SYSTEMIC, STRUCTURAL, AND INTERNAL BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT FOR THOSE LIVING IN POVERTY

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A Dissertation

Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Leadership for Social Justice

California State University East Bay

June 2018

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June 2018
Educational Leadership

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Abstract

In the United States the number of children living in or near poverty is staggering, with estimates as high as 31 million. Many of these students come to school facing multiple challenges that can and do affect their academic performance. Their parents often face a host of challenges as well, including finding ways in which they can participate in their children's education. According to California's new Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), which was enacted in 2014, school districts are required to include parents in the decision-making process. The way parents are to be involved is still nebulous and up to each district in the state. Unfortunately, parents living in poverty are not always able to participate in the day-to-day education of their child, let alone assist in making decisions for the school or district at large. There is a large body of research that shows the positive effects of parent involvement on a student's academic performance. The consequences of a parent's inability to participate is often less academic success for their child. There have also been studies done to ascertain many of the barriers that prevent parents living in poverty from participating within the school system. There remains a need for research to uncover the systemic, structural, and internal barriers to parents' participation and involvement in their children's schools. This research is vital as without this deeper understanding of these three types of barriers, true remediation of the problem cannot occur.

California State University East Bay
Department of Educational Leadership
Doctorate in Educational Leadership for Social Justice

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

God has blessed me beyond measure with the people in my life. This adventure would not have been possible without them. First, my parents, Bobbie and Harry Wallinger and Scott and Joni Stevenson. Thank you for telling me that I could do and be anything I wanted when I grew up. I believed you! I am so grateful for your love and support of all my endeavors through phone calls, cards, visits, and cash.

My friends have been my foundation and have seen me through the very best and the very worst. You have encouraged me and strengthened me and I am a better woman for knowing you. Kae Erickson, Stacy Thompson, Tretonne Brennan, Lara George, and Liz Greene, thank you for holding me up and reminding me that it could be done, one day at a time.

To my mentor, Dr. Maggie MacIsaac, you inspired me and showed me what a woman could accomplish with integrity, fortitude, and grit. Thank you for always calling me back and shining a light on another way to look at things. To Dr. Stephen Hanke, you raised me as an administrator and encouraged me along my journey. I am grateful for your guidance.

I thank all of my professors for your time, commitment, and knowledge. I must thank Dr. Rosanna Mucetti, Dr. Pam Comfort, Dr. Bobbie Plough, Dr. Joe McCreary, Dr. John Castle, and Dr. Gerald Reyes for helping me on my journey. I thank Dr. Sharon Jackson and Dr. Danielle Ligocki for being on my committee and giving me such supportive feedback. Finally, I must thank my professor and committee chair, Dr. Kathryn Hayes. Dr. Hayes you gave me endless support even through difficulty, and I appreciate and admire your tenacity and strength. Thank you for all of your support and understanding.

My cohort team kept me going. Your commitment to never taking a break and refusing to potluck got me through. Mary Kay Going kept us all on track. Andrea Wilson, Martin Castillo, Anne Dizon, Tacey Rodgers, Rona Jawetz, Vernon Walton, David Ortiz, Melissa Ortiz, and Darrell Haydon, thank you for keeping it fun and defining solidarity.

Allison Silvestri, my Critical Friend, what can I say CF? You kept me going through the highs and lows, and this would not have been possible without you. Additionally, thank you to Caffe La Scala who let me work for hours on end with free internet for the price of one cup of coffee, and to Lettuce Restaurant who kept me alive.

Finally, to my incredible daughters Molly Brown and Kate Nerheim. I dedicate this to you. No matter what I do in this life, you will always be my biggest accomplishment. Thank you for inspiring me to dream big and then dream bigger. You are remarkable women and will accomplish anything you set your minds to. I love you and I am so grateful to you both.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Students living in poverty in the United States are often victims of an achievement gap that continues to widen in spite of federal and state compensatory programs (McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Vasquez Heilig, 2008). Although research demonstrates that parents can play a key role in supporting their child's achievement, parents of low income are not always able to participate in their child's education. Because parents living in poverty often lack valued social and cultural capital, they can encounter issues navigating the U.S. public school system, adding to their students' burden (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999).

Although parents living in poverty generally want to advocate for their children, they are often unable to do so because of the systemic and structural barriers inherent in the school system as well as the internal perceptions, social practices, and experiences of the parents themselves (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Jeynes, 2003). These factors combined result in parents living in poverty having less access to the school, less voice in their children's education, and can contribute to students of low income not coming to school as prepared to learn as their wealthier counterparts (Gassman-Pines & Yoshikawa, 2006).

Background of the Problem

In the United States, there are more than 16 million children living below the federal poverty line (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2017) and an additional 21 million living near it (Phys.org, 2016). The U.S. Census Bureau uses the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Statistical Policy Directive 14 to calculate if a family is living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). A family is assigned one of the 48 poverty thresholds. The threshold value is then deducted from the total income; if the threshold is higher than the income, that family is considered to be living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Many families deemed outside of the poverty range may live very close to it and face many of the same challenges those living in poverty do.

Before children living in poverty enter the U.S. public school system, they are often beset by a whole host of factors that deter and often derail educational progress. Maslow (1943) asserted that basic needs: food, clothing, and shelter, when not met, can delay socio-emotional development and create insurmountable obstacles. Reformers tackling the dilemma of poverty and its attendant consequences must be mindful that many of the difficulties students of low income face happen outside of the educational arena and begin in infancy with the most basic needs (Gassman-Pines & Yoshikawa, 2006).

Nonetheless, the education system is tasked with addressing these issues of systemic poverty. Unfortunately, despite all the monies that have been funneled into education reform and compensatory programs in the U.S. over the last 50 years, students living in poverty do not have equal access to a high-quality education, and thus the achievement gap, more accurately identified as the opportunity gap, persists (Bower & Griffin, 2011). The consequences are cumulative (Gassman-Pines & Yoshikawa, 2006) and include high dropout rates, incarceration (Neely & Griffin-Williams, 2013), and a lower quality of life (Eamon, 2001). Additionally, while some students of low income find support to navigate barriers often found in the U.S. public school system, some are left to their own devices. This leads many students to give up and drop out before completing high school (Patterson, Hale & Stessman, 2007). As the opportunity gap widens between students of low income and the rest of the children who attend schools in the U.S., students of low income often feel defeated and do not have the motivation or the systemic support to continue. All of these factors culminate to create a lower quality of life for those living in poverty. Other factors that produce internal barriers are poor nutrition, low quality health care, schools with limited resources, and a constant threat to social and emotional well-being all conspire to rob students of their equitable access to a high-quality education (Gassman-Pines & Yoshikawa, 2006).

There have been many solutions offered to solve this social justice issue that has reached epidemic proportions. Compensatory programs have sought to provide more money for those living in poverty (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) and have developed formulas based on the number of poor students attending school. School board decisions have been examined to look for equitable distribution of resources (Darden & Cavendish, 2012). Foundation Funding has been courted as a means to supplement government funding (Abzug, Olbrecht, Sabrin, & DeLeon, 2016). Charter schools have been established across the nation with questionable results (Jae Young, In-Soo, & Heesook, 2009). Yet none of these proposals have solved the issue of the opportunity gap for students of low income. Tyack and Cuban (1995) described it best as "the journey from policy talk at the national and state levels to what occurs in schools and the classroom is long, often unpredictable, and complicated" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 44). One of the biggest failures of compensatory reforms occurs when they are mandated at the federal, state, and local levels but do not take hold at the classroom level. It is the classroom, after all, where the true change happens (Fullan, 2011).

The research is clear that students perform better when their parents are involved; therefore, the U.S. educational system should be doing everything it can to involve all parents. There is a large body of research linking the positive effects of parent involvement with student achievement (Epstein, 1992; Saddler, 2016). Yet, parents living in poverty are often faced with systemic, structural, and internal barriers they are not able to overcome, to the detriment of their children's education (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). These barriers are both overt and covert and can work in isolation or combine to prevent parents from being involved.

One barrier is a result of parents and schools not always having the same definition of what constitutes involvement (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). School systems often define parent involvement as volunteering in the classroom, attending school events, helping with homework, and communication with their child's teacher. The definition of parent involvement for the purposes of this research encompass a broad spectrum of practices. The school system dictated definition of parent involvement may not be possible for parents of low income due to a lack of time and money (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Epstein et al., 2002; Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Parent involvement can include anything from providing a time and space in the home to do homework, reduced workload at home to study, or familial sacrifice to keep a child in school at all costs Ceballo, Maurizi, Suarez, & Aretakis, 2014), to more traditional help with homework assistance or volunteering in the classroom or working on a committee such as School Site Council (SSC), English Language Acquisition Committee (ELAC), or the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) (Epstein, 2009). For the purpose of this research, Epstein's (2009) definitions of volunteering and help will be used. It states

> “Volunteer” to mean anyone who supports school goals and children’s learning or development in any way, at any place, and at any time - not just during the school day and at the school building. “Help” at home to mean encouraging, listening, reacting, praising, guiding, monitoring, and discussing - not “teaching” school subjects. (p. 1)

On the one hand, schools assume parents have access to the information and channels they need to participate, on the other hand, parents may not know how to access the information they need. The structural barriers faced by parents living in poverty frequently revolve around lack of access to the school (Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Parents who work often cannot afford to take time off to come to the school during the day. Others may lack transportation to get to the school. Still others may not know how they are supposed to participate as a result of the school not reaching out to them (Roeser et al., 1996). Finally, internal barriers may also be a result of the parent’s own experience in school as a child. They may be based on the parents’ inability to ask for help in navigating the public school system (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). Conversely, barriers may be based on inaccurate information coming from their children or other parents (Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Whatever these barriers may be, it is vital that they are uncovered if there is to be any hope for their remediation.

Students living in poverty and lacking parent advocacy can be subjected to exclusion from needed services or to inappropriate support by way of remediation (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). With these issues, the chasm between poverty and academic success often widens from year to year. In most cases, the communities these parents are coming from are not broken nor are their homes (Tuck, 2009). There is, however, a cumulative risk that encompasses many variables for families of low income (Gassman-Pines & Yoshikawa, 2006) that must be factored into the discussion.

This cumulative risk is determined by all the variables such as poor nutrition, inadequate medical care, or a violent neighborhood to name a few, that combine to create barriers that families must contend with (Gassman-Pines & Yoshikawa, 2006). This research will seek to address such risks associated with poverty while not falling into deficit thinking (Tuck, 2009). The deficit thinking occurs when these families are thought of as incapable of a high level of achievement because of their poverty (Tuck, 2009).

Legislative history. In 1965 the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed in an effort to address the issue of systemic barriers that prevented students living in poverty from accessing the same academic success as those not living in poverty. Also, referred to as Title I, ESEA (1965) is a federal grant provided to PK-12 schools in the U.S. with high numbers of socio-economically disadvantaged students in an effort to provide the support schools need to ensure an equitable education (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). After 50 years, Title I has not been able to provide all students of low income equal access to a high-quality education. One reason for the failure is the inability to engage parents in their children's education in a way that impacts academic success (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999; Jeynes 2003). Another reason is that teachers are not trained to meet the social and emotional needs of students living in poverty, let alone how to engage those students' parents (Fullan, 2011).

The standards based reform movement followed the initiation of Title I, with the first major piece of federal legislation titled No Child Left Behind [NCLB] (NCLB, 2001). The goal of NCLB was to ensure all students a high-quality education through a focus on standards and accountability (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Under NCLB, all students were to score at or above standard in mathematics, English language arts, and science by 2014. At the end, NCLB had failed to close the opportunity gap. As with many reform movements, NCLB did not address student needs outside of the classroom. Teachers were legislated to be highly trained in their subject or content area, but not in social and emotional student support nor in parent engagement (Epstein, 2009; Roeser et al., 1996).

In California, the current attempt to improve student achievement and close the opportunity gap is the Local Control Funding Plan or Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP; Local Control Funding Plan, 2013). In response to the research proven importance of parent involvement, LCAP lists parent involvement as the third of the eight state priorities. This indicates that the state is finally aware of the need for parent involvement, but it does not set parameters for how this is to be achieved. In many districts, the result has been the same - LCAP has not increased parent involvement or has shown minimal increase (Koppich, Humphrey, & Marsh, 2015). The parents who were involved before LCAP are the ones who are involved now; those who know how to navigate the system and have the cultural and social capital that are valued by the school system.

Education is frequently at the whim of the current political agenda. Although both politicians and educators frequently agree that reform has to happen in the public education system, there may not be agreement on the reform structure or implementation (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Without the recognition of the effects of poverty and a removal of some or all of the cumulative risk it creates, reforms would continue to be ineffective (Gassman-Pines & Yoshikawa, 2006; Noguera & Wells, 2011).

An example of political agendas determining the fate of education can be found under the current Trump administration. Under this administration, compensatory programs are under attack in favor of the voucher and charter school systems. Betsy DeVos, the Secretary of Education, released the revised application process for states to use. The changes made reflect less input from parents and less transparency than was intended under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) as directed by congress (Klein, 2017). Time will reveal if the Title I funds under ESSA will be distributed in the same way if the voucher and charter movement continues to grow. This new trend could reduce parent involvement even more, thereby further reducing student achievement.

While the state has made parent involvement a requirement, many schools are struggling with just how to involve parents from marginalized populations. Parents of color, parents whose first language is not English, and parents living in poverty may not be involved in the school to the degree the state intended. All parents should have a say in the decisions the school makes per the LCAP (Local Control Funding Program, 2013). The research has shown a great deal regarding the vital role parent involvement plays in students' academic success. There is a lack of more nuanced research regarding the range of systemic, structural, and internal barriers parents experience. Research is especially lacking regarding parents living in poverty, as much of the current research focuses on race. This study could shed light on a resolution to this issue for many parents living in poverty.

Significance of the Study

Although the research demonstrates the positive effects of parental involvement on student academic success, there is a need to understand the barriers that prevent parents of low income from being involved in their children's education. While there has been research that revealed some of the barriers based on race and language (Ceballo et al., 2014; Hill & Tyson, 2009), there is very little depicting the barriers for parents of low income in a wealthier district such as the one I am studying. There are families living in invisible poverty, that is, those who are living in poverty but have blended in with the affluent community in which they live. I am interested in what, if anything, prevents these parents from participating in their children's school. Thus, this study will address systemic and structural barriers, the barriers generated through parent internal perceptions and prior experiences, and the role of race regarding barriers. It will do so using an interview design.

This study will focus on one elementary school in the Bay Area School District. I chose the elementary level because it is when many of the habits and practices of parent involvement begin. I chose this specific site because it is a Title I school and has the highest number of students on free and reduced lunch compared to the other elementary schools. It also is the school assigned to those living in one of the Section 8 housing complexes in the district. The Section 8 housing complex serves a racially diverse community from which to invite participants.

Research has shown that a major challenge regarding parent involvement centers on the definition of involvement. Parents and school staff do not always agree on what constitutes involvement (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). In addition, there are barriers to involvement that stem from both school structure and parent internal perceptions. By having the parents of low income themselves identify the systemic, structural, and internal barriers to parental involvement for those living in poverty, we can begin the process of removing these barriers.

Fullan (2011) suggested that only a whole system reform will be adequate to provide real equity and ensure that all students receive a high-quality education. I assert that parent involvement is a key part of this whole school reform. If systemic, structural, and internal barriers to involvement for parents of low income are uncovered, both the parents and the school staff can work toward their removal. This study seeks to identify the barriers that exist, thus providing valuable information to parents of low income, the school staff, and ultimately, to the students. Knowledge gained from this study may lead to the increase in parents of low income involvement in their children’s education, which in turn may increase their children’s academic success (Saddler, 2016).

Research Questions

The questions posed in this study seek to uncover the systemic, structural, and internal barriers.

1. What systemic and structural barriers do parents of low income face as they negotiate the education of their children?
2. In what ways do the internal perceptions and social practices of parents of low income contribute to the barriers they face in participating in their children's schooling?

The following chapters cover five aspects of the study. First, I elaborate on four theories that provide frameworks for the study of systemic, structural, and internal barriers to parent involvement. An analysis of their suitability for framing this issue follows. Second, I review the empirical literature regarding sociocultural context of the problem and its contributors. Third, I outline the methodology of the study. Fourth, I examine the data to find patterns and trends. Finally, I use my finding to make recommendations on next steps for improving parent involvement in the public school system.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

Conceptual Framework

There are many theoretical frameworks that are applicable to explain the challenge of parents being involved within the school system. The theories that will be examined are cultural capital theory, social capital theory, reproduction theory, and critical race theory. I first cover the role of cultural and social capital in parent involvement, then discuss how the valuing of certain capitals leads to social reproduction. Cultural capital theory is applicable as it explains the generational transmission of knowledge (Bourdieu, 1986) that may or may not be useful in the school system. Social capital theory helps us to understand the parent relationships and networks that can provide support in a community but not necessarily within the school system (Bourdieu, 1986). Reproduction theory outlines the way in which generational transmission and relational networks combine to formulate a person's ability to navigate within the school system (Bourdieu, 1986). Critical race theory affords us the ability to see the systemic racism that permeates every aspect of American life including our nation's school system (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). The purpose of this literature review is to determine the theory or theories that provide the most explicative framework for the barriers to parent involvement.

