suggest, "The experiential knowledge of people is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination" (p. 26). Many schools are not including African American history in the curriculum. When African Americans are mentioned in history books, it is by way of a cameo appearance focusing on Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Civil Rights movement. Teaching history with these glaring omissions sends a subtle message to African American students that their culture is not relevant. In addition to learning about the dominant culture, African American students must learn about their history in order to understand their contribution to this society.

To further examine this from a CRT perspective, Yosso (2005) argued, "Contemporary racism in U.S. schools is deficit thinking" (p. 75). Yosso explains that deficit thinking on the part of school personnel is based on the following assumptions regarding African American families:

> Students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and parents neither value nor support their child's education. These racializedassumptions about Communities of Color most often lead schools to deficit thinking. . . . As a result, schooling efforts usually aim to fill up supposedly passive students with forms of cultural knowledge deemed valuable by dominant society. (p. 75)

Society fails to participate in discussions about race; instead, many suggest we live in a society where race is not a factor. Cornell West (2004) states "To confront the role of race and empire is to grapple with what we would like to avoid, but we avoid that confrontation at the risk of our democratic maturation" (p. 41). Bonilla-Silva (2003) contends this assumption is problematic and potentially destructive as it continues to silence the marginalized groups who continually seek inclusion in schools and society. In order for the school environment to change, schools must acknowledge and respect the culture of African Americans. Schools accepting and recognizing how racism is evident in the school system should become catalysts for change on how schools approach cultures of the marginalized group.

Theme 5: Racism in the School Environment

The parents in this study detected racism in the school environment. Harriet discussed childhood school experiences whereby she had perceived racial tension and abuse in the

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classroom environment. Josselyn discussed her daughter's experiences with racism in a predominantly Caucasian school and Sarah had observed racism among the teaching staff, who were predominantly White, when she was volunteering at her child's school. These perceptions of racism were similar but depended on the racial composition of the school.

The participants in this research shared their accounts of incidents that they interpreted as racial acts by school personnel. Even though parents mentioned different examples of unfair treatment, they mentioned racism as the root cause of injustice in their children's schools. Harriet also shared what she perceived to be racial tension as a child growing up and having a Caucasian teacher. During the interview, she spoke about her teacher abusing her by hitting her because she did not know how to hold her pencil correctly. When I asked Josselyn about positive and negative experiences she had with school personnel, she noted, "I have had experiences with racial issues, teachers saying things out of context based off of kids' racial background." She later shared her experience in reference to a racial issue her daughter encountered at her school, a predominately White institution. When a question regarding race came up in a classroom discussion, the teacher told the students that she couldn't answer the question; instead she told them, "Go ask her (meaning Josselyn's daughter) because she knows because she is Black." Josselyn recalled her daughter coming home from school in tears stemming from the incident that took place at school that day. After her daughter told her what happened, Josselyn immediately emailed the teacher to address the issue. She went on to state that the teacher felt she didn't do anything wrong. During the midst of our conversation, Josselyn was overcome with emotion. She couldn't understand an educator responding in

such a way, especially being so insensitive to her daughter's feelings and culture.

In another conversation, Sarah admitted that she attempted to be involved in her child's school but was not welcomed by school personnel: "The teachers do not want you in their classroom. They send you to the office to make copies or see if the office has any work for you to do, and if not, you have to. . . I mean I am not going to sit there so I'm going to leave." Abrams and Gibbs (2002) found that African American parents are more alienated from public schools than Caucasian parents because they feel they have no voice and are essentially rendered invisible, their input unwelcome. Moreover, researchers who have studied school-family relations that involve low-income families and families of color have found that educators do not welcome, expect, or cultivate power-sharing practices with these students' families (Abrams & Gibbs, 2007; DeGaetano, 2007; Fine, 1993; Henry, 1996; Noguera, 2001). These findings hold for some predominantly White schools. The parents in this study viewed their experiences through a frame of race and racism. In my analysis, I have critiqued their experiences using a critical race framework.

