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Sense of belonging for Black families at their child's school: factors that promote, inhibit, and oppress.

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SENSE OF BELONGING FOR BLACK FAMILIES AT THEIR CHILD'S SCHOOL:
FACTORS THAT PROMOTE, INHIBIT, AND OPPRESS

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughters Sydney and Madison; they are the sunshine to every one of my days. Being their mom is and continues to be the most rewarding part of my identity. One of my goals as their mother is to model for them what strength and independence as a woman looks like and to never let them forget that they can do hard things. I want them to always remember just how strong and amazing they are and for this work to serve as a reminder to them that through commitment and dedication, anything is possible.

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ABSTRACT

SENSE OF BELONGING FOR BLACK FAMILIES AT THEIR CHILD'S SCHOOL:

FACTORS THAT PROMOTE, INHIBIT, AND OPPRESS

Jill Handley

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Parent involvement and student sense of belonging have been positively associated with achievement of African American students; however, African American parents indicate concerns about the way they are perceived and/or treated by school personnel, which could impact the level of parental involvement (Brown & Brandon, 2007; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Latunde & Louque, 2016). The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how the perceptions about family engagement structures influence the sense of belonging for Black families at their child's school.

Qualitative participatory action research (PAR) design was used for this study and purposeful homogenous sampling (Creswell, 2012) was used to select participants. The participants for this study were Black parents/guardians of students in grades K-12 in Jefferson County, Kentucky. This qualitative study used the World Café method to collect multiple data points that were triangulated to contribute to the trustworthiness of the study (Glesne, 2006). Epstein's Model of Overlapping Spheres and Bourdieu's Theory of Structural Constraints were the theoretical frameworks utilized for this study. To examine the potential for oppression in the systems and structures of this case study

and analyze the marginalization of the lived experiences of the participants, a Critical Race Theory lens was used. Examining the counter-narratives of the Black parents/guardians in this study provided insight into the ways in which race, and cultural capital may influence a marginalized sense of belonging for Black families at their child's school.

Data were analyzed through three cycles of coding to determine themes and values. Themes that emerged included teacher/school actions that promote, inhibit, and oppress trust and sense of belonging and representation. Values, attitudes, and beliefs that emerged as important to the participants based on their responses include authentic relationships grounded in connection and mutual respect, representation in staffing and curricular resources and cultural understanding and appreciation.

When discussing factors that promote a sense of belonging at their child's school, participants mentioned trusting relationships as a foundational element. Findings indicated that Black families want to be engaged with their child's school, but traditional, school-centric family engagement structures often inhibit and oppress their sense of belonging, which impacts their opportunity to engage in a partnership with the school. Parent recommendations included a need for increased professional development for employees to better understand Black culture. Parents also advocated for schools to stop blaming Black parents and start creating intentional opportunities for Black families to have a presence at the school with the goal of garnering feedback that administrators will consider when creating systems and structures.

The implications of this study suggest that schools must stop expecting families to conform and must begin to disrupt the inequities that exist for not only students but

families as well. Representation matters and White educators must increase their

awareness about the roles of race and culture in educational and societal structures and be

willing to confront and dismantle racialized systems.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

There is clear evidence that demonstrates an achievement gap between Black and White students still exists (NDE Core Web, 2020). Student sense of belonging (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Hill et al., 2018a; Hill & Tyson, 2009, Orrock & Clark, 2018; Singh et al., 2010; Uwah et al., 2008) and parent involvement (Barnard, 2004; Castro et al., 2015; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003; Jeynes, 2005; Wilder, 2014) have both been shown to have a positive impact on student achievement of African American students. Despite African American parents indicating a desire to be engaged with their child's school, personal, cultural, and structural barriers exist that continue to create inequitable levels of family engagement (Kim, 2009; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Latunde, 2017; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016; Louque & Latunde, 2014; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Yoder & Lopez, 2013). Challenges that inhibit family engagement for Black families stem from a variety of factors to include trust (Bartz et al., 2013; Hill et al., 2018b; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013), social and cultural capital (Huang, 2019; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Yan, 1999), self-concept (Epstein, 2010; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2014), identity (Yoder & Lopez, 2013) and how they are treated (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Student sense of belonging has been positively associated with student engagement;

however, there is limited research that investigates the relationship between parent sense of belonging and parent engagement.

Based on an analysis of the Comprehensive School Survey results, orientation data, parent/teacher conference attendance data, and other family engagement activity data, an inequitable level of family engagement exists between White families and Black families at the district level and my school (Comprehensive Survey, n.d.). If family engagement is predicated by a sense of belonging, then current data suggests a diminished sense of belonging among Black families as evidenced by the inequitable levels of engagement between Black and White families. For purposes of this study equity in family engagement will be defined as a systemic change within a culture of shared responsibility (Ishimaru, 2019) grounded in a social justice approach leading to school wide practices that address and eliminate inequitable practices which will benefit marginalized students and their families (Theoharis, 2007) and establish authentic partnerships (Flores & Kyere, 2021).

To create a partnership with families that equitably honors all voices, we must examine whose voice we are using to establish structures for family engagement. By creating systems and structures for family engagement that are predominantly based on the voice of White families, it could be hypothesized that we are unintentionally creating systems that further marginalize the sense of belonging for Black families. If parents don't feel a sense of belonging, parent engagement may be negatively impacted, which could ultimately impact the student achievement of Black students. Therefore, implications for my research include action research with Black parents/guardians as

primary stakeholders to determine which factors of family engagement structures promote and reduce a sense of belonging at their child's school.

Background

Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) is the largest school district in the state of Kentucky and the 29th largest school district in the nation with an average enrollment of 96,000 students. Of that enrollment, 36 % are coded as African American, 41% White, 12% Hispanic and 11% Other (JCPS Facts, n.d.). JCPS is in Louisville, Kentucky. Louisville has a population of 785,005 (Louisville Population, 2019) and is the fourth most segregated city in the nation based on housing patterns (Kent & Frohlich, 2015). As a result, the enrollment pattern of many of the 167 schools in JCPS mirrors the housing patterns in the city, despite attempts to diversify student enrollment with a student assignment plan that buses students to schools outside of their resides area.

Kenwood Elementary is nestled in a neighborhood in the south end of Louisville. Approximately 48% of the student body lives within a two-mile radius of the school, leaving the other 52% to come from surrounding neighborhoods. Unlike some of the other areas in Louisville, the area in which Kenwood is located is racially diverse, which contributes to the integrated student population of the school. Kenwood serves students in grades K -5 and averages 575-600 students each year. Within that population, 38% are White, 25% Black, 22% Hispanic, 10% Asian, and 5% Other. Eighty-five percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch and 44% of the students are multilingual learners, representing over 30 different countries and 25 different languages.

Every year in the Jefferson County Public School district the Comprehensive

School Survey (CSS) is administered to all district and school-based staff, students in

grades 4 – 12, and all families. The purpose of the survey is to gather stakeholder data

that identifies the level of agreement with a variety of questions focused on school and

district climate. More specifically, the questions in the survey gauge stakeholder

perceptions about the following five areas: connectedness, curriculum, safety,

satisfaction, and teaching. Results are compiled by the district data team and are made

publicly available. District recommendations for data analysis include comparing data

from year to year, comparing individual school results to district results, identifying 5-

year trends for individual schools, and analyzing the results of different groups by

demographics (JCPS, n.d.). To capture a role group's voice on the survey, there must be a

minimum of five respondents per role group. In 2016, 24% of the total surveys received

for the district were completed by Black families as compared to 55% of White families.

To gain an understanding about strengths and areas for growth, our school

analyzed the survey results by role group (student, certified staff, classified staff, parents)

and by race (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian). When analyzing the data in 2016, our staff

noticed a stark contrast in the number of responses between our Black and White

families. Fifty-five percent of the responses received were from White families, whereas

only 16% of the responses received were from Black families. While our percent of white

responses mirrored that of the overall district responses, the responses we received from

our Black families was much lower. Having a lack of active parent voice for 28% of the

school population highlighted an issue at the local level that mirrors national concern of

successfully engaging Black families. Despite having an increased awareness of the

inequitable levels of engagement and attempting to be more intentional with our outreach with Black families, little change has occurred as evidenced by the 2020 results in which 18% of our Black families responded to the survey compared to 45% of our White families. I am interested in understanding the factors that influence the inequitable level of responses between our Black and White families and investigate the perceptions of Black families to determine if the lack of responses is influenced by a reduced sense of belonging at their child's school.

When analyzing our current structures for parent involvement/engagement it was first necessary to define and differentiate between parent involvement and parent engagement. While the two terms are often used interchangeably, Constantino (2015) asserts distinction should be made between the two. Family involvement is often associated with a physical presence at the school whereas family engagement refers to engagement with a child's educational career but can take place at home or in the community.

Based on the idea that student achievement is maximized when school and home create a partnership, Epstein (1995) created a framework for parent involvement that includes the following components: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. In an attempt to create conditions that increased family engagement, others (Commissioner's Parent Advisory Council, 2007; Constantino, 2015) have aligned their strategies with Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement. In 2014, The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships was released through a collaboration between The U.S. Department of Education and The Southwest Educational Development Lab (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

This framework was in response to the need to increase the level of emphasis and value American schools place on family engagement and address the challenge of the lack of opportunities for schools and families to build capacity with their partnerships.

A review of the various models of family engagement prompted an analysis of the current family engagement structures for Kenwood which yielded the following categories: structures that elicit parent voice, structures that focus on informing parents and providing resources, structures that foster family time and togetherness, and structures that celebrate students and family achievements.

Structures for parent engagement that elicit parent voice- Parent Teacher Association, Site-Based Decision-Making Council, Parent Ambassadors, and the Parent Advisory Council for the Family Resource Center

Structures that focus on informing parents and providing resources - Orientation, Parent/Teacher Conferences

Structures that foster family time and togetherness - Fall Festival, Family Movie Night, Newsletters, Social Media

Structures that celebrate students and family achievements - Awards Day, Family Honor Roll, Parent Shout-Outs

The structures that produced the highest level of engagement for our Black families were structures that foster family time and togetherness and structures that celebrate students and family achievement. This analysis aligns with the research on parent engagement of Black families that asserts preference of structures that are welcoming and hospitable (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Kim, 2009; Latunde, 2017),

honor their contributions (Constantino, 2015; Epstein, 1995) and increase their self-concept (Epstein, 2010; Tus, 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how the perceptions about family engagement structures influence the sense of belonging for Black families at their child's school. Numerous studies exist for sense of belonging for students (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Hill et al., 2018a; Hill & Tyson, 2009, Orrock & Clark, 2018; Singh et al., 2010; Uwah et al., 2008) and perceptions about family engagement (Fan et al., (2012; Henderson et al., 2007; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Kim, 2009; Latunde, 2017; Leatherwood, 2017; Newman, et al., 2019; Yoder and Lopez, 2013); however, limited research exists about parent sense of belonging and how it influences parent engagement. In an effort to create more equitable levels of sense of belonging for the Black families at their child's school, it was essential to investigate factors that influence sense of belonging both positively and negatively. Gathering the perceptions of Black families provided data to better inform schools about ways in which they can create organizational systems for family engagement that are more inclusive.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to help the reader understand the context of each term in this study.

Equity in Family Engagement - systemic change within a culture of shared responsibility (Ishimaru, 2019) grounded in a social justice approach leading to school wide practices that address and eliminate inequitable practices which will benefit marginalized students

and their families (Theoharis, 2007) and establish authentic partnerships (Flores & Kyere, 2021).

Parent/Family Engagement - parent/guardian interaction with school and with their children to promote academic achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009)

Parent/Family Involvement - direct support in school through volunteering, going on field trips, or having a physical presence at the school (Constantino, 2015)

Parent/Family Sense of Belonging - the extent to which parents/families perceive themselves to be welcomed, valued, and respected members of the school community (Goodenow, 1992).

Student Sense of Belonging - the extent to which students perceive themselves to be welcomed, valued, and respected members of the school community (Goodenow, 1992).

Title 1 - Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA) provides financial assistance to local educational agencies for children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards (NCES, n.d.).

Trust - mutual understandings and common commitments among individuals and institutions focusing on respect, personal regard for others, competence, vulnerability, and integrity (Bryk & Schneider, 2002)

Theoretical Framework

Bourdieu's Theory of Structural Constraints asserts that society's class structure is replicated in schools and the way in which cultural capital functions within it.

