Summer 8-2016

African American Parental Engagement in a Public Middle School: Contributing Factors

Laura J. McGowan-Robinson
Loyola Marymount University

Summer 8-2016

African American Parental Engagement in a Public Middle School: Contributing Factors

Laura J. McGowan-Robinson
Loyola Marymount University, laurajmcgowan@yahoo.com

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

African American Parental Engagement in a Public Middle School: Contributing Factors

by

Laura J. McGowan-Robinson

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

In partial satisfaction of the requirements of the degree

Doctor of Education

2016

African American Parental Engagement in a Public Middle School: Contributing Factors

by

Laura J. McGowan-Robinson

Loyola Marymount University
School of Education
Los Angeles, CA 90045

This dissertation written by Laura McGowan-Robinson, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

August 9, 2016
Date

Dissertation Committee

[redacted]
Franca Dell'Olio, Ed.D., Committee Member

[redacted]
Angela Bass, Ed.D., Committee Member

[redacted]
Ref Rodriguez, Ed.D., Committee Member

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the sweat on the brows of generations that preceded me on slave plantations and cotton fields, cleaning homes of White people in the South, the near lynching of my great grandfather in East Saint Louis and the blood shed on the backs of my great-great grandparents as slaves, there would be no me. I will be forever humbled by the lives of my ancestors, for without their sacrifice I could never have achieved all that I have.

During the writing of this dissertation, my grandmother Laura Woodley passed away at the age of 98. While she did not witness the completion of the work, I believe she gave me the strength from heaven to complete it. Born in the Mississippi Delta to sharecroppers in 1917, she achieved a sixth-grade education. At the age of 11, my grandmother began working in the cotton fields. She bore 11 children and raised five stepchildren as her own. Of the 16 children, my mother was the only to graduate college.

My mother changed my life trajectory when she graduated from college at 40 years of age. This dissertation is not only a personal accomplishment, but also shattering a glass ceiling for my forefathers and generations to come.

I dedicate this work to my family, immediate and extended. To my husband, thank you for your unconditional love and unwavering support through all my endeavors; you are my rock. To my dad, may you rest in peace, thank you for teaching me to be tough and fight through life's obstacles. To my big brothers, thank you for always being in my corner cheering me along and letting me learn from you. To my sisters, I love you and hope that we continue to grow together. And to my LMU study group family, thank you for your coaching and cheerleading along the way; we held each other up.

To my chair and dissertation committee, you all have challenged and pushed me in ways that I have never been. You see the promise that this work brings to the education community on behalf of African American children and their families. Thank you for your faith in me and in this work.

And to my foundation, my beginning and my end, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, thank you for giving me the vision and perseverance to see this through.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Laura Woodley a former sharecropper from Mississippi, who instilled the love of God and value of education in her family. While she was only able to achieve a sixth-grade education, what she had in wisdom far exceeded any degree I could ever earn. To my mother, Alice, next to my grandmother, one of the hardest working people I know. I dedicate this to you for the sacrifices you made to make sure I had a quality education and a better life. To my father, Alfred, your spirit of consistency and toughness lives on in me. To my husband Nate, without your love and support this journey would have been nearly impossible to complete; I dedicate this dissertation to you as well. Lastly, this dissertation is dedicated to African American families who are silenced by systems and structures that may not see the value of their experiences. May this work shine a light on you, open spaces that recognize your valuable perspectives, and acknowledge your depth of knowledge as your child's first teacher and advocate.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

African American Parental Engagement in a Public Middle School:

Contributing Factors

by

Laura J. McGowan-Robinson

Parental engagement with schools is often considered one of the major contributing factors to a child's success in school. There is not, however, a definition of parental engagement that takes into account the social, historical, and cultural factors that shape a parent's view of their own engagement. This qualitative case study examines how African American parents in a high poverty, urban, charter middle school, come to understand practices and beliefs at their child's school, while building relationships with other parents and school staff. Through the lenses of critical race theory and cultural-historical activity theory, the researcher analyzes how the convergence of race, power, history, and culture frame perspectives of policy makers, those who work in schools, and parents. Through the voices of African American parents, in a socioeconomically disadvantaged school community, they define their own engagement.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

African American children are often identified as being among the lowest academically performing group, on the wrong side of the achievement gap, a subgroup—according to No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002), "at risk," among other labels. Education research has shown that parental involvement contributes to academic success (Epstein & Dauber, 2001; Jeynes, 2005). When it comes to African American parental involvement, educational leaders and teachers often draw conclusions about the level of interest or value African American parents place on education based on how often they observe them at the school site (Auerbach, 2007; Cousins & Mickelson, 2011; Fields-Smith, 2005; Lawson, 2003). When one considers the historical perspective of this group, the extent to which their history and cultural background influences their view or degree to which they might participate in their child's education should be considered as well. Previous experiences of African American parents may frame how they define involvement.

There are conflicting views, however, on what parental involvement means from a diverse cultural perspective (Jeynes, 2005). Epstein's (2001) work on parental involvement is often referenced as the implied standard for determining types of parental involvement. However, as the demographic landscape has evolved over time, critical pedagogical researchers have begun to question Epstein's model (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Dauber, 2001; Epstein, Jansorn, Salinas, Sanders, Simon, & Van Voorhis, F. L. (2002), some referring to it as

Eurocentric or failing to address the diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds of parents in the urban context (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Auerbach, 2007; Olivos, 2006).

Research has indicated that African American parents encounter some barriers to school involvement due to racism from school staff, or to their own negative experiences as students (Lareau & McNamara, 1999; Kim, 2009). According to the literature, educational leaders and teachers may not be taking the historical context and obstacles faced by African American families into consideration when it comes to assessing their level or quality of involvement (Cousins & Mickelson, 2011; Jeynes, 2005).

In the researcher's experience as a child and student, parental involvement positively influenced academics and behavior in school. Teachers and administrators at every school she attended knew her mother. Her mother attended nearly every awards ceremony, track meet, recital, and parent conference in the history of her schooling. In addition to appearing at school events, her mother served in various capacities in school leadership as a parent representative as a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) member and local school council (LSC) president. Her mother's level of involvement was not as consistent during her two older brothers' childhood years—before receiving her college degree and subsequently improved wages. This gave her mother greater flexibility on her job to take time off, be present at the school, and build relationships with teachers. Essentially, her mother's level of involvement increased when she became a member of the middle class. Although this information is anecdotal, the research points to similar trends within the African American community when it comes to the middle class and those in poverty (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Kim, 2009; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & McNamara-Horvat, 1999). There is consistent alignment between middle-class African American parental

involvement and Caucasian middle-class parents when African American parents have access to information about academics and school personnel, and feel welcomed to participate in their child's education (Cousins & Mickelson, 2011).

The researcher was drawn to this topic due to her personal experience as an African American youth and as a school leader seeking to better understand the perspectives of African American parents at her school site. As a school leader, she often heard colleagues ask the question, "What can I do to get my African American parents involved?" Of course, the implied question is, why are African American parents not as involved as other parents? African American parents are often described as not as involved in their child's education as other ethnic groups are in theirs (Kim 2009; Smalley & Reyes-Blanes, 2001). Studies have shown that parental involvement is a factor in increasing the academic and behavioral performance of students (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006). If increased parental involvement has been proven to increase academic achievement (Epstein, 2001), then why would African American parents *not* be involved? Through the exploration of this question, the literature points to complexities of race, culture, class, and culturally insensitive interpretations of what is considered parental involvement as the true impediments to African American parental involvement. Research by Atkins, Brown, Hawkins, Lynn, and McKernan-McKay (2003) on inner-city African American parental involvement calls for clarity on how parents' and teachers' views of the academic setting commingle with issues of race, parenting, and values that underpin parenting practices. The researcher sought to understand the definition of parental engagement based on the context of African American parenting, specifically inner-city African American parents.

Social Justice

Social justice is about equity, fairness, and inclusion of groups that have been historically silenced or disenfranchised, with the understanding that hearing their voices will ultimately result in an equitable society. Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) have stated, "School leaders must act as advocates in their schools and communities and, specifically as advocates for the needs of marginalized students" (648). As advocates, educators are responsive to the needs of the community, which requires them to hear the voices of those they serve and act upon the feedback they receive. Through their advocacy, they shift the agendas of those in power, inspiring action to improve the conditions of those in need. In this spirit, the present research was designed to provide voice to—and advocate on behalf of—African American parents in urban areas, specifically in Los Angeles area middle schools. As indicated throughout this dissertation, issues of race, culture, power, and class directly impact this community, and perceptions of their level of participation are deeply influenced by White middle-class ideology. As previous research has shown, the position of educators as it relates to African American parental engagement has not necessarily been one of advocacy, but rather one that frames the ideal for parental engagement and imposes this ideology onto the African American parents they serve (Auerbach, 2007; Barton et al., 2004; Epstein, 2001). In such instances, the educator is misdirecting his or her influence. Educators must be more responsive to the voices of the parent community and less narrow-minded about the way its members engage at their child's school.

Problem

During government-sanctioned segregation, African American students of various classes attended the same schools, and there was a sense of community and trust; they united as a group.

While being disenfranchised kept them separated from Whites, it united them as a community (Fields-Smith, 2005). Post–Brown v. Board of Education (1954), the unintended effect of desegregation was how African American parents viewed the school system (Fields-Smith, 2005). Parents went from an environment that catered to the needs of their children within their communities to, in some cases, being bussed outside of their communities, sent to communities known for hating them. As a result, trust diminished, and some African American families experienced a loss of connection to the school and the school community (Fields-Smith, 2005).

In addition to the unintended effects of Brown v. Board of Education, issues of class and culture impact the view African American parents have toward schools and how they define parental involvement. Single working-class parents often find it difficult to change their work schedule to attend school events—as a result they find other ways to involve themselves in their children's lives outside of the school setting (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008). With this historical, cultural, and racial context, why, then, is there an assumption that parental involvement must look the same across the board? Post–Brown v. Board of Education, parents have experienced covert and overt racism, instances of unfair treatment of their children, and trends of failing schools in their neighborhoods, all of which has led to a lack of trust and the impulse to detach when it comes to schools and African American parents (Fields-Smith, 2005).

Mapp (2003) studied how a socioeconomically, culturally, and racially diverse group of parents perceived their engagement in their child's education and if there was alignment or misalignment with existing typologies, based on varied racial and economic backgrounds. She also sought to determine what contributed to parental engagement. Parents in Mapp's (2003) study reported that the school's ability to make the parents feel like part of a family was a

contributing factor in their engagement. This family, like environment, was largely impacted by the staff's ability to foster a culture of respect, honor, and shared power between staff and family members; these were the main factors in maintaining a cohesive partnership between school and parents (Mapp, 2003).

Recently released national and state graduation rates as well as discipline data reveal systemic racial and social justice issues in the U.S. educational system. Data released by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in 2014 confirmed that traces of racism linger in public schools as evidenced by disproportionate disciplining of African American children. Their findings concluded that African American children were three times more likely to be suspended and expelled than their White peers (OCR, 2014). While African American students only represent 18% of the preschool population, 48% of preschoolers suspended more than once were African American; in comparison, their White peers, who represented 46% of the preschool population, represented 26% of preschoolers receiving more than one out of school suspension (OCR, 2014). Further, the most recent, 2011–2012 national high school graduation rates among African American students were 68% in comparison to 85% for White students and 76% for Hispanics (Kena et al., 2015). In the State of California, the 2013–2014 graduation rates matched the national rates with the exception of White students who graduated at 78%. These statistics served as not only evidence of the existence of racism in the educational system, but also as a need to address issues of race and cultural bias with teachers and administrators; some 60 years after Brown v. Board of Education (1954) and 50 years after the Civil Rights Act (1964), the same issues of inequity and racism and are manifested through disproportionate suspensions, expulsions, and drop-out rates.

Considering the above statistics, the need to address the shortcomings of the U.S. educational system as it relates to African American students is of the utmost importance. Research has shown that when parents are engaged in their children's education, educational and behavioral outcomes improve (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Epstein, 2001). Given these data, effective engagement between the school and African American parents must be explored further by policy makers, school administrators, and teachers, urgently.

The extant literature on African American parental involvement offers a limited view of how involvement is defined. It appears that African American parents are only considered "involved" based on what they do at the school site and not necessarily how or why they are involved (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004; Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Missing from the literature is awareness of how parents and school personnel comprehend the ways in which the school setting interacts with how race perceptions, child rearing practices, and beliefs underscore those perceptions and practices (Atkins et al., 2003). However, scholars have pointed to the idea of deficit thinking among educators in perpetuating the myth of uninvolved minority parents and the approach to educating African American children (McCullough, 2012; Valencia, 2010).

Research Questions

Based on the problem outlined above, and understanding the incongruence in how parental involvement is defined among researchers and educators, especially among communities of color, the research questions were: (a) How do African American parents in a high-poverty middle school setting, with at 98% Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) population, come to understand practices and beliefs at their child's school? (b) How do African American

parents build relationships with other parents and school staff? (c) What factors do African American parents identify as contributing to their parental engagement or lack thereof?

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine African American parental engagement in a high-poverty, urban, charter middle school setting to determine how they came to understand practices and beliefs about the school while building consistent relationships with other parents and with those in the school community. A clear understanding of these factors, based on the voices of African American parents, might be useful to school leaders and teachers in better understanding the familial, cultural, and social context of the perspectives of African American parental involvement. Based on these understandings, school leaders and teachers might develop culturally and socially responsive ways to include inner-city African American parents in the middle school community. The implications of Williams and Sanchez's (2012) work on parental involvement indicated that a common definition of parental involvement for both parents and school personnel would ensure consistent messages and expectations across the school, which might lead to improved student performance.

Significance

The literature lacks clarity on the level or quality of African American parental involvement compared to that of non–African American parents (Brandon, 2007; Epstein, 1987; Jeynes, 2005). Researchers have offered a plethora of definitions for parental involvement, producing very little consensus around the term. This study seeks to provide clarity around the definition and to amplify the voice of African American parents when it comes to how they perceive parental engagement.

Jeynes's (2007) is but one of many definitions: “Parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children” (p. 83). In response to Jeynes’s (2007) call for researchers to re-examine old ideas of parent involvement—and supported by Auerbach’s (2009) research on familial engagement from the perspective of school leaders, McKenna and Millen (2013) have suggested that parental engagement incorporate two core workings: parent voice and parent presence.

McKenna and Millen (2013) examined ideas on parental involvement from the perspective of urban parents. Their grounded theory, qualitative research was based on a small sample of parents whom they interviewed and with whom they conducted focus groups. From their secondary research, they posited a new form of parent participation. This new paradigm includes sociocultural theory, critical race theory, and educational care philosophy. Their research responded to “erroneous assumptions that can be doubly harmful when put in the context of working with low-income and/or minority parents”; as such, they called for a framework for parental involvement that took into account the sociocultural backgrounds of parents in urban areas (McKenna & Millen, 2013, p. 10).

Considering the lack of clarity around the definition of parental involvement, the researcher proposed cultural-historical activity theory and critical race theory approaches as a lens from which to view it; this method might provide school leaders with another perspective on the types of parental involvement African American parents employ within and outside of their households (Barton et al., 2004). School leaders might not recognize parental involvement taking place in the home, but that may nonetheless directly impact the success of a child inside the classroom. As a result of this study, school leaders may better understand the perspectives of

African American parents and their definition of engagement. Having this knowledge could shape how school leaders and teachers interact with parents and how opportunities for African American parental engagement are structured.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks for this research study are cultural-historical activity and critical race theory (CRT). The cultural-historical activity framework maintains that context is critical to understanding how individuals interact and arrive at certain conclusions. According to this theory, an individual's context frames his or her historical and cultural perspectives (Engestrom, 2001). Cultural-historical activity theory was largely shaped by social reproduction theory, which provides context to complex social and cultural inequalities that are perpetuated in school paradigms. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), all individuals possess social and cultural capital, which they may use in a variety of settings; however, the value of this social or cultural capital is determined by the setting in which it is used because different settings value different types of capital.

Viewing African American parental engagement through the cultural-historical activity theoretical lens shows how those in power in the educational setting—in most cases, the ideology of White and/or middle to upper class—determine the value of the social or cultural capital of inner-city African American parents (Lareau & McNamara-Horvat, 1999). How school leaders and teachers define parental involvement in the school setting sets the norm for parental involvement, and how African American parents meet that expectation determines the value of their contribution.

Lareau (1987) took this conclusion a step further and suggested that social class offers inroads to cultural capital when it increases compliance with the expectations of the school. As parents comply with expectations, their cultural capital increases. Lareau and McNamara-Horvat's (1999) work highlighted historical discrimination against African Americans and the implications of discrimination for the views they had on schooling and the structures in place in the system itself. "Many Black parents, given the historical legacy of racial discrimination in schools, may not presume or trust that their children will be treated fairly" (Lareau & McNamara-Horvat, 1999, p. 42).

Along with cultural-historical activity theory, parental engagement was viewed through the lens of critical race theory (CRT). Given the deeply rooted discrimination that African Americans have experienced and, in some cases, still experience in the school setting, examining how parental engagement is situated in CRT provided a lens to parental engagement policy and practices. As such, the researcher examined how these views influencde the extent to which parents were invited to engage with the school.

CRT explored how race continued to be a factor in inequity beyond class and gender in education. With regard to this theory, Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) have examined the following: (a) how race is still an important factor in inequity, (b) the significance of property rights, and (c) how race and property rights are interrelated and can determine outcomes in social and educational inequity. Race as a significant factor in educational inequity—as viewed by the authors—is distinguished from gender and class, as evidenced by disproportionate rates of suspension, expulsion, and dropout rates of African American and Latino students in comparison to their White counterparts (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). Although both class and gender can

and do intersect with race, as stand-alone variables, they do not explain all of the educational achievement differences between White and students of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). This theory is proposed as a distinct way to examine the complexities of race as it plays out in education.

Conceptual Framework

Using Bourdieu (1990) as the foundation, the Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) conceptual framework takes the attention away from what parents do to participate in their child's education—a more transactional dynamic that is often presented when school administrators and staff talk about parental involvement—instead focusing on the dynamics of why and how parents are involved in their child's education (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004). Traditional approaches to parental involvement have largely been based on the hours parents spend at the school site, or what they do while they are at the school. These approaches often view nontraditional ways of parental involvement through a deficit model. Parents who engage the school in nontraditional ways often fall into categories of poor, urban, single heads of households, or working families of color. School leadership should closely examine any deficit description of low-SES parental involvement and measure it against viewpoints that are culturally sensitive (Smith, 2008).

Research Design and Methodology

This qualitative case study explored African American parental perspectives on their parental engagement and factors that contributed to their engagement, or lack thereof, through focus groups, individual interviews and artifact analysis. African American parents were interviewed individually at their charter middle schools. To determine the perspectives of school

personnel on African American parental involvement at the school site, interviews were also conducted with one school leader, 50% of the teachers, and an office staff member at the school site. In addition to one-on-one interviews, teachers participated in focus groups. The research design provided a rich context from which data was triangulated from multiple perspectives, with the ultimate objective of providing a foundation for the African American parent point of view.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

This study was limited to one charter middle school within Los Angeles County. This limits the generalizability of the study. While charter schools are considered public schools, they are schools of choice. A parent or guardian, as opposed to a traditional district enrollment process that is determined by geographic boundaries, selects schools of choice (e.g. magnet, pilot, charter). As a school of choice, there is an assumption that parents or guardians are selecting a school based on certain factors (e.g. educational program, location, academic performance, etc.), versus traditional district schools enrollment, which is only determined based on where a child lives. Due to these enrollment practices, there may be a perception that parents of charter students—due to the fact that they made a conscious decision to enroll in a charter school—will likely be more involved than parents who may not elect to choose a charter school. However, a 2007 survey of charter school administrators across three states found parental engagement was an area in which 29% said they experienced "major challenges" and 43% reported it as a "minor challenge" (Gross & Pochop, 2007).

An area of critical importance in this study was the exploration of African American parent voice in the United States. Particularly in urban schools with high populations of socioeconomically disadvantaged students, African American parents are not typically sought

after, in culturally responsive ways, to serve as partners in improving educational or behavioral outcomes, or policies that meet the needs of African American students more broadly, throughout the school community (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997). These issues transcend the charter and traditional district school debate. The fact that this study took place at a public charter school, while it is an important data point, is not the defining point in this research study. Therefore, the charter school setting was deemphasized and African American parent voice was highlighted for further analysis.

Another limitation of the study was due to Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations. While the researcher sought to interview families who received Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL), information about the FRL status of families could not be released from the central office. Considering the 98% FRL population at the school, instead of socioeconomic status being the criteria for participation in the study, the researcher examined how the parents within a socioeconomically disadvantaged school came to understand the practices and beliefs in the school environment.

The assumptions associated with this study related to the fact that confidentiality and anonymity were preserved throughout this study for all participants, and that all participants answered honestly. The researcher provided reasonable assurances to the participants that their confidentiality was preserved. Additionally, participants were aware of their ability to withdraw from the study at any time.

Summary/Organization of the Study

In summary, this research was designed to explore issues of race, culture, and class as they related to African American parental engagement a charter middle school in the County of

Los Angeles. The goal of this study was to gather the perspectives of African American parents of their involvement in their child's education, in a school where they were in the dominant group. Additionally, the perspectives of the school staff were gathered to determine if there were areas of congruence or misalignment. These perspectives were juxtaposed with the literature. Based on the research at the school site and through the literature, the goal was to provide insight into the work of the school leadership and staff as they developed responsive approaches to aligning with the diverse perspectives of their African American parents, ultimately meeting the academic needs of their children.

Definition of Key Terms

Critical race theory (CRT)—This theory posits that race is a deeply entrenched part of American life (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). Through this lens, the researcher assessed the interactions and policy that determine the extent to which parents are involved. CRT is based upon three premises: race in the United States as the preeminent determining factor in inequity; a community based on the property rights; and the juncture of race and property.

Cultural capital—A term conceptualized Bourdieu (1990) referring to cultural resources that are brought into a space by an individual or group. These nonmonetary resources may include education or skills.

Cultural historical activity theory (CHAT)—This theory takes into account the context to which individuals are already situated as they enter a particular environment. When they enter a community, individuals bring unique perspectives that are largely based on their history and cultural experiences (Barton et al., 2004).

Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE)—A conceptual framework that takes the attention away from what parents do to participate in their child's education, a transactional dynamic, but instead focuses on the dynamics of why and how parents are involved in their child's education (Barton et al., 2004).

Socioeconomically disadvantaged—For the purposes of this study, families who received free or reduced priced lunch were considered socioeconomically disadvantaged.

School personnel—for the purposes of this study, this term was used to identify all school employees who participated in the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

African Americans were enslaved for approximately 200 years in the United States (Bennett, 1966). Families were often separated as members were sold off to slave owners throughout the United States. As slaves, African American often built families on the plantation; while not bonded by blood, they were bonded by the struggles they faced. Mothers and fathers advocated for their children, as best they could, even when they were powerless slaves (Bennett, 1966).

Post slavery, African American families sought to improve their economic and social conditions through education. In many cases, the strongest advocates for the education of African American children were their parents (Span, 2009). In recent years, the level of involvement of African American parents has often been questioned. This research explores the factors that lead to parental involvement at a Los Angeles County middle school. However, to explore these factors, one must understand the historical implications that contribute to how African American parents define their involvement. One might also consider whether notions of White middle-class parental involvement are imposed upon African American parents and—considering their very different cultural contexts—whether these impositions are fair or unfair. Upon exploring the cultural and historical context of this group, and the degree to which race plays a role in defining parental involvement, this research examined how African American parents define parental involvement today and the factors that contribute to their involvement. Further, the research sought to determine how African American parents came to understand practices and beliefs while building consistent relationships with other parents and with those in

the school community. This research question was influenced by the work of Barton et al. (2004), particularly in terms of some of the methodology and conceptual framework that largely focused on the "whys" and "hows" of parental engagement.

Historical Context to African American Parental Involvement

To recount the history of African American parental involvement, one must begin with the journey of African Americans from Africa to America and from slavery to emancipation. African Americans were brought to America in chains and remained enslaved from approximately 1766 until 1863 (Bennett, 1966). In the years following the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), African Americans focused on building their families and establishing their humanity through education and economic freedom. The major milestones for African American parental involvement in education, for the purposes of this research are: slavery, Reconstruction, Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), Brown v. Board of Education (1954), post–Brown v. Board, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965)*, and *No Child Left Behind (2001)*.

Slavery

The idea of educating Africans in the United States was introduced during slavery. It was illegal for slaves to be educated; the consequence for the slave seeking education was having his or her forefinger cut off the right hand, or death (Anderson, 1988). While illiterate slaves were the norm, many slaves had a hunger for literacy, and some did, in fact, learn to read. Literate slaves, like Enoch Golden, were sought to teach as many other slaves to read as they could (Anderson, 1988). "There is one sin that slavery committed against me," professed one ex-slave, "which I will never forgive. It robbed me of my education" (Anderson, 1988, p. 5). There was a belief among enslaved African Americans that knowledge would unlock power. Despite the

illegality of being educated, by the early 1860s, approximately 5% of the slaves were literate (Anderson, 1988).

The earliest schools for African Americans were founded by escaped slaves (Butchart, 1980). The earliest report of a Black school predated the Civil War and was located in Savannah, Georgia. From 1833–1865, the school operated underground, by a Black woman named Deveaux (Anderson, 1988). Slavery represented a shackling of both the physical body and the mind. Slave owners believed that if they could enslave the mind, the body would follow. The total submission (mind and body) of the slave to the "master" was referred to as "breaking." Thus, when slaves had the opportunity to become literate, they possessed an insatiable hunger to be educated. Harriet Beecher Stowe spoke of the determination of the ex-slave to obtain an education, "They rushed not to the grog-shop but to the schoolroom—they cried for the spelling book as bread, and pleaded for teachers as a necessity of life" (Anderson, 1988, p.7).

The first advocates for the education of slaves, ex-slaves, and freedmen were African Americans themselves (Span, 2009). They saw education as a tool to become equal, self-reliant, economically independent, and politically informed (Span, 2009). They pursued education with such fervor that lack of resources did not prove to be an obstacle they could not overcome. Prior to the end of the Civil War, ex-slaves would convert abandoned plantations and "big-houses" to schoolhouses. "These schools were virtually independent, relying on the resource—usually a Bible, a few books or primers, and a teacher—gathered by the African Americans attending or serving the school" (Span, 2009, p. 32).

Reconstruction and Universal Schooling

To an ex-slave, earning an education was the ultimate statement of freedom. The education of the ex-slave was symbolic of safety and a way to prevent regression, "Education for the freedman could serve as a safeguard against fraud and manipulation" (Anderson, 1988, p. 18). As voting citizens, freedmen had to be literate to understand their political rights (Butchart, 1980). The excitement and desire to learn was not just for children, but for adults as well. "Numerous observers reported black soldiers, workers, and travelers with their primers and readers, snatching moments of rest to study their lessons, or mothers in the mist of their children trying to learn from them what they have learned during the day" (Butchart, 1980, p. 170).

Freedmen held a deep desire to have their children educated. Although parents had to balance the need for their children to work (to ensure they had the means to sustain the household), they also had to balance the importance of education. Often the adults would attend night school after a long day of intense labor, while the children attended school during the day (Span, 2009). When possible, children and parents attended school together; this would occur during a break in their work schedules (Span, 2009).

Not only were African American students in the school, but also their families financially supported the schools their children attended. These schools were also funded by aid organizations and churches (Butchart, 1980). In some cases, freedmen contributed more financially to their schools than their White counterparts did to their own schools. For example, in Maryland, freedmen "raised over $23,000 for their education in 1867 and built 60 schoolhouses. In addition, the paid taxes that year that went exclusively to white schools" (Butchart, 1980, p. 171). On the other hand, Whites gave $3,300 to the Baltimore Association for

the Moral and Educational Improvement of the Colored People of Maryland's Black school (Butchart, 1980, p.171). In some cases, African American sacrificed to give to the schools when they were in deep poverty.

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)

Post slavery, the United States Supreme Court established segregation laws—also known as "separate but equal." This event gave birth to Jim Crow laws, which were pervasive throughout the South and effectively separated Blacks from Whites on public transportation, and in restrooms, restaurants, and schools. "The Separate but Equal Doctrine relegated African American children to inadequate and unsafe schools, while the South's Jim Crow laws forbade black citizens from participating on an equal footing with white citizens" (Tuttle, 2012, p. 1). The segregation doctrine, according to Justice Billings Brown, was not meant to be discriminatory; it was only viewed this way because African Americans interpreted it as such (Williams, 2012). It would take nearly 60 years for African Americans to be emancipated from "separate but equal" education, with Brown v. Board of Education.

Brown v. Board of Education (1954)

One of the earlier actions to desegregate schools occurred in August of 1948, when parents in Dover and Bridgeville, Delaware, expressed interest in having their children attend a local White high school, as they were much closer geographically than the schools their children were attending (Gadsen, 2013). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) voted to support the parent's request. Subsequent complaints were registered about the inequitable facilities and substandard conditions. Shirley Bulah's parents launched a letter-writing campaign to the governor of Delaware, expressing that the bus stop to pick up their

daughter, considering it passed their home on the route to a Jim Crow school (Gadsen, 2013). Their request was denied based on the law that allowed separate but equal schooling.

> You, no doubt, realize that the laws of Delaware require the State Board of Education to provide separate schools for colored pupils. Therefore, we who are responsible or administering the laws, have always considered this to include transportation of pupils. (Gadsen, 2013, p. 65)

This refusal did not quash her persistence.

In Claymont, Delaware, a community not far from the Bulah's, another group of African American parents was challenging segregation (Gadsen, 2013). They, too, were denied on the basis of separate but equal laws. With the coordinated strategy of the Delaware NAACP, Bulah and Belton filed suit, fighting segregation and thus marking the beginning of the battle to end separate but equal education (Gadsen, 2013). Through these cases, for the first time, Jim Crow schools enrolled and admitted African American students.

These cases were the beginning of the coordinated effort by the NAACP to eradicate separate but equal education. The road leading to Brown v. Board of Education was a battle that lasted six years (Gadsen, 2013). This battle began through the efforts of African American parents who believed that their children deserved the same educational opportunities as their White counterparts.

> The parents of Shirley Bulah and the other black children involved in the case were now safe in the knowledge that school officials would not remove these children from their new schools even after the state embarked upon its mission—some fifty-seven years after

> the passage of the modern state constitution—to provide equal facilities for black and white students. (Gadsen, 2013, p. 98)

While some African American parents championed the desegregation of schools, there were African American parents and teachers fully engaged in their segregated schools and proud of the quality of education that their students and/or children were receiving. Walker (2000) highlighted some of the common characteristics of the segregated school: excellent teaching, curriculum and extracurricular activity, supportive parents, and principal leadership. The African American teachers possessed a commitment to the students, "high-expectations," and a "demanding teaching style" (Walker, 2000, p. 265). The Black teachers could identify with the hardships that the students faced and, due to their common struggle, assisted students in developing the tools to navigate their circumstances (Walker, 2000). While teachers were also committed to professional development, they were able to adapt their teaching styles to meet the unique needs of the population they served (Walker, 2000).

Post Brown v. Board (1954)

Supportive African American parents during the period immediately following Brown v. Board (1954) helped their children develop their own educations. This support could come in the form of parents purchasing the materials their children needed. Parents also contributed directly to the school, as the facilities were often substandard in comparison to the White schools (Walker, 2000). Parents would donate their land to the school and food for the students. Parents would often attend school functions such as school concerts and athletic events (Walker, 2000). Not all forms of African American parental involvement were visible at the school site. For some families, sending their children to school was a form of involvement, as it was a financial

sacrifice for African American farm workers (Walker, 2000). Having the child of a farm worker at school and not in the field directly impacted the household's income. Another form of involvement was support of the school's disciplinary practices (Walker, 2000). For example, if a child was reprimanded at school by the teacher for lack of respect, the parent would reinforce the disciplinary action at home.

At the same time, however, there were examples of lack of parental involvement among African American parents. These examples included parents keeping children home and not seeing the importance of school—mostly due to their own lack of education (Walker, 2000). Nonetheless, due to the educational levels of some African American parents, they left the education of their children up to those who were educated and held the teachers in high regard. The principal was respected and the leadership they provided extended beyond the school and into local churches, the students' homes, and the local community. This was a key role in the segregated school. "The African American principal is described as a superintendent, supervisor, family counselor, financial advisor, community leader, employer and politician" (Walker, 2000, p. 275).

Cheryl Fields-Smith (2005) examined the role of parents post–Brown v. Board of Education (1954). After desegregation, the deep ties that many African American families had to their community schools were disrupted. African American children were, in some cases, bussed to communities that were historically unwelcoming to their race. While they were in desegregated schools, African American children may have been placed in courses with nearly all African American students, essentially experiencing segregation within the school itself. Due to cultural and language obstacles, and low expectations for their children from the teachers,

African American parents did not feel connected to the school (Fields-Smith, 2005). Prior to Brown v. Board, the collective struggle of African Americans built strong community connections. The unfair treatment that African Americans faced during segregation bonded them because they faced a common foe: discrimination. During this time, they built their own communities within the larger society to shield their children from subjugation and discrimination (Fields-Smith, 2005). This approach, they believed, increased their children's chances of success.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965)

The *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* was drafted as part of President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty." ESEA was designed to provide equal access to quality education and to provide federal funding to states for educational programs. Title I funds of the ESEA were allocated to support the diverse needs of socioeconomically disadvantaged students in impoverished communities (McDonnell, 2005). Title I is a federal categorical program, which means that to access the federal funds, schools must comply with federal requirements and accountability measures to maintain funding. The goal of the federal oversight and increased accountability measures was to improve academic performance (McDonnell, 2005).

No Child Left Behind (Reauthorization of ESEA)

The goal of No Child Left Behind (2002), proposed during the George W. Bush presidency, was to increase the level of accountability of school districts when it came to meeting the needs of disadvantaged groups. Steeped in standards-based education, NCLB (2002) accountability included heavy emphasis on academic achievement tests directly tied to the state

academic standards, as well as parental involvement in school governance. The academic performance of a school was directly tied to its funding.

NCLB (2002) legislation drew attention to test data of disadvantaged groups (i.e., special education, English language learners [ELLs], African American and Latino). The academic performance of African Americans, in particular, showed a large academic achievement disparity, in comparison to their White counterparts. African American students, on average, underperformed their White counterparts in English and math. According to NCLB, schools must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) each year, as evidenced by standardized test scores. Failure to meet AYP results in schools being placed in Program Improvement (PI). Schools labeled as PI are known in the community as failing schools. As a result of this legislation, many schools in poor, minority, urban areas have been labeled as failing, and thus carry a certain stigma not only in the communities they serve, but also in their state and on a national level. Some point to a lack of parental involvement, socioeconomic factors, historical implications, or low expectations at the school or local levels as key contributors to the lack of achievement.

Parental involvement under NCLB is mandatory, but the legislation does not spell out the degree to which parents should be involved (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Specifically, when it comes to the role that non-White or non-Asian parents play in middle-class schools, the question of how parental involvement is quantified is often overlooked. As African American families gain access to higher performing schools and schools in more affluent neighborhoods, the level of parental involvement and student achievement warrants closer examination.

Contributing Theories and Research

William Sampson's (2002) research on African American student achievement examined the role families play in their child's academic achievement. In his ethnographic study, Sampson (2002) looked at 12 poor African American families in a North Chicago suburb. In his study, there was very little parental involvement at the school site. Most of the parental involvement took place at home, with parents inquiring about homework, extracurricular activity, and the child's relationships (Sampson, 2002). He examined households of average-, high-, and low-achieving students. Of the 12 households examined, he found that the parents of the average-performing students were more involved in their child's schoolwork (i.e., helping with homework, asking about upcoming assignments) (Sampson, 2002). In the homes of high achievers, however, there was less involvement from the parents when it came to schoolwork. According to the findings, the lack of participation from high-achieving parents was not an indication of low expectations; it was quite the contrary (Sampson, 2002). The parents and grandparents of low-achieving students in this study were not as involved in their children's schoolwork (Sampson, 2002).

Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2008) studied African American parental involvement in middle schools to determine what contributed to their level of participation. Through their research, they found that while parents find participation important, the following were contributing factors to their involvement, or lack thereof: school's expectations of their involvement, familial structure, social or economic factors, and the school's policies and the manner in which they were carried out. Through the focus groups in this study, the researchers highlighted several strategies to engage African American parents. African American parents in

this study witnessed school personnel holding their children to lower expectations than children from other racial groups. Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2008) suggested that school personnel raise their expectations for African American students as a way to increase levels of engagement from the parents. To meet the demands of working parents and family demands, schools should provide some flexibility for meeting locations. When considering the diversity of education levels of parents, schools should provide some assistance for parents so they may assist their children with homework in the home. The final strategy their research suggested for school personnel was regarding the perceptions the schools held of African American parents. For African American parents to feel a part of the school community, school personnel must create a culture that assumes that parents care about their children and about being involved. (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008)

In Howard and Reynolds's (2008) study of middle-class African American parental involvement, they found that parents in their study believed that it was important to be involved in and outside of school as well as to develop relationships with school staff. They also discovered that the "intersection of race and class create a complicated picture of African American parents' beliefs regarding schools and the manner in which they should provide optimal learning environments for their children" (p. 11). This study also highlighted how social capital plays a role in how African American parents are perceived by school staff. When parents were able to articulate laws and procedures that schools should follow, staff appeared to be surprised. As such, Howard and Reynolds (2008) encouraged parents to engage in conflict to lead to mediation.

Throughout this research, the term *parental engagement* will be used—as opposed to *parental involvement*. The term *engagement* implies a greater degree of interaction. Parental engagement, as defined by Barton et al. (2004), "is a desire, and expression, and an attempt by parents to have an impact on what actually transpires around their children in schools and on the kinds of human, social, and material resources that are valued in schools" (p. 11). In this context, parental engagement is more than just a few hours spent at the school at a meeting or filing. It is a set of interactions between parents and school personnel that evolves into relationships for better educational outcomes for their children. These interactions empower parents who are high-poverty, allowing them to build capital in nontraditional ways by activating relationships that they can leverage to build influence over time.

Prior to delving into contemporary notions of African American parental engagement, the researcher will begin with the historical foundation, as the cultural-historical activity theory builds upon past experience. These historical experiences will serve as a frame for how African American parental engagement is currently perceived. Through this research, a contention is made that this historical and cultural perspective is embedded in a culture of racism and inequity. Critical race theory provided a lens for examining notions of racism and inequity throughout the African American educational experience.

Theoretical and Conceptual Intersections

This research study was rooted in cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) and critical race theory (CRT). Given the historical and cultural implications of African Americans and their experience in the United States educational system, both of these frameworks provided a critical and culturally relevant foundation for this research study.

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

The cultural-historical activity theory takes into account the context in which individuals are situated as they enter a particular environment. Individuals enter communities with unique perspectives largely based on their history and cultural experiences (Barton et al., 2004). There are five principles of activity theory: One event or system seen as a unit of analysis; multiple points of view in a community ("multi-voicedness"); historicity—events can only be understood with historical perspective; contradictions provide the avenue for innovation; "Expansive transformations" become possible when open to fundamentally different modes of operating (Engestrom, 2001, pp. 136–137). These five principles are understood with the questions: "1. Who are the subjects of learning? 2. Why do they learn? 3. What do they learn? 4. How do they learn?" (Engestrom, 2001, p. 133). By exploring these questions and principles, we are no longer viewing what an individual does, but more why and how they do those things.

The cultural and historical components provided a mode of considering how power plays a role in engagement. The "who" in the unit of analysis might be a highly educated, White administrator or a poor, high school dropout, African American parent. Within this dynamic, history and culture frame how each individual enters the community; within this unit of study, there is an inherent position of power; people are not equally situated in this unit and will not reap the same benefits in this environment (Barton et al., 2004).

As this theory relates to African American parental engagement in an urban public middle school setting, the researcher examined how parents viewed their engagement in the school and why they were engaged. To the extent that African Americans were engaged with teachers, staff, and other parents at the school site, these relationships were explored to

determine how they were developed and why parents began and continue the relationships. The researcher also examined how the school viewed parental engagement and the role of parents in their child's education.

Determining the hows and whys of parental engagement gives one an understanding of the context in which parents engage with the school. It does not, however, speak to the complexities of race, how they influence the educational context, as it relates to how school personnel view parents, and how parents may view themselves and their children as it relates to the school.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT was used to explore how race plays a role in how African American parents are viewed by the educational system and how these views influence the extent to which parents are invited to engage with the school. This theory posits that race is a deeply entrenched part of American life (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). It is with this approach that the researcher viewed the interactions and policy that determined the extent to which parents were involved.

CRT of education is based on three premises: race in the United States as the preeminent determining factor in inequity; a community based on the property rights; and the juncture of race and property creating a unit of analysis by which the researcher can explore educational inequity (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). These premises allowed the researcher to examine how African American parents, in a school largely populated by socioeconomically disadvantaged families, saw themselves and were viewed by school staff.

In the United States, race for African American people has always been a determining factor in inequity (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). As evidenced in the historical perspective of

this literature review, as slaves, African Americans were viewed as less than human and were denied basic rights because they were not seen as equal to Whites. In fact, African Americans were considered property. In more recent history, racial discrimination in education plays out in other ways. For example, African Americans are suspended and expelled at much higher rates than their White counterparts and have higher high school drop-out rates (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006).

In the United States, property rights play a significant role in society. Property ownership is an indicator of access and a key driver in capitalism. During slavery, slaves were property and were the driving force behind the profitability of the agrarian market. Currently, those who have the means to live in higher-income areas have access to better-performing schools, as property taxes fund the schools in those communities; in general, the higher the property values, the better the school (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). Discrimination through property is also demonstrated through access to resources at a school, which may include more competitive salaries for teaching staff, technology resources, diverse course offerings, and better access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006).

Examining how property and racial discrimination play a role in the education system provides a theoretical context for viewing how African American parents are situated in a larger societal context in terms of race and socioeconomic status. It also provides a critical perspective on how traditional notions of parental involvement may not necessarily be the appropriate measuring stick for assessing socioeconomically disadvantaged African American parents.

Ecologies of Parental Engagement

Using Bourdieu (1990) as the foundation, the Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) conceptual framework takes the attention away from what parents do to participate in their child's education—a more transactional dynamic often presented when school administrators and staff talk about parental involvement—instead focusing on the dynamics of why and how parents are engaged in their child's education (Barton et al., 2004). Traditional approaches to parental involvement have largely been based on the hours parents spend at the school site, or what they do while they are at the school. These approaches often view nontraditional ways of parental engagement through a deficit model. Parents who engage the school in nontraditional ways often fall into categories of poor, urban, single heads of households, or working families of color. School leadership should closely examine any deficit description of low-SES parental involvement and measure it against viewpoints that are culturally sensitive (Smith, 2008).

Involvement vs. Engagement

Deficit models of parental engagement view parents as easily controlled or lacking power, to be moved as the school sees fit (Valencia, 2010). These models also fail to acknowledge the resources and value parents and families bring with them to schools (Barton et al., 2004). In Lareau's (1987) research on social differences in family-school relationships, she found that parents had different approaches to the school, based on the varying resources they bring. Further, she found it was important to study "the significance of cultural capital within a social context" (Lareau, 1987, p. 83). All families have cultural capital; however, the values of dominant groups may be viewed as greater than others (Lareau, 1987).

The EPE framework uses Bourdieu's (1990) construct of field as it relates to social capital to explain the term *space* as it relates to Barton et al.'s (2004) work on parental involvement. Space refers to an area of both physical and theoretical boundaries that parents may face (i.e., academic, nonacademic, home, community, learning standards, and school adopted curricula). The principles communicate how they are acted upon by individuals and are shaped by capital they bring to a space. On a macro level, space can operate at a political, social, or cultural level. On a micro level, the person in a given space can interpret space at a given time (i.e., a lesson being taught from the perspective of a teacher in a classroom). (See Figure 1).