Cultural Capital Theory

Parents living in poverty do not always have the education or experience to participate in their child's education in the way the school prefers. They may possess a host of skills that help them in different arenas but are viewed as useless by the school system (Horvat et al., 2003). This may reflect the school's lack of ability to transmute the parent's' capital into a usable resource. The difficulty lies in the fact that the school's capital trumps the parent's, which can lead to the parent feeling further disenfranchised (Bower & Griffin, 2011).

Cultural capital, as encapsulated by Pierre Bourdieu (1986), in its simplest form, can be thought of as knowledge. That is, the knowledge that a person brings into any given situation or institution, including their background, education, and experiences (Bourdieu, 1986). This capital shapes who they are and how they act and interact in the world (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995). Everyone possesses cultural capital. However, one barrier to parent involvement in the school system is that parents do not always have a cultural capital that is valued by the school (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995; Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999).

This is exacerbated when the school and the parents see the role of the parent within the school differently (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). Goldenberg and Gallimore (1995) found this exemplified within the American school perspective as parents were seen as parents "are the first teachers", but the parents' perspective was that the schools held that "la muestra es la segunda mama (the teacher is the second mother)" (p. 203). These differing perspectives can make it seem like the parent is not involved when, in reality, they are involved in a way their cultural capital dictates (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995). Frequently schools ask for parents to volunteer but provide no training or flexibility for that volunteerism (Epstein, 2009). Parents living in poverty may be ill-equipped to participate without this needed training and support.

Social Capital Theory

Where cultural capital can be thought of as knowledge, social capital is best described as relationships. Lareau and McNamara Horvat (1999) agree with Bourdieu (1986) that many parents are barred from involvement with the school due to their undervalued social capital. Parents living in poverty often have strong parent networks, but they are not interconnected with the school (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995; Horvat et al., 2013; Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Parents struggle to navigate the school system in an arena where they have few links and personal connections (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999).

Parents with valued social capital may belong to the school's Parent Teacher Association, School Site Council, English Language Acquisition Committee, or other on-site decision-making body. They may volunteer in the classroom or run an afterschool program. They may help grade papers at home or run a special school event. However, most of the volunteer opportunities are during the day or require some expertise to complete (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Parents living in poverty may not be able to participate during the day for a variety of reasons including lack of transportation, lack of childcare, or a lack of skill (Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Thus, even though involvement in school can increase a parent's social capital, parents living in poverty may not be able to meet the traditional demands schools place on them (Bower & Griffin, 2011). The parents' inability to participate during the preferred activities prevents them from being able to create new relationships with those in the school-sanctioned networks (Horvat et al., 2003). The lack of social networks reinforces the inability to participate; the cycle continues (Bourdieu, 1986).

This is not to say that parents do not possess social capital. Just as with cultural capital, the relationships and networks they have are not the ones that give them access to the school system (Horvat et al., 2003; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Lee & Bowen, 2006). These parents may have social networks that provide their children with opportunities for play dates, sports, or other outside school activities, but cannot address a problem within the school (Horvat et al., 2003). For example, in one study, parents from families of low income tended to react to problems with the school as lone individuals, while parents from middle-class families might respond collectively (Horvat et al., 2003). If a student is treated unfairly by a teacher, a parent of low income may try to go to the teacher, possibly to the principal, and may or may not get a result favorable to their child. An example of this phenomenon was found in the study by Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau (2003) where middle-class parents felt their child was being treated unfairly and did not get satisfactory results from the teacher and/or principal, they called upon their network at school to complain about the teacher in an effort to get the results they desired. These networks also know to go to the district level if the site level does not satisfy them.

Reproduction Theory

Building on capital theory, reproduction theory proposes that within the school system a person's capital is replicated even "against their will" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 71). Reproduction encompasses cultural, social, and economic capital (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). It can be examined through the lens of three different factors. First is the value attached to capital in a given setting, second, is whether or not a person chooses to activate their capital, and third, if the institution in the setting values the capital being activated (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). Lareau and McNamara Horvat (1999) posited an excellent way to think about reproduction as a card game.

You may have an excellent hand for a game of Hearts, but it will not help you if you are playing Blackjack.

Parental involvement within educational institutions can be viewed through the lens of reproduction theory in that the parent may not have the type of capital the school values (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Parents may choose not to activate the capital they do possess if they feel intimidated or unsure of their rights (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Parents may also have a difficult time interacting with the school if they themselves had a negative school experience (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). Bourdieu's (1986) work showed that the school system itself created reproduction of behaviors that would be replicated again and again. In this context "schooling does have its own power to shape consciousness, over and above the power of the family" (Nash, 1990, p. 435). While parents living in poverty want their children to achieve to a higher degree than they did in school, they lack the ability to support that goal (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995).

Critical Race Theory

While many parents find themselves lacking valued cultural and social capital due to the systemic racism propagated by the dominant culture (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999), others feel it was the systemic racism in schools that prevented their involvement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). Critical Race Theory (CRT), which was developed from a legal perspective by law professors Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013), seeks to illuminate how barriers are generated by the systemic racism within the U.S. public school system. For example, textbooks overrepresent the accomplishments of White men over any other group (Brown & Au, 2014). American schools cater to the dominant culture, which is White, and more specifically, White male (Brown & Au, 2014). As a result of this dominant culture bias, White males have had greater opportunities than any other groups and, therefore, appear to have accomplished more (Brown & Au, 2014). This is exemplified in the first of CRT's main tenets that racism is normal in American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013).

Another CRT tenet is that advancement for people of color is encouraged only when it serves the dominant culture's interests (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). Students of color who are excellent athletes may get more resources in school than their less athletic counterparts because winning championships serves the dominant culture. The systemic racism described by CRT is enforced through microaggressions, defined as the day-to-day slights and disadvantages given to people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). Many parents living in poverty who have been subject to these microaggressions within the school system throughout their educational career are wary of the school systems call for their involvement (Howard & Reynolds, 2008).

Theory Analysis

All four of these theories show research that supports the concept that there are systemic, structural, and internal barriers within the school system for those parents living in poverty. Cultural capital, social capital, and reproduction were all theories born out of the sociological work that the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu conducted in the 1970s and 1980s in school systems. Critical race theory evolved out of the American legal community in response to the glaring inequality between Whites and people of color in the legal system. A child of the civil rights movement, CRT became the framework to expose systemic racism in the United States.

Cultural capital theory and social capital theory explain the way in which parents operate within the school system after their capital is reproduced. For the purpose of this study, the theories that best encapsulate the issue of perceived barriers to parent involvement for those living in poverty are cultural capital theory and social capital theory. The frameworks of knowledge and relationships work in tandem to explain why some parents are barred from making real inroads into the school system and thereby helping their children attain a high-quality education.

Social reproduction theory explains why parents living in poverty repeat the same behaviors generationally irrespective of race and is an umbrella under which a sociological understanding of cultural, social, and financial capital also resides. Social reproduction did an excellent job of outlining how a person unknowingly inherited their parent’s capital and blended well with cultural capital and social capital. Reproduction explains the reproduction of behaviors, and cultural and social capital went further still to explain how an individual’s capital was an advantage or a disadvantage. However, it focuses more on how cultural, social, and financial behaviors are replicated. This reproduction is in reference to all groups of race, class, and ethnicity. The theory is limited in that it does not postulate how this capital interacts in the school, only that is it passed from one generation to the next. This research seeks to understand how a parent living in poverty is hindered by their capital when dealing with the school system.

Although social and cultural capital provided a pivotal lens for understanding reproduction of systemic inequities in the school system, they remained underdeveloped on the issue of race. Therefore, critical race theory was examined to understand the underlying systemic racism. Critical race theory exposes systemic racism that may contribute to both the systemic and structural barriers many parents of low income face. It may also contribute to the internal barriers parents perceive as inherent in the school system based on their own school experience. Upon further examination, it became clear that the issue of racism could also be identified within the frameworks of cultural and social capital as a foundational tenet as to why some parents’ capital was undervalued. Critical race theory may expose the racism inherent in the public school system that prevents many parents from feeling valued, let alone welcomed, to participate in their child’s education in the Bay Area School District. This may provide the need for critical race theory in addition to the cultural and social capital theories that work under reproduction.

Empirical Literature Review

The literature reviewed provides an overview of many of the variables that contribute to lack of involvement in public schools, including the socio-cultural context of the problem. In addition, the literature review explores the systemic, structural, and internal barriers to parent involvement. Parents' lack of finesse in navigating the public school system can add to students' burdens. Students living in poverty lacking parent advocacy can lead to what Lareau and McNamara Horvat (1999) outline as "exclusion [which] may include placement in a low reading group, retention, placement in remedial courses, and the failure to complete college-preparation requirements" (p. 48). With these restrictions, the chasm between poverty and academic success widens from year to year. Students are not able to get above their environmental restrictions to make the necessary gains in school. The factors both outside and inside the school contribute to form the student's cumulative risk factor (Gassman-Pines & Yoshikawa, 2006). A student's cumulative risk factor is determined by the number of variables that work to impede their success (Gassman-Pines & Yoshikawa, 2006).

Sociocultural Context of the Problem: The Nature of Poverty

Students living in poverty in the U.S. are often unsure of how their basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter will be met (Gobin, Teeroovengadum, & Becceea, 2012). Schools are often not prepared to handle the needs of these students and can make their burden heavier with unrealistic demands. Sanchez (2005; as cited in Pizarro, 2005) wrote of his own experiences living in poverty and attending public school, "I was never prepared for the emotional trauma that I was to endure at the hands of the educational system” (p. 229). The school did not know how to support his needs or the needs of his parents. The school system, in concert with unmet basic needs, makes the day-to-day expectations of school challenging (Pizarro, 2005).

Children growing up in poverty are vulnerable on many levels; developmentally, emotionally, and socially. Risk factors include those on the level of the individual, the family, and the community, and when looked at as a whole, become a child’s cumulative risk (Gassman-Pines & Yoshikawa, 2006). A study conducted by Gobin et al. (2012) delved deeper into the areas of physiological, safety, social, and esteem needs for students to be able to reach the level of self-actualization, Maslow’s (1943) highest level. Students dealing with multiple issues of health, physical and emotional safety, lack of parent involvement, and self-esteem develop a higher cumulative risk, which is a significant predictor of student performance (Gassman-Pines & Yoshikawa, 2006). This is due to the many stressors these students grow up with that the wealthier group does not (Eamon, 2001). These risk factors combine to make progress a challenge in today’s educational system. This is germane to the need for parent involvement as students feel safer and have higher self-esteem when their parents are treated with respect (Sanchez, 2005).

There is a large body of research that shows people living in poverty do not enjoy the same quality of life as those who are more affluent. Cumulative risk can manifest to create inequity. Eve Tuck (2009) described a report done by the United Nations in March 2008. Tuck stated, “the UN issued a report blasting the United States as a ‘two-tiered’ society in terms of education, health, land and housing, and criminal justice” (2009, p. 411). Poverty affects children negatively from the standpoint of their mental, emotional, and behavioral health (Yoshikawa, Aber, & Beardslee, 2012). It is these critical risk factors that creates challenges for students long before they attend school. The detrimental effects of poverty can be profound no matter a person’s race, ethnicity, or education level (Yoshikawa et al., 2012). Again, poverty is the great equalizer and it affects all those who suffer from it.

An additional difficulty for students living in poverty is that the social and cultural capital they bring with them is not always valued by the school system. Lareau and McNamara Horvat (1999) posit in their study that "one of Bourdieu's major insights on educational inequality is that students with more social and cultural capital fare better in school than do their otherwise-comparable peers with less valuable social and cultural capital" (p. 37). While students may be highly skilled at navigating their lives with very little money, this skill set is not recognized by the school culture as worthwhile. In addition, Lareau and McNamara Horvat (1999) explained that we have to take into account what capital a person has and, if they choose to activate their capital, what is the reaction to that activation by the receiver. Public schools often invalidate the capital that parents from low incomes bring, so when parents do activate their capital, it is minimized or ignored.

This culmination of risk can increase student dropout rates. A staggering 22% of students who have lived in poverty do not graduate from high school (Hernandez, 2011). Many students in low socioeconomic areas go to schools that are financially impacted and cannot provide the resources necessary to support their students' socio-emotional needs (Eamon, 2001). This lack of support makes it more difficult for students to stay in school. There is also compelling research indicating that a contributor to the high dropout rate among those living in poverty is the federal high stakes testing itself (McNeil et al., 2008). The pressure put on students to perform for a system in which they feel undervalued does not provide much incentive (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013; McNeil et al., 2008). In a comparative analysis of seven national studies, Doll, Eslami, and Walters (2013) found that in addition to students who are pushed out due to attendance and discipline or pulled out for external reasons like family or jobs, there are students who fall out due to lack of family support. When the dropout rates increase, so do the incarceration rates (Neely & Griffin-Williams, 2013). Michelle Alexander (2010) stated in her seminal work, *The New Jim Crow*, that “the United States now boasts an incarceration rate that is six to ten times greater than that of other industrialized nations” (p. 8).

The opportunity gap has been fueled by the overrepresentation of dominant White culture throughout the educational system. This is apparent in two examples, the authors of texts, and the number of White teachers. In the first example, the California Common Core State Standards, which were adopted in 2010, gave a reading list in their appendix of text exemplars. Of the 88 recommended books, 69 of the authors are White (Ganji, 2012). All of the texts chosen for grades kindergarten, first, second, and third are written by White authors (Ganji, 2012). Only six of the chosen books have a focus on working-class families or those living in poverty (Ganji, 2012). Students do not have an opportunity to see themselves in school.

In the second example, the opportunity gap has been exacerbated further by the disproportionate numbers of White teachers. According to the California Department of Education (CDE), 65% of all teachers who teach kindergarten through twelfth grade are White (California Department of Education, 2015). This is problematic as White teachers may operate from a deficit mindset. While this may be unintentional, the systemic mindset of deficit thinking has contributed to the continuance of the opportunity gap in schools (Brandon, 2010). To remediate this failure as well as to close the opportunity gap will require all teachers to recognize the systemic expectation for students to assimilate into the dominant culture, and instead, allow students to capitalize on their diverse cultural contributions (Brandon, 2010).

The Role of Parent Involvement

Research has shown that parent involvement is one strategy that can be used to decrease the achievement gap and increase student achievement (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Jeynes, 2003). The connection between parent involvement and student achievement was explored in two meta-analyses comprised of 71 studies. The conclusion of these studies was that parental involvement in a child's education increased student success (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2003). The involvement strategies that were deemed the most effective were different for different groups.

In the meta-analysis of 21 studies by Jeynes (2003), the positive effects of parent involvement were present in every area of student achievement. He found, "overall, one can conclude that parental involvement has a significant positive impact on children across race and across academic outcomes" (p. 213). However, not all groups responded the same. African American and Latino students had greater outcomes from parent involvement than Asian students (Jeynes, 2003). Jeynes (2003) surmised that further research was needed to find out why.

In the meta-analysis of 50 studies or reports by Hill and Tyson (2009), the positive effects of parental involvement on student achievement were also substantiated. Home-based involvement, school-based involvement, and academic socialization were analyzed. However, one involvement strategy was the most successful when working with middle school adolescent students and that was of academic socialization (Hill & Tyson, 2009). While school-based involvement was also successful, students having the opportunity to discuss their academic goals, future plans, and the connection between the two with their parents provided the most academic success (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

Moreover, these studies showed that the effects of involvement differ by age. Hill and Tyson (2009) posit that at the elementary level, parent involvement increases student achievement due to the parent's increased knowledge of curriculum through volunteering exposure. For example, studies have shown that parent teacher conferencing supports student learning as it includes parents meeting with teachers and parents visiting their children's classrooms (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Hill and Tyson (2009) focused on middle school students. This age distinction is important as middle school is an age where students are developing more autonomy. The types of involvement they studied in the middle school setting ranged from school site volunteer work, attending school events, checking on completed assignments, helping with homework, and academic socialization.