The educational system reproduces all the more perfectly the structure of

distribution of cultural capital among classes (and sections of a class) in that the

culture which it transmits is closer to the dominant culture and the mode of

inculcation to which it has recourse is less removed from the mode of inculcation

practised by the family (1973, p.77).

Lee and Bowen (2006) posit cultural capital as the advantage gained by middle

class, educated European American parents from experiencing a lifestyle congruent with

the culture that is dominant in most American schools. As a result, families whose

culture and lifestyle differs from dominant culture can experience multiple disadvantages

including not being able to attend events, receive information and materials/resources,

and/or support students at home. Based on Bourdieu's theory of structural constraints,

systems and structures established within a school may result in unequal access for

parents whose culture and lifestyle are not congruent with the school's culture (Huang,

2019).

Weis, et al. (2009) argue we must generate a nuanced and sophisticated

understanding of family processes and contextual factors that influence involvement,

particularly for economically disadvantaged and ethnic minority families if we want to

truly promote and support involvement from all families. If school systems continue to

reinforce the systems created for those with high levels of cultural capital, is it any

wonder minority parents and students from low socioeconomic environments continue to

struggle with a sense of belonging and achievement?

As an action researcher the goal of my research was to adopt the epistemological

stance of practical knowing by examining systems and structures that may be inhibiting a

sense of belonging and further oppressing a group of students and parents that have already been marginalized due to the social structures that were created through the lens of dominant ideology. As an action researcher, I rejected my role of research as an observer, and instead approached my research through a constructivism approach (Hathcoat & Nicholas, 2014) with the goal of engaging parents/guardians as co-researchers in a meaningful way to refine said systems and increase a sense of belonging for Black parents in schools.

Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence recognizes the impact schools, families, and communities can have on students and is divided into an external and internal model. The internal model of Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence examines "the interaction of the three spheres of influence and shows where and how complex and essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence occur between individuals at home, at school, and in the community" (Epstein, 2001, p.8). As a practitioner I chose a qualitative action research approach to investigate the relationship between the 3 spheres and capture the perceptions of Black parents to identify which factors promote a sense of belonging, which factors inhibit a sense of belonging, and which factors potentially create a feeling of marginalization and/or oppression.

Historically African Americans have experienced oppression because of the societal systems and structures that were created through a dominant ideological lens. To examine the potential for oppression in the systems and structures of the case study, Critical Race Theory was used as an analytic lens. Critical Race Theory is a theoretical framework that examines the application of critical theory including society and culture, race, law, and power (Given, 2008). If systems and structures are still functioning based

on dominant ideology, then it could be hypothesized that parent involvement, and ultimately student achievement, is being negatively impacted by systems that are oppressing minority groups.

Using my specific research topic, I adopted the relative ontological assumption that Black family sense of belonging may be negatively impacted due to a lack of cultural capital in the current systems and structures of schools based on the social structures of their lived experiences. By using Critical Race Theory to help deconstruct my findings, I also made the historical realism ontological assumption (Nicholas & Hathcoat, 2014) that current systems and structures in place for Black students and parents may be creating a sense of marginalization and/or oppression.

Significance of the Study

Studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between student sense of belonging and achievement (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Hill et al., 2018; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Orrock & Clark, 2018; Singh et al., 2010; Uwah et al., 2008) and between parent involvement and student achievement (Barnard, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003; Jeynes, 2005; Wilder, 2014). However, additional research is needed around parent/family sense of belonging. If we can better understand the factors that influence, both positively and negatively, parent sense of belonging in their child's school, recommendations can be made to create more equitable levels of parent sense of belonging and positively impact parent engagement and student achievement for Black parents and students.

Organization of the Study

This research study is organized into five chapters, followed by references and appendices. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study outlining the problem and an overview of the purpose and significance of the study. Chapter 2 offers a review of literature relevant to the research topic with specific emphasis on parent engagement, parent perceptions, and sense of belonging. Chapter 3 outlines the research methods and designs utilized to include participant information, data collection, and methodology used in the study. Chapter 4 contains an analysis of the data and discussion of the findings. Finally, Chapter 5 outlines the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The educational achievement gap between White and Black students has been haunting schools and families for decades. Achievement gap, as defined by Latunde (2016), is "the observed difference in measured performance in groups of students, namely groups defined by low socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity" (p. 1). Participation in the free and reduced lunch program and African American race/ethnicity were significantly and negatively associated with student achievement when compared with European American race/ethnicity in a study conducted by Lee and Bowen (2006). Schools have been analyzing potential factors contributing to the gap and attempting to intervene; however, based on 2019 reading and math data from The Nation's Report Card, gaps still exist between White and Black student proficiency levels in both reading and math (NDE Core Web, 2020).

Howard and Reynolds (2008) identified factors that contribute to the challenges faced by African American students who attend school in impoverished areas. Those factors include under qualified teachers, deteriorating and overcrowded schools, inadequate learning materials, and high administrator and teacher turnover. Inequitable access to out of school learning opportunities and support are additional factors contributing to the achievement gap (Weiss, et al., 2009). When these inequities lead to levels of unstructured time for African American middle school youth who live in dangerous neighborhoods, there is a positive association with depression, delinquency, and exposure to violence (Bohnert et al., 2009). In addition, Hill et al (2018a) reported

African American students having less positive school experiences and a lower sense of belonging.

While much of the research focuses on the contributing factors of failure for African American students, Orrock and Clark (2018) examined factors that contributed to success. Their findings included family values, self-concept, belonging to the school community, and community support/outreach. Osterman (2000) also concluded that "students who experience acceptance are more highly motivated and engaged in learning and more committed to school" (p. 359). Using an Assets-Based Community Development Model (Kretzman & McKnight, 1996) allows researchers the opportunity to focus on the assets of the community to help mitigate challenges instead of focusing on the deficits of an already marginalized community.

Parent involvement and student sense of belonging have been positively associated with achievement of African American students; however, African American parents indicate concerns about the way they are perceived and/or treated by school personnel, which could impact the level of parental involvement (Brown & Brandon, 2007; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016). Additional factors negatively impacting parent sense of belonging include cultural and linguistic diversity, economics, family composition, parental education levels, school communication, interaction with teachers, school success of children, and personal constraints (Brown & Brandon, 2007).

Brown and Brandon (2007) discuss a cycle of uninvolvement in which parents feel a lack of connection to the school, causing teachers to develop a belief that the parents have a lack of interest instead of a lack of connection. In addition to having a

negative impact on parent/school relationships, this cycle can contribute to detrimental effects including "higher dropout rates, higher suspension rates, low motivation, and disproportionate placement in special education" (p. 118). The conclusions drawn from this research indicate a need for educators to understand the factors that institute a feeling of isolation and alienation for parents and implement measures to mitigate them. Failure to do so could enhance parent feelings of school phobia (Epstein 1995), exacerbating fear of or aversion toward the school system and/or personnel and increased suspicion of school motives (Epstein, 1996), both of which impact home/school relationships. If parents don't feel a sense of belonging, parent engagement may be negatively impacted, which could ultimately impact the student achievement and engagement of our Black students.

This chapter is divided into three main sections and provides a review of the literature regarding family engagement, perceptions of Black families about school connectedness, and factors that promote and inhibit a sense of belonging. Theories and their application to engagement, perception, and sense of belonging are presented.

The first section focuses on family engagement and investigates the difference between involvement and engagement, outlining Epstein's (1995) model of parent involvement and other models that patterned themselves after her work. Next, the impact parent engagement has on African American student achievement is examined, referencing several studies that examine parenting style and parental monitoring. This section concludes by connecting Epstein's Model of Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model with the influence of family engagement.

The second section examines perceptions of African American parents, examining the barriers they face, and considerations schools should have when attempting to engage African American families. Bourdieu's Theory of Structural Constraints and Social Capital Theory are analyzed to demonstrate the potential implications for family engagement when society's class structure is replicated in school, particularly for marginalized groups.

The final section of Chapter 2 focuses on sense of belonging for both students and families, connecting Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Next, the influence trust, self-concept, and identity have on sense of belonging is examined. The chapter concludes with a context for examining the study through a Critical Race Theory lens.

Family Engagement

Research has shown parent involvement has a significant influence on student achievement (Barnard, 2004; Castro et al., 2015; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003; 2005; Wilder, 2014). Wilder (2014) conducted a meta-synthesis of nine meta-analyses that examined the impact of parental involvement on student achievement and found that when examining the effect of ethnicity on the relationship between parent involvement and student achievement, results are generalizable across race, confirming that that parent involvement may significantly contribute to closing the achievement gap (2014). Leatherwood's (2017) own personal narrative described the influence parental involvement had on his own school engagement as an African American male. "My mother's involvement in my schooling not only set the standard for academic performance, but it also showed me that the school belongs to me" (p. 227).

Involvement Versus Engagement

Across research studies parent involvement has been defined in a multitude of ways. Jeynes (2010) defines parent involvement as "parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their child" (p. 42) and Howard and Reynolds (2008) define it as "a partnership that envisions parents with governance power within a democratic process" (p. 80). In addition to volunteering at school, attending parent teacher conferences and being involved in other school sponsored activities, Lee and Bowen (2006) posit that parent involvement can also be situated in home contexts to include parents "helping with homework, discussing the child's schoolwork and experiences at school and structuring home activities" (p. 194). Regardless of how parent involvement was defined across various studies, a positive relationship existed between academic achievement and parent involvement (Wilder, 2014). For purposes of this study, parent engagement will be defined as parent/guardian interaction with school and with their children to promote academic achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009) and the term parent will be synonymous for parents, guardians, and caretakers.

The terms family involvement and family engagement are often used synonymously; however, Constantino (2015) asserts distinction should be made between the two. Family involvement refers to direct support in school through volunteering, going on field trips, or having a physical presence at the school. Family engagement means that the family is actively engaged with the child's academic success although they may never come into the building physically. Constantino (2016) refers to this as "invisible engagement" (p. 10). They may be helping with homework at home, asking them about their day, reinforcing school expectations and the importance of school, or

setting goals for their child. Family *involvement* is often guided by the school, whereas family *engagement* is guided by the shared partnership, decision-making, and leadership between school and home to support the student (Latunde, 2021). Involvement can be viewed as *doing to* while engagement implies *doing with* (Ferlazzo, 2011). Lopez-Tamayo et al., (2016) note that just because a parent doesn't appear to be involved in school doesn't necessarily mean they aren't monitoring their child's daily activities. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) propose a continuum that helps schools transition from involvement to engagement in an effort to increase the agency of parents by shifting the emphasis beyond a relationship between parents and schools and instead focus on the relationship between parents and their children's learning. Barton et al., (2004) propose a framework that moves parents from activating traditional forms of capital within school-authored spaces to authoring personal spaces within schools and classrooms to activate capital and engage more deeply with their child's education.

If schools and families are going to effectively work together, then each must see the value in the home/school partnership which includes recognizing their shared interest in student engagement and achievement and the impact the partnership has. "When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work" (Epstein, 1995, p. 702). In an attempt to create a framework that supports the different ways in which parents can engage in their child's school, Epstein created a model known as *Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement.* The six types of parent involvement, as outlined by Epstein, are as follows: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein et. al, 2002).

Epstein's work laid the foundation for many others. In 1999, the education commissioner of Kentucky established The Commissioner's Parent Advisory Council (CPAC) which was composed of a group of 30 parents from across the state. The role of the CPAC was to advise the Kentucky Department of Education on policy issues and to increase parent leadership for improving public education. On March 30, 2006, the then Commissioner Gene Wilhoit gave CPAC members this instruction: "My goal is outstanding practice to involve parents in every school in Kentucky. Your charge is to pull together an agenda for the state and produce a document that builds on what exists and pushes us to a higher level" (Commissioner's Parent Advisory Council, 2007, p. 2). As a result, the work of this committee was released as *The Missing Piece of the Proficiency Puzzle* (2007) and included the following six components of parent engagement:

1. Relationship-building: The school staff builds productive, personal relationships with parents of all students (p. 11).

2. Communication: Two-way information in many forms flows regularly between school staff and parents about students' academic achievement and individual needs (p. 12).

3. Decision-making: School staff encourages, supports, and expects parents to be involved in school improvement decisions and to monitor and assist school improvement (p. 12).