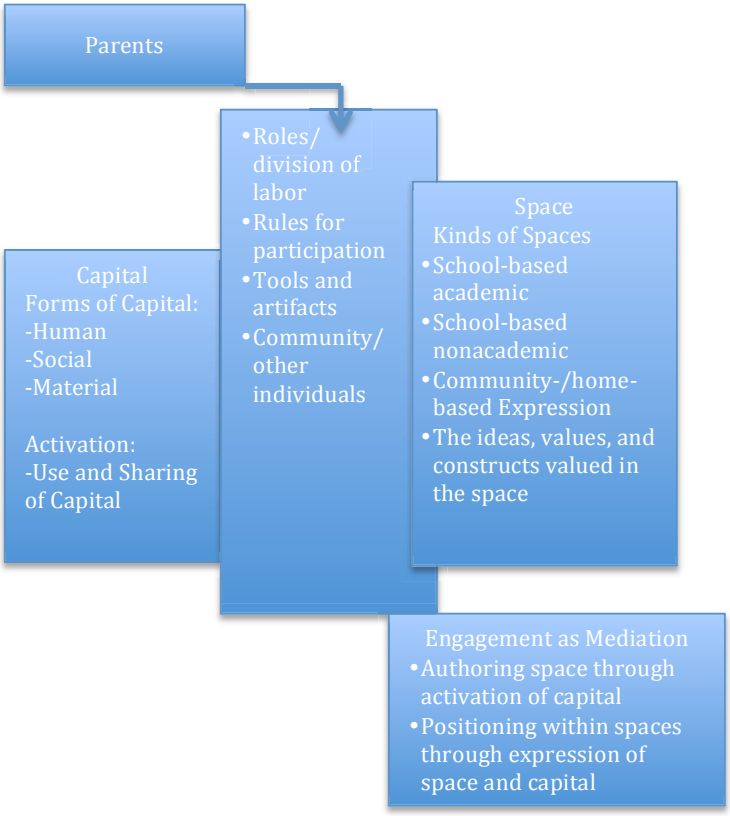

Figure 1. Ecologies of parental engagement (Barton et al, 2004, p. 7).

These are examples of how social capital may influence a given space. Through the EPE framework, parental engagement is analyzed based on what Barton et al. (2004) referred to as "three key conjectures" that rose out of their study:

- "Parental engagement is the mediation between space and capital by parents in relation to others in school settings (p. 6);
- Engagement as mediation must be understood as both an action and an orientation to action (p. 8);
- Differences in parental engagement across different kinds of spaces in urban schools (i.e., academic and nonacademic spaces) are both a micro and macro phenomenon." (Barton et al., 2004, p. 10)

Barton et al. juxtaposed parental engagement and involvement. Involvement is seen as parents participating at the school site as a presence. Engagement is relational and dynamic, largely based on actions from person-to-person steeped in context.

The Convergence of EPE, CRT, and Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

When it comes to the convergence of the three frameworks, cultural-historical activity theory, critical race theory, and the Ecologies of Parental Engagement, as it is constructed, CRT presupposes race as the preeminent factor in inequality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). Those who are disenfranchised are often considered as such because they lack power. In the history of the United States, individuals of color, more specifically African Americans, have been among the least powerful racial groups. According to CRT, race is a social construct; the impact of this construct has been and is still defined by its history. Race, history, and culture are all determining factors in the allocation of social capital.

Through history and culture, as outlined in the cultural-historical theory, one determines how and why individuals are situated in a particular context through the lens of power (Engstrom, 2001). History and culture are what individuals draw from when they interact with other individuals, when they approach a problem, and when they construct a solution. As this notion relates to how parents determine how and why they are engaged in their child's education, their determination is based on their own historical and cultural interactions with schools and parents, itself based on the degree of power one brings to a particular context. How were their parents engaged in their education? To what degree did their level of education or socioeconomics play a role in how they viewed engagement? What were their historical experiences with schooling (multigenerationally)? The answers to these questions are largely influenced by power dynamics. In the synthesis of the historical-cultural activity and CRT theories, with any individual or group, race, culture, and history are significant factors in how they view society and how they are viewed in society.

Similar to the cultural-historical activity theory, the Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) looks at how and why, but in the specific context of parental involvement and social capital. In this framework, the amount of social capital is determined by socioeconomics. Those with more social capital or power determine the rules of parental engagement—most commonly the school administration. In our current schooling model, parental involvement is based on a transactional dynamic measured by time spent at the school site, tasks carried out for the school site, and conversations held with school staff (Barton et al., 2004). The macro factors that define this model are political, social, and/or cultural and are tied directly to issues of power, race,

history and culture, thereby uniting cultural-historical activity theory, CRT, and EPE. (See Figure 2).

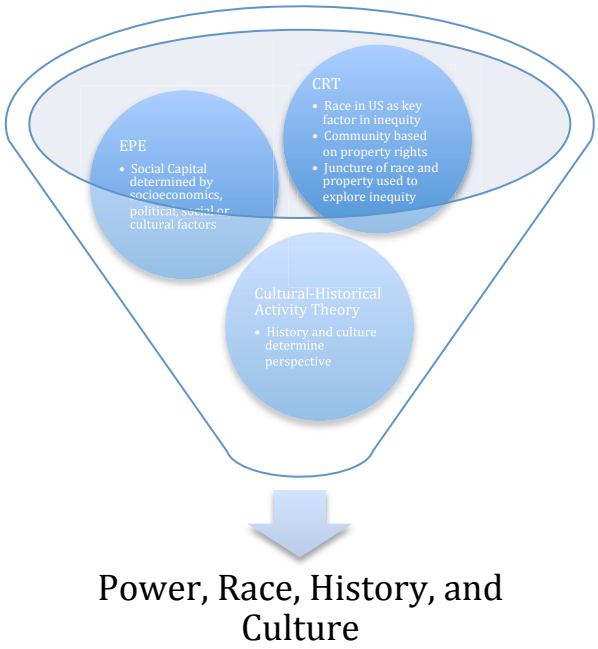

Figure 2. Convergence of EPE, CRT, and cultural-historical activity theory.

Chapter Summary

In subsequent chapters, the researcher will review the methodology, present the data, and offer data analysis. These chapters will employ the conceptual framework to examine what themes emerged and to analyze those themes to assist school leaders in their approach to African American parental engagement.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Background

One of the core tenets of critical race theory (CRT) in the analysis of law and society is recognizing the knowledge gleaned from the experience as well as the community of origin of people of color (Matsuda,1993). This speaks to the idea of voice, which is a consistent thread in CRT in legal scholarship (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Voice in this context is important as it elevates the personal experiences of people of color as valued and critical foundations of knowledge (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). As a result, CRT scholars view and use the personal narratives as credible sources of "evidence and thereby challenge a 'numbers only' approach to documenting inequity or discrimination, which tends to certify discrimination from a quantitative rather than a qualitative perspective" (p. 35).

In this study, the Ecologies of Parental Engagement in urban education served as the conceptual framework to examine African American parental engagement (Barton et al., 2004). Specifically, through an analysis of African American parental engagement in a high-poverty, urban, charter middle-school setting, the researcher sought to determine how the population came to understand practices and beliefs, while building consistent relationships with other parents and those in the school community. Consistent with the CRT core tenet of voice, parent voices in this study served as a critical aspect of the research.

The literature review presented historical perspectives of African American historical experiences over a 150-year period, which gave rise to legislation, the Civil Rights Movement, litigation, educational policy, and accountability. Together, these aspects of a history fraught

with racial discrimination, disenfranchisement, and broken promises deliver a compelling foundation that underpins the current lens through which African Americans are viewed and currently view the educational system. Through history and culture, as outlined in the cultural-historical theory, one determines how and why individuals are situated in a particular context through the lens of power (Engstrom, 2001). After setting the historical and cultural context for African American parental engagement, the hows and whys of parental engagement, as well as how parents foster relationships with school staff and other parents were examined.

Research Questions

The researcher posed three questions to determine how African American parents defined their own parental engagement in the charter middle school setting: (a) How do African American parents in a high-poverty middle school setting, with a 98% Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) population, come to understand practices and beliefs at their child's school? (b) How do African American parents build relationships with other parents and school staff? (c) What factors do African American parents identify as contributing to their parental engagement or lack thereof?

Research Design

A qualitative research methodology was employed for this research. Specifically, the case study was conducted based on the Ecologies of Parental Engagement in Urban Education perspective (Barton et al., 2004). The researcher analyzed African American parental engagement in a high-poverty, urban, charter middle-school setting to determine how these parents came to understand practices and beliefs at the school site, while building consistent relationships with other parents and with those in the school community. Similar to the approach

of Barton et al. (2004), one-on-one interviews and review of school policies related to parental engagement were conducted. In addition to the one-on-one interviews, each constituency engaged in focus groups. However, the researcher primarily relied on the one-on-one in-depth interviews. The steps for data collection were as follows:

- The researcher sent requests to all teachers and staff who met the criteria for participation in the study.
- The researcher interviewed two teachers and one staff who met criteria for the study.
- The researcher interviewed the principal of the school.
- The researcher interviewed 21 parents. Seven parents participated in focus groups, 14 parents participated in phone interviews.
- The researcher analyzed the school policies pertaining to parental engagement.

The first step of the data collection was to send requests for participation in the study to school personnel and parents. The interviews were conducted with the school principal, two of the teachers who qualified for participation in the study, one staff person, and 21 African American parents (representing 10% of the total student population). School personnel were emailed and asked personally by the researcher at a staff meeting. A variety of outreach methods were administered for parent participation including the following: emails, calls, letters sent home via the student, text messages, and robo-calls.

In comparison to other staff, the teachers most frequently interacted with the parents at the school site. The interview with the teachers gleaned their views of parental engagement in general and how African American parents they served interacted with them. Teachers were also

asked about how they built relationships with parents and which relationships were stronger and what contributed to the strength of these relationships.

The staff was generally tasked with tracking how parents complied with the parent engagement policy. South Middle School had a staff person who served in the role of parent liaison dedicated to support parent engagement. Along with teachers, the parent liaison interacted with parents more frequently than any others on staff. School staff were interviewed to determine the level at which parents adhered to the parent engagement policy and to provide examples of the school policy in action.

The interview with the school principal provided the view of the leadership as it related to the goals of parent engagement at the school site. The principal also provided the vision for how the school faculty and staff engaged parents and the expectations for parent engagement.

Parents were interviewed to determine how they viewed parental engagement, their perspective on the policy at the school site, and how their personal beliefs about parental engagement aligned or misaligned with those articulated in the school policy. The parents gave their perspectives on how they were engaged by teachers, staff members, school administration, and other parents.

The researcher hypothesized that African American parents brought their own notions of parental engagement to the school setting. African American parents might have untraditional ideas of engagement that are framed by historical or cultural perspectives, which may or may not be met with acceptance by those at the school site. If school staff understood the cultural-historical perspectives of the African American parents, and how these perspectives frame their

views, avenues might be created for parents to participate in ways that are meaningful in their contexts (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006).

Research Population

The school selected for this study was in a large urban area in Southern California, had a population of African American parents greater than 80%, and free and reduced lunch (FRL) populations of more than 80%. This school was part of a larger network of 11 charter schools, commonly known as a Charter Management Organization (CMO). Participants in the study were the following: African American parents, administrator, teachers, and staff. For the purposes of this research, the school was referred to using a pseudonym: South Middle School. The school was selected due to its geographic location, the high population of African American students, and high population of Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) students.

South Middle School served approximately 217 sixth- through eight-grade students and had a FRL population that was approximately 98%. There were roughly 89% African American and 7% Latino students. The school had a Special Education population of approximately 8%. South Middle School had a total staff of 24, with 10 teachers, 13 staff, and one administrator.

Participants

Ten percent of parents (a total of 21) were selected to participate in the study. All parents at the school site received notification to participate in the study. Ten percent were selected to provide a representative sample size of parents. Conducting the research with this particular group allowed data collection that could potentially benefit secondary educational practitioners and African American parents in lower-income schools, who have been historically underserved in educational settings.

To participate in the study, faculty and staff must have been employed at the school site for at least two years; this was to ensure teachers and staff has historical context on school policies, the school culture and climate, and relationships with students and parents. Given the limited number of employees at the school site, all who qualified to participate received an invitation to take part in the study. Of the 10 classroom teachers, two met the requirement to participate. The staff member, who served as the parent liaison, qualified to participate in the study as well. All of those staff and faculty employed by the school that met the requirement to participate agreed to engage in the study.

Table 1

Type and Total of School Personnel

School	Staff	Teachers	Administrators	Total Personnel
South Middle School	13	10	1	24
Actual Participants	1	2	1	4

Site Selection

Considering the focus on African American parents, their interactions with each other and with school personnel, the school selected provided the greatest opportunity to explore the research questions. With the large population of African American parents in an inner-city area and the high population of FRL students, the site provided the researcher the best opportunity to gather data needed to respond to the research questions.

Data Collection

To determine the perspectives of the school administrator, faculty, and staff of African American parental engagement at the school sites, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews were conducted with not only parents, but also teachers, and a staff member. The principal

participated in a one-on-one interview. The researcher examined the Parent-Student Handbook focusing on areas that pertained to parent engagement and the school parental involvement policy. The research design provided a rich context from which data could be triangulated from multiple perspectives, with the ultimate objective of providing a foundation for the African American parents' point of view. Data from the interviews with school employees, parent interviews, and the school policy were triangulated to determine the type of engagement expected from parents, how they are expected to participate, how the importance parental engagement is communicated, and the parent's perception of the value of the type of participation.

The researcher shared a three-to-four-minute summary of her professional background and the study. The researcher informed the participants that the interviews would be recorded and she would take notes to ensure that she captured all the information. The researcher conducted the interview based on the protocol. Prior to concluding the interview, the researcher answered any questions from the participants.

Sample Size

A total of 10% of African American parents (21 total parents) were interviewed at the school site or by phone. The principal, two teachers (representing 100% of classroom teachers who met the criteria for participation), and one staff were interviewed. The school policy contained in the Parent-Student Handbook, on parental engagement was collected from the school website.

Data Collection Method

Upon the start of the study, the researcher requested a list of the school staff as well as African American families that received FRL services from the school. The school staff information, which included email addresses, was provided by the principal.

The parent information retrieved from the central office was not disaggregated into the FRL population or by race. The failure to provide FRL information was due to the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), as noted by the central office of the CMO. There was no rationale given for not disaggregating by race. Therefore, the researcher sent emails and written correspondence to all families indicating the purpose of the study, the racial population sought, and invited them to participate. The fact that FRL was not released is a limitation of the study. Considering the 98% FRL population at the school, instead of socioeconomic status being the criteria for participation in the study, the researcher examined how the parents within a primarily socioeconomically disadvantaged school came to understand the practices and beliefs in the school environment.

The data collection method was revised three times, due to limited responses from parents: (a) The researcher randomly selected 20% of the parents using Excel and sent participation requests via email and hardcopy; (b) On the researcher's behalf, the school sent participation requests to all families via text, email, and hardcopy; (c) The researcher called families, made an in-person request at the February parent informational meeting, and sent personal emails to families requesting participation in the study.

The first method included was random participant selection for parents, entering all the parents' names into Excel, to select 20% parents with children currently enrolled at the school.

Twenty percent of all parents were selected, so that in the event that some parents declined to participate, the remaining parents on the list may be selected. From the list of 20% of parents, all were sent a written invitation to participate in the study, via their child. Included in the invitation was an offer of a $20 gift card for the parent's participation. The gift card was offered as an incentive for parents to participate in the study.

Parents were given two days to respond to the request for participation in the study. The researcher received zero responses from the invited parents after the two-day response period. After receiving no responses, the researcher consulted with the site principal and determined that she should broaden her outreach to invite all parents at the school site to participate in the study; this was the second revision of the data collection method. The principal agreed to assist the researcher in her outreach efforts by including an announcement of the study via email and text message; this was in addition to the written invitation via the student. The researcher delivered the written notifications to the parent liaison to distribute the following day. The school distributed the written notifications two days later—the date they were to be returned to the researcher from the participants. The text messages and emails were sent on the correct timeline. The researcher received zero responses from the 217 parents in this second attempt.

The third revision to the data collection method occurred the week immediately following the second revision. The researcher returned to the parent contact list and begin calling the parents listed and verbally requesting they participate in the study. The researcher also sent emails following the phone calls to request parent participation. From the phone calls, the researcher received verbal commitments from the parents to participate. The researcher also attended a school-sponsored parent meeting, requesting participation in the study. As a result of

these additional outreach efforts, parents began participating in focus groups, or agreed to be interviewed by phone, due to work schedules and inability to attend at the scheduled times.

Focus Groups

The parents and teachers were interviewed, in a focus group or individually over the course of an eight-week period in a semistructured setting. The researcher conducted focus groups separately for parents and school personnel to provide an opportunity to hear the various perspectives and to identify themes that would emerge to be further explored in interviews. Most of the teachers and staff who participated in the focus groups also participated in interviews. Parents who participated in focus groups did not participate in individual interviews. The participants were asked questions using the parent or teacher/staff protocols. Follow-up questions were asked in the focus group, by the researcher for further clarification and for participants to elaborate on thoughts that would provide additional data in response to the research questions.

Interviews

This individual approach is based on the methodology used by researchers of the Ecologies of Parental Engagement in Urban Education (Barton et al., 2004). While the researcher was prepared to interview the parents at the school site, the goal was to interview them away from the school site to gather more information—preferably at their homes, to connect with them in a more informal setting (Hatch, 2002). According to Hatch, in a less formal setting, subjects may feel more comfortable to share information freely. However, during the course of the study the parents participating preferred to meet the researcher at the school site or via phone. Based on material from the parent interviews, an analysis was conducted to determine the beliefs and

practices the parents related to the school and parental engagement and the relationships they had built with other parents and with school staff.

In interviews with school staff, the researcher sought to gather data on their values and practices related to parental engagement. Particularly, the researcher gathered data to determine if the values and beliefs parents shared aligned with those of the school or not; if not, the researcher asked questions to allow them to share why they believed there was a misalignment.

The school employees participated in interviews and/or a focus group at the school site. Individual interviews were conducted after the focus group to gather more in-depth information from the participants and to explore any themes that arose from the focus group interview.

Table 2

Timeline of Research Study

Timeline	Activity
Chapter One	August 2014
Chapter Two	November 2014
Chapter Three	August 2015
Chapter Four	May 2016
Chapter Five	July 2016

Instrumentation

This qualitative research case study included focus groups, and individual and face-to-face interviews conducted by the researcher with African American parents, school principal, teachers, and school staff. The participants were asked open-ended questions based on their perspectives as a parent or school staff. The responses to the open-ended questions led the

researcher to ask follow-up questions for additional context or for deeper understanding (Hatch, 2002).

For purposes of data triangulation, the researcher conducted a review of the parent involvement policies in the Parent-Student Handbook. The researcher examined these policies for additional context on how, what, and why the school communicated with parents.

Data Analysis

As highlighted in the theoretical framework, the convergence of the frameworks—cultural-historical activity theory, critical race theory (CRT), and Ecologies of Parental Engagement—provided the structure for analyzing African American parental engagement. Cultural-historical theory focuses on how and why individuals interact in the ways they do in a given context; it also frames how interactions with other individuals outside perspectives may impact the how and why in a particular setting. The cultural-historical activity theory explains how inequality of power in social settings impacts those within and outside of power when placed in the same activity network (Engestrom, 2001). CRT regards "racism as endemic and ingrained in American life" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006, p. 18). As a frame for this research, and in consideration of the historical circumstances that brought African Americans to education in America, parental engagement is examined through a critical race perspective as it plays out in this particular school setting. The convergence of these frameworks is explored by viewing the African American participant through the context of a cultural and historical perspective, while examining how traditional notions of parental engagement are framed by race, and how the untraditional notions of it are challenged—or, in some cases, may not be considered at all.

The researcher conducted an inductive analysis of the data based on the interviews and document review (Hatch, 2002). According to Potter (1996), inductive analysis arises from studying specifics from single observations of the data and shifts to searching for repeated instances "across individual then arguing for those patterns as having the status of general explanatory statements" (p.151). Hatch (2002) proposed an inductive model by which the researcher approached the data analysis. As knowledge is developed over time, the researcher begins by reviewing the data to determine how the analysis will be framed. After framing, domains are created to determine how data are organized (Hatch, 2002; Spradley, 1979). These domains are categorized through a semantic relationship, terms that group lines of thinking. The researcher determines which domains are most critical to the study and codes them appropriately. Upon determining the most critical domains, the researcher reexamines the data, and further refines the critical domains and notes links within the data; this step is followed by further analysis within domains. Based on analysis of the critical domains, an outline was developed to articulate the relationships between them. Lastly, the researcher identifies portions of the data to corroborate elements of the outline.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

This study was limited to one charter middle school within Los Angeles County. This may limit the generalizability of the study. While charter schools are considered public schools, they are schools of choice. A parent or guardian, as opposed to a traditional district enrollment process that is determined by geographic boundaries, selects schools of choice (e.g., magnet, pilot, charter). As a school of choice, there is an assumption that parents or guardians are selecting a school based on certain factors (e.g. educational program, location, academic

performance, etc.), versus traditional district schools enrollment, which is only determined based on where a child lives. Due to these enrollment practices, there may be a perception that parents of charter students will likely be more involved than parents who may not elect to choose a charter school. However, a 2007 survey of charter school administrators, across three states, found parental engagement was an area in which 29% said they experienced "major challenges"; 43% reported it as a "minor challenge" (Gross & Pochop, 2007).

An area of critical importance in this study was the exploration of African American parent voice in the United States. Particularly in urban schools with high populations of socioeconomically disadvantaged students, African American parents are not typically sought after, in culturally responsive ways, to serve as partners in improving educational or behavioral outcomes, or policies that meet the needs of African American students more broadly, throughout the school community (Ladson-Billings, 1994). These issues transcend the charter and traditional district school debate. The fact that this study took place at a public charter school, while it is an important data point, was not the defining point in this research study. Therefore, the charter school setting was deemphasized and African American parent voice was highlighted for further analysis.

Another limitation of the study was due to Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations. While the researcher sought to interview families who received Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL), information about the FRL status of families could not be released from the central office. Considering the 98% FRL population at the school, instead of socioeconomic status being the criteria for participation in the study, the researcher examined how the parents

within a socioeconomically disadvantaged school came to understand the practices and beliefs in the school environment.