Some studies show that the link may be dependent of the groups studied from the standpoint of ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic status (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2003; Lee & Bowen, 2006). There are those too who show mixed results based on the types of parent involvement (Ceballo et al., 2014; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Lee & Bowen, 2006). The level of involvement ranged from school site volunteer work, attending school activities, parent teacher conferences, homework support, structuring the child's day to support academics, or discussing school regularly (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Although Lee and Bowen (2006) found that overall there was a positive effect on achievement, there was a disparity of results based on the population studied with socioeconomic level and race playing a greater role than parent involvement. They found that those who did not have the capital to navigate the school as an institution did not volunteer at the school as much as more educated European Americans did, and their involvement was more based in the home. Overall, Lee and Bowen's (2006) study indicated that parent involvement did have a positive effect on student achievement.

By widening the scope of what constitutes parent involvement, Ceballo et al. (2014) conducted a study that focused on Latino adolescents specifically and broadened the definition of parent involvement to include nontraditional strategies such as

> finding children a quiet place to work in overcrowded homes, excusing children from chores in order to do schoolwork, exposing children to the low-paying farm work available to people without an education, and making personal or financial sacrifices in support of children's schooling. (Ceballo et al., 2014, p. 117)

The students in this study identified six areas of parent involvement: Gift/Sacrifice, Future Discussions, Effort, Guilt/Sacrifice, School Involvement, and Home Involvement. Of these six areas, the two that made the most impact were Gift/Sacrifice and Future Discussions (Ceballo et al., 2014). Interestingly, neither of these areas required any specific cultural capital on the part of the parents and could be practiced without a connection to the school itself. This study underscores the importance of broadening the definition of volunteering and having schools embrace the capital their parents of low income can bring.

Ways in Which Parents are Involved

The Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC; 2009) requires teachers to be evaluated in accordance with the California Standards for the Teaching Profession. In Standard Six (6.1), Developing as a Professional Educator, teachers are required to "develop awareness of potential bias that might influence my teaching or affect student learning" (CTC, 2009). In 6.4, Working with Families to Support Student Learning, teachers are directed to ask the following of their practice

> "How do I…" or "Why do I…" • value and respect students' families and appreciate their role in student learning? • develop an understanding of families' racial, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds? • engage families as sources of knowledge about students' strengths, interests, and needs in support of their learning and personal growth and development? • present the

educational program to all families in a thorough and comprehensible fashion? • provide opportunities for all families to participate in the classroom and school community?

The importance of parent involvement is not just suggested as guidelines for best practices, teachers are required to involve all parents in order to hold a California teaching credential (CTC, 2009). Unfortunately, schools often undervalue the ways in which parents can participate.

Epstein (2009) outlined six types of involvement consisting of parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. It is for the purposes of the present study that parenting is listed first. This validates that parents are a key component to student success as this type of involvement was shown to increase student attendance and create value around the importance of school (Epstein, 2009). In each one of the six types Epstein (2009) lists, it show the results for students, the results for parents, and the results for teachers. The difficulty becomes how to successfully implement these six types of involvement. Epstein will be the dominate reference as he created the model for this type of parent engagement.

Parenting. Parenting provides results for students in that it reinforces the values and belief systems of the family (Ceballo et al., 2014; Epstein, 2009). A study conducted with Latino families of low income revealed how the definition of involvement may differ from home to school. In this study, parents considered lessening chores, creating a quiet place for a child to study, and their own parental sacrifice for the sake of their child’s education as valuable forms of involvement (Ceballo et al., 2014). One study showed the school placed little value on the environment parents create at home that is conducive to learning and academic success at school (Lee & Bowen 2006). Conversely, it is due to parenting that students develop an "awareness of the importance of school" as well as their attendance habits (Epstein, 2009, p. 1).

Students learn to respect their parents and develop their foundational habits (Epstein, 2009 & Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995). Parenting involvement gives parents the confidence in their ability to parent well and provides resources on child and adolescent development (Epstein, 2009). It also provides parents with a network of other parents and when their parenting is valued, a supportive feeling from the school (Epstein, 2009; Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). This helps parents feel more comfortable working with the school and may eliminate some of the internal barriers they carry with them.

Communicating. Communicating between home and school empowers the students to take an active role in their own educational pathway. Students understand behavioral expectations, both academic and social, and are able to discuss these with their parents (Epstein, 2009). However, the onus cannot lie solely with the student to act as the keeper of communication. Schools need to ensure that parents are receiving and understanding the communications that come from the school to the parents (Epstein, 2009; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Students who have active reciprocal communication with their teachers are able to make informed choices in regard to which courses will lead them to their academic goals (Epstein, 2009). Students that have a clear understanding on which courses to take are empowered on their educational journey.

Communicating between home and school enables parents to effectively navigate the system and effectively advocate for their children. Clear communication requires two-way communication that is relational. With clear communication, parents understand the school's programs and can assist their child with making informed choices regarding their educational path (Epstein, 2009). In order to make this a reality, schools must take the parents family context into consideration (Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Once clear communication has been established, parents gain confidence, and communicating with the school becomes easier thus creating an educational partnership (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Epstein, 2009). For example, parents who have strong communication with counselors are able to help their children make more informed choices for college (Holcomb-McCoy, 2010).

In his paper on parent teacher conferences, Ediger (2016) recommends that they should be as informal as possible with the focus being on mutual respect and the building of trust. He further recommends eight categories of discussion focus, four academic, and four social and emotional, to develop an accurate profile of the whole child. Finally, he encourages teachers to listen carefully to parents and to acknowledge areas where a student may feel insecure, unsafe, or bullied (Ediger, 2016). This process will work toward the development of trust building, which in turn make parents and teachers collaborators toward the student’s success.

Volunteering. Parents volunteering in the school results in students developing the skill to communicate with adults that are not their parents (Epstein, 2009). Additionally, students benefit academically from the tutoring they receive from the volunteers (Epstein, 2009). Students also learn a variety of professional options from the exposure to the many careers, skills, and talents that volunteers bring into the classroom (Epstein, 2009). Students also see the number of adults vested in their education are not relegated to just those being paid. Volunteering in the school results in parents developing better relationships with school staff as well as gain insight into the job of the teacher (Epstein, 2009). Epstein (2009) also posited that volunteering can increase the skill level of the parent and develop their self-confidence. This enables parents to be more effective when helping their child with work at home.

Learning at home. Learning at home requires that the school provide parents with strategies to help their children at home with homework as well as academic decision-making (Epstein, 2009). The results for students includes a positive attitude toward school, completing homework, and a self-concept as a learner (Epstein, 2009). Students may also begin to view their parents in alignment with their teachers and view home as a learning extension of school (Epstein, 2009). The results parents derive from their children learning at home first and foremost is a greater "awareness of [their] child as a learner" (Epstein, 2009). Parents are better equipped to support their children's learning and encourage their children in homework, course selection, and planning (Epstein, 2009). Academic discussions can occur at home and school and parents again gain a greater appreciation of their own teaching skills (Epstein, 2009). Parents can validate their methods of teaching as an enhancement to the schools. The parents become partner teachers with the school as opposed to feeling outside of the system.

Decision-making. Decision-making entails that parents will be part of the decision-making process. While this was required under NCLB (2001), the directive of such participation, "programs, activities, and procedures shall be planned and implemented with meaningful consultation with parents of participating children", was nebulous at best. Under the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), parent involvement is now the third of the eight state priorities (Local Control Funding Program, 2013). The California Department of Education outlines this involvement as "efforts to seek parent input in decision making, promotion of parent participation in programs for unduplicated pupils and special need subgroups as it relates to culture and climate, equity, and family and community" (California Department of Education, 2015). While the state's directive for parental involvement is becoming more specific, it still does not outline how the involvement will be measured.

Parents involvement in decision-making results in students not only having their rights protected but also an internal knowledge that their parents are a part of the larger conversation regarding their child's educational options (Epstein, 2009). Parents also have the ability to create organizations at the school that directly benefit students (Epstein, 2009). Students can take a sense of pride that their parents are helping to shape the policies of the school. The results for parents is a feeling of ownership of the school's policies and procedures that are based on real participation (Epstein, 2009). Parents also gain an understanding of policies at the local, state, and federal level (Epstein, 2009). Parents develop a feeling of ownership of the learning occurring inside the school with regard to their own children's education.

Collaborating with the community. The purpose of collaborating with the community is to build bridges between students and the community around them. Collaborating with the community helps students make connections through enrichment programs provided by community programs (Epstein, 2009). It also affords them to participate in extracurricular activities they might not otherwise have had available to them and discover new skills (Epstein, 2009). Collaborating with the community can cause positive results for the parents as well. It allows them to build networks through social interactions with other families (Epstein, 2009). This allows parents to build on their social capital. It also affords them the opportunity to take advantage of local resources and make more connections (Epstein, 2009). A final result for parents provides a result for their children as well. When parents take advantage of local resources, they model this behavior for their children and build their children's cultural capital for navigating the public school system.

There are other forms of parent involvement such as parent teacher conferences, driving on field trips, or participating in school governance (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Parents can also be involved in their child's education by attending Back to School Night, Open House, or after school activities created for the school community (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Williams & Sánchez (2013) argued that it is the school's responsibility to increase the opportunities for those living in poverty to participate authentically.

Programs that Incorporate Parent Involvement

There have been programs implemented with students of low income that have shown success. The three programs highlighted here showed success through different strategies. The first focused on prekindergarten students, the second on high school students, and the third focused on a comprehensive operating system. A pilot study encompassing 39 families was conducted to test the efficacy of the Kids in Transition to School (KITS) program in neighborhoods of low income families (Pears et al., 2014). This program was designed to increase school readiness in both academics and self-regulation. The results of the KITS intervention program found that prior to entering kindergarten, students in neighborhoods of low income could increase school readiness (Pears et al., 2014). Part of the success was due to the focus on the students and their families during the "school readiness phase" and again during the "transition/maintenance phase" (Pears et al., 2014, p. 435). The program supported the whole family, not just the student, by holding planning meetings between the school and the parents.

The Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Program was shown to be successful in providing students of low income access to college (Bernhardt, 2013). AVID creates a scholarly community amongst peers, teaches students how to navigate the educational system, and provides students a support community made up of parents, teachers, counselors, and mentors. The primary goal of AVID is family involvement (Bernhardt, 2013). The program recognizes that parents must be given the knowledge to navigate the school system in order to successfully support their children to prepare for college (Bernhardt, 2013). This is accomplished through a series of workshops parents attend to learn how to prepare for college and the enrollment process (Bernhardt, 2013). Parents are taught how to support their child in the process they may not have experienced themselves.

The Comer School Development Program (SDP), first field tested from 1978 to 1987, is currently being implemented in 1,150 schools (Lunenburg, 2011). In a meta-analysis by Borman, Hewes, Overman, and Brown (2003) of 29 comprehensive reform programs, the Comer SDP has been found to be one of the top three. The Comer SDP has shown an increase in student of low income achievement over time in diverse settings (Lunenburg, 2011). The key to the success has been the incorporation of three mechanisms, three operations, and three guiding principles (Lunenburg, 2011). Parents are the key to the Parent/Family Team but are also on the School Planning and Management Team as the home/school collaboration is critical to the program’s success (Lunenburg, 2011).

All three of these programs rely heavily on parent involvement for success. It was not just a component of these programs; it was a foundational tenet. KITS, AVID, and the Comer School Development Program all viewed parent involvement as the keystone for student success and it was required for students to be included in these programs. Therefore, it is imperative that schools create opportunities for parents to participate so that students can be successful.

Types of Barriers

Barriers to parent involvement can be broken down into three main categories: systemic, structural, and internal. Systemic barriers are those that permeate the educational system and maintain the status quo to support the White dominant culture. Systemic barriers prevent equitable practices from taking root in the system. Structural barriers are those that bar participation by preventing access. This lack of access is frequently a result of inflexibility on the part of the school system. Internal barriers are those parents bring with them. These may stem from the parents' own schooling experience, a lack of capital to navigate the school system, or a combination of both. These barriers create formidable obstacles for parents of low income to overcome.

Systemic barriers. Although the positive effects of parent involvement are important for students' academic success, their capital is frequently not valued. Social and cultural capital are the currency upon which parent involvement is dependent. Frequently, schools do not value the capital that parents bring to the table (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999; Lee & Bowen, 2006). When discussing this notion of social and cultural capital that parents bring to the school environment, one difficulty is prioritizing which aspects of parental involvement are the most important (Jeynes, 2003). This is essential as it is the school's prioritization that always takes precedent and supersedes that of the parents. It is the undervaluing of the parents' social and cultural capital that creates invisible exclusion. Conversely, parent involvement can increase social capital and encourage parent networks (Bower & Griffin, 2011). This increased social capital can then be used as leverage within the system (Horvat et al., 2003). Horvat et al. (2003) are even more emphatic about its importance, drawing a direct correlation between social and cultural capital and the likelihood of attending college.

Additionally, there is often misunderstanding in what constitutes involvement (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995). Public schools state that they welcome parental involvement. In truth, schools welcome a particular type of parent involvement, one that falls in line with the expectations of the dominant culture (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). Patterson et al. (2007) were able to identify “a number of contradictory beliefs faculty and staff held about their students that reflected the school’s structure and culture” (Patterson et al., 2007, p. 2). When school and home did not have the same priorities, such as enforcing a common moral code, parents’ priorities were diminished in favor of the school agenda (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995). Oftentimes there is a schism between the parents’ definition of involvement and the schools. Schools have certain expectations of parents; that they will come to Back to School Night and Open House, participate in parent teacher conferences, and return teacher phone calls (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). Many parents feel that helping their children with homework is participation enough. They regard the school as the educational professionals and leave it to them to instruct their children (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995). Sometimes the divide is philosophical. “American school personnel often tell parents that they are the children’s ‘first teachers’, [while] a common expression used by Latino immigrant parents is ‘la maestro es la segunda mama [The teacher is the second mother]”; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995, p. 203). This leads to frustration, as the parents do not understand why the school is not an extension of their parenting. The school complains that the parents are not providing enough academic support for the student (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). The school has discounted the parent’s cultural capital as not valuable as it is not in alignment with the school’s value system (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995).

Structural barriers. The problem of blocking parent participation is pervasive across the country. Schools are not structured to support a broad range of parents. Some barriers are structural. Williams and Sánchez (2013) identified four structural barriers. These include time poverty, lack of financial resources, lack of access, and lack of awareness. These combine to create barriers many parents living in poverty cannot overcome.

Time poverty presents itself when parents cannot work around the school day. School's hours of operation are not conducive to parent's work schedules. The school is not designed for flexible scheduling, therefore many parents who work low-paying jobs do not have the luxury of taking time off work to meet with teachers or other school staff members (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Parents may also have childcare issues that create time poverty. When juggling schedules of two or more children of different ages, parents do not always have the ability to meet on the school's schedule. Many parents of low income cannot afford to get a babysitter. This is due to another structural barrier, lack of financial resources.

Lack of financial resources can be a barrier not only when parents cannot take time off work but also when they cannot afford childcare (Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Parents often miss school events when they have other children at home and are told it is an adult event only. Lack of school-provided childcare can be a substantial inhibitor for those families who wish to participate. Lack of access can occur when parents cannot get to the school. Those who lack transportation are not able to get to the school and the system does not provide transportation for them (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Unfortunately, teachers may interpret a parent's inability to participate during the school day as a lack of valuing their child's education (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Teachers who have not lived in poverty may not fully grasp the inability to take time off of work, even for something as important as their child's education.

Finally, parents living in poverty may have a lack of awareness stemming from the lack of social capital that supports a high level of proficiency in advocating for their children. This can create another block to parent involvement. Working-class families have more ties of kinship than school networks. More time can be dedicated to encourage familial play than school work (Horvat et al., 2003). Horvat et al. (2003) studied the difference between the social networks of middle-class families and those of the poor or working class. They contended that in certain situations children living in poverty had strong networks with extended relatives, but this did not overlap with any connections within the school (Horvat et al., 2003). Middle-class parents however, to bolster their advocacy, formed networks within the school and were able to help one another when a problem arose. This study on class found that parents with strong parental networks, including members who could navigate the school system, were more successful in advocating for their children (Horvat et al., 2003).

Staff can often create structural barriers through a lack of communication (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Parents without computers cannot access email. Parents who do not speak English cannot access English-only newsletters. Many parents are not aware of their rights under the law and can therefore not assert them. In these circumstances, the school becomes the gate keeper of the knowledge. Parents are making decisions based on limited communication as a direct result of the school withholding information from them.

Internal barriers. Poverty is often cyclical. When parents were students growing up, they were often subject to the same cumulative risks students currently in poverty are subject to. This cumulative risk extends to their level of parental involvement. Parents often suffer from the same lack of validation within the educational system as their children (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Parents frequently carry social and cultural capital that are not valued in the school, and the system itself is designed to prevent their involvement

(Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). Parents in poverty may not be able to volunteer in the traditional way as dictated by the dominant culture (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Undervalued capital also prevents parents from participating fully in the public school system more broadly (Lee & Bowen, 2006). While some parents cannot participate due to lack of skill, others have difficulty as a carryover from their own school experience. Many parents had challenges in school themselves and do not feel comfortable in the school setting while others are openly hostile to the inequity of the public school system (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999).