4. Advocacy: For each student, the school staff identifies and supports a parent or other adult who can take personal responsibility for understanding and speaking for that child's learning needs (p. 13).

5. Learning Opportunities: The school staff ensures that families have multiple

opportunities to understand how to support their children's learning (p. 13).

6. Community Partnerships: The school staff engages and partners with community members to plan and implement substantive work to improve student achievement (p. 14).

To help guide the work, the committee created rubrics around each of the six components as a way for schools to self-assess their present levels for parent engagement and suggested action steps to move to the next level. *The Missing Piece of the Proficiency Puzzle* was revised in 2021 by the Kentucky Collaborative for Families and Schools and the six components were reduced to five: relationship building, communications, shared responsibility, advocacy, and community partnerships.

The idea of anchoring family engagement initiatives to one of five components also inspired the work of Constantino. In his book *Engage Every Family: Five Simple Principles* (2015), Constantino outlines five family engagement principles and offers strategies for enhancing each one. The five principles outlined are:

1. A Culture That Engages Every Family

2. Communicate Effectively and Develop Relationships

3. Build Family Efficacy

4. Engage Every Family in Decision Making

5. Engage the Greater Community

In an effort to increase opportunities to build capacity between school and home and enhance family/school partnerships, The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) was developed. This framework includes the following components:

1. A description of the capacity challenges that must be addressed to support the cultivation of effective home–school partnerships

2. An articulation of the conditions integral to the success of family–school partnership initiatives and interventions

3. An identification of the desired intermediate capacity goals that should be the focus of family engagement policies and programs at the federal, state, and local level

4. A description of the capacity-building outcomes for school and program staff as well as for families.

Use of this framework provides schools an opportunity to analyze their current processes and organizational infrastructures to create conditions that are needed to create and sustain effective partnerships with families.

While parent engagement can look different across school and district settings, there is clear evidence that it can significantly influence student achievement. To achieve maximum impact, schools need to work collaboratively with parents to establish a shared definition and vision that is grounded in the different types of involvement/engagement.

Impact on Achievement and Engagement

Hill and Tyson (2009) found the strongest positive relationship between parent involvement and student achievement when schools created structures that helped parents better understand the purpose, goals, and meaning of academic performance, communicated expectations about parent involvement, and equipped them with strategies to support their child. Jeynes' (2003, 2007, 2010) meta-analytic research concurs that parental expectations may be the most crucial component of parent involvement, yielding

the largest effect size on student achievement for both elementary and secondary students. In addition to linking education to future success, academic socialization also helps parents scaffold independence in their children to help them assume greater responsibility in their own learning as they get older, which has been associated with increased grade point averages and decreased behavior problems (Wang et al., 2014). When parents reward learning-related behaviors and provide encouragement to their child, it results in higher school achievement (Areepattamannil, 2010). In addition, warmth and supportiveness between parents and adolescents is likely to have an impact on the effectiveness of parent involvement (Wang et al., 2014).

Leatherwood's (2017) own experience affirmed his findings in the review of the literature that revealed parenting style, parental monitoring, and aspirations, all had an influence on student engagement and achievement. Parenting style is divided into three typologies: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive (Baumrind, 1966).

- authoritative parent - attempts to direct the child's activities but in a rational, issue-oriented manner (p. 891)
- authoritarian parent - attempts to shape, control, and evaluate the behavior and attitudes of the child in accordance with a set standard of conduct, usually an absolute standard, theologically motivated and formulated by a higher authority (p. 890)
- permissive parent - attempts to behave in a nonpunitive, acceptant and affirmative manner towards the child's impulses, desires, and actions (p. 889)

When analyzing the relationship between parenting style and student achievement it was determined that authoritative parenting was favored over authoritarian and permissive

parenting styles because it was associated with higher levels of adolescent school achievement and led children to become autonomous, achievement oriented and self-controlled (Kordi & Baharudin, 2010). Authoritative parenting incorporates both encouragement and monitoring and is associated with positive student outcomes (Jeynes, 2010).

Thompson (2003b) posits that when educators have a lack of preparation or experience in working with families who differ from them, they can sometimes show a lack of respect for different parenting styles. This lack of respect can cause parents to feel as though they are being undermined by the school staff (Thompson, 2003a). Therefore, educators' lack of understanding about the ways in which Black families engage with their child's education can impact both the home/school relationship and parent involvement initiatives created by the school (Weiss et al., 2009). Increased awareness and understanding about the different types of parenting styles, particularly those that differ from their own, would benefit educators and potentially improve the relationship between teachers and parents/guardians (Reynolds, 2010).

Parental monitoring is a dimension of authoritative parenting and has been both positively and negatively associated with student achievement (Areepattamannil, 2010; Chilenski et al., 2015; Hayes, 2012; Hill et al., 2004; Leatherwood, 2017; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2011; Wilson, 2009). Parental monitoring is defined as "parenting behaviors involving attention to and track of the child's whereabouts, activities and adaptations" (Dishion & McMahon, 1998, p.61). Parental monitoring for African American adolescents has been found to positively influence free time, school adjustment, lower levels of conduct disorder, substance abuse and grades (Chilenski et

al., 2015). Reduced externalizing behaviors such as physical aggression, defiance, truancy, and impulsivity which are associated with better academic outcomes are another benefit of parental monitoring (Hayes, 2012; Hill et al., 2004; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2011).

Other studies have affirmed that more directive parenting practices have shown to be more effective in ethnic minority families (Hill & Herman-Stahl, 2002; Pinderhughes et al., 2002). Leatherwood (2017) affirms his mother's tough and "no nonsense" style of parenting as a contributing factor to his success:

> My mother was an authoritarian and I thank her for it now. We didn't debate her
> rules And I had no say in the expectations she set. I was simply expected to
> execute...At points in my adolescence I thought my mother hated me, but now I
> know that she loved me so much that she was unwilling to be my friend...To be
> honest, her demeanor and strength was a deterrent to negative behavior. Given the
> context of East St. Louis I am glad she was tough. She was far tougher than the
> streets and raised a man willing and able to navigate the world with boldness and
> integrity (p. 229).

When comparing the effects of structure at home across demographic backgrounds, Wang et al., (2014) found that African American parents provided a greater level of structure, linked student educational endeavors to future success, and scaffolded independence at lower levels than their European American counterparts.

Conversely, students with limited monitoring did what they wanted and had few expectations to meet. As a result, they were often considered "cool" in school but did not engage or achieve at high levels (Leatherwood, 2017). Areepattamannil's (2010)

findings indicated that parental monitoring was negatively associated with school achievement when it focused on overseeing homework, which is consistent with other research findings that indicated limited or inconsistent relation existed between homework support and checking (Castro et al., 2015; Fan and Chen, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2007).

When parents have high expectations for their children, scaffold independence, and communicate with them about school activities to link education to future success, there is a positive association with academic achievement (Castro et al., 2015, Hill et al., 2018a). Therefore, when monitoring student outcomes, parents need to ensure they balance high expectations with encouragement and support so as not to cross the line into undue pressure to perform (Rogers et al., 2009). Establishing a home structure that provides time, space, and materials without being overly intrusive is a form of parental monitoring that has been positively associated with adolescent outcomes (Wang et al., 2014). Parental supports associated with envisioning a meaningful future and long-term aspirations has also been positively associated with academic engagement (Hill et al., 2018a), self-efficacy, and motivation (Fan et al., 2012).

Epstein's Model of Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory

When establishing successful home/school partnerships, schools must start by examining their attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, and practices about parent engagement. A commitment to understanding the importance of and establishing systems that promote shared responsibility for student achievement is an essential first step (Constantino, 2015; Henderson et. al, 2007). Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence posits that

student learning occurs not only at school but at home and through community experiences. Therefore, stronger partnerships between the three spheres of influence will positively impact student outcomes (Epstein, 2001). Weiss et al.'s, (2009) research that focused on reframing family involvement to support educational equity aligns with Epstein's Model of Overlapping Spheres of Influence in that the researchers recommend a comprehensive approach to family involvement that emphasizes shared responsibility and co-constructing across multiple contexts such as community centers, faith-based institutions, and libraries.

Epstein's Model of Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory is divided into the external model (figure 2.1) and the internal model (figure 2.2). The external model examines how the three major contexts can be put together or pulled apart whereas the internal model examines the interaction and influence of the interpersonal relations of the three spheres and patterns of influence that occur between individuals at home, at school, and in the community (Epstein, 2001).

Theoretical Model
OVERLAPPING SPHERES OF INFLUENCE OF
FAMILY, SCHOOL, AND COMMUNITY ON CHILDREN'S LEARNING
External Structure

Force B
Experience,
Philosophy,
Practices
of Family

FAMILY   SCHOOL

Force C
Experience,
Philosophy,
Practices
of School

Force D
Experience,
Philosophy,
Practices
of Community

COMMUNITY

Force A
Time/Age/Grade Level
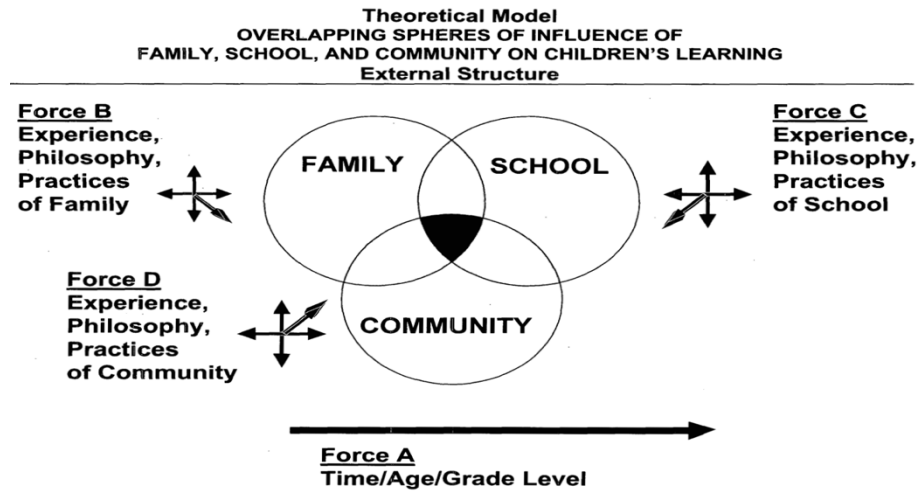
Figure 2.1 Image taken from Epstein, et al., (2002)

Theoretical Model
OVERLAPPING SPHERES OF INFLUENCE*
Internal Structure

FAMILY   SCHOOL

F   S
C
P   T

KEY: *Inter*-institutional interactions (in overlapping area)
F = Family   C = Child   S = School   P = Parent   T = Teacher

Interactions include those at the institutional level (e.g., all families, children, educators, and entire community) and at the individual level (e.g., one parent, child, teacher, community partner).

*Note: In the full model, the internal structure is extended to include the community (Co) and individual business and community agents (A), and interactions in the non-overlapping areas.

Figure 2.2 Image taken from Epstein et al. (2002)

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While the need for parental influence continues throughout a student's educational career, parent involvement looks different in elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools with great levels of engagement in younger grades and less frequent and prolonged engagement at the secondary level, particularly in the area of communication between home and school. A variety of factors including the increased bureaucratic complexity of middle and high school make it more challenging for parents to engage in communication with their child's teachers (Wang et al., 2014).

Based on Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, optimal student achievement will be reached when all three are functioning effectively. Lack of family sense of belonging could impede the successful triangulation of all three spheres. Schools must examine the factors that threaten successful overlap of home, school, and the community.

Given that African American students have less access to experienced teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2014) and are nearly three times more likely to live in a single parent home than European adolescents (Vespa, Lewis & Kreider, 2013), there is a need for family, community, and societal-level programs that foster social support (Lopez-Tamayo et al., 2016, p. 375).

If parent/family sense of belonging is a prelude to parent/family engagement (based on the transference of student sense of belonging being a prelude to student engagement), then factors that impact parent/family sense of belonging must be identified. This study utilized qualitative action research to investigate the relationship between the three spheres and capture the perceptions about family engagement

structures of Black parents to determine which systems and structures promote a sense of

belonging, which systems and structures inhibit a sense of belonging, and which systems

create a feeling of marginalization and/or oppression.