CRT should be employed as a means of assessing parents' perceptions of school personnel. The participants in this study conveyed what Ladson-Billings and Tate (2009) called voice, in that "the voice component of critical race theory provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed" (p. 58). In other words, African American parents in this study have an opportunity to express their reality and perceptions. Racism continues to be an important issue in our society. For some people, it is common, taken for granted, and almost unrecognizable in schools simply since all

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manners of racism are not easily identifiable. Although laws derived from the Civil

Rights movement have attempted to minimize racism in our society, they have fallen

short.

When school personnel respond to parents and their children in the ways

described throughout this section, their words and attitudes may be attributed to

unconscious racism. Subtle acts of racism were evident through microaggressions that

were experienced by Harriet, Josselyn's daughter, and Sarah. Davis (1989) defined

microaggressions as "stunning acts of disregard that stem from unconscious attitudes of

[W]hite superiority and constitute a verification of [B]lack inferiority" (p. 1576). Often,

the participants in this study were shocked and confused by their own childhood

experiences or by incidents at their children's schools; consistently, they blamed racism

as the underlying cause. The parents acknowledged what many educators and researchers

miss: namely, that race and racism are significant factors that contribute to negative

experiences parents and their children have in school. Some of these negative experiences

that were attributed to race include feeling isolated, alienated, feeling invisible and

unwelcome. Such exclusionary practices can result from educators' deficit-based beliefs

about families of color, specifically African American parents (Cooper, 2009).

Moreover, Sarah felt that the invitation from the school requesting parental

involvement was not a sincere gesture. She observed that the teachers perceived her in a

negative manner by not welcoming her in the school environment. Furthermore, she

perceived that the teachers did not want her at the school. As a result, she did not feel a

warm relationship with her children's school. She believed that schools should not

promote parental involvement if they are not going to embrace it in their schools. Schools must recognize that some African American families put forth the effort to participate in their children's schools. However, when their efforts are dismissed and their children are not treated fairly, parents are reluctant to participate in the school setting.

This supports Harry's 1992 findings that noted African American parents reported feelings of isolation, alienation, and disengagement regarding interactions with school personnel. In their aggravation with their children's schools, the parents reported being treated like second-class citizens. It is not a surprise when African American parents refrain from participating in school-sanctioned activities because of the behaviors of school personnel.

If parent involvement is an essential objective for some schools, then schools must provide opportunities to improve home-school relations. In order to achieve this, however, some schools must first deal with the cultural divide that exists between parents and school personnel. The call is for educators to evaluate their interactions with parents and put forth the effort to form meaningful relationships with them. The stories of the parents in this study expose the reality of racial microaggressions in the experiences of many other African American parents. Allowing the voices of marginalized groups to be heard will make an important contribution to educational research.

Summary

The participants in this study demonstrated an active role in the educational progress of their children. According to the findings, all parents agreed that being engaged in their

children's education is significant to the outcome of their future. They identified many ways in which they were engaged in the school and home environments. Some of the parents' efforts included participating in school-sanctioned activities, monitoring homework assignments, utilizing tutoring as a resource, keeping in constant communication with their children's teachers and promoting a strong work ethic. Most importantly, parents in this study were motivated to do all they could to assist their children with navigating the educational system. What was amazing about these parents was their willingness to be quite candid about their motivation for being involved in their children's education. It was a humbling experience to witness these parents share their stories. In some instances, I felt the conversations were more like therapy for these parents than mere interviews. For parents to be given an opportunity to articulate their experiences as they relate to their children's schools is much needed in academic discourse and in schools' relationships with parents.

CRT was useful in examining the experiences of African American families. Examining race in context takes into consideration African American voices and the realities parents face with the educational institutions where their children are enrolled. In particular, this study concentrated on analyzing how African American parents' larger societal experiences as well as personal ones affect the role they play in their children's education. Critical race theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings (1999) argued that to appreciate one's perspective, that individual's voice must be understood. By their voices being heard, African American parents are given a platform to speak their reality as it relates to their involvement with their children's schools. Consequently, having African American

parents share their experiences would open up a door that has not really been dealt with in academic discourse.