The hostility that some parents feel stems from the inherent racism and classism built into the school system (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). Many parents suffered the effects of White dominant culture bias (Brandon, 2010) and do not feel their participation is welcome. Some of these barriers, such as a parent feeling uncomfortable in the school setting, stem from their own experience (Williams & Sánchez, 2013). In fact, parents may not feel qualified to navigate the school system based on their own educational experience. Many parents who feel abused by the school system have too much emotional baggage to feel confident to advocate for their own children (Williams & Sánchez, 2013). This hurdle of a parent’s past may be difficult to overcome even when a school is trying to be inviting. It is vital that a predominantly White teaching force recognize another form of participation as valid (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Brandon (2010) encourages school staff to reject deficit thinking, and instead, find ways to capitalize on the social and cultural capital students bring with them.

An example of one way to reframe parent involvement can be found in the way students and parents are described when they are learning English. English Language Learner (ELL) is the term used to describe the learner. English Language Acquisition Council (ELAC) is the term used to describe the parent group. There is deficit thinking inherent in these terms as the focus is on the lack of English proficiency. A term to celebrate their culture would be Dual Language Emergent. This would give both the students and their parents the sense that their first language held the same value as English.

Teachers are not Trained to Address the Needs of Families Living in Poverty

Educators working with families living in poverty need to be explicitly taught how to engage students and involve parents (Williams & Sánchez, 2013). The lack of understanding can lead to parents feeling unwelcome and invalidated (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Highly qualified teachers are recognized as being vital to the educational success of students (Marszalek, Odom, LaNasa, & Adler, 2010). If being highly qualified were enough, then there should have been an increase in student achievement. However, there is another aspect that must be considered when deeming a teacher as highly qualified and that is their cultural responsiveness. Teachers must be explicitly taught how to teach students who live in poverty by validating student and parent social and cultural capital (Hollie, 2012).

Teachers frequently hold biased assumptions regarding their students who are doing poorly, especially if they are living in poverty. Patterson et al. (2007) extends this challenge to educators

> rather than begin with the assumption that the dropout problem is located in the student and his or her family, we examined how the high school's structure and culture contributed to the high dropout rate among low-income and Latino students. (Patterson et al., 2007, p. 2)

Teachers must be taught how to partner with parents in order to improve the academic success of their students (Isernhagen, 2012). Epstein's (2009) work outlines challenges that teachers may face when trying to involve parents. Ensuring that all parents receive and understand communication from the school is imperative. Teachers may think they have communicated by sending information out, but without a two-way system to confirm receipt and understanding (Epstein, 2009), that information may just float out in the ethos. Epstein (2009) outlined the importance of parents seeing their race and ethnicity represented among the school leadership, either in staff members or parent leaders. Since the teaching staff in California is 65% White and only 18.6% are Latino and a dismal 3.8% are African American (CDE, 2015), parents of color living in poverty may have a difficult time finding people to relate to at the school. That is why becoming highly qualified must include learning how to involve these parents, not just competency in a given grade or subject area.

Sharroky Hollie (2012) stresses the importance of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy for students who have been historically conquered, colonized, or enslaved. These students frequently are relegated to poverty on the basis of the systemic racism within society as a whole. Geneva Gay (2010) stresses the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy for those in poverty, including those of European descent, as they require teachers to validate their cultural and social capital in order to increase student achievement and improve educational opportunities. Culturally responsive teaching capitalizes on the background of all students as an enrichment to the learning. There is no deficit language around race/ethnicity, language, or socioeconomic status. Using this pedagogy will benefit all students and not just those who are traditionally underserved (Hollie, 2012).

Conclusion

The research has shown a great deal regarding the vital role parent involvement plays in students' academic success. The state of California has validated the importance of parent involvement with the recent adoption of the Local Control Accountability Plan

(Local Control Funding Program, 2013) where parent involvement is listed as the third of California's eight state priorities (California School Boards Association [CSBA], 2013). While No Child Left Behind had a parent component, under LCAP, parent involvement has become the law. Despite the law, school districts are often challenged with how to include often marginalized groups of parents, such as immigrants, African Americans, and Latinos, and those living in poverty (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995; Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Parents of color, parents whose first language is not English, and parents living in poverty may not be involved in the school to the degree the state intended. All parents should have a say in the decisions the school makes per the LCAP (Local Control Funding Program, 2013). What is not disputed are the benefits of parent involvement on a child's academic success, and this crosses all lines of race and economics (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Jeynes, 2003).

It is imperative to remember that these families are not impaired. Conversely, Tuck (2009) warned against only looking through the lens of what she labels damaged-centered research. In *Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities*, she warned researchers to be careful when dealing with marginalized populations who have often been abused by the dominant culture. Appealing to urban and native communities, Tuck (2009) asserted that the difficulty with the research being done in those communities stems from historically inaccurate depictions. She goes on to argue that people feel "over researched yet, ironically, made invisible" (Tuck, 2009, p. 411). When assessing the needs of those students in poverty, we must resist the temptation to fall into a deficit-thinking model. If we fail to do so, we continue to ensure students' needs remain unmet, with our own research practices contributing to this problem.

Epstein (2009) outlined six types of involvement consisting of parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. The difficulty becomes how to successfully implement these types of involvement. There is a lack of data showing what parents' internal barriers are that prevent them from participating. Many of these internal barriers might by driven in part by the systemic and structural barriers, therefore, there is a need to develop a greater understanding of what they are and how they may combine to trigger internal barriers. This data could shed light on a resolution to this issue for many parents living in poverty.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

The literature demonstrates multiple consequences facing U.S. students who live in poverty, particularly when parents cannot advocate effectively within the school system. The educational community must understand the systemic, structural, and internal barriers that prevent these parents from participating in their children's education. Particularly, the literature needs further development regarding parent's internal barriers blocking them from participating in their children's education. The following research seeks to uncover this data.

Methodology

Research Questions and Design

Every year, educators struggle to increase parent involvement. However, there can be an even greater challenge to involve parents living in poverty. For the purposes of this study the research question was twofold.

1. What systemic and structural barriers do parents of low income face as they negotiate the education of their children?
2. In what ways do the internal perceptions and social practices of parents of low income contribute to the barriers they face in participating in their children's schooling?

A qualitative interview methods design was the logical choice for this study. The interview method lent itself to uncovering parent internal barriers that prevent them from participating. Interviews allowed for flexibility and the ability to ask the participants follow up questions in real time (Rea & Parker, 2005). This method was chosen in an effort to go deeper than a survey. It ensured that I would have the ability to ask follow up questions to participants' responses whereas a survey would not allow for follow up.

The methodological approach for this study was originally going to be 12 interviews with four African American parents, four Hispanic parents, and four White parents who were living in Section 8 housing. The principal of the school contacted 20 families to see if they would participate and the manager of the Section 8 housing complex put notes on the doors with the information regarding my study. Even with all this support, I was unable to meet the constructs of my original design. Instead, I was able to interview 10 parents of low income participants living in Section 8 housing. Three were African American, seven were immigrants from the Middle East, six were from Afghanistan, and one was from Iraq. This gave me a completely different lens from what I originally anticipated, and the outcomes provided a wealth of information.

I was mindful to ask semi-structured questions (see Appendix A) and I followed these up with further open ended questions to give the participants the ability to formulate their own answers without being led to an answer by the format of the questions (Roulston, 2010). I was also mindful to use the participants' own words when formulating follow up questions. This was to reduce the likelihood of putting words in the participants' mouths (Roulston, 2010).

Interviewing 10 participants alone was not a large enough pool to be considered a reliable sample of a larger population. However, it was valuable in that it gave me the opportunity to obtain insights not possible with a survey (Roulston, 2010). The goal of this study was to use the information gathered from the interviews of parents of low income to ascertain the systemic, structural, and internal barriers to parent involvement in the Bay Area elementary school. This interview method revealed aspects of the system that conspired to prevent some parents who live in poverty to fully participate in their children's education (Lee & Bowen, 2006). The parental inability to participate in turn prevents their children from accessing a high-quality education (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Jeynes, 2003).

Context

The Bay Area Unified School District (pseudonym) serves 10,000 students in 11 schools; seven elementary, two middle, one comprehensive high, and one alternative high school. It is located in a middle-class neighborhood where the median sales price for a home is $765,000 (Trulia, 2016). Ironically, it is due to the increase in home prices that this district is seeing an increase in the number of families living at the poverty or near poverty line, due to the number of families "sharing" living space. In this living situation, the second family is considered homeless by the state. I chose this district as it has many families living in invisible poverty, that is, families who fly under the radar by moving in with relatives, not applying for free and reduced lunch, or working multiple jobs.

Relatedly, the district has seen a dramatic drop in the Hispanic population. Concurrently, the district has seen an equally dramatic increase in the East Indian population. A number of these families have one or more parents that work in the Silicon Valley and are purchasing homes that are over one million dollars. In spite of the increase in wealth, there are still a large number of families living in Section 8 housing (for those living at or below the poverty line). Almost half of the schools in the Bay Area Unified School District are Title I and receive federal funding.

Five of the 11 Bay Area Unified schools are Title I; three elementary, one middle, and the alternative high school. The district demographics are as follows: less than

1% American Indian, 4% African American, 43% Asian, 13% Hispanic, 6% Filipino (not Hispanic), less than 1% Pacific Islander, 26% White, 8% two or more races, 8% socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 7% special education.

Many of the families of low income at the Title I schools cannot, will not, or do not participate with the school in the way the school defines participation. I sought to understand what the barriers are that were preventing them from participating. All of the Title I principals meet together to discuss how to increase parent involvement with their parents of low income. One elementary school has made some gains with their Hispanic low income community with the hiring of a bilingual Spanish speaking assistant principal. However, this did not affect other groups. The rest of the Title I schools are still struggling to involve their parents of low income in a meaningful way for students' academic success.

The school I studied was comprised of approximately 850 students grades K-5. The school demographics are as follows: less than 1% American Indian, 5% African American, 26% Asian, 21% Hispanic, 5% Filipino (not Hispanic), less than 1% Pacific Islander, 31% White, 11% two or more races, 18% socioeconomically disadvantaged, 17% English Language Learner, and 8% special education. It had the highest number of students on free and reduced lunch and the most diverse racial makeup in the district. In addition to the 18% listed as socioeconomically disadvantaged, it still had a number of families who fell under the invisible poverty category.

Participants and Sampling

The study was conducted as a series of semi-structured interviews of the 10 participants. The principal of the Title I elementary school selected an initial list of participants based on their address in Section 8 housing. She provided me with a list of parents from which to choose the 10 participants for the study. Public school records of free and reduced lunch students are confidential and that information was not available to request participants for this study. Therefore, the method used to select the participants was by their address alone. Only those who lived in Section 8, low income housing were asked to participate.

In order to qualify for Section 8 housing, applicants must fall within a specific criteria. According to the U.S. Census, there are 48 poverty thresholds that are calculated to determine who is living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). According to California's Section 8 Housing website

> The main qualification for Section 8 is income level. To qualify for Section 8, the combined household income must be below 80 percent of their area's median income, which can vary depending on the area. Households earning less than 50 percent of the area's median income fall into the very-low income bracket. Approximately seventy-five percent of all vouchers in California are awarded to households in the very-low income bracket. (Section 8 Housing, 2016)

I was particularly interested in this specific group because much of their poverty was invisible. They lived in an upper middle class area and their complex was rebuilt in 2013. The surrounding properties sold for over $700,000. The area was well maintained. The manager who ran the Section 8 housing units had an office attached to the community center which looked like any traditional rental office. The exception was that the public needed to be buzzed in and residents had to make an appointment to meet with the manager. This procedure was in place for security purposes.

I had been employed with the Bay Area School District for 23 years and knew some of the families. This was a benefit as I had developed strong relationships within the community and had a long history of advocacy. Two of the participants knew me from prior years, but I determined it was not relevant as I was no longer the principal of their school. This was important so that none of the interviewees felt pressured to participate by their children's principal and feared retaliation if they chose not to participate. Not all of the participants chosen from the list wanted to participate, and I had to rely heavily on the snowball method. This occurred when a parent who had agreed to participate helped recruit friends or neighbors from the same Section 8 housing to participate as well (Rea & Parker, 2005).

While at the whim of those who chose to participate, every attempt was made to reflect the racial makeup of the school. One parent in particular was responsible for recruiting the majority of my participants, and I was grateful for her agency. The participants were given a choice of where to meet, in the community center within the Section 8 housing complex or in their homes if they felt comfortable with that at a time most convenient for them. They were offered $25.00 for their participation. The protocol with each participant was I welcomed them, thanked them, and gave them an overview of the process. I told them that the questions would be on the subject of parent involvement. They were offered guidelines for participation and a confidentiality statement (Rea & Parker, 2005). All of the participants understood that the session would be recorded and that they could choose not to answer any question or end the interview at any time.

All of the participants have been given pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity. The first participant, John, was an African American father of two daughters and one stepdaughter. He was originally from the Midwest but his youngest child was born in the Bay Area. He was on the list given to me by the principal and we met at a small table outside the community center the day after Thanksgiving. He later tried to recruit other participants but was unable to do so. This was a common problem during the recruitment phase of the study and, based on some of the feedback I received from people who chose not to participate, there was a definite lack of trust as to my motives from some of the people I contacted.

The second participant was Aadela and she became my snowball champion. She was the mother of three children who had immigrated from Afghanistan and she worked at the school. She was on the list given to me by the principal and she recruited six additional participants. We met in the community center, and when I arrived she was there with her husband and six other ladies. She chose to have her husband stay during the interview.

The third, fourth, and fifth participants all met with me in the community center the day after I met with Aadela. Chaghama also immigrated from Afghanistan and was the mother of three children. Damsa had four children and had immigrated from Afghanistan. Esin also immigrated from Afghanistan and was the mother of four children. She brought her youngest toddler with her during the interview and also recruited another participant for me. The sixth and seventh participants also met with me in the community center. Farahnoush had four children and immigrated from Afghanistan. Asal also immigrated from Afghanistan and had three children.

The last three participants graciously allowed me to meet with them in their homes. Benesh was the mother of three children, and all three were present when we met. She immigrated from Iraq. Jasmine was African American, the mother of three, and was originally from the Bay Area. She was recruited by Esin. She and I had known each other previously, and I had had one of her children in my school at one time. Sandra was African American, the mother of four, two of her own and two of a relative that she was raising. She was recruited by Jasmine, and she and I had also known each other previously as I had one of her children in my school. All of the participants answered all of my questions, and all ended on a positive note.

Pseudonym	Ethnicity/Country	Number of Children	Education Level
John	African American	3	Two years of college, no degree Lineman Trade Degree
Aadela	Afghan	3	High School
Chaghama	Afghan	3	High School Graduate
Damsa	Afghan	4	School (level not disclosed)
Esin	Afghan	4	Did Not Attend
Farahnoush	Afghan	4	Fifth Grade
Asal	Afghan	3	Doctorate
Benesh	Persian	3	Masters
Jasmine	African American	3	High School
Sandra	African American	4	High School Graduate

Table 1: Summary of Participants by Pseudonym, Ethnicity, Number of Children, and Education Level

Instrumentation

I used open ended questions, which allowed me to go deeper with follow up questions for the participants (Rea & Parker, 2005). The theoretical framework that underscored the interviews was Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital theory and social capital theory. The theory-driven interviews were used to ensure a valid research process (Roulston, 2010).

The questions were strategically designed to ascertain where the parents concur and differ regarding the school's practices. Parents were asked types of questions that allowed me to understand systemic, structural, and internal barriers based on personal experience. Examples of questions included, Did you attend Back to School Night? If not, why not? Did you attend Open House? If not, why not? Do you have friends from the school you attend school events with? Did you have a positive experience when you were in school? The questions were designed to unearth barriers that were systemic and/or structural, that is, structures created by the school system that prevent parents from participating. They also sought to discover how the parents' own experience may have created barriers that prevented them from being involved in their children's school. Finally, the questions were designed to uncover patterns in the answers from one racial group to the next. However, more patterns were discerned based on the parents' level of education.

Positionality

I come from a position of great concern regarding the participation of parents living in poverty. They often face systemic, structural, and internal barriers that prevent their full participation in their children's schooling. I contend that the parents' inability to participate is a factor in their children's inability to gain equitable access to a high-quality education, and I hope that the information gained from these interviews will provide solutions for solving the lack of involvement. I have worked in the Bay Area School District for 23 years and have seen some inequitable treatment of parents living in poverty by staff at both school sites and the district office. Some of this treatment was deliberate and some was due to cultural blind spots.