The assumptions associated with this study related to the necessity and obligation to preserve confidentiality and anonymity throughout this study for all participants, so that all participants would answer honestly. The researcher provided reasonable assurances to the participants that their confidentiality would be preserved. Additionally, participants were aware of their ability to withdraw from the study at any time.

Chapter Summary

As illustrated in Table 3, the qualitative data that were compiled through focus groups, individual interviews, and document analysis were organized to answer (a) How do African American parents in a high-poverty middle school setting, with a 98% Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) population, come to understand practices and beliefs at their child's school? (b) How do African American parents build relationships with other parents and school staff? (c) What factors do African American parents identify as contributing to their parental engagement or lack thereof?

Table 3

Responsiveness of Data to Research Questions

Research Question	School personnel focus group	School personnel interviews	Parent focus group	Parent interview	Parent and Student Handbook
How do African American parents in a high-poverty middle school setting, with a 98% Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) population, come to understand practices and beliefs at their child's school?	X	X	X	X	X
How do African American parents build relationships with other parents and school staff?	X	X	X	X	
What factors do African American parents identify as contributing to their parental engagement or lack thereof?			X	X	X

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND MAIN FINDINGS

Restatement of the Purpose

Research and history has shown consistently that socioeconomically disadvantaged families of color not only hold education at the utmost importance, but also that parents often make extraordinary sacrifices to ensure their children have access to better educational opportunities (Fields-Smith, 2005; Walker, 2003). In some cases, educators may not know or appreciate the "invisible strategies" that families of color use to support the education of their children (Auerbach, 2007). The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine African American parental engagement in a high-poverty, urban, charter middle school setting, to determine how they come to understand practices and beliefs about the school, while building consistent relationships with other parents and with those in the school community.

A clear understanding of these factors, based on the voices of African American parents, may be useful to school leaders and teachers in better understanding the familial, cultural, and social context of the perspectives of African American parental engagement. Both charter and district schools seem to have a greater interest in parental involvement, sharing information with parents about expectations of the school, presence at meetings and events, but not necessarily engagement (Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & DePedro, 2011). Consistent with critical race theory (CRT), this study highlights the importance of parent voice as valued and critical foundations of knowledge (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Based on these understandings, school leaders and teachers may develop culturally and socially responsive ways to include inner-city African American parents in the middle school community.

Research Questions

The researcher posed three questions to determine how African American parents defined their own parental engagement in the charter middle school setting: (a) How do African American parents in a high-poverty middle school setting, with at 98% Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) population come to understand practices and beliefs at their child's school? (b) How do African American parents build relationships with other parents and school staff? (c) What factors do African American parents identify as contributing to their parental engagement or lack thereof?

Research Process

This research study used a qualitative case study approach to answering the research questions. Specifically, the case study was conducted based on the Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) in Urban Education perspective (Barton et al., 2004). The researcher analyzed African American parental engagement in a high-poverty, urban, charter middle school setting to determine how these parents came to understand practices and beliefs at the school site, while building consistent relationships with other parents and with those in the school community. Similar to the approach of Barton et al. (2004), the researcher analyzed one-on-one interviews and the school policies related to parental engagement. All participants were interviewed using a semistructured interview protocol. In addition to the analysis of one-on-one interviews, the researcher analyzed focus group transcripts. The interviews and focus groups were conducted with parents, teachers, staff, and the principal, over a seven-month period.

The focus groups with teachers and staff were completed first. There were a total of three teachers invited to participate in the study, as these were the only teachers who met the

requirement of being employed at the school for at least two years. There were a total of 10 teachers on staff. Of the 10 teachers, three teachers had been on staff at least two years. The one teacher who chose not to participate had recently left the school for an administrative role at another school. The staff member who participated in the study served in the role of a parent liaison and was entering his third year of employment at the school.

Due to the small number of teacher and staff participants in the study, one female and two males, the researcher combined the focus group. However, on the day of the focus group, one of the teachers cancelled for health reasons. The researcher conducted the focus group with one teacher and one staff member, both male. The teacher and staff focus group was held for approximately one half hour after school. The teacher who cancelled participated in a one-on-one interview with the researcher the following week.

There were nine questions posed in the semistructured focus group interview. To analyze the data from the focus group, the researcher analyzed the responses from the participants by theme and categorized them by responses that required further explanation for clarification or for depth by the participant. The consistent themes were: building trust and relationships with parents, defining parental engagement, school outreach to parents, and importance of parental engagement. Responses that the researcher identified as requiring more explanation were formulated as follow-up questions for the one-on-one interviews.

All teachers and staff who participated in the study engaged in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. The one-on-one interviews with teachers and staff were approximately 25–30 minutes in length. With the exception of the one female teacher who did not participate in the initial focus group, the questions posed during the one-on-one interview were based on previous

responses. The remaining interview participant was posed the nine questions asked in the focus group and was asked follow-up questions during the one-on-one interview.

The principal participated in a one-on-one interview, two weeks after the teachers and staff. The principal interview protocol was comprised of eight questions. The interview with the principal was approximately 40 minutes. The questions posed were based on the themes defining parental engagement, communicating the goals of parent engagement at the school to employees, communicating the goals of parent engagement to parents, building relationships with parents, and African American parental engagement.

The 21 parents who participated were either in focus groups or one-on-one phone interviews. There were a total of two focus groups, one focus group of four parents and one focus group of two parents. The remaining 14 parents participated in phone interviews, due to work schedule conflicts and unavailability to come to meet in person. The parent interview protocol was comprised of 11 questions based on the themes: engagement in child's education, benefits/drawbacks of being involved or uninvolved, importance of African American involvement, school expectations and outreach for parental engagement, and building relationships with school staff/teachers and building relationships with other parents. The researcher analyzed the responses to identify the common themes across the 21 parent focus groups and one-on-one interviews.

The school policy on parental engagement was analyzed to triangulate the data received from school staff/teachers, principal and parents. The Parent-Student Handbook included the parent involvement policies, which included specific opportunities for parents to volunteer and participate, as well as communication procedures and the parent-student compact.

Organization of Chapter Four

In Chapter 4, the researcher will present the data collected via the research process and data collection method. The research questions posed will be discussed and answered in Chapter 5.

Summary of Key Findings

Focus Groups

The questions posed to parents and teacher focus groups were based on the work of Barton et al. (2004) conducted based on the Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) in Urban Education and the research questions, or trends that emerged in the data. The questions were modified for the audience of school staff, teachers, and the principal. The questions that were based on the EPE framework and the research questions were:

- What motivates you to be involved/uninvolved?
- What are the benefits or drawbacks to being involved/uninvolved?
- Why should African American parents be involved in their child's middle school experiences?
- Does your child's school have expectations for parents to participate? If so, what are they?
- What type of outreach, if any, does the school do to encourage parental engagement?
- How would you classify your relationships with your child's teachers or school staff? Are there some relationships that are stronger than others? Explain.
- How would you classify your relationships with your other parents at your child's school?

Questions posed that related to the trends in the data were:

- [If a parent responded that they are not engaged as much as they would like] What keeps you from being as engaged?
- What do you think it means to be engaged in your child's education?

Parent focus groups. The themes that emerged in the parent focus groups and interviews were the importance of parent engagement in middle school, parent engagement as important factor in child's success, few parent-to-parent relationships, and challenges that prevent parents from volunteering at school. In the first parent focus group, most of the parents, with the exception of one, said that they were not as engaged. For one parent, it was because of frustration with communication with her child's teacher, for another it was because their child seemed to be doing satisfactorily academically:

> It's to come and see what's going on in the classroom, because when I ask my son what's going on, "Oh, I'm doing okay. I'm going to pass." I need to come see for myself so I can learn just like he's learning, because I still need to learn too because he come home with some homework, I probably wouldn't even know what to do with it, but if I come into the classroom like a student, then I can learn.

Another parent expressed dissatisfaction with a teacher's communication style, as well as the amount of tests and lack of homework her child received:

> Well, because I'm trying to get involved, but I'm not getting the response that I want beneath the scene. At times, I'm all in, and then other times I'm like, "Forget it. I just can't wait until I take you out."

The researcher asked for clarification on what the parent meant by "the response that I want beneath the scene" and the parent responded with the following:

> Well, I don't know if it's wrong for me to base it on how it was when I was going to school in elementary or middle school, but I'm used to seeing, "Okay, you have a test this week, and three weeks or a month from now, you're going to have another test," but now, it's just I don't know when tests are. She doesn't get any homework assignments. When I do bring it up to the teachers, she still doesn't get homework assignments. I don't know how to support my daughter and her improving her grades if I'm not getting any response from the teacher more than, "Oh, she's a great student, lovely to have in class. She just needs to stop talking so much." Okay, cool. I talked a lot [00:08:00] too, but I need to know about the work. That's what I'm not getting enough of. Can you send her home with something extra? Anything.
>
> One of her teachers, he talks entirely too fast. I never understand what he's talking about. By the time we start with one question, by the time we finish with his answer, I have no idea what he just said. I'm like, "How does my daughter even understand, or the other students, if I can't even get through what he's saying?" That's why sometimes I'm in, and then sometimes I'm just like, "When is this school year just going to be over?" It's like I'm not going to get any answers. I try to show up to the parent meetings, so that's where my involvement comes in.

One of the parents in the focus group described herself as very involved:

> I'm very involved because education is very important to me with my kids. Since we located here, we're kind of new to the area. I'm really involved. Try to make sure they get all the education that they need, whatever is needed. I'm their advocate.
>
> I haven't had a lack of chance and opportunity here at [South] Middle School, but I'm working on coming to volunteer more. That's what I'm used to doing. I have more time on my hand because I don't work at this time, so I'm able to volunteer and come in, check in to see if they on point, how their grades are, and I try to stay more one-on-one base with the teachers.

In the second parent focus group, parents expressed challenges with work schedules as a barrier to parental engagement:

> I am not that involved. I just...other than the phones calls, cause I work a lot. I get a lot of phone calls so, it's a lot of phone calls from different teachers. Sometimes text messages which helps because sometime I can't answer the phone. My parent involvement is a negative. I'm going to be doing a volunteer soon. Because evening, after work, I come. But this in between hours and volunteering for trips and the little stuff that they have, I can't.

Another parent expressed her limited availability due to work schedules:

> I mean I do come and check on him and things like that. They inform me of whatever needs to be taken care of or what not, and whatever situation. As far as the activities, it's hard. I got to work.

Teacher/staff focus group. As it related to defining parental engagement, in the teacher/staff focus group, the opinion on parental engagement in terms of engagement with

school personnel and being physically at the school site, versus engagement outside of the school site, in nontraditional ways, was split. A teacher stated:

> For me as a teacher, parental engagement is based on the parents being engaged with the student academically, meaning supporting them with their work, specifically with the actual [content 00:01:26], and then also making sure that they are organized and understand how the learning cycle goes and what assignments are due when, what specific materials you need to be successful, and that you're on time to you school. Then outside of school, I would say parental engagement is exposing students to other academic support resources and supplementary resources [00:02:00] like, I guess, some content related activities. Maybe if you're interested in math, like engineering workshops, or if you're interested in English, going to different journalism councils and joining the kind of organizations that support the student and their interests.

The parent liaison had a different take on parental engagement.

> I would say the parents' interest in what's actually going on at the school, inside the classroom and outside. Actively making it a point to visit the school to get to know the staff and get to know the operations of the school. Supporting the school in its vision any way you can while supporting your student at the same time academically.

Interviews

School personnel interviews. Table 4 outlines the themes that arose from the teacher/staff focus group and interviews. The school personnel interviewed all had similar views of the importance of building relationships and trust with African American families they served. While there were some differing opinions on if parent engagement included physically being at

the school site, there was recognition that parents may be engaged in other activities with their children outside of school. All school personnel were consistent in their answers about how the school provided outreach to families on how to engage with the school.

Table 4

Themes from School Personnel Focus Group and Interviews

Themes	Staff/Teacher Focus Group	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Principal
Building trust & relationships	X	X	X	X	X
School outreach	X	X	X	X	X
Defining parental engagement	X	X	X	X	X

Building trust and relationships. All school personnel identified building trust and relationships with parents as a critical part of parental engagement. They all thought it was important to reach out to parents early in the school year to make introductions and to highlight the positives they were seeing with students academically and behaviorally.

> When it comes to our [African American] people, I would say that you actually have to go over and beyond you cant actually expect for them to come to you and give that support [off 00:14:36] top. You have to make a phone call. You have to make a personal relationship with this person. Oftentimes you have to put up with whatever the complaint is. Sometimes there's a concern or a complaint, and you actually have to take on that verbal beating in order to get access to fix that complaint. You must resolve the issue

> before you get this person on your team. For some reason there's a negative connotation that I noticed with what the school wants to do when it comes to the parent and the student. I can call the parent and say your student is not coming into class with their hood on. It's a negative thing. Why does my son have to do that? Why does this have to happen? I believe actually getting this parent on your side, [going over and beyond 00:15:24], will eventually get that parent to ... I think it's a trust area. You can establish that trust with this parent that I'm actually here on your side, on your student's side. You have more of a [likelihood 00:15:40] actually get that parent to come around and join that vision of the school.

The parent liaison stressed the importance of listening and following through as an important part of establishing trust with families.

> Whatever I can do to establish I'm someone who can be trusted that we're here for the betterment of the family, not just that student. It could be giving a gift and always acknowledging the positive things about what you see in your student. That usually brings parents around quickly. Positive phone calls before you receive a negative phone call. Then, making myself 100% transparent to what my vision is for their child and their family. Make myself, also, available for whatever the concern or complaint is. If I see you coming in [00:18:00] in a negative attitude, I'm going to ask you what's going on, what can I help you with. I'm just always there to listen to them. Most of the time, just having somebody listen to you can actually address the issue in their complaint. It might take a 30 minute listen to hear that one issue and usually after that you listen to them. It's

all good from there, honestly. Usually. You making sure you follow up with the concern and then usually you have no issue with the trust again.

A teacher gave the following example as it related to the importance of trust in relationship building with African American parents.

> It is more of trust than anything. The sooner you create a relationship with a parent where there's just a [phone 00:16:15] call saying “hey”. The first week of school. The first day of school. I want to give you my e-mail address. Talk number. Make sure you have it in case you have any questions or concerns come up. Parents are all automatically like wow, nobody did that before. Great, I'll take that. If something comes up, and you make sure you let me know, too. If they're doing something that they [have no business 00:16:34] and usually that message gets relayed to the kid. The math teacher called today… by letting them that you'll be whatever setting you have.

Another teacher stated that parents she had the strongest relationships were proactive and contacted her first.

> They were formed [because] that they called me first. They're the ones that in the beginning you're like, "Oh boy. Here we go," but you can tell they really have their child's back. They make it clear in the very first conversation that they're calling way before parent conference or way before back to school night that they really want to be involved, and for me to work with them. Those are formed by text messages, phone calls, them coming over here, them letting me know if I need anything, et cetera.

The parent liaison noted the proactive communication as a way to building closer relationship.

That's how I know who's interested. When I think in my head who are my top parents that I can call right now I need you guys to come help out, I think of the ones who I'm in communication with via email. The ones that have came up to me and said this is what I need to happen. Even if it's a complaint because now I have incentive to get you involved in this school through your complaint. You don't like the food, well come on in and let's help me serve it. Figure out what it is you don't like about it. You have an issue with a certain teacher. Okay, let's set up a meeting in the classroom. You know what I mean? She can come in that's the incentive for me whether it's a complaint or concern.

School Outreach. The teachers, staff, and principal all mentioned several types of outreach techniques or communication tools they used to communicate with the parents. These included newsletters, parent orientation at the beginning of the school year, parent informational meetings, flyers, text messages, and email communication.

The weekly newsletter [is how we encourage parent involvement]. We always let them know that we need help, volunteer hours, incentives, et cetera. That I see.

Another teacher expressed:

We have newsletters we send out together with information. We have parent nights, parent informational meetings. We have cupcakes with [The principal] where they come and discuss whatever the current issue is that's going on. We have parent-teacher conference. We have a back to school night. I call at the beginning of the school year and say, "Hey, my name is [Teacher's name redacted] your kids, students math teacher. This is my contact information if you have any questions." We build a relationship and we communicate.

Parent engagement defined. School personnel acknowledged various types of engagement they saw among African American parents. However, the school staff had an expectation of communication with the families of their students as an indication of engagement or interest in the education of the student.

> …knowing what's happening is so critical because when I hear a parent tell me, "He comes home every day and says he doesn't have homework." We're two months into the school year. It's like that signals to me specifically that there's some type of disconnect here about your understanding of what your role in the student's academic life and how you should be supporting them because there's no way you should be going on two months, three months without knowing whether or not your kid actually is doing her homework. Always for me, I tell the parent like, "Is this the first year that your student has lied to you concerning what their academic requirements are?" If it's not, then we need to talk about a system we can put in place to start next year to make sure that we don't find out six months from now.

Another interviewee expressed similar thoughts as it related to the level of communication between the parent and the teacher as an indication of engagement.

> I define parental engagement by the parents being involved in their student's education. They call me. They want to know what grades their student's are getting. They're helping them with their homework. They're involved with what I need. We're just working together to make their child successful.

The principal acknowledged that there might be parents who may not play an active role on campus, but were engaged in their child's education. While she had not been tracking this

type of nontraditional engagement, she had some indicators that could highlight parents were aware of homework assignments and tests.

> I haven't really been intentional about understanding the impact a parent has when there's a non-traditional approach to their engagement with their child and their child's school community, but I will share just of the scholars that, of the parents that I rarely see, but their children are doing an excellent job, or they're exceptionally ... they're doing a great job at school. When I talk to those scholars, well they do share with me, well my parent does talk to me about how my school day is going, and they tell me they wish they could be here. Or they may say that previously in elementary school [00:14:00] they were much more hands on, but for whatever reason they're not as hands on, but they're still committed to my learning.
>
> We ask that parents sign agenda's on a weekly basis, and we check for these signatures every Friday morning. So that give me an idea of who those parents are that we may never see, but I know that every Friday morning, their child comes with their agenda signed. Then I can also, if I'm doing further investigation, see that that child is doing a great job with, in terms of grades and academics, that that parent, my assumption of course is that that parent is just taking a non-traditional approach to supporting their child's learning.

School personnel were asked to define parental engagement. Their responses were consistent as it related to parents showing an interest in their child's education. There were some differences in opinion as to how parents might show their level of interest (i.e., visiting the school, attending meetings, calling the teachers, etc.).

> I define parental engagement by the parents being involved in their student's education. They call me. They want to know what grades their student's are getting. They're helping them with their homework. They're involved with what I need. We're just working together to make their child successful.

The principal defined parental engagement as a "layered approach when it comes to the school community."

> It can be the amount of time that you are present on campus. It can include your conversation and your [00:02:00] intentionality with your child after school, discussing the school day, and at times it can be shown through a parent's actions, and ethics, as it relates to academics, just in their environment. So when I think about parent engagement, I really kind of think about it as a layered approach to what it means to support a child's academic ventures, and just their futures.

Parent interviews. In the parent interviews, the following themes emerged: the importance of parent engagement in middle school, parent engagement as important factor in child's success, few parent-to-parent relationships and challenges that prevented parents from volunteering at school. All 21 parents interviewed considered parent engagement at the middle school level as important. Among the reasons listed included impressionability of the adolescent as it related to peer pressure, hormonal changes, images in the media about African American youth, and preparing them for the independence of high school. Adopted from Behar-Horenstein (2008), the questions posed during the parent interviews related to the themes were:

- How involved are you in your child's education?
- What motivates you to be involved/uninvolved?

- Why should African American parents be involved in their child's middle school experiences?
- How would you classify your relationships with your other parents at your child's school?

Table 5

Parent Interview and Focus Group Themes

Parent Themes
Importance of African American parental engagement in middle school
Parental engagement as important factor in child's success
Few parent-to-parent relationships
Challenges that prevent volunteering

Importance of African American parental engagement in middle school. Some of the parents highlighted how middle school children are very impressionable when it comes to peer pressure.

> It was said that middle school ... A lot of parents give their child freedom, a little bit more freedom because, "Oh they're teenagers now," and they want to allow them to make their own choices, but when they're not there to monitor those choices, the child can be easily influenced and then venture down the wrong path. I think I got sidetracked, but middle school, specifically middle school, and especially the African-American culture, you walk onto a campus, it's [00:10:00] not a parent meeting, you're just going up there. You

walk on campus and it's kids cursing left and right and they're listening to provocative music over in the corner. When they're not being monitored and when they're not being told that something is wrong they continue to do it.

Another parent reiterated how failure to address the issue of peer pressure and decision making in middle school may influence decisions that children make at the high school level.

Middle school is a time that is very influential in the child's life. During that time they're going through a lot of peer pressure, going through the preteen years. They'll be graduating and getting ready to go to high school. They're going through maturity levels so I think it's very important that the parent is very hands on because at middle school there's a lot that takes place…

South Middle School African American parents recognized the role that hormones play in adolescent development as another reason for engagement at the middle school level.

Middle school, I feel is very important because they're also going through a hormonal change. Things come their way, different type of pressure, different kinds of ... They get into boys and girls, and stuff like that. Some of them are very gullible to peers, so we have to let them know that that's what's coming their way, and get them prepared for high school, because it's only going to get more intense in high school. You just basically need to really stick on them, because this is where peer pressure ... This is where their life is of different sexes, the time and age where everybody's trying to grow up a little too fast. You just want to stay on them. That makes it harder, that I've noticed, with their work because they're more into the fashion, and the who likes who, and different things like that.

Another South Middle School parent commented on how she believed parent presence may deter students from fighting and bullying.

> I think with the middle school kids because they're growing, they're coming to their teenage years and that's when puberty is starting to hit. So I think as we get more involved I think we'll cut back a lot of stuff with our young women and our young men as far as fighting and bullying that I have seen at school. One of the girls with this ... one of the fights the other girl because some guy likes the girl ... if they see their parents or just more parents on the campus I think it'll eliminate a lot of that.

Parents also recognized the importance of their engagement with their middle school children as a counter to the images of African American youth in the media.