CRT allowed for the incorporation of counter-storytelling (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) as a method of reporting the stories of African American parents whose voices have not been heard and as a tool that is instrumental in disputing the assumptions that African American parents are not actively involved in their child's schools. This study provided the participants a voice to reflect and provide a descriptive account of their experiences as they relate to parent engagement and parent involvement. A tenet of CRT focuses on listening to the voices of marginalized groups as they share their roles about race in our society. Furthermore, CRT dispels the myths that have been perpetrated by school personnel and academic discourse.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

The Use of Critical Race Theory and the Ecologies of Parental Engagement

Today, African American parents are often criticized for not being involved in their children's educational process. It is often argued that African American parent involvement is limited due to cultural barriers, parents' past experiences and current workload/time constraints. Missing from the research are the voices of African-American parents as to how they are involved in the educational progress of their children.

The aim of this qualitative study was to listen to the stories of African American parents in an effort to understand the ways they are involved or engaged in the educational experiences of their children. The study also attempted to identify the support systems African American parents use in regards to their children's education. This study sought to answer the following questions: (a) In what ways do African American parents in this research engage in the education of their children in the school and the home environment? (b) How do these parents educate their children in ways that teachers cannot see? and c) How do these parents distinguish between education and schooling? This chapter will revisit the research questions and provide implications for future research.

Five African American parents with children from 9-17 years old enrolled in a tutoring center located in the south suburbs of Chicago participated in this study. Parents used the tutoring center as a resource to assist their children with their education. The methodologies used for this study were one-on-one interviews, observations, and a focus

group. The objective of this research design was to explore the various ways this group of African American parents participated in their children's education.

In this dissertation, I used the EPE and CRT to frame my methodological approach, resulting in the use of stories that focused on the experiences of African American parents as they engaged with their children's education. Their level of engagement served as an asset, thereby overturning the deficit-based assumptions held by school personnel and academic discourse. It further sought to understand the parents' roles as they engaged in their children's schooling process.

The primary purpose in employing EPE is that they recognize and understand that parents, specifically African American parents, are their child's first teacher and the educational opportunities and life-lessons they provide their children outside the school environment are as important as the ones being offered in the school environment. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, EPE is a process in which parents and schools interact in particular spaces using specific forms of capital to create a level of engagement that truly benefits a child's schooling experiences. Lastly, the EPE framework provides African American parents with the ability to gain access for their children by seeking out resources to ensure that their children are successful inside and outside the school realm.

The primary purpose in employing CRT for this inquiry is that it recognizes that the first step on the path to racial fairness is to provide an opportunity for the voices of the oppressed to be heard as an effort to articulate their experiences and current realities. Although laws stemming from the Civil Rights movement have attempted to correct the injustices that took place in this country, injustice continues. For example, in spite of

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Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, (1954) where laws were put in place to end segregation, today schools are more segregated than ever before (Lopez, 2003).

Research Questions Revisited

1.   What ways do African American parents in this research engage in the education of their child in the school and the home environment?

The parents in this study employed several strategies in relation to their level of involvement and engagement in the education of their children in the school and home environment. The parents in this study recognized their critical role in supporting their children's academic path, believing it was their responsibility to be involved or engaged in their education. All the participants were convinced that their level of involvement or engagement would be the pathway to a better future for their children. All of the participants in this study were involved inside and outside the school realm.

In the school environment, Harriet participated in her child's education, by serving as his advocate. Since Harriet's child suffered from a learning disability, she had to be the voice that ensured he received the support services he needed to be successful in school. She was motivated to be involved in her child's school because she felt his education was her primary responsibility. Additionally, her own personal experiences that include attaining a college degree motivated her to push him towards higher education.

At home, Harriet participated in her child's education by teaching him about being responsible. She taught him how to do chores, wash his clothes, and cook for himself. Additionally, she reinforced what he had learned at school. If she noticed that

her son was having difficulty in school, she enlisted support from family and friends while looking into community resources such as tutoring.