I worked at the Bay Area Elementary School itself for 14 years. The housing development from which my participants come has always been Section 8 housing. My children attended the Bay Area Elementary School and had friends that lived in this development. As a teacher, I would do home visits, and as a parent, I would take my children to playdates. My experience found that many of these families were struggling to meet their children's daily needs let alone stay in the area. Some parents were on public assistance and others worked one or two low-paying jobs to keep their families afloat. In addition to free and reduced lunch, the Bay Area Elementary School staff provided free backpacks and school supplies, clothes, and food to those families in need. The teacher, office staff, or child nutrition workers were often the first to recognize a need. Many of the students and their parents attempted to blend in with the surrounding community, making their poverty “invisible”.

I am a White female and was vigilant to recognize systemic bias in my questions based on my own social and cultural capital. Additionally, I was aware that my past experience with this population could color my interpretation of my results.

Trustworthiness and Validity

The procedures I used to ensure a trustworthy study were in strict adherence to the protocols of the interview method. I reviewed my questions with an unbiased third party, Professor Hayes, to ensure the study had not been built to skew the data. I was cognizant of possible bias while interviewing. To ensure that the interviews were valid, I chose parents from the same elementary school from similar Section 8 housing. This adhered to the protocol that the participants have commonality (Rea & Parker, 2005). Every attempt was made to interview a racial cross section of the population but those who agreed to participate were three African Americans and seven from the Middle East. Data was analyzed to assess if there were similar patterns among groups.

The advantage of conducting interviews was the opportunity to go in depth and ask clarifying questions (Rea & Parker, 2005) thus increasing the data trustworthiness to represent their experiences and perceptions. While detractors argue against the validity of such interviews as being too biased (Roulston, 2010), I am trying to uncover systemic and structural barriers and the ways their own internal perceptions and experiences shape parent’s engagement. Ultimately, the exploration of perceptions will give valuable data on the barriers to parent involvement in the school system.

The limitations of the interview method are there are less anonymity and a greater chance for what Rea and Parker (2005) refer to as “interview-induced bias”. This results when the interviewer leads the interview in a certain direction. Roulston (2010) warns against a simplistic question and answer session without a deeper understanding of the underlying theory. Additionally, I only interviewed 10 participants so the findings are fairly contained. While they are informative in the case of this school, they do not necessarily generalize to a broader population. Nonetheless, I hope to contribute to a broader theoretical understanding of the experiences parents living in poverty have.

Analysis

My goal for the analysis is three-fold. First, I want to determine what the parents view as systemic and structural barriers within the school that prevent parents of low income from being involved in their children’s education. These may not be barriers from the school’s perspective, but they are from the viewpoint of the parents. Second, I want to unearth the ways in which parents’ internal perceptions and experience shape their engagement with the school. Third, I want to discover if there are patterns that emerge and what they are based on. I compared the responses from the parents to find common perceptions as well as to devise where perceptions differ. This method does not allow for generalizing to a larger population but is worthwhile for studying a small one.

I coded the interviews using cultural capital theory, social capital theory, and critical race theory to guide my analysis (Roulston, 2010) and used both induction and deduction to interpret the data. The deductive came out of using the theories and the inductive came out of the patterns that emerged from the data. The theory of cultural capital helped me understand how the intrinsic barriers may be the result of a lack of valued knowledge that a parent living in poverty may bring with them. The theory of social capital sheds light on parents of low income undervalued social connections. The categories afforded by these two theories showed some barriers were due to the structures the school puts in place that prevent the parent from being able to participate during the school day. Others resulted from parents not having the valued knowledge giving them the ability to navigate the school system. I also looked for emergent themes that may shed light on the barriers and possibly ways to remove them.

Conclusion

Although a great deal of literature addresses some pockets of the barriers to parent involvement for those living in poverty, very little addresses the structural, systemic, and internal barriers of parents based on their own experience combined. I sought to understand from the parents' point of view what stops them from participating in their children's education. In addition, there was a need to investigate barriers across racial groups. However, due to a lack of diversity in my racial sampling, I explored emergent patterns showing similarities and differences in participants based on other criteria such as education. I addressed the gap in the research by conducting a qualitative study utilizing the interview method. My hope was to uncover barriers and use them as a basis for implementing changes in practice as an educator. I identified the dominant culture bias to create better understanding for staff of the parents' challenges. My final aim was to understand why parents are not involved in an effort to create systems and environments where they can not only increase their involvement but also feel like the integral part of their children's education.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

Parent involvement has been identified as a vital component under both the current Local Control Accountability Plan (California Department of Education, 2016) as well as its predecessor, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) Act. In spite of the governmental validation that parent involvement contributes to and even increases student academic success, parents still find barriers to their participation in the public school system. Parents of low income continue to have an underrepresented voice on public school policies and practices.

In an effort to pinpoint the source of parents of low income underrepresentation, the findings in this study sought to answer the following two questions.

1. What systemic and structural barriers do parents of low income face as they negotiate the education of their children?
2. In what ways do the internal perceptions and social practices of parents of low income contribute to the barriers they face in participating in their children's schooling?

The findings showed there were systemic barriers, structural barriers, and internal barriers that would combine to prevent parents of low income from participating in their children's education.

Systemic Barriers

Systemic barriers are those that permeate public education from start to finish, beginning with the way students are educated in teacher education and credentialing programs. Unless there is a commitment by the university to culturally responsive pedagogy, most teachers are trained from the onset of their careers to cater to the dominant culture which in the U.S. is middle- to upper-class Whites. Once teachers are in the classroom, the systemic barriers can continue through a student's entire educational career.

Systemic barriers can often be found in the practices of staff and administration. The interviews unearthed some common frustrations of the parents. They also uncovered the way in which parents feel supported, giving educators' concrete examples to work from. The following topics were those that multiple parents highlighted as creating barriers to their involvement in their children's education: negative communication, negative attitudes of staff, deficit thinking, and racism. Many parents also discussed how positive communication and attitudes of staff made them feel welcomed and allowed them to participate in their children's education.

Communication

Communication, both positive and negative, was the number one topic that parents discussed during the interviews. The type of communication parents received from school staff could often make or break whether or not the parent felt welcomed, included, or willing to participate.

Negative communication. All 10 of the parents interviewed had experienced either a lack of communication or negative communication in their dealing with the public school system. Some of the parents experienced this at the Bay Area Elementary School, some in other schools their children had attended previously, and some from their own schooling experience. All of the parents stressed the need for communication between the school and the home. When asked about the lack of communication he experienced in the Midwest one parent stated, “I feel like maybe with the teachers, they dealt with more disciplinary issues. And that could possibly be...I’m just making an assumption, like a reason why they, uh, were always fed up or, you know, lacked communication” (John, personal communication, November 2017). John felt that the teachers were so busy dealing with behavioral issues that they had no patience to communicate with the families. Another parent gave concrete suggestions of what the school should do to communicate better. “I think they should send more letters…and post things on boards too. Right where you can see it when you first walk in” (Jasmine, personal communication, December 2017).

An interesting observation about this comment is that several parents talked about a wall of information inside the school. Two parents indicated that the school secretary showed them where the resource wall was to get information and yet Jasmine did not know it existed. This lack of communication regarding the availability and location of resources is a barrier for many parents. Some parents may need to be shown explicitly where to find updates from the school. The Bay Area School District where this school is located had made a district wide policy to go paperless, therefore, there would be no flyers. This parent was not aware of this policy and was still looking for information to come home in her children’s backpacks rather than electronically.

One parent was horrified with the lack of communication when her son was injured at school. Her son came home with bruises all over and she never received a phone call from the school. “He’s got a bruise all over. Then when I saw this, it was so painful to me, then I went to talk to the teacher. Teacher, as a mom, why didn’t you call me? She never care about that” (Aadela, personal communication, December 2017).

This lack of communication led to a breach of trust between the parent and this teacher. It also called into question the school's policy about communicating when a child is injured. Was it the school's policy to notify parents and, if so, why was it not followed in this circumstance? This parent did not know she could have complained to the principal about the way this situation was handled. She lost faith in the teacher, and in her understanding, had no further recourse.

Class expectations was another area parents needed clear communication. A parent who was trying to get help for her child struggled with what her child needed to do in class. The parent asked for help

> [In] third and the fourth grade. But, um, now they're, I, I asked and they had a meeting for those parents, you know, the kids kind of behind, and I ask her, and, she, she still need help. Can you help her out? And she said, okay, yeah, yeah. But she's still not going to that class or anything. (Chaghama, personal communication, December 2017)

This parent struggled to even describe what she had gone through for two years to get more support for her student and to understand what the school expectations were for her child and her as a parent. She concluded

> Every same, uh, three or four times a week, she was like half an hour, what that person teaching her...like how to read and write. And I don't know why she didn't learn. My concern is like, uh, um, what, what kind of, you know, uh, I don't know what to say. Education or whatever you guys, they did for her, but I don't know. It's not enough for her to learn. (Chaghama, personal communication, December 2017)

It seems that her daughter was receiving some type of intervention but the parent had no understanding of why her child was struggling and exactly what the school was doing to help. With no capital to navigate the system (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999) and no clear communication from the site, this parent was literally at the whim of the school to provide appropriate supports for her daughter. It was unclear if it was a language barrier that hindered the communication or if there was not enough communication. Regardless of the cause, this parent did not have a clear understanding of what was happening with her daughter.

Communication barriers were also present for parents who had excellent navigation skills. As one savvy parent described, "Sometimes there is missing information here and there, and, uh, uh, usually I prefer to meet in person" (Benesh, personal communication, December 2017). Because English was her second language, Benesh preferred to meet in person to ensure she understood what the teacher was saying. It was difficult for her to get communication in writing because she could not ask clarifying questions to ensure understanding. Benesh had a master's degree in the sciences and was more than capable of navigating the school system but still preferred the support of an in-person meeting to prevent language from becoming a barrier. This shed light on yet another barrier, that of teachers not differentiating their communication style to meet the parents' needs. She continued

> Uh, I would say, uh the school offer like two parents conference yearly, but I think that's not enough, and sometimes when you ask for even a quick meetings with the teacher, sometimes they tell you, 'We have a meeting with the principal, we have another meeting with other staff,' so it looks like the teacher's always busy, and you have to ask sometimes two, three times. So I, I would say the school principals or vice principals that, talk to their teachers to give parents

> extra time, or set an appointment when parents ask for that. (Benesh, personal communication, December 2017)

Positive communication. Eight of the 10 parents interviewed had examples of positive communication practices from the school. One parent was thrilled that after only eight months at the school the principal knew who she was, even though her son had never been in the office for anything. "I didn't go talk with the principal and my principal say, 'Hi Omar's mom.' Wow, you understand me, I'm Omar mom. Yes, I'm happy about that" (Asal, personal communication, December 2017). The principal showed this parent she was interested in her family by connecting a parent new to the school with her child and then greeting her.

Another parent was grateful that the teacher would remind her of upcoming events at more than one school. As a single parent with three children, one of who was a special needs child, she had a lot to keep track of.

> You know, and especially when she know I'm busy, you know. And then all my children is three years apart, you know, so it can be kind of rocky. And sometimes she reach out to me, you know, and won't let me miss a date or something 'cause I have three kids at two different schools, right? (Jasmine, personal communication, December 2017)

This type of communication support ensures that parents will not miss school events. While not all parents would need this level of support, the teacher was differentiating for one who does. Another parent needed extra support when he moved his family from the Midwest. His daughter was behind academically and he was impressed by the level of support provided by the school.

> And she was severely behind actually, but when she came here, the, the teachers were just so patient and they really worked with her. Um, they offered after school programs within the school as well. So it made a huge difference, I mean, um, within the first few months. Huge difference. (John, personal communication, November 2017)

He went on to praise the teacher for the frequency of her communication. “My daughter’s teacher. Um, she’s very helpful. She uses Class Dojo and you could message her directly and she can respond immediately, so that’s awesome...It’s very convenient. I mean to track, you know, um, a child’s progress daily” (John, personal communication, November 2017).

John was grateful for the daily communication from his child’s teacher as she was so far behind when she first started at the Bay Area Elementary School. One of his biggest complaints about the schools in the Midwest was the lack of communication. The Class Dojo program helped him to feel engaged in his daughter’s education on a daily basis.

Sandra, a single parent of four children attending two different schools, summed it up best when asked what the school could be doing to make it easier for parents to be involved

> Just basically keep us in the loop. Keep us informed so we can be active with our kids ‘cause we like to know what our kids is doing when they’re not with us…keep the Gmail’s going out, the flyers, the letters, and I feel like everything would be, the way it is now, going fine. (Sandra, personal communication, December 2017)

Raising four children alone, Sandra relied heavily on the information she got from the school. She had good relationships with the front office staff and felt comfortable asking for help when she needed it.

Parent involvement is not only a best practice for school staff, it is required by law. In order to engage parents in a meaningful way, schools need to communicate effectively with their parent population. This requires staff to differentiate communication styles for the variety of parents and cater to the parents' needs. Some parents may prefer an email while others may require a face to face meeting. Once engaged in communication, schools need to ensure that the communication is positive for the parent. This does not mean that the school cannot relay difficult information to the parent such as a student misbehaving or low grades, but it does require that this be done with the utmost respect to the parent and their child. While parents appreciated knowing about upcoming school events, their primary concern was how their children were doing in school, what they could do to support them, and how to get them extra help if needed.

Attitudes of Staff

In addition to communication, parents listed the attitudes of staff as highly important. Positive communication and the positive attitudes of staff frequently were interdependent, as a staff member with a negative attitude toward parents may have a lack of communication or negative communication while a staff member with a positive attitude toward parents may tend toward more positive communication. The parents in this study were able to give several concrete examples of both negative and positive attitudes of staff.

Negative attitudes of staff. When staff do not value parents, they feel it. A staff member with a negative attitude can easily alienate a parent and make them feel voiceless. After explaining to the teacher that her daughter was having a very difficult time with the homework and crying, the teacher was unwilling to differentiate for the student. Even when the parent explained that she was having a difficult time assisting her daughter since it had been such a long time since she had been in school, the teacher still would not differentiate. The parent told her, “This homework’s kind of hard for her. Um, this, can you do anything? It was like, ‘Oh no. This is, uh, for everybody. You know, it’s not only for a, your child. Everybody has to finish this homework’” (Chaghama, personal communication, December 2017). This became such a frustration for Chaghama that she chose to put her youngest child in an Islamic school and forgo the public school altogether. This is an extreme example of how a staff member’s negative attitude can result in parents abandoning the public school system completely. For parents who do not have another option, their frustration continues. The teacher’s attitude, or lack of knowledge on differentiation, was to blame the student for not doing the work even when she knew the student was having a difficult time. This was evident when the teacher did not try shortening the homework assignment to see if the student could then have some success. While the reason for the negative attitude may have different causes, feeling overwhelmed or not having the skill to differentiate, it was still the teacher’s responsibility to follow up on the parent’s concern. There was also an implicit blame of the parent, who had explained to the teacher that it had been such a long time since she had been in school that she did not feel able to help her child. Nevertheless, the teacher did not shorten the homework assignments or provide additional support for the student. This was the same teacher that Chaghama tried to speak with at Back to School Night but the teacher walked away to speak with another parent. Real or perceived, Chaghama experienced this and described it as a negative attitude of the teacher.

While the Bay Area Elementary School worked hard to welcome parents in the office, some parents had a different experience at other school sites. They described they felt the negative attitudes from their very first introduction to the school coming from the front office staff. At a school in the Midwest, a parent described his experience, "Um, I mean, I've, I've had experiences, I guess, at other school districts where, you know, they act like you didn't even walk in office. And so you have to flag down people to get their attention (John, personal communication, November 2017).

Another parent shared an experience she had at the elementary school attended before the Bay Area Elementary School where parents were not even allowed in the office door during the school day.

> No, no, over there is a huge people, um, at first you have to stay on the line because office is closed, and knock, and then if they have time they welcome you, if not they say we have to make an appointment for next time. (Damsa, personal communication, December 2017)

This school had only one person working in the office and would literally turn parents away. Those that did not know how to navigate this system may not know how to get past that type of gatekeeper. None of the parents expressed having any of those challenges at the Bay Area Elementary School and many of them named Susan in the front office as being especially helpful.

Parents also shared that there was a disconnect for some teachers regarding the cultural differences of U.S. schools for some of the students, especially those coming from Afghanistan and Iraq. In those countries boys and girls did not attend school together. They did not change for physical education classes. Teachers who neglected to understand and prepare for these cultural differences appeared to have a negative attitude toward the parents. A parent shared how she felt upon leaving Afghanistan and starting school as a high school student in the U.S.