Ecological Model

Bronfenbrenner's work produced the Ecological Systems Theory, which posits an

individual's development is shaped and created by various encounters and experiences

within their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Under the assumptions of the Theory

of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, students are influenced by the ecological

environments of school, home, and community; therefore, an ecological systems

perspective would examine the transactional relationships between the three systems

(Friedman & Allen, 2011). Ecological Systems Theory investigates the macro-, meso-,

and micro- levels of individuals (Orrock & Clark, 2018). Macrosystems define the largest

system and focus on the cultural, social, political, and economic aspects of society. The

mesosystem bridges the space between the individual and the systems outside of their

home. These systems could include peers, school, work, church, or community where an

individual lives. Microsystems are defined as the interactions an individual has with each

system; therefore, each system interaction is analyzed as a unique experience

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Environmental context influences the development of student sense of belonging.

Through the lens of the ecological model, Chiu et al., (2016) investigated student sense of

belonging focusing on macro systems (hierarchical versus egalitarianism and collectivism

versus individualism) and the microsystems (teacher-student relationship) and found

teacher-student relationships as a key factor for promoting a positive sense of belonging for students.

Results from Lopez-Tomayo et al. (2016) provided support for the ecological systems theory in that parental monitoring (microsystem) influences outcomes for behavior (reduced externalizing behaviors) and improved grade point average. When parents consistently knew where their children were, the influence of the exosystem could not penetrate the positive impacts of parental monitoring. Thus, parental monitoring significantly contributes to the well-being of urban African American youth (Lopez-Tomayo et al., 2016).

As evidenced by the study conducted by Orrock and Clark (2018), "when support, encouragement, and belonging are created in an individual's lived experience, across systems, the outcome is success" (p. 1037) which supports utilizing an ecological systems framework to determine strengths of interactions between systems. For this study ecological systems theory was useful for analyzing the impact of family engagement structures on parents' sense of belonging at their child's school.

When schools, families and communities work together to improve the nature of their partnership, students benefit. "Good partnerships withstand questions, conflicts, debates, and disagreements while providing structures and processes to solve problems" (Epstein, 2010, p. 84). A variety of frameworks exist to support the work of improving family engagement. While there are slight differences in each of the models, they are all grounded in relationships, communication, and shared decision-making. To create partnerships that are built on trust and mutual respect, schools must enlist the voice of families. This study sought to understand how the environmental context of family

engagement structures influenced sense of belonging for Black families at their child's school.

Parent Perceptions

Considerations and Barriers

Understanding parent perception is a critical factor when establishing systems for family engagement. How parents view their role in their child's education and the belief they have in their own ability can have an impact on the level of parent involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). While creating successful family/school partnerships can be a challenging process, most families would be willing to engage in this partnership if they had more encouragement from school staff (Henderson et al., 2007). Newman et al., (2019) assert that parents cannot shoulder all responsibility when identifying problems with parent involvement.

While African American parents participate in home-school collaboration, perceived barriers between home and school have sometimes stifled their engagement, which has led to inconsistencies in improved academic achievement of their child. Some of the perceived barriers identified by parents in the study conducted by Howard and Reynolds (2008) were a need to have a better understanding of the ins and outs of school, a need to have a more welcoming environment that doesn't posit educators as authority figures, and a need for a space for networking with other African American parents. Other barriers to parent involvement include level of education, family circumstances, physical and psychological conditions and resources, language, and work conditions (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). In a qualitative study by Yoder and Lopez (2013) that sought

to understand parent perception about factors that impacted parental engagement, the following categories emerged; tangible barriers, supports and resources, marginalization, jumping through hoops, and school choice.

In addition, when focusing on building relationships and two-way effective communication, it is imperative that educators be mindful of what they are focusing on and the message it sends. When examining how different dimensions of parental involvement linked to constructs of school motivation across ethnic groups, Fan et al., (2012) found that parents of African American students generally reported that most of their contacts with school related to student problems. This resulted as a strong negative factor in predicting student motivation, engagement, and self-efficacy. In his own experience, Leatherwood (2017) asserts that educators were quick to call about behavior issues, but less apt to call about academic success. A constant focus on negative behaviors "cultivated an environment that seemed to welcome hostility and tension into the hallways of our school" (p. 227).

When working with Black families, it is important to also consider the historical implications that have created marginalized conditions for family engagement. Black parents have often been directly or indirectly affected by segregation, discrimination, and the unequal treatment of Black children (Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

To reduce feelings of withdrawal or alienation with families, schools must examine their current structures to ensure they are mitigating any factors that may be creating barriers and/or adding to the negative perceptions families have about family engagement. Kim's (2009) review of the research suggested minority parents do not like the formality or time restrictions of parent teacher conferences, nor do they like when

teachers, principals, and staff conduct themselves in a professional, businesslike manner. Instead, they prefer a more informal, welcoming environment that is built on an appreciation of cultural differences. When schools create a welcoming environment, they make it clear to parents they value parental involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Latunde (2017) suggests that schools examine the hospitality model churches use to make Black families feel like valuable community partners. This includes personalizing invitations to events, inviting Black parents to a series of informal conversations, and acknowledging what they are already doing to support their children.

In addition to utilizing churches as models for hospitality, schools can create partnerships with local churches and other community organizations to host events there. In a study conducted by Latunde (2017), in which she offered a series of workshops in three different settings: church, school, and community organizations, 97 percent of the Black participants attended the workshops at a church or community setting while only 3 percent chose to attend the workshop at school. To determine other considerations for family engagement with Black parents, Latunde and Clark-Louque (2016) conducted a survey with K-12 parents from across the nation. Their findings identified programs and organizations that specifically serve Black families and social interactions with other parents as the strategies and resources Black parents used to best engage with their children.

When positive partnerships are not established between home and school, it can have a negative impact on parental involvement. Based on Brown and Brandon's (2007) review of research, when the connection between African American parents and school is weak it can be attributed to personal, cultural, and structural barriers faced by African

American parents that make them feel isolated from the school. In a study conducted by Lareau and Horvat (1999), some of the Black families shared concerns about patterns of racial injustice that existed in the community and across the country showing up at their child's school citing the attention the school gave to some holidays while systematically ignoring the celebration and contribution of Black heroes as one example. The principal of the school in this study rejected the claim of bias and the teachers thought the family was attempting to undermine authority and were identified by one teacher as the "most upsetting" parents in her teaching career because they would raise their voice in conversation. Because this family always seemed angry, one of the teachers in the study admitted to avoiding interaction with them. Sometimes African American parents' seemingly adversarial interaction style is perceived by staff as an unwillingness to work together and can lead to exclusion for family engagement (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). However, the parents in Hill et al.'s (2018b) study posit their attitude is an indicator of intense care, concern, and caution to ensure their children do not experience discrimination and bias.

Sheehey and Sheehey (2007) assert failure to find common ground can also lead to strained home/school partnerships. "Professional thinking is grounded in theory acquired from years of preparation and accumulated experiences and the thinking of parents is grounded in personal experiences with their child" (p. 3). Epstein (2001) found that parents are most effectively involved when teachers are encouraging. To help mitigate these disparities in experience, schools should make sure they build relationships with families, acknowledge parent involvement contributions, and focus on a child's strengths.

Parents' belief about the role they play in their child's schooling is often shaped by their perceptions of contextual factors (Newman, et al., 2019). According to Howard and Reynolds (2008), "structures have not been created or maintained to increase African American parent involvement because no pressure has come from makers of parent involvement policy or the constituents they serve" (p.90). In a study that investigated the ways in which African American parents wanted to engage with schools and what resources were needed to build capacity to stay engaged in their child's education, Loque and Latunde (2014) found that the participants all engaged in a parent group at some level and that organizations serving African American parents were helpful and enhanced the internal structures at home and school. These findings indicate that African American families need and want resources that are specific to them (Loque & Latunde, 2014). Kim (2009) recommends that future research include not only parent willingness but also school effort and willingness to modify the structure of their parent involvement initiatives to support minority parents. This validates the need for this study to examine systems and structures that will create a more welcoming environment for Black families and encourage a more active voice in parent engagement and decision making.

Bourdieu's Theory of Structural Constraints

Bourdieu's Theory of Structural Constraints asserts that society's class structure is replicated in schools and the way in which cultural capital functions within it (Bourdieu, 1977). Yosso's (2005) review of Bourdieu asserts cultural capital can be acquired two ways, through formal schooling and from one's own family. Cultural capital can be viewed as "linguistic and cultural competence and a familiarity with the styles, tastes, and dispositions of the dominant cultures" (Kim, 2009, p.82) and is shaped by one's habitus.

Habitus, as defined by Dumais (2002) is "one's disposition which influences the actions that one takes" (p. 46). Much like cultural capital, individuals whose habitus is consistent with the environment he/she is operating in benefit from having a social advantage (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

> Perceptions about school and the roles parents play are often rooted in the lived experiences of working-class families of color and have an "indelible influence" on how they define parent involvement and engagement at their child's school. When parent engagement is viewed through the lens of 'what parents do' it creates a deficit model, especially in high poverty communities. When schools view parent engagement through a deficit lens parents are assumed to have little knowledge or capital to advocate for their child and may also be viewed as part of the problem with a child's underachievement (Howard & Reynolds, 2008, p. 84).

Lareau and Horvat's (1999) review of the literature found that the value of capital is largely based on the patterns of dominant ideology and therefore posit being White provides White parents with a cultural resource in which to navigate and negotiate the system more easily. When school structures are created through the lens of the dominant ideology it can create oppressive conditions and reduced cultural capital for families of color (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Therefore, families with less cultural capital such as access to resources, education, competence in dealing with school culture, and language are at a disadvantage when attempting to access parent engagement resources, activities, and decision-making opportunities. It should be noted that although being White affords the privilege of race, the intersectionality of socioeconomic status and/or language can also adversely impact the cultural capital of White families.

Based on a 2017-18 report from the U.S. Department of Education that presents data on the race and ethnicity of public-school teachers in the nation's public schools, 79.3 percent of public-school teachers are White (Spiegelman, 2020). If the majority of the teachers are White and are not making concessions for racial, ethnic, and cultural differences when establishing parent engagement expectations of the school, systems of marginalization will continue to replicate the social systems of society and further disadvantage Black families.

Lee and Bowen (2006) posit "In relation to parent involvement, cultural capital is the advantage gained by middle class, educated European American parents from knowing, preferring, and experiencing a lifestyle congruent with the culture that is dominant in most American schools" (p. 198). As a result, families whose culture and lifestyle differs from dominant culture can experience multiple disadvantages including not being able to attend events, receive information and materials/resources, and/or support students at home. In a study conducted by Lareau and Horvat (1999) the implicit standard for family involvement emphasized positive, polite interactions between families and school staff. Therefore, parents who interacted with calm voices, positive affirmations and limited criticisms were viewed as involved and experienced a sense of inclusion versus those who did not were viewed as hostile and angry which created a sense of exclusion. Based on Bourdieu's theory of structural constraints, systems and structures established within a school may result in unequal access for parents whose culture and lifestyle are not congruent with the school's culture (Huang, 2019).

Promoting and supporting involvement among all families requires that we generate a nuanced and sophisticated understanding not only of family processes

and the outcomes associated with them, but also of the contextual factors that influence involvement, particularly for ethnic minorities and economically disadvantaged families (Weis, et al, 2009, p.10).

If school systems continue to reinforce the systems created for those with high levels of cultural capital, is it any wonder minority parents and students from low socioeconomic environments continue to struggle with a sense of belonging and achievement? Schools must stop waiting for parents to change their cultural capital to fall in alignment with "the ways things have always been done" and instead gain stakeholder voice that empowers the capital held by traditionally marginalized groups. Schools must ask themselves if the decisions they are making are promoting high achievement for all students and engagement and empowerment for all families or are the systems they have in place perpetuating systems of inequitable access and opportunity. Barton et al., (2004) posits the need for schools to empower families by allowing space for parents to author a place of their own in school so they can be positioned in a place of influence. Schools must move away from "re-actions" which are described by Barton et al. (2004) as things parents do that are endorsed within a prescribed structure and norms set up by the institution of power, such as attendance at a PTA meeting, and instead position parents as framers of school instruction instead of receivers. Therefore, if schools are going to transform education, they must take a look inward to determine how their practices are reinforcing racial and class hierarchies and begin to dismantle them.