Josselyn participated in her child's education by keeping in constant communication with her child's teacher by email and visiting the school quite often. Her level of involvement was recognized by school personnel. She was motivated to be involved in her child's education because she wanted her daughter to have a great future. Josselyn believed that without education, she would not have a future. Additionally, she believed that if her daughter knew she cared about her education, she would care about her education as well. In addition to being involved in the school environment, she encouraged her child every day by sharing positive messages to inspire her to do well in school. At home, Josselyn made sure that her daughter completed all homework assignments and kept up with her study habits. Like Harriet, Josselyn also sought assistance from tutoring when her child had difficulty with her classes in school.

Sarah participated in her children's school by attending open houses, parent-teacher conferences, and senior night and other activities scheduled at school. She was motivated to be involved in her son's life because she believed that if he did not at least have a high school diploma, he would not be able to get the kind of job that would help him succeed in life. Additionally, her level of involvement stemmed from her mom's participatory efforts when she was in school.

In the home environment, Sarah monitored her children's when they did their homework, so that she could help them if they needed assistance. She shared that it was important for her to be there to provide her children support. By doing so, she felt that

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she was a contributing source in their education. Additionally, she supported her children's learning in the home by allowing them to navigate through the different learning websites.

Tracy participated in her child's school by checking grades, making sure that all assignments were turned in, and staying in contact with her child's teachers by posing any concerns about her child's educational process. She was motivated to be involved in her child's schooling experiences because she wanted her child to have better experiences in school than she did. Additionally, she was motivated to be involved because her parents were involved in her education when she was a child. Furthermore, she felt it was an enriching experience to watch her children grow and to be a significant contributor in the process. At home, she utilized tutoring, different learning websites, and study workbooks.

Due to Tamera's profession as a teacher, she was unable to participate in many of her child's school-sanctioned activities. However, she established a relationship with her child's teachers by communicating with them by way of email. She believed that as a parent, it was important to form a partnership with her child's teachers. By doing so, she felt her son would be successful in school. As a parent, she recognized that her son struggled socially in school. In order to support him in this area, she found extracurricular activities outside of school, which enabled her son to interact with children his own age. In the home environment, she supported her child's learning by utilizing tutoring and monitoring her child's grades twice a week.

Overall, the parents in this study were motivated to be involved in their children's education. They believed that it was their responsibility to ensure that that their children received a quality education. Although, these parents faced some challenges, they were motivated to do all they could for their children. This belief underscore the position of Squelch (2006), who contends that it is the responsibility of the parents to nurture, discipline, and socialize their children. Additionally, Squelch argued that parents have a duty of care and are co-responsible, with teachers, for their children's education.

In contrast to previous research (Compton-Lilly, 2000; Jackson & Remillard, 2005), I learned in this study that parents did not fit the negative portrayals and assumptions that urban African American parents are disinterested or uncaring. On the contrary, these parents perceived themselves as a vital resource that cared for their children and were involved in their children's education.

2. **How do these parents educate their children in ways that teachers cannot see?**

Collectively, these parents didn't fully rely on the school to educate their children. They recognized that as parents, they were their child's first teacher, and they had a responsibility to educate their children as well. The following examples demonstrate the many ways parents in this study provided support to their children.

Josselyn, Harriet, and Sarah demonstrated commonality in terms of discussions about what happened in school that day. Tracy and Sarah had discussions about extracurricular activities, and Tamera and Tracy had discussions about getting ready for college applications and looking at colleges. Other topics that surfaced in only one of the

interviewee observations included talking about difficulties the child was having with specific teachers, classes, or problematic grades, as well as the parent's encouragement, advice, and expressed pride in the son or daughter.

Furthermore, the parents in this study were very engaged in all facets of their children's schooling process. The participants' behaviors and actions supported their beliefs that education is a critical component of their children's future. Their level of involvement encompassed a wide range of engagement practices that occurred in the home. These findings are consistent with DeMoss and Vaughn (2000) who found that although parents with young school-age children agreed that parental presence at school is important, they also recognized other ways that parents are involved who are unfamiliar to school personnel and researchers. Similarly, Gutman and Lloyd (2000) also found that African American parents used a range of methods to support their children's schooling experiences.

3.   How do these parents distinguish between education and schooling?

The participants in this study provided their interpretations of education and schooling. First, all of the parents recognized that education is a lifelong process. Furthermore, they recognized that schools are one of the domains where children receive an education. However, they wanted to be acknowledged for actions they engaged in outside the school domain that made them active participants in their children's education.