> We had really respect for school. Um, not, nobody can say anything to each other. None of those names and stuff was really bad. Nobody can say that. And right

> here, like, I especially was, like, boys and girls in high school kissing and stuff, here I was like embarrassed to go and see that. I was like... “Oh.” What, like there’s, there girls was separate and the boys was separate the school. That’s why I was so embarrassed to see those people. Later on, we used to it, uh, but right here, school to me it’s really bad, depends on our school we went to in Afghanistan. (Chaghama, personal communication, December 2017)

Another parent shared how her daughter felt when first starting school in the U.S.

> Yes. Uh, boy and girl together and then, for, um, for everything. For, uh, clothes, uh, for, um, hijab, for everything. From everything my kids for first year is very nervous. My daughter, my daughter come in, uh, every day and uh, she cry, “Mom, why you didn’t go in my country? I don’t wanna to go the school.” (Asal, personal communication, December 2017)

Her daughter felt very traumatized by the cultural differences between Afghanistan and the U.S. She did not feel like she belonged and felt different as a girl in school with boys for the first time, for wearing different clothes, and perhaps, for being a Muslim. That was the implication from the comment about the hijab.

Another example of a staff member having a negative attitude occurred with one parent in her attempt to sign up her three children for free and reduced lunch.

> It was an incident where I guess I didn’t fill out the form...incorrectly. Where my daughter, she had, um...she was given lunch and then my son, they said, oh, he couldn’t get lunch. And I have to wait until it got approval. Like I couldn’t put his name on the form too so it was like, um...Yeah, it was that kind of incident. (Jasmine, personal communication, December 2017)

The parent had forgotten to put her sons name on the form. Her daughter was approved for free and reduced lunch and according to California state law, if one sibling is approved they all are. Nevertheless, because she filled out the form incorrectly, the woman working in child nutrition at the school refused to feed her son. She knew he would be approved based on the sibling but made the family wait anyway. It was within her purview to feed the child pending approval, but she refused to do so. This type of negativity results in mistrust between the parent and the school system. While it is possible the child nutrition worker thought she was doing the right thing, it was perceived by the parent as negative.

Positive attitudes of staff. Parents and their students require a safe place to adjust to the cultural differences between their country of origin and the U.S. and this requires a positive attitude from all levels of staff. The front office is usually the first point of contact for most parents so the treatment they receive there can make a large impact on the way the parent and their children feel about the school. Among those parents interviewed, the importance of a positive attitude was not limited to those coming from another country. All three of the parents born and raised in the U.S. expressed the importance of feeling welcome in the office and by the teachers.

Susan, the front office secretary, was mentioned several times by many of the parents interviewed. Susan sat at the very first desk in the office and made a point of welcoming parents. She was also named as the person who would walk parents over to show them the wall of resources. A parent described Susan and her colleagues this way, "Susan and the ones working in the office, she's really good person all the time. Uh, she's all the time helping me, helped all the time" (Chaghama, personal communication, December 2017).

Another parent appreciated that the attitude of the office staff went further than just a welcome and a warm smile. She gave concrete examples of the ways the women in the front office assisted her

> Okay. And then they ask, “How, how can I help you?” And if I want information for anything, uh, actually the front is really help. They, looking on their website, they print it out for me, the paper I want or the form, or, and stuff like that. (Benesh, personal communication, December 2017)

This is an asset for the parent that may not have a computer or printer at home as the school is ensuring equal access to information. This type of assistance is also invaluable for the parent that does not know how to navigate the paperwork required.

Support is needed from the students’ teachers as well. The positive attitude from teachers in their effort to help parents locate resources builds trust between the parent and the school and allows parents to be more involved. Parents may need explicit help finding resources. “The child teacher, and then they show me because since they are so nice they show me the right way, what to do. They say, they give me the contact number, the counselor, everything” (Damsa, personal communication, December 2017). As stated earlier, some parents may need to meet with their children’s teacher face to face either to feel more comfortable or to ensure understanding of the information being given. This teacher understood how to support this parent so that she could be a better advocate for her daughter.

Many of the parents interviewed had more than one U.S. school district to compare. This was true of both those who had immigrated and those who were born in the U.S. They described the difference between the attitudes of staff in schools where they felt welcomed and schools where they did not. What came up most frequently was a friendly attitude, a willingness to help, and the space and time to ask questions. One parent had the experience of never hearing from the teacher unless there was a problem until she moved to the Bay Area Elementary School.

> Yes, because over there is, you know, um, the teacher are not, ah, um, like they are not patient at all. Any small thing, they call me in, call me in the office they say, "Your daughter is not participating in, like, they are not listening." They are not, they are not like that. And over here the teacher are so nice and patient, they never call. If they call, they always told me the good thing, not the bad thing. (Damsa, personal communication, December 2017)

Upon moving to the Bay Area Elementary School where the attitude of her child's teacher was a positive one, the negative phone calls stopped. She only heard from the teacher for positive comments. She noted that the teacher was patient and this contributed to a more tolerant attitude with the child.

When asked to give advice to the school on how to increase parent involvement, a parent simply said, "For parents, I would say like, um, be good with them" (Farahnoush, personal communication, December 2017). Though this may seem simple at its core it is a guiding principle for effective parent engagement. Authentic respect and kindness goes a long way to make parents feel welcomed in their child's school. Keeping in mind that a parent may not have the capital to navigate the school system without explicit direction and help, schools need to anticipate needs. Differentiating one's approach to meet the parents' needs is also crucial to engage parents in their children's education.

Deficit thinking. Equally damaging but much more insidious to barring parent engagement is deficit thinking. Deficit thinking can occur even when staff has a positive attitude. Many times, staff is not even aware that they have deficit thinking when dealing with students or their families. Deficit thinking results when you do not expect a person to be able to meet an expectation you have for others due to their circumstance. An example would be a teacher thinking a student living in poverty could not do as well academically as other students due to their lack of resources (Rumberger & Thomas, 2000). This type of thinking, which may not be conscious, erodes the students' opportunities to push themselves.

When discussing his experience in the Midwest, this parent described teachers spending their efforts on behavioral control rather than teaching. The lack of engagement described below brings into question the lesson design if this is happening day after day.

> I'm, I'm not quite sure. But, um, when you have to spend half a class period telling children to sit down and stop talking and kicking them out of your class, then obviously, that takes away from the lesson and, um, attention to, you know, students and what they need. (John, personal communication, November 2017)

Deficit thinking comes into play with parent involvement when staff assumes the same for the parent. Instead of providing the appropriate scaffolding needed so that the parent can participate, the staff may carry a separate set of expectations. One parent was concerned that the way the teacher was correcting the math was lowering her son's math grade. Students were correcting their own work and her son was continually lowering his own grade. When she brought it to the teacher's attention, the teacher responded

> And she said, 'Oh, silly, that's right, why you didn't give yourself points for that, point for…' So usually like if he come with 15 out of 30, when I'm asking for that, his grade up to 24 out of 30. (Benesh, personal communication, December 2017)

The teacher did not stop the practice and the parent was very concerned that her son's final grade was not an accurate reflection of his ability. The teacher did not notice the disconnect between the student's homework and test scores and this is an example of deficit thinking. While other factors may have contributed, a lack of skill in differentiation or rigidity in teaching, it still denotes deficit thinking when she did not acknowledge the need for change in her practice. The parent planned on bringing it to the teacher for further discussion.

Another parent who had not graduated from high school herself had a lot of frustration around not being listened to regarding her oldest son's needs. She talked to the teachers at the Bay Area Elementary School multiple times to try and get him extra support. While she felt her experience at the school had been fairly positive, this was an instance where she felt the school did not meet his needs. Deficit thinking around the mother's opinion may have been a contributor. As she explained

> Um, most part it's been positive. Um, just one incident when, um, you know, I tried to get my son some extra help when he was in, like, the second or maybe first grade. And they wind up taking him and putting him into, um, a special class when he got in the fourth grade, which kind of was, um, you know...it kind of, you know, irritated me because I tried to get him that extra help in the beginning. But overall, you know, it's fine. (Jasmine, personal communication, December 2017)

Her son was finally placed in a Special Day Class (SDC) but not until he was in fourth grade. While the school must be mindful about the over identification of African American boys in special education programs, there had to have been a significant gap early on. Years were wasted by not listening to his mother's request for more support and she did not have the capital to know to ask for him to be assessed. Later when I asked her if she knew how to get support for one of her children, Jasmine smiled and answered, "I'm learning" (personal communication, December 2017). I asked her if she had anyone that helped her and she said, "Um, I had to do it on my own" (Jasmine, personal communication, December 2017).

The way this scenario fits under deficit thinking is that the school administration and three teachers, first grade, second grade, and third grade, did not have high expectations for this African American student from a single parent home. When the student fell behind academically, that was expected by the school and therefore nothing was done, even at the mother's request. Ironically, her daughter who was three years younger than her son in SDC, was performing at a fourth grade level while in third grade. This eradicated the idea that her son's low academic performance was due to something happening in her home.

Another parent gave up on the school completely. She had also asked for help for her daughter and was told it was not available. She was transparent with the school when she told them she did not have the skill to help her daughter with the homework. When asked about attending Back to School Night she said, "I did, but not anymore because I don't want to go for no reason, you know? They didn't, that really, you know, to help me out, they didn't" (Chaghama, personal communication, December 2017). Her daughter felt the same way. After two years of feeling ignored the daughter no longer wanted to participate. The mother described an incident when there was an invitation to a school event

> Yeah, still like...she bring the papers, like, they invite us to come to the book fair or like this night. I was like, she's like, "We don't have to go mom." I was like, "Okay." I don't want to go because they didn't help her. (Chaghama, personal communication, December 2017)

This parent and her daughter had become completely disconnected from the school due to a lack of support over time. This parent had tried to get academic support for her daughter for three years. The school may have wanted to give the student time as she was learning a second language, but this was never explained to the parent if that was their reason for waiting. From the parent's perspective, her pleas for help were ignored. By the time her daughter was given extra help in fourth grade, both the parent and her daughter felt alienated from the school. Their trust in the school was gone.

The most challenging aspect of deficit thinking is that many educators do not believe they have it. In order to unearth deficit thinking, educators need to have courageous conversations about their core beliefs regarding students of color, students with disabilities, students living in poverty, and any other marginalized groups. Districts need to offer professional development in the area of culturally responsive pedagogy and universities need to make it part of their credentialing programs. This barrier is systemic and will require a systematic approach to dismantle it.

Racism. Systemic racism is still prevalent throughout the public school system. Students and their parents are often subjected to microaggressions throughout their day. Much like deficit thinking, many staff members are not aware that they carry inherent bias that favors the White dominant culture. The Bay Area Elementary School has had some training in Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning by Dr. Shrarroky Hollie. However, that training was more than eight years ago and there has been quite a bit of staff turnover since that time.

Most of those interviewed did not talk about experiencing racism at the Bay Area Elementary School, though many of them had experienced racism in the public school system. All of the examples given were when parents felt their race played a part in negative treatment. One parent had experienced a lot of racism when she started high school in the U.S. after leaving Afghanistan. She had been called names and even kicked. However, the racism she described against her daughter and herself at the Bay Area Elementary School was far subtler than what she experienced as a student. She described an incident that happened when she went to her daughter's back to school night and how she was treated by the teacher

> Yeah. She was welcoming the other parents, and I was there, like, before everybody. And I was like introduced myself and I said, uh, “I’m, uh, this mom. I’m, uh, Zanip’s mom.” And she was like, “Okay, okay.” I just want to ask her how is Zanip doing? And she didn’t give me a chance to talk to her to, uh, say about my daughter, you know? How she’s doing in class. And, um, she’s like, “Oh. Oh, hi.” But she’s like ignoring me and go to the other person. (Chaghama, personal communication, December 2017)

This parent had a very difficult time discussing this topic during our interview. She was visibly upset and crying. Her experience is worth noting because I do not believe she relayed any of her feelings to the teacher, the principal, or the staff. Eventually, she put her younger daughter in Islamic School to get away from this treatment. She continued with her experience

> I don’t know most of the questions. And she said, “Okay,” and give her, uh, um, after school or during the school half an hour to read and, um, not, not in math anything, just the reading and that’s all. And she had little bit attitude or maybe because I’m wearing this scarf or something, she, um, every time they had, uh, something going on at the, inside the class, when I go, uh, she was welcoming the other people, but when I go there, it was like a, she’s kind of...you know, it was like, “Oh, who cares. Oh, you’re here.” Um, I was really upset about that. (Chaghama, personal communication, December 2017)

This parent believed that the teacher was treating her differently because she was wearing a hijab, which easily identified her as a Muslim. She had suffered greatly within the public school system after coming to the U.S. as a high school student. She did not have the necessary capital to navigate the system and advocate for her daughter. Her perception was that she was unwelcome, and that it was based on her race or because she was wearing a scarf which would suggest that it was based on her religion. This parent had expressed that she felt welcomed by Susan in the front office but had not felt welcomed into the school setting by the teacher. She was no longer willing or able to participate in the school from that point on.

Another mother described her daughter's dismay in the first days of attending school. She felt threatened because students were making fun of her because she was a Muslim. "Mom, everybody looks my clothes like that, to everybody say, "Oh you are love, loving me and you're Muslim." You, I'm, I'm separate, I'm sep, separate in the school" (Asal, personal communication, December 2017). More than one parent interviewed expressed that there was racial or religious motivated bullying occurring at the school.

Another parent discussed his experience in the public school system for both himself and his daughter. His descriptions were bleak, from lowered academic standards to a lack of behavioral interventions. He felt that if he had not had his parents to advocate for him, he would not have made it through school. His parents put him in private school in ninth grade, and he left the Midwest and moved his daughter to the Bay Area School District because of the quality of the schools.

> They had to keep enough students at this school for funding I'm sure. And so, um, that is kind of how I felt treated, um, at the other school. It did slight. Um, I just, I feel bad for a lot of kids. I just...I feel like there was this, uh, unfa-, unfair advantage for some kids versus others. I just, I just, just maybe look at life differently. (John, personal communication, November 2017)

He later spoke of his mother's advocacy for two of his friends as well. Both had gone on to graduate from college. He felt sure that would not have happened had she not been there to provide them structure. He saw many other students who did not make it.

All students need a safe environment in which to learn. Asal's daughter wanted to go back to school in her home country of Afghanistan rather than be subjected to the teasing at school for being Muslim. While her daughter was eventually able to adjust, her mother still had difficulty with many of the cultural differences between schools in Afghanistan and schools in the U.S.

The parent who had filled out the lunch form incorrectly felt that the treatment of her son was racially motivated. She had negative experiences with this staff member in the past and stated, "The lunch lady, I understand she's been there for a long time, but we are all humans. Um, I feel like she kind of prejudice, a little" (Jasmine, personal communication, December 2017).

As previously stated, this employee had denied a student food knowing that he would be approved for free and reduced lunch as his sister had already been approved. This was not the only parent who felt she was not being treated as human based on race. Another parent who worked at the school stated

> For the school. To be, to be fair. To be fair. Don't think about um, races. Just think about human. This is the most important for everybody. And we need to support each other anytime...Yeah, this is the most important for me. You know the people is think about races, I'm really hate that. I really hate that. But we are human you know. (Aadela, personal communication, December 2017)

During the course of her interview she had been the most positive. She was the parent that had recruited six of the other parents to participate in the study. It was not until the end of the interview that she brought up race at all. She was not just talking about the adults, as a noon supervisor she observed racist behavior from the students as well.

> Yeah. Like you know it was so many thing happened, like the last, last year. This year my fourth year I work in the same school. You know it was um, between

> some student, they fighting. You know like everyday, student fighting for no reason, and they talking about something that's no supposed to be talk about. (Aadela, personal communication, December 2017)

What the students were not supposed to be talking about was race. She was very distraught over the racist comments students were making to one another when fighting on the playground.

While some of the incidents described may be the result of culturally non-responsive pedagogy, the parents perceived them as racist. Schools need to understand that intended or not, this perception of racism affects the parents' ability to be involved in their children's education. One parent moved his family across country to find a better school for his daughter. Another parent left the public school system altogether. All of the parents were concerned about the way their children were affected by this behavior. While school staff may have been unaware that the parents' perceived race as a problem, it was affecting these families.

Structural

While systemic barriers reside in both seen and unseen practices, structural barriers are the ones that prevent parents from participating in their children's education due to lack of access. This lack of access can be due to the structure of the school day, limited teacher availability, lack of academic support, and limited opportunity to attend events. Parents are unable to surmount these structural obstacles and be more involved with their children's school.