> I think it's one of the most critical times of life for any race of child, but particularly because our children come into that phase of life with added issues, unique to their race, to the experience of being black in the United States of America. I think that we just need to apply ourselves a little more to it, and also because of the views of society and the stereotypes that say what are they really going to accomplish? What are they really going to become? …They want them to see these images, they want to demoralize them, they want them to think, "Why are you even trying? You're never going to get there.". There is all of these negative messages, I talked to my son about these subliminal messages, and I try to alert him, these images that he's seeing and why they want put them out there and how they are trying to affect the way that you think and how motivated you are.

Another parent remarked on how if parents are not there to counter the negative images and messages in the media, the children may become susceptible to those narratives.

> I would say African American parents need to be more involved in their children's academic lives because so much of our culture is wrapped up in a lot of negative environments and things that they hear from the media. If parents aren't as involved with their children's lives, they depend on what they hear and see from other channels of communication as well as their environment, which can take them on the wrong path.

The African American parents at South Middle School highlighted the importance of parent engagement during middle school as a training opportunity to prepare their children for high school.

> This is where it starts. You've got to jump on it now in order for them to get, you know, involved. Once I think they go to high school, their peers become more influential to them. If we get it embedded into them in the middle school, then they already have that foundation.

Two other parents remarked that elementary and middle school engagement is important because they viewed starting engagement in high school as too late.

> It's just important. They wait until they get to high school, and then when it's too late, then they want to get upset with the child. It's like, well it was really on you too because you should have been involved. It doesn't hurt to pick up the phone and call the teacher, or even get an email address and email them and say, "Hey, how is my son or daughter doing?" We just lazy, some of us.

> I think it's really important in middle school, because that's the age when they're really transitioning over, and that's going to shape who they'll be, and what they'll be

when they get in high school, because if you don't catch them now, it's almost too late, from what I see.

Parent engagement as a factor in child's success. Parents also acknowledged the importance of engagement when it comes to the ultimate success of their child. Reinforcing the importance of getting good grades and school attendance was highlighted with one parent.

> If the emphasis isn't placed on education and getting good grades and the attendance, once kids get to high school, because that wasn't there. That wasn't in place before. I just feel as if though the kid was just, "Okay, I just show up when I want to and don't show up when I don't want to. "I think the parents being involved at this age or even at the younger age and just stressing the importance of school and the importance of not just school and good grades, but the importance of attending and showing up, and showing up with a good mind, having the behavior to back it up as well. That's one of the major things.

One parent acknowledged that some children may not have parents actively engaged in their lives, but stressed the importance of a role model in the absence of a parent or guardian.

> The reason why I feel like they should be involved is because as you see, the majority of African American kids are not really doing so well. They're out on the streets. They're gang banging. They're killing one another. I feel like if they have their parents, or it don't even have to be their parents, it could be some kind of role model in their life, it could make a big difference and a different impact.

Few parent-to-parent relationships. Of the African American parents interviewed, they expressed very few if any relationships, or minimal interactions, with other parents. Of those

who had relationships, they were due to child's activities outside of school or as a result of a friendship their child had with another student.

> Those relationships are good. For the most part. My daughter she's in a few of the sports at this school so those relationships and bonds she has formed with those other students as well as the parents. You know transferred over to me to where we do the sleepovers, we do the get together with the kids and then take them places outside of the school setting, which just builds the relationship even stronger

There were some parents who knew other parents as a result of seeing them at parent meetings or grade-level meetings.

> It's strong but the strongest is amongst the 10 that I said that will come to the parent meeting, because we're the ones that are always meeting, and trying to think of ways to make our kids seventh grade year fun and memorable, and trying to enhance anything if there is something that needs to be enhanced.

With the exception of one parent, none of them expressed history of negative interaction with other parents; the one parent with the negative experience still considered her interactions with parents mostly positive.

> The parents are wonderful. I've had an issue with, actually I've had issues with two parents actually, and I think it goes back to where people come from. …those were isolated [incidents]. I think that, I know from talking to the parents and after I spoke with them and expressed how I felt, and letting them know that I'm a very involved parent, and if there's any issues, here's my number, call me, I'm very involved, and if my son says anything disrespectful, any one of my sons, let me know. I'm going to always be here, I'm

not going to ignore it. I think they were taken back, like, okay, she's an involved parent, and their whole demeanor changed, their whole attitude changed.

The remaining parents did not have relationships due to work schedules or lack of interest.

I don't have any relationships with any parents at the school, and that's mainly because of my involvement [work and school conflicts]. I'm not there for meetings.

Another parent stated:

I don't have any relationships with the other parents at the school. I don't have the time to develop relationships.

Challenges that prevented parents from volunteering at South Middle School. The challenges African American parents listed that inhibit their ability to volunteer at the school included work schedules, parent's school schedule, multiple jobs, and school volunteer opportunities do not align with parent's availability.

If it's not so early or in the middle of the day. In my case, on the weekend is not good for me. That's when most of my work is done on the weekend.

A parent of a seventh grader was a single-parent, working and attending school. She expressed her desire to come to parent meetings and other school activities.

Being a single parent, my involvement in my child's education is not how I would want it to be. I would like to be that PTA mom going to all these meetings, being at his game, etc. Now because I work full-time and I'm in nursing school.

She had received emails from the school encouraging her to come to meetings, at times offering incentives:

I've gotten emails saying, "If you come to this meeting, we'll give you a voucher for a piece of uniform clothing." (laughs) Okay, this sounds great and everything, but I can't come. That's not going to help me. Thank you, but that's not going to help me. I can't just say I'm not going to come to work today to go to a meeting. I want to be there but hey, I work. MY schedule don't allow it. Maybe do it on the weekend so I can go (laughs).”

Review of Parental Engagement Policy

The Parent-Student Handbook for the school was available online. The handbook addressed expectations for parental involvement at the school and was followed by a compact that was an acknowledgement by the parent and the student that they would commit to adhering to the policies outlined. As it related to parent involvement, the school offered eight different opportunities for parent and family involvement. The handbook is not included to maintain the anonymity of the school.

Parent/family volunteering. Parents and guardians were asked to complete 40 volunteer hours in a school year. The responsibility to complete these hours was not limited to parents or guardians; they may be shared among family members over the age of 18. Examples of volunteer opportunities are listed in Table 6.

Table 6

Volunteer Services

Volunteer activity	Before school	During school	After school	Varies
Attending school sponsored				X
Trainings & Parent leadership Group	X			
Morning Supervision		X		
Lunch supervision and Cleanup			X	
Afterschool Supervision				X
Assisting in Preparing for Parent Meetings				X
Special Event Coordination		X	X	
Chaperoning (no more than 20 hours)				

Parent-teacher conference. Parent-teacher conferences were held every year and were approximately 15 minutes. During these conferences parents and teachers "have the opportunity to discuss the academic, social and emotional growth patterns of the student" (Parent-Student Handbook, p. 35)

Parent-teacher meetings. Parents initiated these meetings to discuss academics or other concerns with teachers or administrators. Parents contacted the office manager to schedule a

meeting; the office manager communicated with the teacher or administrator the purpose of the meeting and coordinates the meeting.

Parent Information Meetings (PIM). The Parent Liaison and parent leaders arranged these monthly meetings to inform parents of school issues. The Parent Liaison engaged parents to participate in these meetings to "devise strategies to involve parents in school programs" (p. 35).

Parent grade-level meetings. The purpose of these meetings was to share information with parents with children in a particular grade, to provide "grade specific information and collaboratively plan student-centered activities" (p. 35). These meetings were held along with PIM. Each grade level had a chairperson who was responsible for constructing the meeting agenda and submitting it to the Parent Liason for approval, a treasurer, secretary, and a Field Trip Coordinator. The officers were elected annually. The grade-level meetings were led by the parents, with assistance of school administration and teachers.

Parent classroom observations. Parents were invited to visit their child's classroom with or without an appointment for a 20-minute period. Parents could visit their child's classroom for extended periods of time with an appointment and approval from the principal.

School Site Council (SSC). The SSC included teachers, administrators, parents, and community members who collaborated to devise and monitor the school's Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA). In adherence to the state regulations for membership, the school's membership at the secondary level included a "minimum of twelve (12) elected members: (25% parents/community members, 25% students, 10% Director, 30% teachers, and 10% other school

staff). The middle school may, but is not required to, include student representation on the SSC," (p. 36).

Cadres. These small working groups were initiated as needed to respond to specific concerns at the school. Participants in the cadre included teachers, administrator(s), support staff, parents, students, and community members who are involved in the school. Once the goal of the group had been achieved, the cadre was disbanded. The cadres' proposed solutions were shared with the principal.

Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) Surveys. To ensure that parents were participants in the decision-making process of the school and the Charter Management Organization (CMO), they were asked to participate in a bi-annual survey. This survey was to "help identify areas of needed improvement in both instructional and non-instructional operations," (Handbook, p. 36). The survey was available online at the conclusion of each semester to provide administrators pertinent information in the development of goals, actions, and budget. Parents without access to computers could complete surveys during the Parent Information Meetings.

Parent-student compact. The parent-student compact was an agreement between the school, parent, and student outlining the expectations for each party. These expectations include maintaining high academic standards, respect for one another, parents serving as advocates for their child's education, and students being engaged learners and dealing with conflict in a constructive manner. As it related to parents' involvement with the school, the compact stated parents

be an active presence in my child's school, by completing 40 hours of volunteer per year (per family), and attend Parent-Teacher Conferences (annually), Parent Information Meetings (monthly), conduct classroom observations, and attend other school events, to the greatest extent possible. (p. 41).

Chapter Summary

Qualitative data were collected in order to investigate the research questions. The qualitative data that were compiled through focus groups, individual interviews, and document analysis were organized to answer (a) How do African American parents in a high-poverty middle school setting, with a 98% Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) population, come to understand practices and beliefs at their child's school? (b) How do African American parents build relationships with other parents and school staff? (c) What factors do African American parents identify as contributing to their parental engagement or lack thereof?

The parent participants who participated in the parent focus group and interviews were asked 11 questions. The themes that emerged were the importance of parent engagement in middle school, parent engagement as important factor in child's success, few parent-to-parent relationships, and challenges that prevent parents from volunteering at school. There was agreement among parents that parental engagement at the middle school level is critical.

The school personnel who participated in the focus groups and interviews were asked nine questions and follow-up questions for clarification or elaboration, based on their initial responses. The themes that emerged in school personnel focus groups and interviews were the importance of building relationships and trust with African American families they served. While there were some differing opinions on whether parent engagement included physically

being at the school site, there was recognition that parents might be engaged in other activities with their children outside of school.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Restatement of Purpose

The importance of parental engagement in the education of their children is consistently cited as an important factor in a child's educational outcomes and the ultimate success of the school community as a whole (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Epstein, 2001). However, the role that race, power history, culture, and socioeconomics plays in the involvement of African American parental engagement are not consistently taken into account by policy makers and school administrators (Cousins & Mickelson, 2011; Jeynes, 2005). The aforementioned variables shape the way African American families view the educational system and how they interact with school personnel. Without taking these aspects into account, one has in essence removed the lens by which African American parents view education. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine African American parental involvement in a high-poverty, urban, charter middle school setting to determine how they came to understand practices and beliefs about the school while building consistent relationships with other parents and with those in the school community.

The theoretical and conceptual frameworks that served as the foundation for this study were the cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE), and critical race theory (CRT). The convergence of these three frameworks situated race as the first factor constructing the lens for this study. For the purposes of this research, this assumption was the foundation used to view inequity. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) identified race as a primary lens through which to view inequity for two reasons: contrary to gender and class, race

is untheorized; class-and gender-based theories alone do not address the unique issues that race surfaces as it relates to the disparities in academic achievement between African Americans and Whites. For these same reasons, this study viewed race as a primary lens though which parent engagement was examined.

The cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) takes into account the context in which individuals are situated as they enter a particular environment. Individuals enter communities with unique perspectives largely based on their history and cultural experiences (Barton et al., 2004).

Similar to the CHAT, the Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) looks at how and why, but in the specific context of parental engagement and social capital. In this framework, the amount of social capital is determined by socioeconomics.

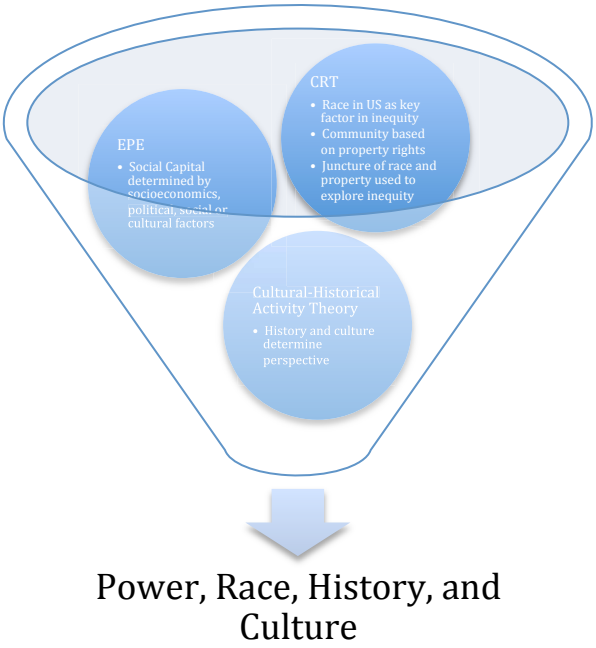

Figure 3. Convergence of CHAT, CRT, and EPE.

The disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions, the chronically low levels of academic achievement of African American students, and high rates of incarceration of Black males was not new information for African American parents who participated in this study (Kena et al., 2015; OCR, 2014). They often explicitly or implicitly referred to the media's portrayal of African American youth, incidents of police brutality, and historic failures of the system to educate their children. Every parent interviewed spoke of their desire for their child to be successful in life and wanting to make sure they helped them achieve. Some were more aware of the nuances of social capital and the role it played at the school level; others desired to be more visible at the school, but had to make a trade-off to work or attend school to further their own education to provide for their children.

Based on the interviews with teachers and parents, the opportunities parents had to engage with the school were transactional in nature. Parents demonstrated involvement through the completion of volunteer hours, parent conferences regarding report cards, and attending parent meetings. While this type of participation at the school site may yield some benefits as it relates to being informed about their child's grades and school events, it does not lend itself to parent-to-parent or teacher-to-parent relationship building, and authentic engagement in school policy decisions or acknowledgement of engagement that may not take place on the school site. While school policy mentioned opportunities such as the School Site Council (SSC) and Cadres, which give parents opportunities to engage in deeper levels of engagement with the school, none of the parents or teachers interviewed cited this as an opportunity. The only person to mention these options was the school principal. The type of parent volunteer opportunities most often offered to South Middle parents did not account for the parent who might work several jobs to

make ends meet, a single parent with more than one child who works late hours, and the parent who has a job and is a full-time student. These same parents might take their child to tutoring, stay up late to assist their child with homework to make sure it is completed, or pay for their child to participate in a sports club or cheerleading and attend games on the weekends. While these parents were every much engaged in the lives of their children, this type of engagement did not appear to be taken into account by the school.

Organization of Chapter Five

In Chapter Five, the researcher will analyze the findings presented in Chapter 4 through the lens of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks and substantiate them through the relevant literature. The researcher will respond to the three research questions. Additionally, this chapter will explain the significance of the findings and make recommendations for the school, the school leadership, and future research.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine African American parental engagement in a high-poverty, urban, charter middle school setting to determine how they came to understand practices and beliefs about the school while building consistent relationships with other parents and with those in the school community. This study sought to answer these questions: (a) How do African American parents in a high-poverty middle school setting, with a 98% Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) population, come to understand practices and beliefs at their child's school? (b) How do African American parents build relationships with other parents and school staff? (c) What factors do African American parents identify as contributing to their parental engagement or lack thereof?

To answer these questions, the researcher conducted individual and focus group interviews with parents and school personnel, and reviewed parent engagement policies of the school. The researcher developed interview protocols for teachers, the school administrator, and parents. The interviews were with two teachers and one parent liaison (the only faculty and staff members who met the criteria for participation), the site principal, and 21 African American parents. The findings from the qualitative study are discussed below.

Summary of Main Findings

This section highlights the main themes identified from the analysis of the data in Chapter 4. The researcher used the main themes as points for discussion of the main findings, the implications for further research, recommendations for the South Middle School, and for school leaders. The themes that emerged from the interviews of parents were: the importance of parent engagement in middle school, parent engagement as important factor in child's success, few parent-to-parent relationships and challenges that prevented parents from volunteering at school. The themes that emerged from the interviews with school personnel were: building trust and relationships, school outreach, and defining parent engagement. Each of these themes was examined through the lens of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

Analysis of Parent Data

The Importance of Parent Engagement

Critical race theory. The African American parents who participated in this study were all aware of the importance of being engaged at the middle school level. They mentioned the role that technology, media, and peer pressure played in the lives of adolescents. Due to these various competing interests, parents spoke of the importance of being involved in their child's life. In

addition to the above, parents were acutely aware of the role that race plays in the lives of African American children. The following quotation from a parent encapsulates the concerns of many of the parents interviewed.

> I would say African American parents need to be more involved in their children's academic lives because so much of our culture is wrapped up in a lot of negative environments and things that they hear from the media. If parents aren't as involved with their children's lives, they [their children] depend on what they hear and see from other channels of communication as well as their environment, which can take them on the wrong path.

There was no doubt from African American parents at South Middle that their engagement was critical to their child's success. The sensitivity to media as it relates to what they viewed as the negative portrayal of African Americans points to the CRT view of "race as endemic and ingrained in American life" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006, p. 18). In a focus group, parents brought up the subject of recent police brutality across the United States.

> Because they [African American children] see negative about them, whether we tell them or not, they process. They [participant's children] going all, they killed this black boy, they killed this black boy, this black girl got shot. Did you know... they're like, well mama. If they did [killed] these many people, you know...so they're still going to form their own opinion about the situation. Even with the explanation.

Based on these conversations, it was apparent that African American parents at South Middle were aware of the importance of engagement and, even more, were in tune with social factors that contributed to negative views of their children. These parents, some of whom stated that

they were not at the school site regularly due to demanding work schedules, indicated that their engagement largely occurred at home. It could take the form of candid conversations about the portrayal of African American youth in the media with their children and the importance of doing well in school, or making sure homework assignments are complete and being available if called upon by the school.

Parents who were not visible at the school or who might not proactively reach out to teachers could be viewed as nonparticipatory, or as not caring about their child's education (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). However, one parent spoke of her own struggle with the educational system and not completing high school as a factor in her being less visible or apprehensive about being engaged. She acknowledged her personal challenges with trying to help her six children navigate the educational system.

> I didn't finish school, so sometimes I get frustrated when my kids bring work home to me. I really don't know how to help them because when I was growing up… we had [00:10:00] a little bit more of a guidance. When you brung homework home, you had either a workbook or you had something to follow to show how you could help your child. Now, because of how they changed everything, it's Common Core, and it's what they expect out of you.

Cultural-historical activity theory. CHAT allows the researcher to examine the theme of the importance of parental engagement by not only what the parents know and do, but also how that is reconciled by the community in which the action takes place (Barton et al., 2004). We can put parent's perspective in a social context where the action is taking place. Parents interviewed expressed a range of activities in which they engaged, which they considered

parental engagement. These activities included enrolling children in tutoring or sports activities outside of school, helping their children with homework, being available when the school requested their presence, volunteering at the school site, attending parent informational meetings, and attending parent-teacher conferences. While some of the activities above required being at the school site, not all of them did. Based on the analysis of school policies and conversations with school staff and administration, those activities that parents were engaged in outside of school were not tracked or acknowledged in the school's parental involvement policy as sanctioned engagement activities. School personnel remarked that they did not have the level of engagement from parents that they would like based on the numbers of parents in attendance at the monthly parent informational meetings.

> It's sad to see the amount of numbers that show up every month, not [the same]… amount [of students] that we have in the school. It's sad to see that I haven't even talked to some of these parents since the beginning of the school year. I'd like to definitely see 100%.

In focus groups and interviews with school personnel, it was apparent that more value was placed on parents being at the school site versus other types of engagement. One staff member defined parental engagement as parents being present at the school and getting to know staff.

> I would say the parents' interest in what's actually going on at the school, inside the classroom and outside. Actively making it a point to visit the school to get to know the staff and get to know the operations of the school. Supporting the school in its vision any way you can while supporting your student at the same time academically.

However, one teacher did highlight the importance of parents being engaged directly in the academics of their child outside of the school, rather than at the school site.

> Parental engagement is based on the parents being engaged with the student academically, meaning supporting them with their work, specifically with the actual [content 00:01:26], and then also making sure that they are organized and understand how the learning cycle goes and what assignments are due when, what specific materials you need to be successful, and that you're on time to you school. Then outside of school, I would say parental engagement is exposing students to other academic support resources and supplementary resources [00:02:00] like, I guess, some content related activities. Maybe if you're interested in math, like engineering workshops, or if you're interested in English, going to different journalism councils and joining the kind of organizations that support the student and their interests.

While some school personnel acknowledged parental engagement off campus, the school policy did not acknowledge the value of these nontraditional types of engagement. The school policy placed more value on what parents did at the school site, rather than how their own social context influenced the types of activities they were currently engaged in and how it had value to them and their children. Within the context of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), schools and other community organizations are rooted in cultural values (Barton et al., 2004). "These values manifest themselves in recurring social practices and their artifacts that give order, purpose, and continuity to life in that social organization" (p. 4). The social practices that frame parental engagement at South Middle School were influenced by the policy, Eurocentric middle-class notions of parental engagement and traditional practices that place value on seeing parents at school in order for them to be meaningfully engaged (Olivos, 2006). It was apparent that the views of parents versus the school personnel and policy are askew.

Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE). The EPE conceptual framework allows the researcher to view how the interplay of race, social dynamics, and power impact the views of parents, school personnel, and policy. Through this lens, as it relates to the theme of the importance of African American parental engagement at the middle school level, race plays a critical role. With race being an enduring part of American society, the way African Americans are viewed in history and media could shape the value an African American places on him- or herself. Parents in this study were aware of their important role in defeating the negativity that is played in a recurring loop in society. One parent shared how she talked to her son about subliminal messages.

> The reality is harsh for them, we're not the only ones, in foreign countries races are being targeted, treated like whatever, but here [United States] it is on display. They want them to see these images, they want to demoralize them, they want them to think, "Why are you even trying? You're never going to get there." There is all of these negative messages, I talked to my son about these subliminal messages, and I try to alert him, these images that he's seeing and why they want put them out there and how they are trying to affect the way that you think and how motivated you are.