Schools are the main institutional resource where children receive an education. They have been charged with the responsibility of 1) teaching children and 2) teaching parents what their children need to learn. However, they seldom recognize that parents

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have a critical role in this process as well. Additionally, school personnel are closing the door on an opportunity to develop lasting partnerships with parents, specifically African American parents. Most importantly, the parents in this study recognized that both education and schooling is needed. When a child succeeds academically, both schools and parents can celebrate the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders.

Implications for Practice

Schools

The stories that the parents shared in this study indicate that school personnel should dispel the assumptions that African American parents are not interested in their children's educations. They need to put forth the effort to communicate with families to see how they support their children in the home environment. Furthermore, school personnel should not assume that these parents are unaware of the significance of their involvement in their children's education. Schools that accept the position that African American parents are not concerned about their children's education may be unwilling to provide opportunities that would promote collaboration between parents and schools.

Findings from the study recognize that parents are involved in their children's education in numerous ways. School personnel who describe involvement merely as school-sanctioned activities do not take into account the ways parents are involved outside the school realm. Schools that associate parent involvement with school-sanctioned activities ignore parents, specifically African American parents, who are actively involved in their children's education. When schools do not take into account the

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nontraditional methods of parent involvement this could limit some parents from being involved in their children's schooling experiences.

Educators

The most significant implication of the research on parent involvement and engagement is that educators should reflect on how they relate to parents. Additionally, they should ask themselves why many of them respond to African American parents from a deficit perspective and how these messages convey uncomfortable feelings for parents when it comes to being involved with their children's school. Findings from the study recognize that some African American parents were not welcomed in the school environment. As a result, parents did not feel that their support was appreciated. Educators acknowledging their interactions with parents can assist with the development of positive and trusting parent-educator relations and lead to educators and African American parents collaborating in the educational trajectory of the children.

Parents

Schools are not the only environment in which children learn. Children also learn at home and therefore their parents must be acknowledged as co-contributors in their education. The parents in this study presented some important data relating to how they supported their children's educational experiences. Additionally, they were committed to providing the necessary guidance to their children to ensure their success in school. The parents had high hopes and desires for their children and utilized their form of capital to gain access for their children. The stories shared by these parents exposed the racism and

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negative perceptions stemmed from the actions and behaviors of school personnel. Most importantly, the parents challenged the perceptions that parents are not teaching their children at home or are not concerned about their children's academic achievement.

From a broader perspective, I learned much from these participants in this study. First, schools should not judge parents without providing them an opportunity to share how they support their child's education in the home environment. Second, schools should disregard their role as sole-educators and acknowledge that parents are their children's first teachers. Lastly, schools should put forth the effort to form partnerships with these parents. By doing so, when students are successful, both parents and schools can celebrate.

Researchers

CRT provides marginalized groups an opportunity to share their stories. Counter-storytelling, a tool within CRT, provided this study group an opportunity to share how they supported their children's schooling experiences and to contest the assumptions school personnel had about their families. For those African American parents who are involved in the education of their children in and outside the school realm, research can play a critical role by providing them a voice to share their experiences about their children's schooling. Researchers providing this space will also gain insight about these families and how they navigate the educational system for their children.

Many of the participants in this study were shocked by the treatment they received from their children's schools and, as a result, attributing it to racism. The racism

they experienced in their children's schools often came in the form of micro-aggressions. These micro-aggressions were revealed when Harriet was abused by her teacher for not holding her pencil correctly, when Sarah was not welcomed in the school environment, and when Josselyn's daughter was asked to answer a question about African Americans. These subtle racist acts made visiting the schools an uncomfortable experience. Future research that uses CRT to study the experience of African American parents should continue to highlight subtle acts of racism in schools and their effects on African American families.

Using CRT as a methodological approach is a valuable tool when examining the experiences of marginalized groups because the subjects are finally able to speak about their reality. By sharing their experiences, African American parents are able to challenge negative stereotypes. Since African American parents play a key role in the education of their children, including them in academic discourse is essential if such discourse is to be valid.