Structure of the school day. The first structural barrier can be seen in the way the school day itself was structured. Many schools operated between the hours of 8 am to 4 pm, often determined by the contract between the classified and certificated staff and the district. Unions negotiated the contract, which dictated the hours staff were required to work. Yet, many parents worked during the time that the school is open. While some parents could take time off work to meet with school staff, those living in poverty or working minimum wage jobs may not have that luxury.

Even if a parent was able to take time off from work they would not have been able to get into this school office outside of the Bay Area School District. “Yeah, one person in the one, in the whole office. That’s why she can’t manage it, she can’t handle it. She says, ‘You have to come next time because I’m so busy’...close the door” (Damsa, personal communication, December 2017). This parent made the arrangements necessary to go to the school office and was not allowed in because they were so short staffed. She was not even offered the ability to make an appointment to come on another occasion.

Another parent shared that she felt the school day should be longer in order to fit in all the programs that should be made available. “I think school should be longer. I think that, um, at least until 5:00 or something like that, until the parents get off or 6:00 to give them time to get off from work” (Jasmine, personal communication, December 2017). Her challenge was getting everything done for her three children by herself before the end of the school day.

Limited teacher availability. Parents discussed communication with the teacher as being a key component to them being able to support their children’s education. Parents discussed their inability to get appointments with their teachers due to the teacher’s schedule. “Sometimes when you ask for even a quick meetings with the teacher, sometimes they tell you, “We have a meeting with the principal, we have another meeting with other staff,” so it looks like the teacher’s always busy” (Benesh, personal communication, December 2017).

While many parents are content with getting emails from the teacher, several of the parents interviewed were English Language Learners. This parent explicitly stated she preferred meeting in person so she could ask questions.

Lack of time for academic support. Another structural barrier was the lack of time for academic support. Many schools struggled to provide a robust Response to Intervention (RTI) program because of scheduling conflicts. Schools that needed to work around music, physical education, and other preparation periods may not have been able to offer more than a couple of intervention sessions to students. Two parents described their children were receiving intervention but it was occurring after the school day. This created a barrier for parents who could not let their children attend an afterschool program due to scheduling conflicts.

A parent with a special needs child expressed her frustration with not understanding the Individualized Education Plan process. She did not agree with the Special Day Class placement, but by then he was already in the fourth grade and she did not want to deny him help. Most Individualized Education Plan meetings are scheduled between one and three hours. If you are a parent who has a job, or need to care for other children, three hours may not be a realistic time frame.

Limited opportunities to access events. Night events usually are for a specific purpose, and parents are given one opportunity to get the information. Duplicate information is often not presented on multiple nights. This structure does not allow schools to meet parents where they are. When asked if she attended Back to School Night, one parent replied, “I was busy. I had an appointment with my son” (Jasmine, personal communication, December 2017). Another parent was not able to go, “Last year was sick but my daughter, she go because she was over eighteen” (Esin, personal communication, December 2017). Structural barriers can also occur when the school or the district schedules things at the same time. A perfect example is Back to School Night. All seven elementary schools in the Bay Area School District start at the same time on the same night. For parents that have more than one child at the school, they either have to choose which child’s class they will go to or go to more than one class getting only partial information from each. Parents of special needs students especially may have children at more than one site. They are at the mercy of the teacher to present the information for them at an alternative time or miss one of their children's school altogether. The teacher is, of course, under no contractual obligation to accommodate. One parent described the predicament her mother was in trying to raise seven children.

> Well, she had seven kids, so it was kind of hard, especially handling it the same day or, you know, at the same time. So she'll make her rounds through, she made sure she made her rounds. 'Cause we had graduations that, you know, she actually had a car accident trying to make it, um, to one. On my fifth-grade graduation, I'll never forget 'cause she still made it. You know, a little few minutes here, a little few minutes here, and I think that they should, you know, um, be able to spread them out. All schools should have a different time. (Jasmine, personal communication, December 2017)

Schools are asking some parents to do the impossible and both the parent and their children suffer because of it.

Some families do not have the necessary transportation to get to events. One parent interviewed said, "I didn't have transportation for a while" (Sandra, personal communication, December 2017) and that was the reason she could not attend her children's Back to School Night. The school could have proactively arranged a ride for this parent or made other arrangements such as video conferencing so this parent could get the information. Unfortunately, this was not done so she just missed out on the information given for four children. While the school would have sent home the handouts, that could not duplicate the experience of being at the event or the opportunity to speak with her child's teacher.

Another structural barrier parents face is the inability to bring younger siblings to the school. Some schools discourage parents from bringing young children to meetings or parent nights and this restriction can make it impossible for the parent to participate. In my experience as a principal I had seen teachers send invitations to attend Back to School Night that specifically told parents not to bring their children.

The structural barriers within the public school system present challenges for parents to be engaged in their children's education. While educators may interpret the parents' lack of participation as not caring, oftentimes parents are being asked to choose between a meeting and their livelihood. Until schools create structures that promote creative inclusivity, there will continue to be a segment of their parent population who will not be able to participate due to the constraints of other obligations.

Internal

Internal barriers to parent involvement are those the parents carry with them based on their own personal experience. Many times, these barriers were created due to a lack of cultural or social capital. Without this capital, parents did not know how to navigate the public school system. Other parents carried a great deal of shame around school. This stemmed from a negative school experience the parent had personally or a feeling of shame that stemmed from the parent not knowing how to help their child. Many parents living in poverty do not know their rights as parents. This knowledge, or cultural capital, was available to the parents who had the highest level of education. The other parents interviewed did not know the steps to take to get the support they needed in order to better advocate for their children.

Some parents interviewed felt shame around their participation with the school based on their own schooling experience. One parent did not finish school and was ashamed of it. When talking about her mother's support she stated

> She tried to force me into how to- to- to be, uh, found, to learn how...You know, kids do what they wanna do when they get to a certain age, and, um, a parent can do only so much. (Jasmine, personal communication, December 2017)

This was the same parent who had gotten in the car accident trying to attend her daughter's fifth grade graduation. It was clear she felt a lot of remorse about not finishing school from the tone of her voice and her body language. She stated her mother could only have done so much to try to get her to finish school. Another parent only completed school to fifth grade and when asked how far she had gotten in her schooling she said, "Like fifth. Because there was a, you know, war" (Farahnoush, personal communication, December 2017). Yet another parent had not attended school at all in her home country and was now attending classes at the local junior college. She was very proud of the fact that she was gaining the education she had been denied in her youth. She relied heavily on her husband to navigate the school system and was looking for the ability to do so herself.

Parents also carried the internal barrier of not feeling welcomed at the school. After years of feeling that the school system did not support her or her child, one parent did not feel she belonged and, therefore, stopped trying. One parent described it, "Yeah, it's not that...I feel like it's not for me and my family" (Chaghama, personal communication, December 2017). She was the parent that eventually moved her youngest daughter to the Islamic school. Another parent felt actual fear when going to the school in another city. "No, no, not at all. [I am] scared from the teachers. You know, when I see they are not, ah, looking at their face like, face-to-face or eye-to-eye contact, they are not like...I don't know they are ignore us" (Damsa, personal communication, December 2017). This parent felt afraid of the teachers and did not want to attempt to engage them.

A parent with more cultural capital may have addressed their behavior directly or taken it to the principal. This parent just retreated.

Parents who do not know how to navigate the system are looking for allies within the school. Without an ally to help them advocate, parents are often left confused and at times, afraid. They become reliant on the school to tell them what they need to know and not all schools have parent education built into their structure. Parents may need translators, flexible hours, or a designated support person from the school. Those parents who do not know how to navigate the school system need someone to explain, step by step, what their options are to support their student.

At the end of our interview, Chaghama gave the best example of the weight of the internal barrier she was carrying.

> The school, um, I, uh...I had a really bad, uh, um, bad experience for myself and for my kids. I'm asking those people we are human, too, you know? Don't be racist. Everybody's, it's not about like wearing a scarf or, you know, color, uh, anything. It's about human. You helping other. You know, be nice with each other. You know. Just, it's, it's a media saying everything about Islam, but nobody knows. Nobody knows what, what, what's going on. Those people make those, uh, stuff to us. It's not us. It's not us. Our, our dean, our, uh, Islam is peace. Not fighting. Yeah. I'm just saying don't, uh...uh, I don't know what to say, but, um, any racist, I don't want any racist, any school, anybody. (Chaghama, personal communication, December 2017)

More than anything else, she was barred from participating in her children's education by the internal barrier of being a Muslim in a country that was targeting Muslims. A culturally responsive school would have had a plan in place to make sure she and her children felt welcomed in their new environment. In the absence of this, Chaghama filled in the blanks with negative perceptions based on her past experience from her high school. Internal barriers need to be tackled explicitly through the relationship building between school staff and parents.

Parent education. At the end of each interview I asked parents to give advice to other parents and to the school on how to increase parent engagement. It was in this section that I realized that it was the parent's education that determined their level of cultural capital to navigate the public school system rather than their socioeconomic level, race, or ethnicity. The less education the parent had, the more they relied on the school to do the right thing for their children. The higher the education the parent had, the more they took the onus on themselves to ensure the school was doing the right thing for their children.

When asked what she would do if there was a problem with the school, one of the parents who had never attended school until she was an adult stated, "Uh, they should not, uh, if the kids go to school, they should not to make a problem. The children, because of the children. Their children go to school, they should know everything about the school, about the kids" (Esin, personal communication, December 2017). She put her total and complete faith in the school to take care of her children's needs. She did not have a frame of reference for what the school should be doing and, therefore, had to assume they were doing all that they should. Another parent attended school until the fifth grade but had to stop going because of the war in Afghanistan. When asked what she would advise she stated, "I kind of them like, uh, take by self to school and look the homework like, look at what they're doing" (Farahnoush, personal communication, December 2017). She was getting the majority of her information about what the school was doing by the homework her children brought home and the communication from the school. Once again, the parent is relying on the school to advocate appropriately for her children.

As the parents' education level increased, so did the information in their answers. Three of the parents had completed school to the twelfth grade. One in the U.S., one in Afghanistan, and one in India. Sandra, a single parent of four children, two of her own, two of her sisters, and one with special needs, gave the following advice to parents

> Um, basically to stay involved with your kids and with their teachers so you can know, you know, where your kids is basically going and how they're growing because it shows what type of treatment they're getting' at home and then what type of treatment they're getting at school so basically, it's best to, you know, just stay active in the kid's schooling and you know, just to keep them on top of everything and so they don't have to be, you know, I want to say, behind. (Sandra, personal communication, December 2017)

Damsa, a mother of three daughters and one son stated

> Yes, ah, every time follow the rules, go to the, um, meetings, they send you a paper or email, d- don't even miss it, because if...when you miss you don't know what's going on in the school. That's really important. (Damsa, personal communication, December 2017)

As their education level increased, so did their understanding of how the school system worked. Aadela had three children with one in elementary and two in high school. She laid out the chain of command succinctly saying

> Yeah. First of all I have to go talk to the teacher. Because the teacher is very close to my son. All of my kids everyday. Then after teacher is not help me, then I'm going to talk to Principal. The principal for example, if there is not helpful, then I'm going to district office. (Aadela, personal communication, December 2017)

Two of the parents interviewed had earned advanced degrees in their countries before coming to the U.S. The difference in their answers shows in stark relief the amount of capital they have to navigate the system in contrast with those less educated. It did not matter that English was not their first language or that they did not attend school in the U.S. What mattered was their school experience and the modeling they had from their parents to navigate through school. Benesh, mother of three, earned her master's degree in science. Her advice for parents was

> I would say it's, it's the important things that parents involved with their kids, because many times kids have problem and for some reason sometimes they don't want to say, or sometimes they want you to ask what's going on every day, so it's very important to ask, and if you, if they have something to communicate with the teacher, if no response, going to the principal, because that could be effect on them. If, I mean, if the parents ignore that, that could affect on them not just academically, but even on their health. (Benesh, personal communication, December 2017)

Finally, there was Asal, the mother of three children who held a doctorate degree, spoke five languages, and was a principal of a school in her home country. Her advice to families was comprehensive

> I go to school and talk with teachers, to the principal, vice principal. And like that. To this is for family check the friends and parents and pick up, drop off time on time, talk with teachers, talk with families, talk with kids all, uh, always, always talk to kids. What's the problem, you have some problem, what's your...what, what you think about this friends, what you comfortable with the school, with comfortable with the teachers, comfortable with friends. Um, what's, what you see negative inside the class? What do you see positive inside the class? Are you

> enjoying this class? Are you enjoy work with teachers? You're not comfortable, you change your school, you change your class, you change your teachers. Because this is not first time, this is always, always, always the kids go down. (Asal, personal communication, December 2017)

This information could help schools target those they need to support by looking at the parents' education level. Parents with a high school education or less may need much more support to navigate the public school system. Schools could query this information when students began. The schools could then use this information to create a support plan for the family.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that there are systemic, structural, and internal barriers that prevent parent engagement. Many of the systemic barriers can be addressed through systematic professional development on culturally responsive teaching practices. Additionally, teachers will need to take an objective look at their own internal biases if there is any chance for their elimination. Structural barriers could be moved immediately by changing the way parents are given information. The use of technology could alleviate the need for parents to be physically in the room for things such as parent conferences, specialty parent nights, and board meetings. Finally, educators can help remove some of the internal barriers parents carry with them by building authentic relationships with parents. By getting to know the parent personally, educators can anticipate problem areas for parents and together search for ways to remove them.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

Schools need to put more effort into parent education in an effort to increase parent involvement (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). As the chasm between the poor and the middle class continues to widen, there is a moral imperative to close the opportunity gap. The findings from this study have shed light on practices that can be altered, supports that can be embedded, and structures that must be changed.

First, my study revealed that there were barriers to parent involvement at the systemic, structural, and internal levels. Systemically, the greatest factors were the communication of staff and the attitudes of staff. All 10 of the participants talked about how important it was to them that they have a good relationship with their children's teacher and that positive communication and a positive staff attitude was key to that relationship. These two combined may have the largest impact as to whether or not parents feel comfortable to be involved with the school.

Second, deficit thinking was a systemic barrier to parent involvement. Teachers were not always aware of their deficit thinking and it translated into lower expectations of students and parents. Teachers did not expect parents to be able to participate and did not assist them to be able to do so. Parents described feeling left out and not welcome in their children's classroom.

Third, racism emerged as a systemic barrier for seven of the 10 parents interviewed. Many of them had experienced racism outside of the Bay Area Elementary School and only three within the school. However, the racism they experienced was frequently in the form of microaggressions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). These microaggressions led to an undercurrent that made these parents feel either not wanted, or at times, less valued than other parents at the school. Microaggressions were expressed through both verbal and nonverbal communications.

The structural barriers that parents faced revolved around the structure of the school day. Parents living in poverty often could not meet the teachers within the confines of the eight in the morning to four in the afternoon schedule and, therefore, missed out on crucial face to face meeting times. Another complaint was that certain activities were held for multiple grade levels at once on the same night, making it impossible for parents to hear all of any one of their children's teacher's presentations. The school made little effort to meet them where they were. There was little differentiation to take an individual family situation into account.

The internal barriers that prevented parents from being involved in their children's education included their lack of social and cultural capital (Horvat et al., 2003) and the shame they felt as a result. Some parents believed they could not argue with the school and many did not have any idea of their rights as parents (Bower & Griffin, 2011). The largest predictor of the amount of capital parents had to navigate the school system was their own level of education, regardless of what country they went to school. This was somewhat of a surprising finding, in light of the fact that race played less of a role.

Discussion of Findings

While investigating the first research question, what systemic and structural barriers do parents of low income face as they negotiate the education of their children, I was not expecting how pervasive the systemic barriers were. While communication and staff attitude were the two most important aspects to the parents, the underlying theme was the need for social and cultural capital to navigate the system. These findings were similar to Horvat et al. (2003) who found that the school was unable to transmute the parents' capital into usable capital for the school. Parents described the need for a good relationship with the staff because many of them were completely reliant on the staff to advocate for their children. Without the knowledge of their rights, knowledge of how to bring a complaint from the classroom level up to the district office if need be, parents were at the whim of staff to help them. Therefore, a good relationship determined whether or not the parent felt confident that the staff member would help their child. Parents described a loss of faith in the staff when they realized this had not been done. The literature showed that parents of low income have to defer to the teachers' expertise because the parents do not feel confident of their own expertise (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Social and cultural capital. Social capital was helpful if the parent had someone in their group with the cultural capital to navigate the school system. If no one in their group had such capital, then it was just a group of friends going to school events together (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995; Horvat et al., 2003; Howard & Reynolds, 2008). That type of social capital may have been useful navigating the community or their housing development, but it did not help them at the school. Cultural capital came up as a need again and again. The most challenging aspect of a lack of cultural capital was parents did not know what they did not know. One parent insisted the school knew everything and would do the right thing, while another expressed disappointment over the way her son's qualification for special education was handled. Many parents did not know what questions to ask. If they did ask for help for their child, they did not know what to ask next if they were told it was unavailable.