Marginalization was listed as a theme that created frustration for parents who resided in low-income housing in a study conducted by Yoder and Lopez (2013). Parents reported feeling dismissed by the school when they attempted to be involved in their

child's education leaving them to feel ostracized and paralyzed. Jumping through hoops

in which families attempted to solve problems by overcoming power differentials also

left feelings of marginalization and powerlessness due to the hierarchical placement of

the low-income families. School choice was viewed as a way to possibly mitigate some

of the marginalization, however exercising choice required a level of capital that some of

the participants did not have (Yoder & Lopez, 2013).

Capabilities and connections are two of the four C's of the program and policy

goals of The Dual Capacity-Building Framework (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Differences in

cultural capital may impact the ability of parents to gain social capital from the school,

even if they are physically present at the school (Lee & Bowen, 2006). To combat these

differences, Barton et al., (2004) proposed the Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE)

framework (figure 2.3), making the argument that parental engagement should act as the

mediation between space and capital.
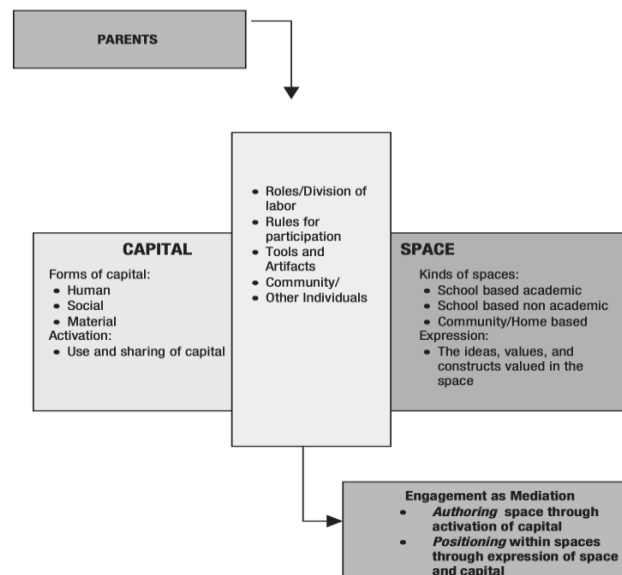
Figure 2.3 Ecologies of Parental Engagement Framework.

Image taken from Barton, et al., (2004)

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The EPE framework suggests a shift away from analyzing what parents should be doing to helping them better understand the hows and whys of their engagement through a model that views parents as partners and honors the experiences and resources that frame the parents as individuals (Barton et al., 2004). Within the EPE framework space is seen as a critical factor in parent engagement because spaces are often defined by not only the individuals who inhabit them, but also the rules and expectations associated with the space which can be influenced at the macro level by the capital that exists in the space and at the micro level through the capital that is brought into the space by individuals. Creating spaces that allow parents to share their stories can not only erode barriers to parent engagement but increase the social capital of all families (Barton et al., 2004).

Sense of Belonging

Student Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging is essential to our wellbeing (Chiu et al., 2016). Research on the effect of student sense of belonging is contradictory because of methodological issues and variances in the definition of sense of belonging (Booker, 2006). For purposes of this study Goodenow's (1992) psychological sense of belonging definition will be used for student sense of belonging and is defined as the extent to which students perceive themselves to be welcomed, valued, and respected members of the school community. Several studies (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Hill et al., 2018a; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Orrock & Clark, 2018; Singh et al., 2010; Uwah et al., 2008) affirm the positive relationship between student sense of belonging and achievement while other studies (Booker, 2004;

Osterman, 2000; Voelkl, 1997) found no statistically significant relationship between self-reports of school belonging and achievement.

When a student believes there is a personal connection to the school, engagement is more likely to occur. Hill et al. 's (2018a) review of research about sense of belonging found that school belonging can have a powerful influence on academic engagement and significant connection to achievement for African American students. The variable that impacted the sense of belonging for the 9th and 10th grade African American males in Uwah et al.'s (2008) study was receiving a direct invitation from teachers to participate in school programming. Uwah et al., (2008) posit that because the participants in the study were accustomed to negative stereotypes associated with being a Black male, invitational gestures from teachers were valued because they were looking past the negative perceptions associated with the stereotype of being Black and being a male. In an ecological model study of 193,073 15-year-old students across 41 countries that examined the relationship between multiple variables and student sense of belonging, teacher-student relationship had the strongest link (Chiu, 2016) which confirms the influence positive relationships with school personnel can have.

Teacher-student relationships and overall school climate can impact students' sense of belonging. When students feel they are cared for, safe and treated fairly, they are likely to develop a positive sense of belonging to the school (Booker, 2006; Ma, 2003). Conversely, when African American students feel there is a lack of trust, lower expectations, and/or unfair systems in place at a school, sense of belonging is negatively influenced (Voelkl, 1995). Peer relationships also play a role in student sense of belonging for African American students. In a study of 1,377 seventh grade students in Washington DC, African American students who

felt they belonged with peers at school set higher educational goals for themselves and experienced more efficacy in reaching them (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015).

African American students may experience identification-connection divide which, according to Booker (2006) means "Minority students educated in majority contexts may regard school as valuable, but negative interactions and experiences with members of the majority group can prevent feelings of true sense of belonging" (p.3). Therefore, students may understand the purpose of school, but the environment is not conducive for establishing a sense of belonging. Faircloth and Hamm (2005) concluded that "In ethnically diverse schools, practices should not be levied uniformly across the student body without attention to how members of different ethnic groups might experience them" (p. 306). Schools must examine their practices to ensure they are differentiated and affirm all racial and ethnic identities. Students must see themselves in the classrooms and in the curriculum. In an attempt to disrupt teacher education with the goal of producing teachers who appreciate their students' assets, Ladson-Billings introduced culturally relevant pedagogy (1995). Culturally relevant pedagogy is committed to collective empowerment that focuses on academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

In a study by Murphy and Zirkel (2015), sense of belonging was impacted by perceived make-up of the group. The more African American students perceived a particular major was composed of students of color the more they anticipated belonging to that group. Could this anticipated sense of belonging impact parent sense of belonging? If Black parents perceive that the majority of parents that are associated with the school are White, could this negatively influence their sense of belonging to the

school? Cook-Sather (2002) asserts the need to empower students by inviting them to share their perspective, so they feel they have shared responsibility for their education and a stronger sense of belonging. If shared responsibility through stakeholder perspective and voice will better engage students, could the same be true for parents? By enlisting the perspective of the Black parents in this study, I sought to investigate this notion.

Parent Sense of Belonging

Disparities in educational outcomes and inequitable treatment have strained the relationship between African American families and schools (Delpit, 2012). Louque and Latunde (2014) found it was less common for African American families to attend school board, PTA, and site council meetings because they felt disillusioned and unwelcome. This lack of attendance has huge implications for stakeholder voice since these are the decision-making bodies for the school and give parents an opportunity to advocate for their children. Latunde and Clark-Louque (2016) assert, "If schools made families feel welcome in the classroom, both Black families and schools would benefit" (p 78). For purposes of this study Goodenow's (1992) psychological sense of belonging definition will also be referenced for parent sense of belonging and is defined as the extent to which parents/guardians perceive themselves to be welcomed, valued, and respected members of the school community.

Ineffective communication has been cited as a primary barrier to parent sense of belonging for Black families (Louque & Latunde 2014; Kim, 2009). Latunde (2017) cited the following as top errors schools make when communicating with families: unclear about concepts students were learning, finding out problems when it was too late to help,

hearing from schools only about negative situations, or problems with their child without offering a solution or plan to address the problem. Communication with families needs to be ongoing, meaningful, and two-way if schools want to make parents feel valued.

In addition to ineffective communication, research has indicated a variety of other barriers that inhibit African American parent sense of belonging including a staff culture of arrogance (Thompson & Louque, 2005), lack of family cultural capital (Lee & Bowen, 2006), teachers' perceptions about the capacity and efficacy of minority parents (Kim, 2009) and lack of diversity of parent involvement programs (Kim, 2009). Latunde's (2017) review of research indicated that Black families often find school less than hospitable, citing disparate treatment of White and Black children, judgmental attitudes from staff, and not valuing parent concerns or ideas as reasons for a reduction in trust in schools. In addition, Black families have reported experiencing racism and bias. Weiss et al. (2009) assert that school personnel often fail to create comprehensive involvement initiatives for African American parents because they have a lack of understanding of the ways in which African American parents engage with their child's education. Therefore, if schools want to increase parents' sense of belonging, they must develop meaningful relationships with students and families and evaluate their current systems to ensure families feel valued.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

A sense of belonging is considered a basic human need based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (figure 2.4). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a motivational theory and consists of a five-tier model of human needs designed in a hierarchical pyramid. The

5 tiers from bottom to top are: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1962).
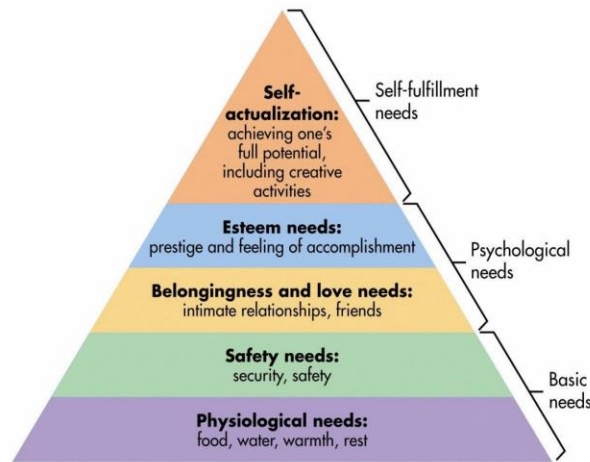
Figure 2.4 Image taken from McLeod, (2021)

Maslow's initial work (1943) posited that the lower-level needs must be met before higher-level needs could be met; however, he later clarified that each individual is unique, and the hierarchy was not intended to be approached with absolute rigidity (Maslow & Lewis, 1987). When applying this theory to a sense of belonging, implications for schools would include ensuring family basic needs are being met and structures exist to create a safe, welcoming, and trusting environment.

Factors that Influence Sense of Belonging

Trust

Trust and respect are basal elements of meaningful family engagement partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). It is essential that schools work to embed the needs

and voices of ethnic minority families to increase trust and sense of belonging (Williams & Baber, 2007). The underlying foundation for each of Epstein's Six Models of Parent Engagement are trust and respect (Epstein, 2010); however, some critics claim that Epstein's model is Eurocentric and school based (Smith et al., 2011).

Minority families often find it more difficult to develop trusting relationships with their child's teacher (Bartz, Hill, & Witherspoon, 2013), leaving African American parents more likely to monitor school personnel than collaborate with them (Wang & Sikh-Khalil, 2014). Posey-Maddox (2017a, 2017b) and Reynolds (2010) found that exposure to racial microaggressions also impacted the trust between African American parents and school personnel. In a study conducted by Hill et al. (2018b), African American parents "expressed feelings of marginalization and lack of trust in the school" (p. 19), indicating they stayed involved to make sure their child was treated fairly.

Systems that have perpetuated discrimination and mistreatment of African American parents have added to the lack of trust, making African American parents feel less welcome and often struggle to secure resources for their children (Cross, 2011; Hill, 2011). The historical legacy of racial discrimination in schools creates a lack of trust for Black parents that their child will be treated fairly in school (Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

When interviewing African American parents, Posey-Maddox (2017a) found that when the parents felt the school personnel viewed them as a valuable part of the school system all the time and valued their opinions, a climate of trust could be established. Conversely when school staff members were perceived as condescending and insensitive, home-school relationships were weakened (Abdul-Adkil & Farmer, 2006). A social misalignment between staff and families sometimes occurs in urban schools because

many of the teachers have limited ties to the families and community in which the school

resides (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). If schools are going to break down the barriers of

mistrust with Black families, they must analyze their interactions, make a shift from a

school-centric culture to a parent-centric culture (Mapp & Hong, 2010) and engage in

equity training that includes implicit bias, microaggressions, and a more comprehensive

understanding of the community in which their families reside.

Healthy home-school relationships are grounded in relational trust and are

developed through day-to-day social exchanges in a school community. Relational trust is

formed through mutual understandings and common commitments among individuals

and institutions focusing on respect, personal regard for others, competence,

vulnerability, and integrity (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Upon examining the impact social

relationships in school has on student achievement, Bryk and Schneider (2002) found that

relational trust fosters organizational conditions that make it more conducive to affect

improvement efforts. Conversely the researchers found when expectations are violated

individuals typically withdraw their trust with the institution, sometimes severing ties

completely. It could be hypothesized that a lack of engagement and sense of belonging

for African American families is the result of a lack of relational trust between the school

and family. Therefore, implications for this study included examining how/which

structures for family engagement build and erode trust with families at their child's

school.