The findings for this study have significant implications for how parent involvement and engagement are conceptualized. Even though the parents in this study are not representatives of all African American parents, they offer a depiction of parent involvement in the school and home environment that is unusually represented in the literature. My findings highlight the importance of analyzing the ways they utilized resources in the community to support their children outside school boundaries. This research shows that not only are parents advocates for their children, but they also create learning opportunities in everyday real-life circumstances.

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This study is from the African American parents' perspective on involvement and engagement. Although limited in scope, it adds significantly to the conversation about African American parents' level of involvement and engagement in their children's education. Given that I only dealt with families who had children attending a tutoring center, further research could be held in schools focusing on parent involvement from the teachers' and school administrator's perspectives. Combining multiple perspectives can enhance educator and researcher knowledge of parental involvement in the African American community.

Strengths

The qualitative methodology used in the current study is one of the strengths of this research. Given the nature of the one-on-one interviews, participants in this study were given an opportunity to discuss their experiences and perceptions of participating in their children's education. Parents were able to define their roles rather than measure themselves against the assumed roles prescribed by school personnel and researchers. Additionally, the strength of this study is that it gives voice to the experiences of African American families who have been classified in the literature as uninvolved and not concerned about their children's education. In fact, parent voices were able to provide precise descriptions regarding their level of involvement.

Limitations

Despite these strengths, this study has several limitations. The first limitation is my own bias that I bring as the primary researcher. As an African American parent with a child in

the school system, as a former teacher and current administrator, I have had my own experiences that were quite similar to those of the participants. As a researcher, I was mindful to stay focused on this research and listen to the stories told by the participants.

Second, I only included a small sample of African American parents with children attending a tutoring center in the south suburb of Chicago. The sample was kept small in order to capture the depth of the current realities the families would share in this study. The results from this study are intended to further the discussion on African American parent involvement and to generate broader results and recommendations.

A third limitation involves my selection process. This study only selected parents who had their children receiving tutoring from a center located in the south suburbs of Chicago. Additionally, this study was not to generalize the results and findings to other racial groups; rather, my objective was to further my understanding regarding the level of involvement from African American parents. Despite these limitations, this study does provide a better understanding of the resources African American parents utilize to assist with their children's education.

<div align="center">**Reflections on Author Position**</div>

In the beginning of my dissertation, I recalled my past and present experiences with African American parent involvement. Like the participants in the study, I am an African American parent who is active in her child's schooling experiences. Conducting this research has allowed me to reflect on how I approach parents at the school where I serve as an administrator. As a result of my research, the following plan will be

implemented. In order to develop partnerships with parents, the school will offer them two options to share how they support their children's education: 1) those parents who are able to pay a visit to the school will be provided an opportunity to share how they navigate the educational system for their children; 2) those parents that have work constraints will receive a phone call and will be asked verbally how they support their children. This process would be a valuable tool, as it will identify the countless ways parents support their children. Most importantly, it will provide school personnel a starting point on how to work with and not against these families.

It is my hope that this study will elicit a critical dialogue that recognizes the role some African American parents play in their children's education. Overall, this study illustrates that African American parent involvement includes not only direct involvement in schools such as participating in school-sanctioned activities, but also indirect or hidden behaviors such as assisting with homework, navigating resources in the community to support their children and communicating the importance of receiving an education. Additionally, this study portrayed that some African Americans parents care about the future outcomes of their children. While the level of their involvement is not known to school personnel, parents are committed and have a desire to seek out resources to support their children's academic success. As an administrator and former teacher, this research has given me the insight to have open communication with my parents and provide them opportunities to share the numerous ways in which they participate in their child's education and schooling.

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Appendix A: CONSENT AND PARENTAL PERMISSION

DEPAUL
UNIVERSITY
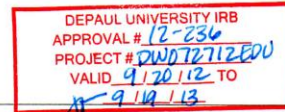
Institutional Review Board
1 East Jackson Boulevard
Chicago, Illinois 60604-2201
312/362-7593

CONSENT AND PARENTAL PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH 7574

Outside the Realm: The Counter-Narratives of African American Parent Involvement in their children's education

What is the purpose of this research?