While this type of engagement was not recognized in policy—as it is not of the mainstream—it was valued in the social context of these African American households.

The social context of the parents, as they saw it, was critical in shaping the students' perspective as they related to education and, more importantly, to society. From interviews with the school staff, teachers, and the principal, they were just as aware of the unique role that parents played in offering guidance through very complex issues that would arise due to race and

societal issues that impacted their children's daily lives. While the South Middle parent-student compact highlighted the schools role in "providing a structure for complete involvement in the schools' activities to parents, students, teachers, staff and administration," the structure lent itself to providing access to school activities, but it did not address structures to engage parents in ways that they may find meaningful beyond the activities.

Parent Engagement as an Important Factor in Child's Success

Critical race theory. Research has placed the presence of parents in the school setting as one of the most important factors in a child's achievement, while parental involvement at home is viewed as less important (Kim, 2009). "This view has double jeopardy because there is tendency to assume that parents' lack of participation in the school also means a lack of interest in their children's education and their participation at home" (Kim, 2009, p. 80). Based on conversations with parents at South Middle, this assumption could not be further from the truth. The level of engagement of parents in their child's education on societal issues and the importance of education was honest and indicated a deep concern for their child's success. The African American parents as well as school staff at South Middle were aware of the importance of parental engagement at the middle school level as a factor in a child's success. However, how parents and school personnel at South Middle define parental engagement differed in some regard.

Parents often cited middle school as one of the most important phases of a child's life. Parents spoke of the need to be present for their children not only in the school context, but also in every aspect of their lives. Through the lens of CRT parents viewed parental engagement as a factor in their child's success not solely through an academic lens, but through a racial lens as

well. The awareness of racial discrimination and seeing education as a way to overcome issues of poverty that disproportionately impacted their community were deeply engrained in the African American parent's approach to engagement.

> They probably already have strikes against them. I'm not going to say for sure, but we feel that in the news, …discrimination does still exist, so we have to be proactive on behalf of our children if we want to give them a fighting chance. Let them know, if they don't see you don't care, then they'll show us. They might not get it now, but if they see that their parents are caring and involved in their lives, then maybe that will motivate them more to try harder to achiever their goals.

There was a feeling of urgency among African American parents as it related to being involved at the middle school level. To some parents, if they were not engaged in their children's education by the conclusion of middle school, it was too late.

> I think middle school is almost like that stage to where if the kids doesn't get it, if the kids aren't comfortable in the school setting… I think high school just becomes worse for the kids. If the emphasis isn't placed on education and getting good grades and the attendance, once kids get to high school, because that wasn't there. That wasn't in place before. I just feel as if though the kid was just, "Okay, I just show up when I want to and don't show up when I don't want to." I think the parents being involved at this age or even at the younger age and just stressing the importance of school and the importance of not just school and good grades, but the importance of attending and showing up, and showing up with a good mind, having the behavior to back it up as well.

Other parents considered middle school the most important stage for parental engagement.

I think by the time they get in middle school, you need to be more involved. I'm not involved as much with my daughter she's in elementary school. I'm not involved in her stuff as I am with him. I'm preparing him for high school and ultimately for college.

The awareness of race and its impact on African American children was apparent throughout the interviews and focus groups. The parents saw themselves, in many respects, as the critical messengers for their children on issues surrounding the perception of African American youth in society, the importance of furthering their education, and making good choices that would impact their futures.

Cultural-historical activity theory. Through the lens of CHAT, the social context of the school and the African American household are different. While to some degree these differences are expected, there was no indication of an attempt to build a bridge between the school policies on parental engagement and the African American parent's social context to draw parents into the school community in more meaningful ways. The school view of parental engagement, which is shaped by race and class, places more value on the social capital that, traditionally, White middle class parents bring (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2007; Auerbach, 2007). Due to the fact that the parents and the school are not placed within equal networks of activity, they do not glean the same type of rewards from their mediating space (Barton et al., 2004). In order for a mediated action to occur, there is an interaction between an individual and "mediating artifacts/tools and signs, a semiotically produced cognitive tool, that resulted from the interaction" (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 16). For school personnel, in their network of activity for parents, the mediating artifact or tool might be report card conferences or completing 40 volunteer hours, with the goal or outcome being school site involvement. On the other hand, for

parents, the mediating artifact or tool might be staying up with their child while he/she completes a homework assignment with the goal or outcome being a show of moral support. These are two different networks of activity, with two very different outcomes.

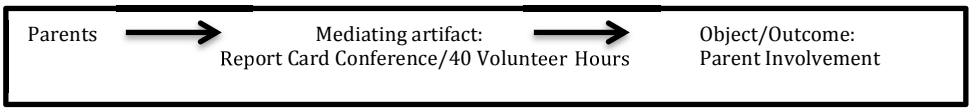

Figure 4. Traditional explanation of parental involvement (Adapted from Barton et al., 2004).

Ecologies of parental engagement. Through the EPE framework, the researcher examined the hows and whys of the parental engagement in this instance. For parents, the mediating artifact was more complex than one action that produced a goal or outcome, but it was based on relationships and action "that cut across individuals, circumstances, and events that are produced and bounded by the context in which engagement takes place" (Barton et al., 2004, p. 6). This type of engagement was not linear, but rather required multiple interactions among teachers, other parents, school administration, and other stakeholders in various spaces, ensuring their children had the guidance to be successful in and outside of school. In this regard, the parent participants had varying degrees of engagement. For example, some parents were highly communicative with teachers and requested that teachers check-in with them via email or phone regularly about their child's progress. This level of frequent communication, however, was not the norm.

> I communicate with his teachers at least once every two weeks. I check his grades on Illuminate [the school's student information system] to see where he's at. If there are missing assignments, then I send them individual emails requesting the information or asking if maybe it wasn't submitted or if he can do what he needs to do in order to get the

> paperwork that he needs to do to get his homework in. … They're [school personnel] in the front of the school. We talk and we have a quick conversation. I talk with the dean almost every day (I think we talk a little too much) and…with the principal [during] the after school program. I guess the conversations of us talking every day and seeing each other makes me feel like we have a closer relationship.

According to Barton et al. (2004):

> Parental engagement as the mediation between space and capital by parents in relation to others in school setting means that what parents "do" in the school setting is an active manifestation of the physical and material boundaries of that they want to do. (p. 6)

These types of relationships illustrated the parent activating her capital in the school space and building relationships with school personnel to advocate on behalf of her child. She was using the resources at her disposal to be proactive. By observing and activating the tools the school may or may not have made available to this parent, she had authored a space at South Middle despite not having the traditional capital.

Few Parent-to-Parent Relationships

Critical race theory. There was very little evidence of parent-to-parent relationships among African American parent participants. Through the lens of CRT, voice plays a critical role in communicating the experiences of disenfranchised individuals. Voice gives power and validity to the experiences of the oppressed (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). The dialogue of communities of color are missing, not because they are lost, but because they are silenced (Delpit, 2006). Schools have a unique opportunity to build communities of change within their four walls, but also that is lasting and go beyond their physical structures. At South Middle

School most parents expressed that they had cordial relationships with other parents, but did not engage beyond an occasional “hello.”

> I only met maybe a few parents at the school. I really can't say. I'm going to say maybe 3 or 4 that I met, they seem pretty nice. I don't have any issues and I don't get any kind of negative vibe or anything. We all want the same things for our child, which is to do good and stay involved in their education. They're good for me in my book.

Parents expressed that they were not opposed to getting to know other parents better, but do not have the time.

> If I really had the time, my time is...I would really like to know the parents, especially the ones that he [her son] is friends with.

Parents who had relationships with other parents were either participants in the monthly parent meetings or grade-level meetings, or their children were friendly with other families.

> The strongest [relationships] is amongst the 10 that I said that will come to the parent meeting, because we're the ones that are always meeting, and trying to think of ways to make our kids experience fun and memorable, and trying to enhance anything if there is something that needs to be enhanced. Our communication and our relationship is stronger than the other parents.

These types of parent-to-parent relationships allowed parents to share experiences and engage in conversations that elevated their concerns and allowed them to problem solve, providing greater levels of support, not only to their children but also to the entire school community; this is the beginning of justice in critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). “Critical race approaches allow us to rethink and reconstruct traditional school policy and practices around the

insights of the greatest stakeholders—those who experience the brunt of educational injustice" (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, p. 209).

Cultural-historical activity theory. In a CHAT context, the school was operating at another activity level from the parents. If they were operating in the same activity level, the school and the parents would be engaged more collaboratively. In this case, for the most part, the parents were individually operating at their own activity level. The school was mostly operating separately from each parent. If they were operating on the same activity level, particularly in a school that is predominately socioeconomically disadvantaged, school-based parent-to-parent relationships would give space for parents to engage in conversations using their social capital in a context that had not traditionally allowed or valued their type of social capital (Lareau, 1987). This practice, in and of itself, empowered parents to engage in issues they might not have otherwise engaged. This also gave school personnel an opportunity to hear the conversations and consider viewpoints they may have not otherwise been aware of.

Ecologies of parental engagement (EPE). CHAT served as the impetus for EPE in the creation of a new space, a shared activity level between school and parents. This space that values parents' social capital is not a traditional form of engagement; it allows parents to question school practices and policies. Ultimately, this places parents in the role of advocate of their children and holding the school accountable. In this context, it is about parents being comfortable in sharing their perspectives together, based on their own experiences and knowing they are accepted and valued. This would be a new paradigm for South Middle School, requiring the school to be open to strong advocacy and accountability from parents.(Barton et al., 2008)

Challenges that Prevented Parents from Volunteering at School

Critical race theory. African American parents at South Middle School consistently shared the following as challenges to their volunteering at the school site: work schedules, time meetings are scheduled, multiple jobs, and parent enrolled in school. School personnel were aware of the challenges that some of the parents faced and had given some flexibility in allowing other family members to volunteer on behalf of the parent or guardian, holding meetings in the mornings, evenings, and some weekends, giving parents opportunities to make in-kind donations in lieu of physically completing hours. While some parents used these alternatives, school personnel spoke in more favorable terms about parents who were physically present or communicated with the school more consistently. A staff member shared what the school expectations were for parental involvement.

> We expect, and we actually ask for 40 hours working volunteer time that's directly helping with the school. Whether it's a donation. Whether it's on-campus help. Assisting the teacher in the classroom in the 40 hours that we expect. I would say basically we expect a 365-day actually helping out in the school. That can also be [00:06:03] helping out at home with homework. We expect the parents to at least show up for at least three times out of the year to show up to the classroom just to kind of see what's going on in the classroom. We expect them to show up once a month for parent informational meetings. We expect for them to actually support the school vision [and that 365 00:06:23]. If I call you, and I ask that your student needs to be on time, we expect you to support that.

While the expectations listed above are ways for parents to engage at the school site, the list stopped short of highlighting ways the school could meaningfully engage the parents to become important voices for decision making, supporting parents on how to help their children with homework, and how to develop parents to become even stronger advocates for their children. Much like researchers on the subject of parental engagement, schools and policy makers had placed involvement at school above involvement at home (Kim, 2009).

Critical race requires hearing the voices of those African American parents who express challenges with coming to the school site to volunteer. How might the school find ways to honor the involvement that is happening at home? School personnel at South Middle appeared to have awareness of some of the challenges that parents had to volunteering at the school site, but the school policy did offer them ways to value and support the engagement happening at home.

Cultural-historical activity theory. The African American parents at South Middle who expressed challenges with meeting the 40-hour volunteer requirement had multiple, competing priorities. In most cases, they were single heads of household, working, and had more than one child. When it came to making a choice of attending a school meeting, or missing work, they chose work. "Typically, working-class African American parents have families of three or more with combined incomes of $35,000 or less and live in more economically and socially challenging neighborhoods" (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008, p. 143). The social and economic contexts from which families come should impact the policy and the types of interactions the school has with the parent, as it relates to their ability to be on site on a more frequent basis. While concessions have been made to allow for more flexibility, the interviews from staff and teachers did not indicate recognition of these challenges.

Ecologies of Parental Engagement. EPE recognizes the challenges that working class families of color may face when it comes to being on the school site. With EPE, the attention is not focused on what parents do, it is focused on the whys and hows. While the parent and student compact highlights parents demanding the best from themselves, assisting children with homework, asking them about their day and encouraging good work habits, and completing the volunteer hours, at South Middle focus seems to be based on what visible actions parents were engaging in at the school site. EPE calls for more substantive actions on behalf of the parent that increase the role of advocacy. These actions occur over time and are usually started as a result of a teacher or teachers inviting parents into the school space, valuing the perspectives they bring and showing them how to engage more broadly.

In the context of South Middle, the policy structure lent itself to more transactional relationships between school and parent. The perspective of staff was based on parent's taking the first step. For parents who conveyed challenges with coming to the site, they might not communicate with the school at all because they are unable to contribute in the ways the school outlined in policy, or they may not know how. For African American parents at South Middle, their social context was likely different from that of the teachers, staff, and administration, which was limiting or preventing them from engaging in ways that the school culture demanded. (Barton et al., 2008)

Analysis of School Personnel Data

Building Trust and Relationships

Critical race theory. The principal, teachers, and staff all indicated the importance of building relationships of trust with African American parents to effectively engage them. They

expressed the need to relate to parents and listen to them. The parent liaison expressed the need for African American parents to be heard and to see consistency among school personnel. This idea links to the concept of voice as it relates to CRT.

> It's that trust issue. Whatever I can do to establish I'm someone who can be trusted that we're here for the betterment of the family, not just that student. It could be giving a gift and always acknowledging the positive things about what you see in your student. That usually brings parents around quickly. Positive phone calls before you receive a negative phone call. Then, making myself 100% transparent to what my vision is for their child and their family. Make myself, also, available for whatever the concern or complaint is. If I see you coming in [00:18:00] in a negative attitude, I'm going to ask you what's going on, what can I help you with. I'm just always there to listen to them. Most of the time, just having somebody listen to you can actually address the issue in their complaint. It might take a 30-minute listen to hear that one issue and usually after that you listen to them. It's all good from there, honestly. Usually. You making sure you follow up with the concern and then usually you have no issue with the trust again.

The idea of voice as it relates to developing trust is a critical first step in reaching parents who feel that they or their child(ren) have been mistreated or mishandled. The experience that the parent liaison described shows his sensitivity to understanding the importance of voice as it relates to working with African American parents as well as establishing trust by being consistent. For African American parents at South Middle, being heard was the first step.

Cultural-historical activity theory. As established earlier in the chapter, the structure of the school did not have a shared activity space for parents and the school. This would explain

why parents and school view parent engagement in different ways. However, in cases described by the liaison and the principal, they had carved out their own spaces with some African American parents on an individual basis. In some cases, they identified the need for African American parents to have "voice" and be heard. They also understood the historical and socioeconomic factors that impacted how African American parents may view the school. They understood the importance of building trust by display of consistent actions they took with the child and the student. This could be interpreted as school personnel's understanding the importance of sharing the same activity level with parents.

While these interactions were occurring, school policy did not allow the structure for this to happen consistently for all parents. This may explain why some African American parents expressed frustration, but did not know how or to whom to direct their concerns. Unless parents were proactive in addressing someone at the school with their concern, they would not have the forum to have their issues addressed.

Ecologies of parental engagement (EPE). There were instances where school personnel were engaging with certain parents to build relationships of trust, inviting parents who might not know how to navigate school spaces to engage. Through these individual experiences, parents might learn how to engage the school at their activity level. Once African American parents saw the results of the relationship they built, they were more willing to engage with school personnel and bring issues to the forefront. However, these instances of individual parents being exposed to EPE were inconsistent and truly based on the experience of school personnel as it related to engaging African American parents at the school, or in previous school settings. There was no evidence of the school having trained teachers and staff on engaging in the ways they described.

School Outreach

School personnel consistently expressed how frequently they communicated with parents. The school communicated with parents regarding general updates impacting the entire school community, student specific information regarding academics and behavior, and opportunities for parents to participate in volunteer activities. Some teachers may have their own communication with parents individually or through mass communication with their classes. All school-wide or teacher-specific communications to parents happened weekly and monthly via email, text, paper, or telephone. Despite these efforts, school personnel had not achieved the levels of parent participation they would have liked.

Critical race theory. In the realm of school outreach, through the lens of CRT, the voices of the African American parents are critical. While South Middle School utilized multiple forms of media to communicate with parents, there was also no mention from school personnel regarding how parent voice had contributed to their outreach strategy. South Middle might benefit from engaging parents in a conversation about what type of communication might be most effective in reaching African American parents.

Cultural-historical activity theory. Using the lens of CHAT, the school was operating on its own activity level and not the parent's. The school determined what forms of media were most effective for parent outreach and executed upon it. While the parents might benefit from other forms of communication, the school culture dictated the expectations.

Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE). EPE situates parents in the forefront; as it relates to how schools should engage in outreach to parents, the social and cultural context should be considered. In this case, South Middle might ask, "Based on or social and cultural

context of our parents, what is the most effective medium of communication?" In a study conducted by Deslandes and Bertrand (2005), parents of seventh- and eighth-grade students, regardless of demographics, responded best to personal outreach from teachers. A direct request to a parent from a teacher may pique interest of a parent who might not otherwise participate in school events. Additionally, the personal interaction may initiate a relationship between the parent and the teacher.

Parent Engagement Defined

Critical race theory. The school personnel's definition for parental engagement was heavily weighted toward parents being present at the school site as an indication for student success. In addition to being present at the school, parents considered engaged were those who actively sought out the staff and were in regular communication with teachers and administration. School personnel seemed to value the relationships with the parents they saw and communicated with more often. They determined which parents were interested and engaged with them first. However, the principal's view of parental engagement was slightly different from those of the staff. She considered engagement as "layered," both being involved at the school site and in the home.

The parent view was heavily focused on the values and expectations they instilled in their children regarding academic success and building awareness of their child living in a highly "racialized" society. They also considered their willingness to be available when called upon as an indication of their engagement. African American parents expressed how much they valued personal outreach from teachers and often expected teachers to initiate the relationship.

The perspective of South Middle school personnel and African American parents were not aligned. Critical race theory challenged the school to engage with parents to find out why this misalignment existed and challenged the school to alter its approach to meet the needs of these parents. Based on conversations with parents and the school, this disparity existed because parents had not been informed by the school in defining what engagement meant to it. Instead the school defined it, and parents either adopted the school's approach, or declined it by virtue of them not complying.

Further, the school policy placed heavy emphasis on the roles that parents played on the school campus. While there was mention of parent expectations to assist their children academically and be active participants in their education, parents were recognized for visible actions at the school site. Per the school policy in the handbook, families of students at South Middle were encouraged to complete 40 volunteer hours per school year. All of the suggested volunteer activities required parents to be on the school site. However, the parent liaison and site principal noted that some parents who had limited availability and might not have been able to complete their hours on site had the option to make in-kind donations (i.e., school supplies, Kleenex, etc.) to the school to supplement for volunteer hours.

Cultural-historical activity theory. The social context for African American families in public schools is fraught with complexity; even more complex is the relationship with socioeconomically disadvantaged African Americans. However, the educational system has maintained the same view of parental involvement regardless of the race or socioeconomics of the parent. For all intents and purposes, the approach has been one size fits all. Through the lens of CHAT, at South Middle, this approach placed African American families and teachers in

different spaces with very different perspectives and goals on parental engagement. The ways that school policy and personnel viewed engagement was heavily weighted toward what parents do at the school. While many parents viewed their engagement at home and availability to communicate with the school when needed, as engagement. The school and parents were operating in two different fields.

Ecologies of parental engagement (EPE). EPE acknowledges the value that being present in the school actually brings to parents. When a teacher invites African American parents into the school space, they will begin to recognize that the time and interactions they have with the teacher is actually more valuable, as they are able to engage more directly. In this space, African American parents can connect with teachers and discover forms of capital that are valued in the school environment; this does not require a parent to be visible at the school (Barton et al., 2004).

The views of the school personnel and the administration of the school, while slightly different, both highlight parental presence on the school site as indicators of engagement. While school policy does mention parents as advocates, supporting their children academically and at home, the recognition and value placement is based on parents being at the school site. Based on the data, there is incongruence between the parent's view of parental engagement and the staff and administration's view at South Middle School.

Research Questions

The researcher posed three questions to determine how African American parents defined their own parental engagement in the charter middle school setting: (a) How do African American parents in a high-poverty middle school setting, with a 98% Free and Reduced Lunch

(FRL) population, come to understand practices and beliefs at their child's school? (b) How do African American parents build relationships with other parents and school staff? (c) What factors do African American parents identify as contributing to their parental engagement or lack thereof?

Answering Questions

Question One

How do African American parents in a high-poverty middle school setting, with a 98% Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) population, come to understand practices and beliefs at their child's school?

Of the 21 parents interviewed, the perceptions they had about the school's practices and beliefs were: the school valued parents completing volunteer hours at school, but did not consistently enforce the requirement; the school valued parent attendance at the Parent Informational Meetings; the school valued frequent communication to parents en masse, but not in a timely or well-coordinated manner on certain matters; the school staff was available and followed up if parents had questions or concerns, but did not consistently reach out to parents proactively.

To inform parents of the school policies and expectations, South Middle School held a parent orientation each year. At the orientation they reviewed Parent-Student Handbook, set the expectations for the year, shared a calendar of events, and presented parents and students with the compact. The parent-student compact was an agreement among the school, parent, and student outlining the expectations for each party. These expectations included maintaining high academic standards, respect for one another, parents serving as advocates for their child's

education, and students being engaged learners and dealing with conflict in a constructive manner. As it related to a parent's involvement with the school, the compact states parents

> be an active presence in my child's school, by completing 40 hours of volunteer per year (per family), and attend Parent-Teacher Conferences (annually), Parent Information Meetings (monthly), conduct classroom observations, and attend other school events, to the greatest extent possible. (p. 41)

According to school personnel, the orientation set the foundation for parents as it related to how they could engage in their child's education with the school. Aside from the orientation, parents were informed by attending monthly Parent Information Meetings (PIMs) where school staff shared updates about the school and upcoming events. In addition to the meetings, parents were provided communication via email, text messages, phone calls, and hard copy. Parents who were unable to attend the initial orientation were given a one-on-one orientation to ensure they were aware of the school's expectations.