Positive communication. Positive communication was the first gateway through which parents could feel welcomed to be involved in their children's education but it must go far beyond a friendly smile and a handshake. For parents to be truly welcomed in the school they must be given a vehicle through which they can participate. Epstein (2009) found that positive communication provided positive results for students, parents, and teachers. Staff needs to arm parents with all the required information for them to advocate for their children knowledgeably. This is only possible when there is no deficit thinking at work.

Deficit thinking. Deficit thinking erodes the relationship between parents and staff (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Parents can sense when the staff member they are working with has deficit thinking, though they may not know that term. When a staff member does not make an effort to help the parent's involvement in their children's education, they are creating a barrier. More importantly, when deficit thinking presents as rigidity, staff are unwilling to meet the parents where they are. Ultimately, parents are left out (Brandon, 2010). This happens when staff focus on following the rules rather than doing what is right. This lack of advocacy for the parent on the part of staff leads to frustration for the parent.

By developing real relationships with parents, staff can anticipate their needs and thereby assist parents in advocating for their children. An example of this was the parent who could not attend back to school night because she did not have a car. This mother of four children missed out on a crucial information night because she did not have a ride. A staff member could have helped arrange transportation had there been advocacy for this parent, which would have directly affected four students.

Racism. While the racism described by the parents interviewed was both overt and covert, the covert was by far the more prevalent of the two. The overt racism was described by one parent as being hit and kicked when she came to the U.S. from Afghanistan as a high school student. Other parents described being verbally abused because they wore headscarves. Still others described their children being teased at school because they were Muslims. In most cases the school handled these incidences directly. It was the covert racism that was more difficult to deal with and much harder to prove.

The bulk of the racism these parents described could be defined as microaggressions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). On the most basic level, these microaggressions were propagated by staff members in the dominant culture that were simply culturally insensitive. They did not take the cultural background of their parents into account or how to help support the student's integration into U.S. culture (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995). One example was a lack of transitional support for students who had never been in a mixed-gender school. There was simply a dominant culture assumption that they would assimilate into the culture.

Other examples of microaggressions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013) occurred with another two parents I interviewed. The example of the Jasmine, who forgot to put her son's name on the free and reduced lunch form along with her daughters, was denied food for her son until the new paperwork was processed. This was done even though once one child qualifies, they all do. The parent felt this happened because she was African American and the lunch lady was racist. Chaghama was the first parent in the class and she tried to talk to the teacher who turned away from her and moved onto a parent who was White. She felt certain it was because she was wearing her headscarf. It happened on more than one occasion until she gave up trying to talk to the teacher. One of the most blatant microaggressions happened to both of these parents when asking for help for their children. Neither one were given an appointment with their children's teacher to discuss what was wrong and what their options were as a parent to advocate for their children. Crucial knowledge was withheld from these parents on the part of staff that would have empowered them to make informed decisions on behalf of their children.

Structural barriers. The structural barriers that prevented parents from being involved in their children's education were primarily due to the structure of the school day (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Multiple parents expressed that they felt more comfortable meeting with teachers in person and, yet, appointments with teachers were difficult to get due to the teacher's other responsibilities. When they could get an appointment, it had to be during school hours. Many teachers were done by four o'clock and this made it very difficult for working parents to meet.

Another structural barrier was the scheduling of the two most crucial school nights, Back to School Night and Open House. Back to School Night was scheduled all on the same night making it impossible for parents to get to a full teacher presentation if they had more than one child at a school. Every parent interviewed had no less than three children and struggled to be in two or more places at once. Parents who had transportation needs were not offered solutions for how to attend (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Parents who had children at more than one elementary school had no option except to choose which child's they would be attending.

Another structural barrier was not knowing where to find information they needed (Williams & Sánchez, 2013). The Bay Area Elementary School tried to provide resources but the wall where they were housed was not at the front of the school and parents had to be shown where it was. Those who did not know to ask, did not get the information. Lack of cultural capital could be just as detrimental with structural barriers as it was with systemic ones.

Internal barriers. The second question, in what ways do the internal perceptions and social practices of parents of low income contribute to the barriers they face in participating in their children's schooling, was informative on many levels. Firstly, parents frequently carried shame around their lack of cultural capital. Secondly, they often denied a problem existed even after giving a detailed description of what it was. This was true particularly when the school was responsible, as in the case of the student who was not identified for a special day class (SDC) until the fourth grade. Thirdly, the education level of the parent was the greatest predictor of how much capital they had to navigate the school system and, thereby, how much shame they felt.

The majority of the shame the parents felt stemmed from their inability to truly advocate for their children. As already stated, the parents did not know what they did not know, however, this did not mean that they were unaware that it was their own lack of knowledge and experience that was contributing to their children's plight. The parent who tried to get help for her daughter for three years knew her daughter was not being served, but she was at a loss as to how to change the situation. She did not have the social capital to rely on a group to support her through the process. Year after year, she tried the same method to get help, asking her child's teacher, and year after year she was told it was not available. By the time her daughter did receive tutoring in fourth grade, her mother felt ashamed, defeated, and helpless. She ultimately pulled her younger daughter out of the school system and put her in an Islamic school that she could navigate. In my literature review, I did not find evidence of parents leaving a school due to their lack of agency. It would be valuable to investigate how frequently this occurs.

I was surprised how time and time again the parent did not push their concern up to the next level. For some of the parents, they did not know this was an option. For others, trying to work with the teacher was the strategy they chose. So many of the parents were carrying the experience they had when they were in school and it was clear that many did not want to “rock the boat”. The shame became a double-edged sword. Parents were ashamed that they could not do more for their children and then ashamed that they did not have the skill set to do more for their children. Parents were suffering from a lack of validation (Lee & Bowen, 2006). When parents brought up concerns like the correcting of the math work, the free and reduced lunch application, the need for tutoring, and were ignored, there power was stripped from them and the school invalidated their opinion. I would listen to a parent describe a situation where the school failed their child, then take the responsibility upon themselves. I surmised that if they took responsibility, it gave them some semblance of control or power in a situation in which they clearly had none. Had they known the right steps to take to navigate the school system, they might have had a very different outcome.

Another unexpected finding was that parents rarely spoke with any school staff other that the front office staff or their child’s teacher. Only one parent talked about working with administration on an issue. She was highly skilled at navigating the school system and knew that she could work with an administrator to resolve a problem. Additionally, they rarely went to the teacher multiple times on the same issue if they were not satisfied. A parent was unhappy about the self-grading policy in her son’s class. She spoke to the teacher about it, proving that it had substantially lowered her son’s grade. The teacher acknowledged the error but did not stop the practice. The parent was very dissatisfied with her son’s report card grade in this subject area but had not yet brought it back to the teacher’s attention. This left her feeling frustrated and diminished her confidence in the teacher’s abilities. This supports research that finds many schools only want a certain type of involvement, one that complies to what the school deems acceptable (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999).

Another parent detailed that both he and his daughter received a sub-par education in the school system in the Midwest. He was eventually moved to private school in ninth grade, and he moved her to the Bay Area in third grade. When discussing this in both cases, he would often point to the frustration of the teachers as being a result of the students' bad behavior. He also discussed that the public school had inadequate textbooks, technology, and facilities. Instead of being outraged at the lack of support the public school had given their students, he seemed to accept the sub-par education as a result of the students' negative behavior. It was a complete acceptance of the deficit thinking that the school perpetuated in its students, generation after generation. I did not find literature that highlighted this phenomenon and it may be an area that warrants further study. Five of the 10 parents interviewed described intolerable behavior with acceptance. None of the parents seemed surprised by the experiences and conversely, were pleasantly surprised when they were treated well. Throughout the interviews, parents would downplay their negative experiences and deny their severity. This was true even when the school was undeniably at fault.

Parent education level. The greatest indicator for possessing the cultural capital for navigating the school system was the parent's level of education. Research showed that this was something that should be monitored to target support to those with the least education (Lee & Bowen, 2006). This was true regardless of what country the parent was from. The parent did not need to be from the U.S. or ever attend school in the U.S. in order to know how to successfully navigate the U.S. school system. Likewise, the three parents born, raised, and schooled in the U.S. had varying degrees of agency based on their own level of education. The parents with the highest level of education, that is, more than a high school diploma, understood the school system's chain of command. They knew that if you did not get a resolution from the teacher you could go to the administrator. If you did not resolve it at the administrator level, you could go to the district office. The parents who attended college also seemed more confident in their ability to advocate for their children. An interesting finding was that all of the parents who went to college expressed that their own parents were very involved with their education. They modeled how to participate with the school in their home country so the parents knew what to do (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). All of these findings combined to provide some substantive implications for practice.

Implications for Practice

The first implication for practice to involve parents is the dire need for culturally responsive pedagogy in the public schools (Gay, 2010; Hollie, 2012). It is clear that those in the education profession are continuing to alienate many of the parents of the children they serve. Oftentimes this spills into the classroom and students are being alienated as well. In order to adequately educate educators in culturally responsive pedagogy, it must become required training both in university training programs as well as with annual professional development.

Credentialing programs need to educate teachers on the overrepresentation of the dominant culture in all aspects of education. The overrepresentation of White teachers, combined with the overrepresentation of dominant White culture in curriculum both in subject and authorship, have created an unbalanced educational system, one in which the dominant culture can operate oblivious to the plight and experiences of marginalized populations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). This lack of representation alienates those who do not see themselves and creates a false reality for those that do. Chaghama felt certain that it was her hijab, signifying she was a Muslim, that allowed her daughter's teacher to ignore her through microaggressions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). Had the teacher been sensitive to the challenges currently facing Muslims in the U.S., she would have gone out of her way to welcome Chaghama and her children to the school.

Teachers must also be taught explicitly to spot and resist their own biases (CTC, 2009). This work can begin with examining their practices of inclusivity within the school. Using the philosophy *All means All* from the Orange County Department of Education Scale-UP Multi-Tiered System of Support (Orange County Department of Education, 2018), teachers can examine the areas where they do not think this is possible and then examine why. When a reason is produced for excluding a group, work can then be done to create inclusive practices for that selfsame group. Schools can investigate research-based programs that can support teachers in reflecting on their own implicit bias. This work will require the support of site administration, district leadership, and the state university system.

The next implication is the education system must do a better job of attracting and retaining teachers of color and males into the teaching profession. Currently, 65% of teachers are White nationally (California Department of Education, 2015). As we increase the diversity amongst the teaching staff on school campuses, culturally responsive pedagogy will remain a foundational component. Even when the diversity of the staff increases, that does not ensure inclusive practices. They need to be taught explicitly. The culturally responsive pedagogy will support diverse staff populations just as much as diverse student populations (Hollie, 2012). In order to make this a reality, there is a need to create teacher pathways at the high school level to give students early exposure to the profession. Currently, teaching programs are designed in such a way that students may not have their first exposure to a class of students until their junior or senior year of college. Students must be provided teaching experiences earlier if we want to attract a diverse group of quality candidates.

In addition to recruiting and retaining diversity within the teaching staff, there is a need to do the same with support staff, being careful not to create a classified/credentialed class system amongst staff. In many schools, there is a hierarchy between classified staff, credentialed staff, and administrators. All staff need to be treated with the same level of respect if schools are to transfer this behavior to their students and their parents. To become truly diverse, human resources must balance hiring practices at all levels, support staff, teaching staff, and administrative staff.

Another implication is to restructure the school day to meet parents where they are and increase inclusivity. Important night events such as Back to School Night and Open House should be offered more than one night so that all parents can attend. Grade levels should be staggered so that parents do not have to choose which child's class they will attend. Child care should be offered so that parents can give their full attention to the information being given. Parents of special needs children should have the opportunity to attend both their child's Special Day Class (SDC) as well as any general education class their child mainstreams into. To create the schedule that meets parent needs, the school should survey the parents about what they would need to attend. Carpools could be arranged for parents that lack transportation or video conferencing for those that cannot attend.

The first priority for staff is to build relationships with the students and their parents (Ediger, 2016). Parents should be asked about their preferred method of communication from the very beginning of school thereby avoiding the waste of time sending messages through an unused system. Teachers must differentiate for their parent group in the same way they would differentiate for their students. Using Epstein's (2009) model of parent engagement, teachers need to ask parents how they can be involved rather than give them a prescriptive list of teacher-dictated choices. When parents have identified how they can participate, teachers need to value it and capitalize upon it to show their students that they value the parents' involvement.

Finally, school staff need to check in with parents more frequently. Just like any other relationship, the parent/school relationship requires time and attention to thrive. Many parents expressed that they needed more time face to face with their child's teacher in order to feel comfortable that they are offering the correct support for their child. Districts may need to negotiate night conferences into their contracts to allow parents that work nine to five to be able to meet with the teacher. Teachers may use video conferencing as a way to offer parents a night conference without having to come to the school. Ultimately, schools need to understand that the current method of parent engagement is leaving many parents out. The way to discover the best method to engage a parent is to ask them directly and then do what they request.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study implies that there is still work to be done in the area of parent engagement both as a whole and for parents living in poverty. The Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) requires parent involvement as the eighth of the state's priorities, but it has not offered a blueprint as to how to achieve this. On the basis of this study I have identified three main areas for further research.

First, research must be done on districts that have high parent engagement. While all of these districts should be studied, particular attention should be paid to districts with high levels of poverty and those that serve traditionally marginalized populations. Once these districts have been identified, an inventory should be taken of all the engagement strategies that are offered. A meta-analysis should be done to create a ranking of the most effective strategies at the least. This information is important so that schools and districts do not squander time and money on practices that have been deemed ineffective. Once the top engagement strategies are identified, it would be helpful to know why they are successful so that districts can incorporate them into their professional development.

Second, research should be done on schools that were able to restructure their day to make staff more accessible to parents. How were they able to do this? How did they get buy in from all of the necessary stakeholders, teacher unions, district leadership, and parents? What has been their success in engaging more parents? How was this measured?

It is important to showcase districts that are having success with a restructured schedule so that they can model how to navigate the challenges.

Third, research should be done on a local level. At sites and districts, surveys should be given to all parents to find out their questions and concerns. If need be, these surveys could be given one on one in person or over the phone in the parent's first language. As previously stated, relationship is everything for parents to feel comfortable. Schools should start the relationship by researching what parents are worried about and what they are unsure of. Part of the survey could be a list of terms like a Student Study Team (SST), 504 Plan, or an IEP. Ask parents, "Do you know what to do if you are unsatisfied with an answer?" "Do you know your rights as a parent?" Empower parents to be an equal partner in their child's education.

Conclusion

The systemic, structural, and internal barriers to parent engagement for those living in poverty are formidable. Their removal will require support from the state, university, county, district, and site level. It requires a commitment to changing the way schools have traditionally defined what parent involvement is and honoring the contributions, in any form, that parents can make. Culturally responsive teachers will need to anticipate the needs of their parents by building relationships with them and differentiating to meet their needs. Administrators will need to support parents by restructuring events and tailoring the distribution method of information to meet the diverse needs of the parent population. It is imperative that schools are diligent about including their parents as there is a direct link between their involvement and student achievement. For this effort to be effective, schools may need to broaden their definition as to what constitutes involvement, ensure school and district communications are being received, and create meaningful, authentic opportunities for parents to participate in their children's education.

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APPENDIX A

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Questions

1. How many children do you have?
2. What grades are they in?
3. When you think of your child/children's school, has your experience been positive or negative overall?
    a) Can you give examples of a positive experience?
    b) Can you give examples of a negative experience?
4. Did you go to Open House and if not, what prevented you from going?
5. Do you have a network of friends or parents to help you with school issues?
    a) Do you have a friend to go to school events with?
6. Do you feel welcome in the front office? Why or why not?
    a) Is there a staff member you feel comfortable talking to when you need help with something school related?
    b) Are there staff members you feel value you?
    c) Can you give me examples of what they did to make you feel valued?
    d) Are there staff members you feel do not value you?
    e) Can you give me examples of what they did to make you feel not valued?
7. Do you know how to get support services if you need them?
    a) Define support services… give examples…
8. Did you go to public school growing up?

   a) Where did you attend school?
   b) How was it decided that you would attend that particular school?
   c) How much school did you complete?
9. Are you a single or double income household?
10. Did you have a positive experience in school> How do you feel about that school?
11. Were your parents involved with that school?
    a) If yes: How were they involved?
    b) If no: What do you think prevented them from being involved?
    c) Did this experience affect how you feel about the school? How you interact with staff?
12. How many languages do you speak?
13. 13. If you had a message for parents, what would it be?
14. If you had a message for schools, what would it be?