Self-Concept

Self-concept, how a person perceives themself, vitally influences one's behavior

and is derived from self-esteem and self-efficacy (Tus, 2020). A positive relationship

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exists between a positive self-concept and achievement (Chamundeswari et al., 2014; Meerah & Mazlan, 2017; Murugan & Jebaraj, 2017) and motivation (Sikhwari, 2014). If a positive self-concept can be achieved through recognition, appreciation, familiarization, and optimistic rational thinking of oneself (Tus, 2020) then schools should evaluate how they are creating systems that promote these characteristics in both students and families.

Self-esteem is often regarded as the belief in oneself and can influence sense of belonging both positively and negatively (Rosenberg, 1965). In a study conducted by Correlating (2018) in which 600 students completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, significant positive correlation existed between their self-esteem score and their grade point average, indicating that a positive correlation also exists between self-esteem and academic performance. Students with a higher self-esteem also demonstrated a higher level of self-value with regards to their level of satisfaction about their performance and their social and educational status. This study concurs with several others that posit the positive relationship between self-esteem and academic performance. (Ahmad et al., 2013; Akinleke, 2012; Ogot, 2017). If self-esteem is also defined by self-worth and self-value, then one could question if higher self-esteem produces greater academic outcomes or if greater academic outcomes produce higher self-esteem.

Self-esteem was also noted to be the single most important predictor of sense of belonging in an empirical study conducted by Ma (2003). Implications for this study assert that students who had a greater feeling of worthiness felt more comfortable in schools whereas low self-esteem created feelings of alienation thus negatively influencing one's sense of belonging. Ma's (2003) findings also suggest that school climate (academic press, disciplinary climate, and parent involvement) was more

important than school context (school size and school mean SES) in shaping student sense of belonging, asserting that teachers and administrators can play a critical role by establishing a safe and caring environment that treats students fairly. Based on the previously cited research, one could posit that the climate created by teachers and administrators could also impact parent self-esteem and sense of belonging.

Self-efficacy focuses on a person's belief in their ability to accomplish a task or goal based on the situation and is often considered as the effectiveness and skills to deal with life's struggles (Tus, 2020). Increased self-efficacy can positively influence student motivation (Chiu et al., 2016; Saeid & Eslaminejad, 2016) and is predictive of students' ability to succeed (Bandura et al., 2001).

Although students are the main focus of home/school partnerships, other benefits include increased self-efficacy of parents. Confidence (self-efficacy) is one of the four C's included in the policy and program goals of The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). When self-efficacy improves, parents gain more confidence in their parenting skills, curriculum-related interactions with their children, interactions with other parents and increased leadership capacity in decision making at the school (Epstein, 2010). Rodriguez et al., (2014) found that parents who considered themselves efficacious were more likely to be involved in their child's school regardless of the school's parent involvement efforts.

Kim's (2009) review of the research revealed that teacher biases, assumptions, perceptions about parent capacity and attitudes towards parents can also influence parent self- efficacy. Parents who live in poverty often doubt their own abilities because they feel they lack the specialized knowledge needed to advance their child's education (Bryk

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& Schneider, 1996). This doubt is often created by schools when they exclude families from school activities, information, or fail to see parents as an asset in their child's education because of their socioeconomic status (Yoder & Lopez, 2013). In a study conducted by Yoder and Lopez (2013) in which they focused on parent perceptions of involvement in children's education, one participant shared the following: "Because I feel that us being low income, poor people, working people, that we get dumped on a lot and we're not heard, and they dismiss us that we're nothing" (p. 427).

Implications for schools include honoring parents as the expert on their child and teaching them that self-efficacy does not require knowledge about content rather knowledge of resources. Teacher self-efficacy can also play a role in successful parent engagement. Teachers who are more confident in their own abilities communicate more regularly with parents and invite parent feedback and support (Kim, 2009).

Albert (1991) conceptualized sense of belonging into 3 C's (connect, capable, and contribute). Although her study was focused on students connecting with others, feeling capable, and contributing to school by performing duties, it could be hypothesized that each of these capacities could also influence parent self-efficacy and ultimately parent sense of belonging. Therefore, schools must reduce the feelings of alienation experienced by families and increase their efforts to connect with families, increase their self-concept and build upon the assets of their families to provide opportunities for contribution.

Identity

When parents have a self-awareness of their position in the school community in relation to others it can impact identity, which in turn can influence their confidence and social capital (Barton et al., 2004). In a study by Yoder and Lopez (2013) parents felt

stigmatized by their low-income status which caused them to experience feelings of fear, guilt, and shame. In an attempt to combat the microaggressions experienced at their child's school, and be perceived as less threatening, some parents in a study conducted by Reynolds (2010) said they intentionally dressed professionally and used softer tones when speaking to school personnel.

Students of color may experience uncertainties about their perceived sense of belonging based on their racial identity. "While students from stigmatized racial and ethnic groups may experience a strong sense of self-worth and self-esteem overall, stereotypes in the educational context may nonetheless diminish their sense of belonging at school" (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015, p 5). It is important that students be able to see themselves in the schools they attend both in the materials chosen and the curriculum that is taught. Schools that incorporate an Afrocentric curriculum or emphasize the relevance of their students' culture and experiences encourage students to view their identity in a positive manner (Harper, 2007). Finn's (1989) identification-participation model asserts that students must identify with the school and feel welcome and respected as a member of the school community or they will begin to disengage. If the ability to see themselves represented in the school impacts student sense of belonging, then it could be hypothesized that the same holds true for parents. Gaining insight from families about ways in which they see themselves represented or fail to see themselves represented in the school could provide valuable insight for school leaders. Implications for this study included participant counter-narratives to help identify factors that promote and inhibit sense of belonging for Black families at their child's school.

Critical Race Theory

Historically African Americans have experienced oppression as a result of the societal systems and structures that were created through a dominant ideological lens. Schools often make assumptions that because they are the educational experts, what they implement and suggest is effective and as a result students, parents, and communities need to conform to their systems (Yosso, 2005). Findings from Yoder and Lopez's study (2013) suggest that "even with the establishment of desegregation policies instituted in the education sector, there still exists a covert form of oppression among minority and low socioeconomic families" (p. 430). U.S. Schools often operate from a deficit thinking model, blaming students and families of color for poor academic performance (Reynolds, 2010). Racialized assumptions, such as students of color enter school without normative cultural knowledge and skills and/or parents don't value or support their child's education, further limit the cultural and social capital students and families possess (Yosso, 2005). Garcia and Guerra (2004) posit the need for a "critical examination of systemic factors that perpetuate deficit thinking and reproduce educational inequities for students from nondominant sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds" (p. 155).

This examination of systemic factors has obvious implications for those hampered by racial oppression and inequity because many have experienced schooling in a manner that has had negative, at times detrimental, consequences for them. Educational researchers can play an important role in examining these circumstances to improve educational outcomes for all children because in many ways, children of color, particularly Black males, find their experiences and opportunities being shaped largely by issues of race and gender (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Reynolds, 2010).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that examines the application of critical theory including society and culture, race, law, and power (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw et al., 1995, Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Delgado & Stefancic, 2013) and attempts to examine the role of racism in structural oppression (Tichavakunda, 2019). Race and racism are embedded within the framework of American society (Parker & Lynn, 2002) and have therefore helped define the U.S. systems and structures (Bell, 1995), including the systems and structures in schools. CRT can be used to challenge the ways racism implicitly and explicitly impacts social structures (Yosso, 2005) and is grounded in five tenets: (1) the intercentricity of race and racism; (2) the challenge to dominant ideology; (3) the commitment to social justice; (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (5) the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches (Solórzano, 1997). By using the tenets of CRT this study aims to challenge the family engagement structures that may be marginalizing the sense of belonging for Black families at their child's school.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used in the field of education to examine race and racism found in schools and further investigate practices, policies and procedures that further oppress racially marginalized students and families (Reynolds et al., 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). School-centric practices are often bred in Eurocentric culture in which the cultural capital of marginalized groups is not valued. Schools often make racialized assumptions that parents of color don't support or care about their child's education (Reynolds, 2010; Yosso, 2005). This subordinate view of Black parents further limits their social and cultural capital and negatively impacts the development of trusting relationships between families and the school. Failure to create trusting relationships and

honor the voice and ideas of Black families not only creates further marginalized

conditions for families but has a detrimental impact on the achievement of Black

students. One way to capture the voices of Black families is through counter-storytelling

or counter-narratives which is an approach that honors the voices of marginalized people

of color and utilizes the knowledge gained from their experiences to disrupt racialized

systems and structures still operating through a White dominant ideological lens

(Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). Reynolds (2010) utilized counter-storytelling through a

CRT lens to gain perspective about the ways race influences experiences for Black

parents and their Black male students.

One of the goals of CRT in education is to excavate how race operates at the

structural level (Brown, 2014). In an attempt to broaden the definition of cultural capital,

Yosso (2005) examined it through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and developed

the Community Cultural Wealth framework. This framework demonstrates that just

because the cultural capital marginalized families bring to the table differs from the

dominant ideology of traditional cultural capital, does not mean it does not carry value. If

schools are going to empower their families of color, they must begin to uncover and

utilize the abundance of cultural wealth families possess.

"An explicit acknowledgement of race and racism in educational theory and

practice contributes to a unique analysis and a richer, more comprehensive examination

of the challenges Black families encounter" (Reynolds, 2010, p. 148). He further asserts

that there is a gap in the scholarly research that includes first-hand, detailed accounts

from Black parents themselves, about the roles that they believe power, race, and racism

plays in their experiences. If systems and structures are still functioning based on

dominant ideology, then it could be hypothesized that parent involvement and ultimately student achievement are being negatively impacted by systems that are oppressing minority groups. Therefore, examining the perceptions of Black families about family engagement structures through a CRT lens would give credence to the experiential knowledge and lived experiences of participants and look to challenge family engagement systems and structures that were created through the dominant ideology of what parent engagement "should" look like. To examine the potential for oppression in the systems and structures of this case study and analyze the marginalization of the lived experiences of the participants, a Critical Race Theory lens was be used. Examining the counter-narratives of the Black parents/guardians in this study provided insight into the ways in which race, and cultural capital may influence a marginalized sense of belonging for Black families at their child's school. In addition, honoring the lived experiences of the participants enhanced their voice and garnered recommendations for ways in which systems and structures can be revised to combat further marginalization based on race.

Summary

Family engagement and student sense of belonging can positively influence student achievement (Barnard, 2004; Castro et al., 2015, Fan & Chen, 2001; Wilder, 2014; Jeynes, 2003; Jeynes, 2005). Black families want to be engaged in their child's education; however, barriers often exist (Hornby & Lafaele, Howard & Reynolds; 2011; Kim, 2009; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Latunde, 2017; Yoder & Lopez, 2013) that inhibit optimal integration of the three spheres of influence which include family, school, and community (Epstein, 2001). School systems and structures often mirror the structures of society which typically require a high degree of cultural and social capital to successfully

access (Bourdieu, 1977). Based on the connection between Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and sense of belonging, until a school is able to establish trust and foster a strong and efficacious sense of self-concept in families; a strong sense of belonging for families will not occur. Furthermore, failure to restructure family engagement will hinder the potential to maximize all tenets of family engagement. Schools must examine their family engagement systems and structures to see if culturally relevant practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995) exist and ensure all voices are equally represented in their policies and decision making.

While the relationship between parent engagement and student achievement has been established, there is a gap in the literature about the role parent sense of belonging in their child's school plays in parent engagement. The purpose of this study was to investigate how the perceptions about family engagement structures influence the sense of belonging for Black families with their child's school. Investigating parent perceptions provided firsthand accounts to address the research questions of this study.:

RQ1: From the perspective of Black parents/families, what factors contribute to parent/family sense of belonging in a school community?

RQ2: How do trust and parent/family engagement structures impact sense of belonging for Black parents/families?

RQ3: What historical factors and or/ conditions have negatively impacted parent/family sense of belonging to a school community?