Parents were asked if the school had expectations for parental engagement and, if so, to describe what the expectations were. All 21 of the parents interviewed knew that the school had expectations for parents to participate. However, not all of the parents were entirely clear about what the expectations were and if the school necessarily enforced them.

> Yeah, I believe it's the parent meetings. I believe it's to support the teachers, support the students. Sign that-…agenda, yeah.

Another parent knew there were expectations, but was not sure what they were exactly.

> To answer your question, I don't know what expect- … the parent meetings, I guess. I don't know what else.

While some parents were clear on the requirements, they saw a need for parents to support the school more and have greater communication between the school and the parents.

> They have expectations to do volunteer hours needed on campus for supervision or detention, when they have the parent information meetings. I do know that at the school we are lacking parent involvement and one thing I think that should be...parents should be held accountable just as well as the child. I think it should be like a series of standards that should go...sort of go around the world type standards...where the parents know the expectations of the school, what the school expects of the parents and the child and vice-versa. Therefore the communication between the administrators and the teachers can be effective and not have a disconnect because some parents be up in arms because they don't like a certain this or a child came home saying this. It be a defense mechanism instead of "let's see how we can get through this together and work this out."

There was a similar response from another parent about the need for parents to be involved at the school site.

> You know, they shouldn't have to beg us to take a day off to participate in a field trip. I know everybody can't do it, but not every one of those parents work either. You understand what I'm saying? It's like nobody volunteers to do anything, and they need that assistance. You know, schools are totally different now. They don't have what they used to have. You know, and I think being a parent involved ... My mother was very involved in our school, in the school when we were in elementary. My mother had to start working when I got into middle school. It's all there. It's all available and accessible to us.

> When you think that how the expectations, they're begging for people to come out. The same ten parents, the same 15 parents, they ask.

Other parents thought the school was not consistent in ensuring that expectations were met. They also found the volunteer hour requirement a challenge to meet due to work schedules.

> They do and they don't enforce them. Yeah, I think it's about 30. …Something like that. …the volunteer hours, so my thing would be like, I'll donate stuff for volunteer hours because I can't be there. If I could be there, I'd be there. But, first my other job, I work all different schedules so I don't know when I'll be at work. And then the other one has sick, no vacation leaves. So if I take off, then I don't get paid. No way.

The parents were asked what types of outreach they received from the school to encourage their engagement. Their responses were consistent with school personnel. They mentioned the schools multiple forms of communication: newsletters, emails, phone calls, and text messages. While the school communicated with parents about their expectations and beliefs, the parents had different perspectives on how those expectations and beliefs were carried out on the regular basis. Among parents, there was a perception of inconsistency regarding how the beliefs and values of the school were carried out. African American parents at the school had different perspectives on what their roles were as they related to participation at the school, but agreed that the role they played in reinforcing the importance of education and how to navigate the complexities of the world as an African American was critical to their children's survival. One parent remarked on how she valued the school's attempts to get parents involved, but wanted to engage parents more deeply.

> I would like it to be more structured so to say. I would like it to be more, how do I say it, I want it to be more educational and not all we're not just there for fun or to donate or to do fundraisers. I would hope it to be more educational.

The school made attempts to find ways to encourage parents to engage at the school site; however, based on research and data from parents, the school would be better served by providing African American parents with an opportunity to share their voices on the role the school should play and the role of parents in their child's education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). Additionally, the school should provide space for parents to share their thoughts and candid feedback on the current system of parental engagement and how they can improve it. To engage parents more deeply in the school, the school should provide opportunities for parents to learn about what students were learning in the classroom and how they might be a resource at home. To gain more of a collaborative school community, South Middle could develop the skills of parental engagement in school policy development and advocacy on behalf of their child by offering workshops to parents.

Question Two

How do African American parents build relationships with other parents and school staff?

In interviews and focus groups, African American parents were asked how they would classify their relationships with their child's teachers or school staff and if there were some relationships that were stronger than others?

African American parents' approach to relationship development with school personnel at South Middle varied. Some parents reached out to teachers and administrators regularly, sending emails to staff inquiring about their student weekly; others engaged in conversations

with the teachers during drop-off and pick-up. Some parents may have engaged the school due to a complaint or concern and developed a relationship with the administration or parent liaison as a result of their intervention. Other parents were very active at the school site (i.e., monthly parent informational meetings, grade-level meetings, assisting with traffic flow, etc.) and, as a result, had developed relationships with teachers and administration. The parents who expressed the most difficulty with the school's policy did not have relationships with school personnel beyond seeing them once or twice or because the teachers called to give a report on their child.

The school personnel at South Middle spoke of parents taking the first step to developing relationships with them. However, most of the African American parents expected teachers to initiate and follow through on relationships with them. Of the parents who took this perspective on relationship development, they felt as though the relationships with teachers were neutral to not very strong. Teachers who spoke of the parents they did not have the strongest relationships with were classified as the ones who they did not communicate with often; these parents were not proactive in developing relationships with teachers. Research has shown that generally the parents who are proactive at developing relationships with teachers have the social capital to navigate the school environment and are traditionally White and/or middle-class parents (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Teachers generally identify more with parents with whom they share the same social capital and/or class. The view of teachers in this instance points toward the traditional notions of parental engagement which may not value the social capital of socioeconomically disadvantaged African American families (Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

School personnel spoke of the importance of trust building with African American families to engage them more effectively, indicating their awareness of how to identify with the

parents' social capital. However, this trust building seemed to be activated if parents had a complaint, or if their child needed additional support in the area of behavior or academic intervention.

> When I think in my head who are my top parents that I can call right now I need you guys to come help out, I think of the ones who I'm in communication with via email. The ones that have came up to me and said this is what I need to happen. …even if it's a complaint because now I have incentive to get you involved in this school through your complaint. You don't like the food, well come on in and let's help me serve it. Figure out what it is you don't like about it. You have an issue with a certain teacher. Okay, let's set up a meeting in the classroom. You know what I mean? She can come in that's the incentive for me whether it's a complaint or concern.

One parent expressed feeling as though staff treated those parents who were more visible differently than those who were not. The school had not engaged her, so she had not engaged them.

> I think there is a lot of favoritism to the parents that do come up there versus the parents that don't come to the meeting. That's how I feel. Well, they haven't really reached out. I don't have a relationship with them. I only interact with the teachers whenever I need to talk to them about something about [my son]. It's very rare. They don't really hear from me.

Some parents waited or expected teachers to initiate relationships with them. African American parents' own negative experiences with the educational system lead to mistrust of schools in many cases (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008). CHAT points to one's own historical and

cultural experiences as shaping how they view a particular context they are in (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). In the case of African Americans, the failure of the U.S. educational system spanned from preslavery to the current systemic failure of the educational system to educate African American socioeconomically disadvantaged youth. The lack of trust African American parents feel toward the educational system may play out by their not seeking to build relationships with school personnel or not assuming the best intentions of school personnel as they related to reports from the school regarding their child's behavior or academic performance. The autonomous approach African American parents have toward engagement at the school could be reshaped if schools created more welcoming and warm environments (Kim, 2009). Considering this historical context, the onus is on the school to find ways to build trust among African American parents and the school.

Some parents communicated with teachers and administrators regularly. These parents emailed, called, or spoke directly to school personnel on a regular basis, in some cases weekly. In speaking with these parents, they wanted to constantly be informed about their child's behavior and academic progress, so they could be proactive about any issues that ensued. They also found value in developing relationships with the school, so teachers and administration knew who their children were. These parents might not necessarily have attended all of the meetings or be seen on campus regularly, although they found value in regular communication with the school.

Lastly, there were parents who were visible at the school site and communicated with school personnel regularly. These parents attended most of the monthly parent meetings, and were involved in grade-level meetings and school activities. They found it important for their

children and school personnel to see them actively involved at the school site. These parents were the most vocal about not seeing other parents at meetings or other school activities and the school's failure to be consistent about its expectation of involvement.

Question Three

What factors do African American parents identify as contributing to their parental engagement or lack thereof?

Of the 21 African American parents who participated, four indicated that they were not engaged or engaged at low levels. Parents who identified themselves as highly or moderately engaged in their child's education fell into two major categories: (a) a desire for their child to be successful and (b) keeping their child safe from external factors (violence, media, peer pressure). Of those who indicated a lack of engagement, they consistently cited scheduling conflicts with work.

African American parents at South Middle were aware of race and its impact on their children in society. They viewed education as an important factor in their children's success. Most parents had aspirations for their children go to colleges or universities. Some parents were attending college themselves. They saw education as access to opportunity.

South Middle's African American parents often saw themselves as the primary voice in educating their children on how to critically view media and in countering negative messages about what their children may or may not be able to accomplish. Parents expressed their awareness of the competing images and messages their children see regularly. They spoke of their ongoing struggles with their children's access to technology, peer pressure, and explaining Black America's issues with law enforcement. These issues overlap with school and home, and

parents are acutely aware that their failure to address these issues now, may result in their children's inability to cope or make the right choices.

Significance of Findings

African American youth have highest rates of suspensions and expulsions, fueling the school-to-prison pipeline; hearing the voices of the parents may aid schools in better addressing the needs of African American children. African American parents are the strongest advocates for their children, but historically educational systems have not valued their social and cultural capital. Schools must give space for parents to interact with each other and with the staff, as their voices speak truth to power changing perceptions and bringing about change in a system in which they have historically been silenced.

Traditional transactional parental involvement is not valuable for African American parents or students. As educational institutions, schools should provide skills to parents on how to navigate their systems, so they develop the social capital to hold schools accountable for providing quality education for their children.

Social Justice

The importance of race, power, culture, history, and culture as it relates to African American parental engagement in socioeconomically disadvantaged schools should be considered as policy makers determine policy, administrators shape the school culture, and teachers interact with parents. From a social justice perspective, the duty of the educational community is to be aware of injustices toward African American families and to give the space and place to engage in dialogue and, ultimately, determine policy that is informed by their perspective. The absence of parent voice in policy and implementation has led to policies and

school cultures that are void of parents' cultural perspectives, but shaped by the perspectives of those who develop policy or lead schools. This exclusionary approach contributes to disproportionate disciplinary actions against African American students (OCR, 2014).

Parents at South Middle defined parental engagement in their own terms. Their engagement was built on a critical understanding of historical racial discrimination, personal experiences with the educational system, and media that portrays socioeconomically disadvantaged African American communities in a negative light. They believed their primary responsibility was to ensure their children are aware of racism, how they can navigate it, and use educational opportunities to gain success in spite of it. In addition, South Middle School African American parents defined engagement as being available, both in and/or out of school, when called upon, and providing their children with the resources they need to be successful academically and in life.

Recommendations for South Middle

It was apparent that school leadership at South Middle was committed to finding better ways to engage their parent community. However, there was a lack of alignment between the context from which parents were speaking and how the school was approaching their engagement. The school wanted to see visible actions from parents as an indication of their engagement and parents to see their engagement as primarily home based and secondarily school based. There was also a social context from which parents come that the school was not addressing.

Considering the socioeconomic factors that impact the community and the school, an emphasis should be placed on educating parents on how to support their children in an

educational context (i.e., an understanding of the implications of Common Core, how to help their children with homework), and how to engage with school policy (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008). Some parents at South Middle did not have a high school diploma or experienced difficulty in their own schooling; they wanted to help their children with their academics, but felt helpless. Developing parent workshops to teach them how they can support their children academically will not only help the child, but also foster stronger relationships between the school and the family.

Understanding the historical, social, and cultural dynamics of African American parents, South Middle teachers should take the initiative to build relationships with African American parents and be consistent about strengthening the relationship over time. Considering the lack of trust between the school and the African American parents acknowledged by school personnel—not necessarily as a consequence of any action taken by South Middle—to open the lines of communication, the teachers have to not only initiate the relationship, but also be consistent in their outreach. This may foster greater levels of engagement, give space for parent voice, and highlight the value of African American parents' social capital.

The type of parental engagement practices that South Middle valued was not only heavily skewed toward traditional Eurocentric middle-class notions of parental engagement, but also highly transactional in nature. Moving away from traditional transactional parental involvement toward including parents in more meaningful opportunities to engage with the school community will not only improve advocacy of parents on behalf of their children, but also increase accountability among school personnel, as parents will hold them to a higher standard. The parent-student compact, within the school policy, asks for parents to be advocates for their

child's education, but the school does not provide the resources or the space for parents to engage in acts of advocacy. In order for advocacy to take place, parents need to know where to begin and how to engage.

> When parents are respected as partners in the education of their children and when they are provided organizational support that enables them to channel their interest to the benefit of the school, the entire culture of the organization can be transformed. (Noguera, 2009, p. 250)

The current approach to parental engagement is based on the school policy. In order to change the approach to parental engagement, the first step is to revisit and revise the school policy to ensure parents are not just present, but actively engaged with the school. This policy revision should include the parent voice as one of the primary authors and include space for parents to engage with each other.

Recommendations for School Leaders

Considering the primary responsibility of fostering relationships with African American parents lies with the school, it begins with the school leadership. School leaders must take responsibility for ensuring the vision for parental engagement is communicated clearly and consistently to school personnel. This includes the staff understanding the "why" as it relates to understanding the social, historical, and cultural contexts of African American families. Leadership should provide training that ensures personnel understands the unique challenges African American parents face in a primarily socioeconomically disadvantaged school, while valuing their rich cultural histories and what they bring to the educational environment. "The prevalence of unfavorable attitudes about minority parental involvement in our culture, as well as

limited school practices to encourage minority parental involvement, has great impact on hindering parental involvement as does individual hardship" (Kim, 2009, p. 92). The leadership must set the tone by first calling out deficit thinking, denouncing it, and setting up an environment that respects and recognizes the value that African American parents in high poverty schools bring to the community (Smith, 2008). A critical factor in increasing minority parent involvement at school are policies that respect and articulate the importance of understanding parents (Nakagawa, 2000). This begins by training teachers on understanding, respecting, and being open to the social capital that parents bring to the school environment (Barton et al., 2004; Lareau, 1987; Mapp, 2003).

After the foundation is set among school personnel, the school leader must create spaces for parents to engage with each other. The importance of voice among African Americans is paramount to rooting out issues of injustice and creating a space for moving toward more trusting relationships among parents and school personnel. School leaders should not shy away from inviting African American parents to share their voice on more complex issues facing the school community. As Kim (2009) highlighted, when schools attempt to engage those parents who would otherwise not be, it might alter the view of parents encouraging more collaboration. This change in approach may change the culture of the school as opposed to recreating the same culture year after year.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was limited to one school in one city. In order to make this study more generalizable, a study of a larger cross-section of African American parents in a socioeconomically disadvantaged school setting should be completed. In addition to a larger

cross-section, the researcher recommends further research to determine the specific types of supports and education the school can offer to African American parents to serve in roles that inform school policy and student educational advocacy. As suggested by Kim (2009) in her research on minority parent involvement and school barriers, "Researchers should pay attention not only to the barriers for minority parents but to the school barriers" (p. 81). If schools are making it difficult for parents to engage authentically in their child's education, researchers and policy makers need to listen to the voices of parents and take a critical look at the educational institutions that serve them. Considering the current view of parental involvement as one tied to White middle-class ideology, ideas of equality and equity should be explored in terms of culturally responsive parental engagement policies and practices. How might schools and policy makers approach culturally responsive parental engagement? Finally, the idea of parental involvement versus engagement as it relates to the idea of time spent at a school versus the impact that is made as a result of their engagement should be explored through the view of the parent.

Summary

The findings of this study demonstrated how the roles of race, history, power, and culture came into play with African American parental engagement at South Middle School. Race is deeply rooted in the fiber of America and American culture; to not take into account how race frames interactions among parents and teachers, and students and teachers is a failure to view how history shapes the view of African American parents toward the educational system and how their children are viewed in society as a whole. Race and history form the lens by which African American parents view the school. This could be history as it relates to the community

more broadly, or the parent's personal history. In contemplating race, the importance of the school in allowing space for the voices of African American parents to share their experiences with each other, and with the school, in helping shape how the school defines policy is an important consideration.

This study explored the role that social capital plays in schools in relation to the socioeconomics and race of parents, as well as the interplay between the social capital of parents and school personnel. This examination uncovered the incongruence between the views of engagement: the traditional view that is highly based on parent's presence at the school, and the other that is based on the level of engagement at home and communication with the school. This exposed the need for South Middle to address potential deficit thinking with teachers and staff, while developing a culture that takes the initiative to build relationships with African American parents.

Conclusion

Historically, African American parents are the greatest advocates for the statistically most poorly served children in the United Stated educational system, African American students. However, the voices of these parents have not been included in the political and educational interventions made on behalf of their children. Notions of parental engagement for African American families in socioeconomically disadvantaged settings are lacking the nuance or respect of cultural difference. The unique historical, racial, social, and cultural dynamics of African American families are not taken into account in the development of engagement policies or practices. Rather, they are lumped into the same traditional notions of engagement as White middle class parents.

Parental engagement for African American parents at South Middle was about what parents do and less about why or how they engage with their children. This reduced the engagement of parents to a checkbox of having completed hours or attended meetings, a less substantive way of deeper engagement. School administrators and policy makers should consider activating a type of engagement that challenges power structures and puts parents in positions of power to advocate on behalf of their children, but also sees parents as powerful collaborators and supporters of the school. This type of engagement is a detour from what school personnel experience in schools like South Middle. To introduce this type of engagement will likely make teachers and administrators uncomfortable as they will see levels of challenge from African American parents unlike they have seen before. This type of engagement is necessary, as it surfaces injustices and gives space for the school to resolve issues and make adjustments to systems and structures that have historically lacked respect of the social and cultural contexts of African American parents. This approach may serve as the beginning of more positive and collaborative relationships between the school and African American parents.

Epilogue

The researcher began this study with a personal account of how her mother was engaged in her education and how she came to be interested in this study. It is important to note the researcher's reflection as a recipient of African American parental engagement as a child, serving as a teacher and administrator in schools with higher populations of African American students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, to the current role of a researcher. The researcher's mother gained more tools for navigating systems during her undergraduate

experience and after as a new member of the middle class. This changed her mother's perspective on the importance of engagement and involvement.

The perspective of her mother shaped the researcher's understanding of parental involvement. This understanding became the definition of parental involvement for the researcher and colored her view of African American parental involvement more broadly, particularly in her work as a teacher and an administrator. As a teacher and administrator, the researcher expected the African American parents she worked with to adhere to a similar role that her mother played as a single parent, not realizing that the perspective that she experienced was one of the White middle class.

In the role researcher, her ideas of how African American parents should be engaged or involved have shifted significantly. The researcher now understands the complexities of how race, power, history, and culture shape the perspectives of these parents. The role that class plays in the shaping of perspectives cannot be overlooked or understated. The researcher has developed a heightened sensitivity to these issues and recognizes how the educational system is not necessarily designed for accessibility to one and all. She acknowledges that in order to unlock the system to all, one must first understand how access to the system is locked to some; build relationships of trust with those who lack access; be open to criticism and change; and collaborate with the parents to improve outcomes for those who have been failed as a result of being locked out.

Appendix A
African American Parent Interview Protocol

1. How many children do you have enrolled at this school?
2. What grade(s) is/are your child(ren)?
3. How involved are you in your child's education?
4. What motivates you to be involved/uninvolved?
5. What are the benefits or drawbacks to being involved/uninvolved?
6. Why should African American parents be involved in their child's middle school experiences?
7. Does your child's school have expectations for parents to participate? If so, what are they?
8. What type of outreach, if any, does the school do to encourage parental engagement?
9. What are your opinions about the requirements?
10. How would you classify your relationships with your child's teachers or school staff? Are there some relationships that are stronger than others? Explain.
11. How would you classify your relationships with your other parents at your child's school?

Teacher and Staff Interview Protocol

1. What is your current role at the school site?
2. How long have you worked in your role at this school site?
3. How do you define parental engagement?
4. Of the parents you may work more closely with, how or why were these relationships formed?
5. What expectations, if any, does the school have for parental engagement?
6. What type of outreach, if any, does the school do to encourage parental engagement?
7. How does the school encourage African American parental engagement?
8. What type of outreach, if any, does the school do to encourage parental engagement?
    a. How do you ask parents to get involved?
9. Why should African American parents be involved in their child's middle school experiences?

School Principal Interview Protocol

1. How do you define parental engagement?
2. Is this message communicated with your staff? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. Have you observed one racial group having more parental engagement over another? If so, which group? What do you think contributes to their engagement?
4. Have you observed one racial group having lesser amounts of engagement? If so, which group? What do you think contributes to their lack of engagement?
5. Of the African American parents who may work more closely with the school, how or why were these relationships formed?
6. What expectations, if any, does the school/organization have for parental engagement?
7. What type of outreach, if any, does the school do to encourage parental engagement?
    a. How do you ask parents to get involved?
8. Why should African American parents be involved in their child's middle school experiences?

Appendix B
Permission to Conduct Research (IRB)

Loyola Marymount University
IRB Application Questionnaire

All materials must be typed.

1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Please describe the purpose of your research. Provide relevant background information and briefly state your research question(s). You may provide relevant citations as necessary. (300 Word Max.)

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine African American parental engagement in a high-poverty urban charter middle school setting, to determine how they come to understand practices and beliefs while building consistent relationships with other parents and with those in the school community. A clear understanding of these factors, based on the voices of African American parents, may be useful to school leaders and teachers in better understanding the familial, cultural, and social context that frame the perspectives of African American parental involvement.

The research questions are:

- (a) How do socio-economically disadvantaged parents come to understand practices and beliefs at their child's school?
- (b) How do African American parents build relationships with other parents and school staff?
- (c) What factors do African American parents identify as contributing to their parental engagement or lack thereof?

Based on these understandings, school leaders and teachers may develop culturally and socially responsive ways to include inner-city African American parents in the middle school community.

Participants will include parents, teachers, staff, and the school principal. Participants will participate in focus groups and/or individual interviews. In addition to focus groups/interviews, the researcher will conduct a document analysis of school policies and correspondence to parents regarding parental engagement.

2. SUBJECT RECRUITMENT

How will subjects be selected? What is the sex and age range of the subjects? Approximately how many subjects will be studied?