We are asking you and your child to be in a research study because we are trying to learn more about how African American parents are involved in their children's education. In particular, the study concentrates on learning how larger societal, historical and personal experiences affect the roles they play in their children's educational experiences. You are invited to participate in this study because you had a child who was either enrolled or assigned to Academics Tutoring Center during the 2010-2011 school year. This study is being conducted by Deborah Watson-Hill, a graduate student at DePaul University as a requirement to obtain her doctorate degree. This research is being supervised by her faculty supervisor, Dr. Horace Hall.

How much time will this take?

This study will take about 2 hours of your total time. The semi-structure interview will last approximately 45 minutes followed by 20 minutes of me observing your interaction with your child. Lastly, on a scheduled set date, you will participate in a focus group with other parents that will last approximately 45 minutes. This study will take about twenty minutes of your child's time.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to answer questions about your culture, your educational experiences and the educational experiences of your child, allow me to observe your interaction with your child and participate in a focus group. The focus group will involve questions about your culture, educational experiences (for you and your child). I will record your interview and focus group on audio tape and transcribe it later to get an accurate record of your responses. If you allow your child to be in this study, s/he will be asked to be observed with you in your home. My goal is to observe your interaction with your child. I will document what I see and hear during the observation.

What are the risks involved in participating in this study?

Participating in the interview does not involve any risks other than what you would encounter in daily life. For example, you or your child may feel uncomfortable about answering any questions; therefore you or your child can opt out at anytime.

Participating in the observation process of the interview will involve a minimal risk. For example, you may feel uncomfortable with Deborah Watson-Hill (principal investigator) observing your interaction with your child. Therefore, you may stop the observation at any time.

Participating in the focus group does involve a minimal risk. For example, participants may share what was said during the focus group, therefore focus group participants will be reminded to keep the conversations they hear confidential.

What are the benefits of my participation in this study?

You or your child will not personally benefit from being in this study. However, we hope that what we learn will allow us to have a better understanding on how African American parents support their children's education. Additionally, this study will help schools and African American parents form meaningful partnerships, which in turn will promote the academic success of children.

Version July 26, 2012   Page 1 of 2

Can I decide not to participate? If so, are there other options?

Yes, you can choose not to participate or to allow your child to participate. Even if you agree to be in the study now, you can change your mind later and leave the study. There will be no negative consequences for you or your child if you decide not to participate or change your mind later. Your decision whether or not to be in the study or allow your child to be in the study will not affect your or your child's standing at the Academics Tutoring Center.

How will the confidentiality of the research records be protected?

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any report we might publish, we will not include any information that will identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only the researchers will have access to the records that identify you or your child by name. Some people might review our records in order to make sure we are doing what we are supposed to. For example, the DePaul University Institutional Review Board may review your information. If they look at our records, they will keep your information confidential. Research information will be recorded and kept on file for 3 years. Once the 3 years are up, audio files will be erased and transcribed data will be destroyed by a paper shredder.

Whom can I contact for more information?

If you have questions about this study, please contact Deborah Watson-Hill @ 773-315-4673 or by email at deborahwatson30@yahoo.com or my faculty advisor Dr. Horace Hall @ 773-325-4693 or by email at hhall@depaul.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Susan Loess-Perez, DePaul University's Director of Research Protections at 312-362-7593 or by email at sloesspe@depaul.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information. I have all my questions answered.

☐ I consent to be in this study and to allow my child to be in the study.

☐ I **DO NOT** consent to being in the study or to allow my child to be in this study.

Child's Name:_____

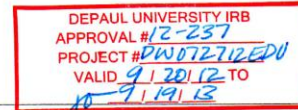Signature:_____   Date: _____

Printed name:_____

Appendix B: ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE

DEPAUL
UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board
1 East Jackson Boulevard
Chicago, Illinois 60604-2201
312/362-7593
FAX: 312/362-7574

ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

OUTSIDE THE REALM: THE COUNTER-NARRATIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

What is the purpose of this research?
We are asking you to be in a research study because we are trying to learn more about how African American parents are involved in their children's education. In particular, the study concentrates on learning how larger societal, historical and personal experiences affect the roles they play in their children's educational experiences.
You are invited to participate in this study because your child was enrolled at Academics Tutoring Center during the 2010-2011 school year. This study is being conducted by Deborah Watson-Hill, a graduate student at DePaul University as a requirement to obtain her doctorate degree. This research is being supervised by her faculty supervised by her faculty supervisor, Dr. Horace Hall.