RQ4: What kind of changes would Black parents/guardians recommend to increase family sense of belonging in schools?

The majority of the research on African American students and sense of belonging has been quantitative, therefore qualitative studies will add to the field of study by gaining insight into perceptions and lived experiences. The upcoming chapter will explore the methodological approaches used to examine the participant perceptions about family engagement structures at their child's school.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology for this qualitative case study regarding the factors that influence a sense of belonging for Black families at their child's school. Analysis of the family engagement data at both my school and the district in which I work has revealed inequitable representation of Black families. Although structures that foster family time and togetherness and structures that celebrate family achievement have a higher level of engagement for Black families than structures that elicit parent voice and structures that focus on informing parents and providing resources, gaps still exist between Black and White families for all four structures of family engagement at my school. Sense of belonging positively impacts a student's engagement in school (Osterman, 2000); therefore, if family engagement is predicated by a sense of belonging, then inequitable levels of sense of belonging also exist for Black families at my school. In this study I explored perceptions about family engagement of Black families and sought to understand the factors that influence family sense of belonging at their child's school. Within this chapter, the methodology will be explained. Furthermore, a review of study participants, data collection methods and analysis, ethical concerns, researcher positionality, and strategies for ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are outlined.

Research Methods and Design

Qualitative participatory action research (PAR) design was used for this study. Qualitative research seeks "to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them" (Glesne, 2006, p. 4). A qualitative approach was appropriate because this study examined an important issue in education through the perspectives of the participants to discover what they have experienced and how they interpret their experiences (Slavin, 2007).

Action research explores practical problems with the intent of developing a solution and "works on the assumption that all stakeholders whose lives are affected by the problem under study should be engaged in the process of investigation" (Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021, p. 22) The key characteristics of action research, as outlined by Creswell (2012, p. 586) are as follows:

- A practical focus

- The educator-researcher's own practices

- Collaboration

- A dynamic process

- A plan of action

- Sharing research

Participatory action research (PAR) involves a team of stakeholders (to include the researcher) who collaborate to solve a common problem or improve the effectiveness of a system (Slavin, 2007). PAR was an appropriate method for this study because its purpose was to enable action and it paid careful attention to power relationships and

advocated for shared power between the researcher and those being researched (Baum et al., 2006). Participatory action research as defined by Baum et al., (2006)

> seeks to understand and improve the world by changing it. At its heart it is collective, self-reflective inquiry that researchers and participants undertake, so they can understand and improve upon the practices in which they participate and the situations in which they find themselves. The reflective process is directly linked to action, influenced by understanding of history, culture, and local context and embedded in social relationships (p.854).

Action research usually addresses issues that are of personal interest to the researcher and co-researchers and often focuses on issues that are impacting school effectiveness or student achievement (Slavin, 2007) and strives to improve the quality of organizations (Stringer, 2007). An analysis of family engagement data indicated an inequitable level of engagement between White and Black families at my school. Conducting action research as a principal allowed me the opportunity to engage parents as stakeholders in the quest to address the problem and bring about change that increases the sense of belonging and engagement for Black families. I worked with the participants to uncover factors that influence parent/family sense of belonging and will utilize the findings to improve practices and increase the active voice of Black families at my school and make recommendations to other school leaders. PAR allowed the opportunity for all participants to contribute and enhance their voice.

By adopting a relativist perspective, I pursued a constructivist approach to my case study as I attempted to capture the perspectives of the participants about family engagement and sense of belonging (Yin, 2018). Because I attempted to understand how

the lived experiences of the participants influenced their sense of belonging and pried open territory about which I have only vague hunches, a qualitative stance was an appropriate choice (Marecek et al., 1997).

Context

As an educational practitioner of 26 years, I have always been interested in creating opportunities for students and teachers to be the best they can be. Although I consider myself to be a data nerd, always combing through different sets of data to make informed decisions, what I have come to conclude is that quantitative data only tells you so much. As a researcher I was interested in digging deeper into the why behind challenges that I have been unable to problem solve with sets of quantitative data alone. One of those challenges I have been unable to successfully navigate is the achievement gap that exists between our Black and White students.

Despite attempting a host of interventions with our Black students that have produced an increase in proficiency rates, an achievement gap still exists. Through my early work in the doctoral program, I realized I had been attempting to find solutions to a challenge without engaging the voices of the primary stakeholders. Studies have indicated that a positive relationship exists between student sense of belonging and achievement (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Hill et al., 2018; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Orrock & Clark, 2015; Singh et al., 2010; Uwah et al., 2008) and between parent involvement and student achievement (Barnard, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003; Jeynes, 2005; Wilder, 2013). However, additional research is needed around parent/family sense of belonging at their child's school and the impact it has on family engagement.

In addition to closing the achievement gap, this topic is of particular interest to me because based on attendance rates of family engagement activities combined with the results of the Comprehensive School Survey that is administered to parents every year, an inequitable level of engagement exists between Black and White families at my school.

Participants and Setting

As a long-time educator, I am committed to improving access and opportunity for students of color and their family. My goal for this study was to gain information that will help make changes in schools to increase the sense of belonging and community for Black families. To obtain valid and meaningful data in qualitative research, it is important to conduct research in a place where rapport can be developed with the subjects (Slavin, 2007). For this study purposeful homogenous sampling (Creswell, 2012) was used to select participants. The participants for this study were Black parents/guardians of students in grades K-12 in Jefferson County, Kentucky.

While this topic is important to me and has the potential to inform decision making about ways in which family engagement structures can become more inclusive, I knew that obtaining participants for a research study with a White researcher that participants didn't know would prove to be a challenge. Historically there has been a sense of distrust between White researchers and Black participants. Since the Tuskegee Experiment, in which hundreds of African American men were lied to by the government and had treatment withheld for the sake of "research" Black communities have rightfully mistrusted public health and researchers. The Tuskegee Study is considered by many to

be our nation's "most powerful symbol of scientific racism, moral blindness, and mind-numbing arrogance in the name of 'science'" (Jones & Reverby, 2022, p. 1539).

Long-standing barriers to trust cannot be overcome overnight; therefore, I acknowledge the potential distrust my role as a White researcher and educator plays in this study. Trust is an essential element of meaningful partnerships between families and schools (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) that I have worked hard to establish with the families at my school during my 16-year tenure as the principal. However, due to the conflict of interest identified by my district's IRB, I was unable to conduct the study with Black families at my school with whom I had already established a level of relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Thankfully, I was able to collaborate with a community partner who acted as a liaison for the study to solicit recruitment materials. As a cultural broker, this community partner sent out the flier and recruitment letter to a group of Black families he had previously engaged with through various community events he had hosted. Through that structure parents were made aware of the current challenge identified for the study and invited to participate in action research with the goal of helping identify factors that promote and inhibit a sense of belonging for Black families at their child's school and make recommendations for ways in which family engagement systems and structures can promote a greater sense of belonging for all families. Although the sample was from a target population, information was gathered from those who volunteered for the study. An informed consent form was given to each participant for this study.

When conducting research, location matters. Meetings held in "institutional arenas" can be perceived as threatening and "judgmental bastions of authority" (Stringer

& Aragon, 2021, p. 155). African American parents have reported the school building as a place of contention for meetings and have cited it as a reason why they don't engage in parent involvement activities. In a study conducted by Latunde (2017), only 3% of 107 families involved in the study attended the workshop in a school setting. Hospitality also matters to create an environment of safety and trust. Hospitality requires inclusion and an embrace of differences. Latunde (2016) proposed a model of hospitality as a framework for parental engagement. This framework was grounded in Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Volf's (1996) theory of exclusion and focuses on school personnel establishing safety and trust with families by examining differences in perspectives in the areas of physical space, emotional space, spiritual space, and intellectual space. To begin to build trust with families, Latunde suggests first engaging in informal conversations and acknowledging what families are already doing to support their children and find out what concerns they have. For this reason, the setting for the parent/guardian gatherings in this study was a neutral location in the community.

In addition to helping distribute recruitment materials, Mr. Jones also provided suggestions for a community location that would help establish a warm and welcoming environment. Latunde (2017) found that when working with Black families location and hospitality are key factors; therefore, in addition to choosing a community location I selected World Café as the method for data collection because of the social nature of the design. After the recruitment materials had been solicited to potential participants, 14 parents accepted the invitation to participate. To ensure I chose a day and time that would best meet their needs, I polled the potential participants and determined that Sunday afternoon would be the best day to conduct the event.

Data Collection Procedures

This qualitative study used the World Café method to collect multiple data points that were triangulated to contribute to the trustworthiness of the study (Glesne, 2006). Action research is most productive when participants have the opportunity to talk extensively about their perceptions and experiences (Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021). Latunde and Louque (2016) found socialization serves as a resource for Black parents which creates implications for providing social networking opportunities. For this study, participants gathered in a community location and engaged in data collection using the World Café (WC) method which "uses a tightly controlled format to generate free-form conversation, engaging stakeholders in meaningful dialogue to identify and shape future directions for action" (Leigh, 2014, p. 825). Using World Café provided the opportunity to collect data simultaneously from a variety of individuals. World Café was selected for this study because it was designed to be as inclusionary as possible to provide participants an opportunity to engage with others and reflect upon their lived experiences (Löhr et al., 2020). The intent of World Café is to provide an intimate gathering space to make everyone feel more comfortable and open to sharing their ideas about the questions being posed. Therefore, the space set-up was important when creating the atmosphere.

One of my goals for this study was to neutralize the perceived power/authority of my role as the White principal and researcher in the process. The World Café method doesn't have a defined leader, rather a facilitator to help equalize the voice of all participants. As the facilitator my goal was to establish an open and safe environment in which all participants felt comfortable expressing their ideas and opinions. Making parents/guardians feel comfortable enough to share their true feelings was incredibly

important; therefore, creating a space that mirrored a café style format in a place that made them feel at home was advantageous (Stringer, 2007). This method allowed for group discussion in a smaller format which not only allowed parents/guardians an opportunity to get to know one another but was also less threatening. "The strength of WC for data collection is its "cross-pollination of ideas" through evolving rounds of information exchange and the use of a café-style social context that facilitates the sharing of information in an equitable and nonthreatening manner" (Löhr, et al., 2020, p. 2).

The World Café is a simple process for bringing people together to focus on questions that matter and was founded on the assumption that everyone has the capacity to work together and contribute. Dimensions of the Café process that help uncover the collective wisdom of the group include belief in everybody, diversity, invitation, listening, movement, good questions, and energy (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). With the goal of fostering authentic dialogue based on participant perspectives in an effort to create actionable knowledge, the seven design principles were used as a guide for the World Café design (Brown & Isaacs, 2005, p. 40):

- Set the context - purpose, participants, parameters

- Create a hospitable space - a welcoming environment that creates psychological safety and mutual respect. Adhere to cafe etiquette (contribute, listen, connect)

- Explore questions that matter - focus on powerful questions that elicit collective engagement

- Encourage everyone's contribution -enliven the conversation by inviting full participation

- Cross-pollinate and connect diverse perspectives - through the structure of the design participants have the opportunity to contribute, build on the ideas of others and make new connections

- Listen together for patterns, insights, and deeper questions - focus on nurturing coherence of thought without losing individual contributions

- Harvest and share collective discoveries - making the collective knowledge visible and actionable

To ensure fidelity of The World Café method, I utilized the hosting guide as outlined by Brown and Issacs (2005). An icebreaker activity was introduced at the beginning of the first round to allow participants an opportunity to get to know one another better with the goal of increasing their comfort level before they engaged in discussion about the questions for the café session. Participants were gathered in small groups, introduced themselves and their child(ren)'s name and one thing about their child(ren). After participants had time to share, they returned to their table. Each group then decided on a table host who would facilitate conversations and a recorder who would take notes and summarize key ideas. At the end of each round the table host stayed where he/she started, and the other participants rotated groups. At the start of each new round the table host highlighted key points from the previous conversation and began to discuss questions for that round. During the final round participants returned to their original table to discuss new insights and suggestions for their original question and made recommendations for action. These recommendations were recorded on chart paper and shared with the whole group. The share out session was recorded so that it could be viewed later during data analysis. Participants then responded to the individual prompt, "If there is one thing that

has not yet been said or explored but is necessary in order to reach a deeper level of understanding/clarity what would that be?"