How will subjects be contacted? Who will make initial contact with subjects? Specifically, what will subjects be told in initial contact?

If subjects will be screened, describe criteria and procedures.

The researcher has a professional relationship with the CEO of [redacted] Schools, the proposed Charter Management Organization selected for this study. The CEO has given the researcher an option to select the schools, within the [redacted] network she would like to include in the study, based on the population highlighted in the research. The researcher sent the following requesting permission to conduct the study at two of the [redacted] middle schools:

Hello [redacted],

I hope all is well.

I think the last time we spoke I shared that I am pursuing my EdD at LMU. I'm embarking upon my third and final year. I am studying African American parental involvement at the middle school level. Specifically, I am studying the historical and socio-cultural factors that contribute to their involvement or lack thereof.

Initially, I was going to conduct this research at [redacted], but considering my role as [redacted] and my close relationship with the parents, I thought it best that I research another site. After thinking about the type of population I am interested in studying, [redacted] fits most closely. I am interested in a school with at least 30-40% African American students and a FRL of 80+%. Would you be open to me conducting my research at two of your middle school sites? I am happy to discuss this at length; I just wanted to get your initial thoughts.

Let me know when you would like to chat.

Best,
Laura

The CEO has agreed to allow the researcher to conduct this study at an [redacted] middle school of her choosing. The CEOs approval is attached to this application for review.

The school selected for this study, [redacted] Middle Charter Academy serves approximately 166 sixth- through eight-grade students and has a FRL population that is approximately 84%. There are roughly 89% African American and 7% Latino students. The school has a Special Education population of approximately 8%. [redacted] has a total staff of 24, with 11 teachers, 13 staff, and a School Director.

The study will include 10% of the parent population, 50% of the teaching staff, one staff member and one administrator, all of whom will be at least 18 years of age and older, representing both gender groups. The school personnel participating in the study will include the site principal, five teachers, one office staff member, and sixteen parents.

Upon the start of the study, the researcher will request a list of the parents of African American students who receive Free and Reduced Priced lunch services from the school. The subjects will be at least 18 years of age and male or female. The listed parent names will be entered into randomizing software, such as SPSS or Excel, to select twenty-five parents, whom have children currently enrolled at the school in the FRL category. Twenty-five parents will be selected, so that in the event of some choosing not to participate, other parents may be selected. From the list of 25 parents, all of them will receive an invitation to participate in the study. To incentivize parent participation an offer of a $20 gift card will be included in the invitation. Of those that respond, from each site, the first sixteen (10% of the parent population) to respond will be selected. The initial correspondence to parents is below:

Dear Parent/Guardian:
I am currently undertaking a research study of African American middle school parental engagement. Specifically, I am studying the factors that contribute to an African American parent's involvement at his or her child's school. The purpose is to better understand how parents are involved in the education of their child. I would like to interview you to learn how you are involved, how you interact with the school and other parents.

If you are interested in participating, please sign and return the bottom of this letter. Parents who are selected to participate will receive a $20 gift card.

Sincerely,
Laura J. McGowan-Robinson, MEd

I am interested in participating in the study on parental engagement at the middle school level. Please see my information below.

Parent's Name:

Parent's Phone Number: ( ) -_____ Email Address _____

Best time to contact you _____

Upon the start of the study, the researcher will request a list of staff and a list of teachers from the principal, who meet the following criteria: Are at least 18 years of age and employed at the school site for at least two years. The researcher will enter the names into randomizing software, such as SPSS or Excel, to select the 50% of the teaching staff and one staff member. Of those selected, they will receive the following correspondence:

Dear Faculty/Staff:

I am currently undertaking a research study of African American middle school parental engagement. Specifically, I am studying the factors that contribute to an African American

parent's involvement at his or her child's school. The purpose is to better understand how parents are involved in the education of their child. I would like to interview you to learn more about the school's perspective and your perspective on parental involvement.

If you are interested in participating, please sign and return the bottom of this letter.

Sincerely,
Laura J. McGowan-Robinson, MEd

I am interested in participating in the study on parental engagement at the middle school level. Please see my information below.

Name:

Phone Number: ( ) -_____ Email Address _____

Best time to contact you _____

3. PROCEDURES

Summarize fully all procedures to be conducted with human subjects.

The researcher will share a 3-5 minute summary of her professional background and the study. The researcher will inform the participants that the focus groups interview and one-on-one interviews will be recorded and she will take notes to ensure that she captures all the information. The researcher will begin conducting the interviews based on the protocol. Following the interview, the researcher will answer any questions the participants may have, remind the participants of the confidentiality of the study, and conclude the interview.

4. RISKS / BENEFITS

What are the potential benefits to subjects and/or to others?

What are the reasonably foreseeable risks to the subjects? (Risks may include discomfort, embarrassment, nervousness, invasion of privacy, etc.) If there are potential risks to subjects, how will they be minimized in advance? How will problems be handled if they occur?

The benefits to the subject participating in the survey are their ability to share their opinions about the schools parental engagement policies confidentially. Additionally, participants will be aware that their opinions may impact how school policymakers and administrators consider how race, culture and socio-economics play a role in parental perceptions about their engagement.

The risks to the subjects is that they may feel uncomfortable being recorded or may feel uncomfortable sharing their candid thoughts about the schools parental engagement policies. Knowing that these factors may cause some level of discomfort the researcher will cover the confidentiality precautions that she will take to ensure that the integrity of the research is preserved.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY

Will subjects be identifiable by name or other means? If subjects will be identifiable, explain the procedures that will be used for collecting, processing, and storing data. Who will have access to data? What will be done with the data when the study is completed? If you are collecting visual images of your subjects please justify this.

The subjects will not be identified by name in the research; participants will be referred to by numbers or pseudonyms. The recording will begin with the researcher assigning a number to the participant. The number will be listed in the researchers notes and at the beginning of each interview. The recordings will be stored at the home of the researcher in a locked file cabinet. The recordings will be transcribed and then be destroyed at the conclusion of the approval of the final dissertation defense.

6. INFORMED CONSENT

Attach an informed consent form or a written request for waiver of an informed consent form. Include waiver of written consent if appropriate. If your research is being conducted in another language, please include copies of the translated "Informed Consent" or "Waiver of Written Consent" forms.

Please see the attached.

7. STUDENT RESEARCH

When a student acts as principal investigator, a faculty sponsor signature is required on the application form.

N/A

8. RENEWAL APPLICATIONS

When the submission is a Renewal Application, include a summary of the research activities during the previous granting period specifically addressing: number of subjects studied and any adverse reactions encountered, benefits which have been derived, any difficulty in obtaining subjects or in obtaining informed consent, and approximate number of subjects required to complete the study.

N/A

9. PAYMENTS

If subjects are to be paid in cash, services, or benefits, include the specific amount, degree, and basis of remuneration.

Each parent participant will receive a $20 gift card. This amount was chosen to encourage participation in the study. While this is not a great deal of money, it may provide an incentive for parents who may not otherwise participate.

10. PSYCHOLOGY SUBJECT POOL

When students from the Psychology Subject Pool (PSP) are to be involved as subjects, permission must be obtained from the PSP prior to running subjects.

Forms are available from the Psychology Office in 4700 University Hall. It is not necessary to inform the IRB of approval from the PSP, however the PSP requires IRB approval prior to permission for using the pool being granted.

N/A

11. QUALIFICATIONS AND TRAINING

Describe the qualifications of, or method of training and supervision afforded student experimenters. This includes past experience, type and frequency of student/sponsor interactions during the experiment, and Human Subjects Protections Training.

N/A

12. RANDOMIZATION

Describe criteria for assigning subjects to sub-groups such as "control" and "experimental."

N/A

13. USE OF DECEPTION

If the project involves deception, describe the debriefing procedures that will be used.

Include, verbatim, the following statement in the consent form: "Some of the information with which I will be provided may be ambiguous or inaccurate. The investigator will, however, inform me of any inaccuracies following my participation in this study."

N/A

14. QUESTIONNAIRES AND SURVEYS

Include copies of questionnaires or survey instruments with the application (draft form is acceptable).

If not yet developed, please so indicate and provide the Committee with an outline of the general topics that will be covered. Also, when the questionnaire or interview schedule has

been compiled, it must be submitted to the Committee for separate review and approval. These instruments must be submitted for approval prior to their use.

Consider your population. If they are foreign speakers, please include copies in the foreign language.

African American Parent Focus Group/Interview Protocol

12. How many children do you have enrolled at this school?
13. What grade(s) is/are your child(ren)?
14. How involved are you in your child's education?
15. What motivates you to be involved/uninvolved?
16. What are the benefits or drawbacks to being involved/uninvolved?
17. Why should African American parents be involved in their child's middle school experiences?
18. Does your child's school have expectations for parents to participate? If so, what are they?
19. What are your opinions about the requirements?
20. How would you classify your relationships with your child's teachers or school staff? Are there some relationships that are stronger than others? Explain.
21. How would you classify your relationships with your other parents at your child's school?

Teacher and staff Focus Group/Interview Protocol

10. What is your current role at the school site?
11. How long have you worked in your role at this school site?
12. How do you define parental engagement?
13. Of the parents you may work more closely with, how or why were these relationships formed?
14. What expectations, if any, does the school have for parental engagement?
15. How does the school encourage African American parental engagement?
16. Why should African American parents be involved in their child's middle school experiences?

School Principal Interview Protocol

9. How do you define parental engagement?
10. Is this message communicated with your staff? If so, how? If not, why not?
11. Have you observed one racial group having more parental engagement over another? If so, which group? What do you think contributes to their engagement?
12. Have you observed one racial group having lesser amounts of engagement? If so, which group? What do you think contributes to their lack of engagement?
13. Of the African American parents who may work more closely with the school, how or why were these relationships formed?

14. What expectations, if any, does the school/organization have for parental engagement?
15. Why should African American parents be involved in their child's middle school experiences?

15. PHYSICIAN INTERACTIONS

To ensure that all patients receive coordinated care, the principal investigator is obligated to inform the primary physician (when not the principal investigator) of all studies on his/her patients.

N/A

16. SUBJECT SAFETY

Describe provisions, if appropriate, to monitor the research data collected, to ensure continued safety to subjects.

The researcher will put all recordings and other data collected in locked cabinet in the researchers office.

17. REDUNDANCY

To minimize risks to subjects, whenever appropriate, use procedures already being performed on the subjects for diagnostic or treatment purposes. Describe provisions.

N/A

18. COUNSELING

In projects dealing with sensitive topics (e.g., depression, abortion, intimate relationships, etc.) appropriate follow-up counseling services must be made available to which subjects might be referred.

The IRB should be notified of these services and how they will be made available to subjects.

N/A

19. SAFEGUARDING IDENTITY

When a research project involves the study of behaviors that are considered criminal or socially deviant (i.e., alcohol or drug use) special care should be taken to protect the identities of participating subjects.

In certain instances, principal investigators may apply for "Confidentiality Certificates" from the Department of Health and Human Services or for "Grants of Confidentiality" from the Department of Justice.

N/A

20. ADVERTISEMENTS

If advertisements for subjects are to be used, attach a copy and identify the medium of display.
N/A

21. FOREIGN RESEARCH

When research takes place in a foreign culture, the investigator must consider the ethical principles of that culture in addition to the principles listed above.

N/A

22. EXEMPTION CATEGORIES (45 CFR 46.101(b) 1-6)

If you believe your study falls into any of the Exemption Categories listed below, please explain which category(ies) you believe it falls into and why.

1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), if information taken from these sources is recorded in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

3) Research involving survey or interview procedures, except where all of the following conditions exist: (i) responses are recorded in such a manner that the human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, (ii) the subject's responses, if they became known outside the research, could reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subject's financial standing, employability, or reputation, and (iii) the research deals with sensitive aspects of the subject's own behavior, such as illegal conduct, drug use, sexual behavior, or use of alcohol.

   All research involving survey or interview procedures is exempt, without exception, when the respondents are elected or appointed public officials, or candidates for public office.

4) Research involving the observation (including observation by participants) of public behavior, except where all of the following conditions exist: (i) observations are recorded in such a manner that the human subjects can be identified, directly or through the identifiers linked to the subjects, (ii) the observations recorded about the individual, if they became known outside the research, could reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subject's financial standing, employability, or reputation, and (iii) the research deals with sensitive aspects of the subject's own behavior such as illegal conduct, drug use, sexual behavior, or use of alcohol.

5) Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

6) Unless specifically required by statute (and except to the extent specified in paragraph (1)), research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of the Department of Health and Human Services, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: (i) programs under the Social Security Act or other public benefit or service programs, (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs, (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures, or (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.

I believe the research is exempt under 1, 3 & 5, due to the fact that the study is focused on parental engagement (a normal educational practice) and will be conducted in established or commonly accepted educational setting. Additionally focus groups interviews, one-on-one interviews and document review are the primary methods of data collection. The interviews will be the main source of interactions with human subjects. Recordings will not identify the subjects by name and the questions are not sensitive, nor criminally linked, in nature. All questions are related to parental perceptions and school employee's beliefs about parental engagement.

Please deliver to: Julie Paterson, IRB Coordinator, University Hall, Suite 1718 or jpaterso@lmu.edu.

References

Abdul-Adil, J. K., & Farmer, A. D. (2006). Inner-city African American parental involvement in elementary schools: Getting beyond urban legends of apathy. *School Psychology Quarterly, 21*(1), 1–12.

Anderson, J. (1988). *The education of blacks in the south, 1860–1935.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of Carolina Press.

Archer-Banks, D. M., & Behar-Horenstein, L. S. (2008). African American parental involvement in their children's middle school experiences, *Journal of Negro Education, 77*(2), 143–156.

Atkins, M., Brown, C., Hawkins, T., Lynn, C., & McKernan-McKay, M. (2003). Inner-city African American parental involvement in children's schooling: Racial socialization and social support from the parent community. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 32*(1/2), 107–114.

Auerbach, S. (2007). From moral supporters to struggling advocates: Reconceptualizing parent roles in education through the experience of working-class families of color. *Urban Education, 42*(3), 250–283. doi:10.1177/0042085907300433

Barton, A. C., Drake, C., Perez, J. G., St. Louis, K., & George, M. (2004). Ecologies of parental engagement in urban education. *Educational Researcher*, *33*(4), 3–12.

Bennett, L. (1966) *Before the Mayflower: A history of the Negro in America 1619–1966*. Chicago, IL: Johnson Publishing Company.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1990). *Reproduction in education, society and culture* (Vol. 4). London, UK: SAGE Publications.

Brandon, R. (2007). African American parents: Improving connections with their child's educational environment. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *43*(2), 226–120.

Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

Butchart, R. (1980). *Northern schools, southern blacks, and reconstruction: Freedmen's education, 1862–1875.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

California Department of Education. *District enrollment by ethnicity - enrollment by ethnicity for 2013–14.* (n.d.). Retrieved from http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/Enrollment/EthnicEnr.aspx?cChoice=DistEnrEth&cYear=2013-14&cSelect=1964733--LOS%20ANGELES%20UNIFIED&TheCounty=&cLevel=District&cTopic=Enrollment&myTimeFrame=S&cType=ALL&cGender=B

California Department of Education. *Special education enrollment by ethnicity and disability, by district.* (n.d.). Retrieved from http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/SpecEd/SEEnrEthDis3.asp?Disttype=S&cSelect=1964733-LOS^ANGELES^UNIFIED&cChoice=SEEthDis3c&cYear=2013-14&cLevel=Dist&ReptCycle=December

Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub.L. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241 (1964).

Cousins, L. H. & Mickelson, R. A. (2011). Making success in education: What black parents believe about participation in their children's education. *Current Issues in Education*, *14*(3), 1–15.

Delpit, L. D. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York, NY: The New Press.

Deslandes, R., & Bertrand, R. (2005). Motivation of parent involvement in secondary-level schooling. *The Journal of Educational Research, 98*, 164–175.

Dixson, A. D., & Rousseau, C. K. (2006). *Critical race theory in education: All God's children got a song*. London, UK: Taylor & Francis.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). (2002, January 8). *Laws.* Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html

Engestrom, Y. (2001). Expansive learning at work: Toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work, 14*(1), 133–156.

Epstein, J., & Dauber, S. L. (2001). School programs and teacher practices of parent involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools. *The Elementary School Journal*, *91*(3), 289–305.

Epstein, J. L. (1987). Parent involvement: what research says to administrators. *Education and Urban Society*, *19*(2), 119–136. doi:10.1177/0013124587019002002

Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., & Van Voorhis, F. L. (2002). *School, family, and community partnerships: your handbook for action. second edition.* Retrieved from http://0search.ebscohost.com.linus.lmu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED467082&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Fields-Smith, C. (2005). African American parents before and after Brown. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*. *20*(2), 129–135.

Gadsen, B. (2013). *Between north and south: Delaware, desegregation, and the myth of American sectionalism*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Gross, B., & Pochop, K. M. (2007). *Leadership to date, leadership tomorrow: A review of data on charter school directors*. Center on Reinventing Public Education, Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs, University of Washington.

Hatch, J. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Howard, T. C., & Reynolds, R. (2008). Examining parent involvement in reversing the underachievement of African American students in middle-class schools. *Educational Foundations, 22*(1–2), 79–98.

Jeynes, W. H. (2005). A meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement to urban elementary school student academic achievement. *Urban education*,*40*(3), 237-269.

Jeynes, W. H. (2007). The relationship between parental involvement and urban secondary school student academic achievement a meta-analysis.*Urban education*, *42*(1), 82-110.

Kena, G., Musu-Gillette, L., Robinson, J., Wang, X., Rathbun, A., Zhang, J., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., Barmer, A., & Dunlop Velez, E. (2015). *The Condition of Education 2015 (NCES 2015-144)*. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch

Kim, Y. (2009). Minority parental involvement and school barriers: Moving the focus away from deficiencies of parents. *Educational Research Review*, *4*, 80–102.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishing.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. (2006). Toward a critical race theory in education. In A. Dixson & C. Rousseau (Eds.), *Critical race theory in education: All God's children got a song* (pp. 11–30). New York, NY: Routledge.

Lareau, A. (1987). Social class and family-school relationships: The importance of cultural capital. *Sociology of Education*, *60*(2), 73–85.

Lareau, A., & McNamara-Horvat, E. (1999). Moments of social inclusion and exclusion: Race, class, and cultural capital in family-school relationships. *Sociology of Education*, *72*(1), 37–53.

Lawson, H., & Briar-Lawson, K. (1997). *Connecting the dots: Progress toward the integration of school reform, school-linked services, parent involvement, and community schools.* Oxford, OH: The Dansforth Foundation and the Institute of Educational Renewal at Miami University.

Lawson, M. (2003). School-family relations in context: Parent and teacher perceptions of parent involvement. *Urban Education, 38*(77), 77–133.

Mapp, K. L. (2003). Having their say: Parents describe how and why they are engaged in their children's learning. *School Community Journal, 13*(1), 35–64.

Matsuda, M. J. (1993). *Words that wound: Critical race theory, assaultive speech, and the first amendment*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

McCullough, C. M. (2012). *Brown v. Board of Education (1954): An analysis of policy implementation, outcomes, and unintended consequences* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (3544480)

McDonnell, L. M. (2005). No Child Left Behind and the federal role in education: Evolution or Revolution? *Peabody Journal of Education* (0161956X), *80*(2), 19–38.

McKenna, M. K., & Millen, J. (2013). Look! Listen! Learn! Parent narratives and grounded theory models of parent voice, presence, and engagement in K–12 education. *School Community Journal, 23*(1), 9–48.

Nakagawa, K. (2000). Unthreading the ties that bind: Questioning the discourse of parent involvement. *Educational Policy*, *14*(4), 443-472.

Noguera, P. A. (2009). *The trouble with black boys:... And other reflections on race, equity, and the future of public education*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.

Olivos, E. (2006). *The power of parents: A critical perspective of bicultural parent involvement in public schools*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Potter W. J. (1996). *An analysis of thinking and research about qualitative methods.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Sampson, W. (2002). *Black student achievement: How much do family and school really matter?* Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

Smalley, S. Y., & Reyes-Blanes, M. (2001). Reaching out to African American parents in and urban community: A community-university partnership. *Urban Education, 36*(4), 518–533.

Smith, J., Wohlstetter, P., Kuzin, C. A., & De Pedro, K. (2011). Parent involvement in urban charter schools: New strategies for increasing participation. *School Community Journal*, *21*(1), 71.

Smith, M. (2008). Right directions, wrong maps: Understanding the involvement of low-SES African American parents to enlist them as partners in college choice. *Education and Urban Society*, *41*(2), 171–196. doi:10.1177/0013124508324028

Span, C. (2009). *From cotton field to schoolhouse: African American education in Mississippi, 1862–1875*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Spradley J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview.* New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Theoharis, G., & O'Toole, J. (2011). Leading inclusive ELL social justice leadership for English language learners. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *47*(4), 646–688.

Tuttle, Kate. Plessy v. Ferguson. In *Africana: The encyclopedia of the African and African American experience* (2nd ed.), K. A. Appiah & and H. L. Gates Jr. (Eds.), *Oxford African American Studies Center*. http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/opr/t0002/e3154

United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (2014). *Data Snapshot: School Discipline - Civil Rights Data ...* Retrieved from http://ocrdata.ed.gov/Downloads/CRDC-School-Discipline-Snapshot.pdf.

Valencia, R. R. (2010). *Dismantling contemporary deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice /Richard R. Valencia*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2010.

Walker, V. (2000). Valued segregated schools for African American children in the south, 1935–1969. *Review of Educational Research, 70*(3), 253–285.

Walker, V. (2003), The architects of black schooling in the segregated south: The case of one principal leader. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision, 19*(1), 54–72.

Williams, L. F. (2008). Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896). *The Oxford companion to American law*. K. L. Hall (Ed.) New York, NY: Oxford University Press. *Oxford African American Studies Center*. www.oxfordaasc.com

Williams, T., & Sanchez, B. (2012). Parental involvement (and uninvolvement) at an inner-city high school. *Urban Education, 47*(3), 625–652.

Yamagata-Lynch, L.C. (2010). *Activity systems analysis methods: Understanding complex learning environments*, Springer Science+Business Media. doi.10.1007/978-1-4419-6321-5_2