How much time will this take?
This study will take about twenty minutes of your time.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate in this study?
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to allow Deborah Watson-Hill (researcher) to observe you in your home with the parent who enrolled you in Academics Tutoring Center

What are the risks of being in this study?
This study does involve minimal risks. For example, you may feel uncomfortable about me observing you interacting with your parent. Therefore, you may opt out of this study at any time.

What are the benefits of being in this study?
You will not get any benefit from being in this study. However, we hope that what we learn will allow us to have a better understanding on how African American parents support their children's education. Additionally, this study will help schools and African American parents from meaningful partnerships, which in turn will promote the academic success of children.

Can I decide not to participate? If so, are there other options?
Yes, you can choose not to participate. We have asked your parent to let you be in this study. But even if your parents have said "yes," you can still decide not to be in the study. Even if you agree to be in the study now, you can change your mind later and leave the study. Nothing bad will happen if you decide not to participate or change your mind later.

How will the confidentiality of the research records be protected?
The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any report we might publish, we will not include any information that will identify your child. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researchers will have access to the records that identify your child by name. Some people might review our records in order to make sure we are doing what we are supposed to. For example, the DePaul University Institutional Review Board may review your information.. If they look at our records, they will keep your child's information confidential. Research information will be recorded and kept on file for 3 years. Once the 3 years are up, audio tapes and files will be erased and destroyed by a paper shredder.

Whom can I contact if I have questions?

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If you have questions about this study, please contact Deborah Watson-Hill. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Susan Loess-Perez, DePaul University's Director of Research Protections at 312-362-7593 or by email at sloesspe@depaul.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep with you.

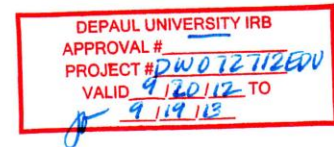**Statement of Assent:**
I have read the above information. I have all my questions answered. (Check one:)

☐ I agree to be in this study.   ☐ I **DO NOT** agree to be in this study.
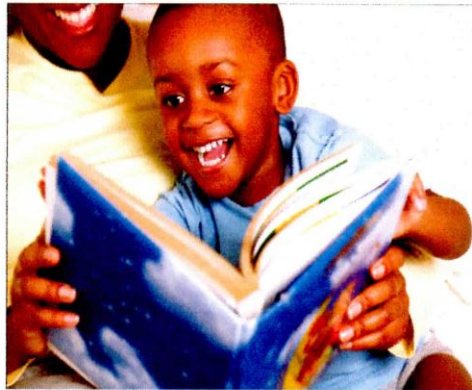
Signature:_____   Date: _____   Grade in School:_____

Guardian/Parent's Name:_____

Appendix C
RECRUITMENT FLIER

Looking for African American parents or guardians who had children attending Academics Tutoring Center during the 2010-2011 school year to participate in a Parent Involvement research study.

The purpose of this research is to listen to the voices and gain insight into the lives of African American parents on how they are engaged in their children's education. In particular, the study concentrates on learning how larger societal historical experiences affect the roles they play in their children's educational experiences.

Participants will be interviewed, observed and participate in a focus group.

If you are interested please contact, Deborah Watson-Hill, a doctoral student attending DePaul University at 773-315-4673.

All information will be kept confidential.
Thanks for your consideration.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What do you do to support your child's education?

2. What motivates you to be engaged in your child's education?

3. What resources do you use to support your child's education?

4. What has been your experience with school personnel?

5. What would you like me to know about your child?

6. What were your experiences like in school?

7. How did your parents support your schooling?

8. How will your involvement make a difference in your child's educational future?

9. What personal experiences have prepared you to be involved in your child's education in the home and school environment?

10. What haven't I asked that you would like to share?

Thanks for your time!