Throughout our meeting for World Café, I built in member checking opportunities by asking clarifying questions to ensure I accurately captured the perceptions of the participants to ensure the validity of the study. Member checking is especially important when there is disparity in power relationships between stakeholders (Stringer & Aragon, 2021).

Ethical Considerations

Action research is defined as "a respect for people and for the knowledge and experience they bring to the research process, a belief in the ability of democratic processes to achieve positive social change, and a commitment to action" (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003, p. 15). Brydon-Miller (2012) posits action research is essential to help dismantle the "hierarchical and patronizing system that privileges the knowledge and experience of researchers over that of those being researched" (p. 159). As an action researcher focused on investigating factors that could be further oppressing an already marginalized group, it was important that I take necessary steps to build authentic relationships with the stakeholders and neutralize my perceived power and dominance because of my role as a White administrator and researcher. It was essential that I not only recognize the power dynamics that exist but address them throughout the entire research study (Stevens, et al., 2016).

To ensure I considered ethics throughout the study, I used the structured ethical reflections (SER) tool (Stevens et al., 2016). The SER tool allowed me to align the

values most relevant to the study with developing partnerships and questions, recruiting participants, collecting and analyzing data, member checking and presentation of the findings. Because of my commitment to promote social justice through action research while maintaining the responsibility and ethical demand to act in the best interest of the participants in my study, I adopted a model of covenantal ethics (Hilsen, 2006).

Because the purpose of the study was to analyze factors that may be oppressing the voices of and inhibiting a sense of belonging for Black families at their child's school, this study required courage on behalf of myself as the researcher and on behalf of the participants involved. I had to be prepared to accept the responses from participants with an open mind and not compromise the integrity of the study because of the potential critical feedback from participants. This study encouraged participants to accept social responsibility in identifying and providing suggestions for increased sense of belonging for Black families at their child's school. I was intentional about the need to establish trust and mutual respect between myself and the participants by being honest and transparent. The SER tool and process allowed me to reflect on considerations for each of these values throughout the entire study to ensure ethical collaboration as an action researcher. Permission was gained through the Institutional Research Board (IRB) to ensure ethical treatment of all participants.

Data Analysis

Three pieces of data were collected during The World Café: individual table reflections, the video recording of the group share, and the individual reflections. Each piece of data was coded separately during the first cycle. Next, I analyzed the coding

from the first round to determine themes. Coding in qualitative research is "the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis and synthesis" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 8). Qualitative researchers look for patterns when they are coding because patterns indicate habits, salience, and significance in people's lives. Consistencies and repetitive patterns make the data enhance the trustworthiness of the evidence (Saldaña, 2021).

The first cycle of coding was inductive using in vivo coding that captured the participants words and phrases to help attune me to the participant's perspectives and honor their voice (Saldaña, 2021). During the second cycle I categorized the data from cycle one into focused codes or themes. Focused coding searches for the most frequent codes to develop salient categories (Saldaña, 2021). Values coding was used during the third cycle to help capture the attitudes, beliefs, and values of the participants as I sought to understand their perspectives about sense of belonging in their child's school (Saldaña, 2021). When the data analysis was completed, I sent a letter to the participants that summarized the main findings to provide another opportunity for member checking. In addition to thanking the participants for taking part in the study, I invited them to provide additional feedback regarding my interpretation of the findings.

Limitations of the Study

Time and resources can be a limitation of case study research as well as deciding on the "boundaries" of a case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Not having a previous relationship with the participants prior to the study limited the opportunity to build trust. Although several Black parents/families were invited to participate, because the sample

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came from those who volunteered, it created a biased sample. The sample size of 14 participants could be seen as a limitation when making generalizations. As previously mentioned, the power dynamic that exists between myself as the White principal in a position of authority and White researcher and the Black parents could also be a limitation.

Assumptions of the Study

The researcher makes the assumption that all participants engaged in the study willingly and answered all questions truthfully. It is also assumed that action research through case study analysis was the most appropriate method for gathering the perspectives of Black families as it relates to understanding factors that promote and inhibit a sense of belonging at their child's school.

Process for Exploring Researcher Positionality

As a White woman, race and culture are two things I never thought about or had to think about until four years ago when I enrolled in a cultural diversity class upon seeking my English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsement. Through the coursework, and my continued interest in diversity, I have since explored issues such as implicit bias, White privilege, and culturally relevant pedagogy. Although my work as a practitioner is supporting change through curriculum and equity analysis of materials and resources, my work as a doctoral student and researcher has led me to want to go deeper and explore systems and structures through a racial and cultural lens.

While I do not have the racial context of my participants, I can relate with the culture of feeling less than, not because of the color of my skin but because of the words and actions of others. Through my doctoral work my goal is to continue to strive for excellence both personally and professionally and impact the trajectory of those who have been marginalized by systems and structures that were created through a lens of dominant ideology. I hope that my work with families will be a stepping stone for the work that is needed to begin to dismantle systems that extend beyond the education realm so that equitable opportunities can and will be provided for all students and families.

As the White principal of a school and White researcher, it was important that I examine my position as an action researcher. To help accomplish this, my research utilized the components of Milner's Framework of Researcher Racial and Cultural Positionality (2007). Milner's framework consists of four components—researching the self, researching the self in relation to others, engaging in reflection, and shifting from self to system.

I adhered to "*research myself in relation to others*" by considering the following question: "How do I negotiate and balance my own interests and research agendas with those of my research participants which may be inconsistent or diverge from mine?" (p. 395). Throughout the study I was intentional about remaining keenly aware of the power dynamic that exists through my position as a White, middle class principal conducting research with Black families. Through the structured ethical reflection (SER) tool I identified trust and transparency as two of the key values for my research. Trust needed to be present to help build authentic relationships with the participants so they understood that their narratives and counter-narratives would be equally valued (*engaged reflections*

and representation). Transparency was also essential an essential requirement so that the participants did not think I had an ulterior agenda other than the one I set forth at the beginning of the research. To achieve this, I had to make sure all information was meaningfully accessible (Kapiszewski & Karcher, 2021) and ensure that I clearly communicated the purpose and goals of the study. I had to be clear about the active role the participants played in the study, emphasizing the importance of family engagement that promotes a sense of belonging for all families and the value of their voice as partners to address the challenge identified in the study. In addition to sharing this information orally with the participants, I obtained informed consent from all participants outlining the purpose and procedures of the study. Transparency was also addressed by providing member checking opportunities throughout the process to enrich and confirm the findings (Koen, et al., 2014). I had to be cautious with my words to ensure participants did not feel as though I was blaming them when I discussed "lack of voice" as Black parents not doing their part in their child's education. As I *shifted from self to systems,* I was mindful not to take participant feedback personally by remembering that the purpose of the study was to uncover decisions that may have unintentionally marginalized the sense of belonging for the Black families at their child's school. Because school systems and structures often mirror the systems and structures of society it should not be surprising to uncover said systems at my own school, a school that has had White principals and White parent organizational leadership since it opened in 1955.

It was also critical that I become aware of the seen and unforeseen dangers of my research topic (Milner, 2007). Addressing this topic may uncover information that, when shared with White staff members, may elicit defensive emotions and responses,

particularly if the changes to family engagement structures are counter to their own perceptions about family engagement. As the principal of a school, I must be aware of this potential danger and be prepared to engage my staff in professional learning that increases their awareness of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) that demands equitable practices for all students and families, to include family engagement. By not addressing this topic, an unforeseen danger could include a continuation of potentially oppressive systems that would further promote policies and practices ingrained in racism. Remaining color-blind to policies and approaches that could "potentially lead to the dangers of exploitation and misrepresentation of individuals and communities of color" (p. 392) is another potential unforeseen danger.

Strategies for Ensuring Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability

In qualitative research trustworthiness helps establish credibility and quality of the study (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Throughout the study I included member-checking opportunities with participants to ensure reliability and validity. I ensured all participants had access to the data analysis to confirm the analysis as objective and valid. After the initial café process in which the data was collected, a letter was sent to the participants that thanked them for their participation in the study and summarized the main findings. There was also an invitation to provide additional feedback regarding my interpretation of the findings.

In addition to trust, the elements of my structured ethical reflection included honesty, inclusiveness, respect, and transparency. To achieve this, I was open and honest

with participants about the protocol they would be engaging in, set the tone for an environment of respect and inclusion by establishing norms for ensuring all voices are heard, and discussed how the data would be collected and shared. Brown and Issacs (2005) discuss the importance of being intentional with the specific language used during the café process to discuss each person's unique *contribution* versus their *participation* to avoid an overemphasis of I (participate) instead of we (contribute). I was mindful of the vocabulary I used to focus on the collective work we would be working on as a group. Before the event began, I discussed the following café etiquette recommended by Brown and Issacs (2005, p. 167):

1. Focus on what matters.

2. Contribute your thinking and expertise.

3. Listen to understand.

4. Connect ideas.

5. Listen together for patterns, insights, and deeper questions.

As the Café host, I encouraged everyone to engage in the conversation with the goal of learning from each person at their table. I also made sure each table facilitator and recorder understood their roles and responsibilities and created a protocol that allowed all members to provide honest and critical feedback. Throughout the process it was also important that the established protocol ensured all members felt their responses were validated and judgment was withheld.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to outline the methods and procedures for conducting case study research that examined the factors that influence a sense of belonging for Black families at their child's school. Researcher positionality addressed my role as a White principal and researcher and the impact that had on the study. Participants, setting, and data collections procedures were outlined with details so the study could be replicated. Limitations of the study, ethical considerations and assumptions were discussed and shared a common theme around trust. This chapter concluded with a discussion of researcher positionality and assurances for trustworthiness and credibility.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

As a principal, I recognize the gap in family engagement between our Black and White families which mirrors the academic achievement gap between our Black and White students. If sense of belonging positively impacts engagement for students (Hill et al., 2018a) then could it also have the same impact on families? The research shows that Black families want to engage with their child's school, however, often experience barriers that prevent this from happening (Kim, 2009; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Latunde, 2017; Latunde & Clark-Loque, 2016; Loque & Latunde, 2014; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Yoder & Lopez, 2013). Schools are notorious for creating family engagement systems and structures that work for the school without cultural considerations for families (Huang, 2019; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Yan, 1999). When families fail to engage with these school centric structures it creates what Brown and Brandon (2007) refer to as a cycle of univolvement leaving schools to blame the families. While I could hypothesize reasons why Black families might feel a diminished sense of belonging at their child's school, to gain an understanding as a White female principal I wanted to investigate the lived experience of Black parents.

On the day of the event, I arrived at the community center early to create a café style atmosphere in anticipation of the 14 parents who said they would attend. Tables were covered with colorful tablecloths and matching plates and napkins. Food, drink, and desserts were ready to be served upon participant entrance. Unfortunately, even though

14 parents responded affirmatively to attend the event, only five actually showed up that day. It was the first sunny day we had had in three weeks and most of the participants who were unable to attend called or sent a text to let me know they wouldn't be able to make it. As the five attending participants arrived, I greeted them at the door and invited them in to get something to eat. The first two participants who arrived, both female, knew one another and sat together. The third participant, also female, entered the room and sat at a separate table. While awaiting the arrival of the other two participants, I sat with the mother who was sitting by herself and asked her about her children. She shared that she is the mother of twin boys who are in high school. When the final two participants arrived, I met them at the door, welcomed them and encouraged them to get something to eat and join one of the groups. One participant, the only male of the group, joined the mom who was sitting by herself and the other female participant sat with the table of two. After joining the tables, participants immediately began conversing with one another. As the five participants ate, I circulated around the room engaging in conversation with everyone.

When everyone had finished eating, I introduced myself to the group, discussed the rationale behind my research, addressed my positionality as a White educator and researcher and reviewed the consent form. Participants were given the opportunity to clarify and ask questions. After all questions had been answered, participants signed their consent forms and I thanked them for agreeing to share their lived experiences with me.

Participants were then invited to engage in a brief ice breaker in which they introduced themselves to the group and shared the name(s) and one special thing about

their child(ren). Each of the participants smiled with joy as they talked about their child(ren). Four of the five participants' children attend Jefferson County Public Schools. Three of the four have children in two different elementary schools while one mom has two children in the same high school. The only male participant in this session has a son who attends a private middle school and a daughter who is 10 months old. Next, I explained the protocols for the event that were grounded in the seven design principles of the World Café design (Brown & Isaacs, 2005).

The first discussion prompt participants engaged in was *Do you feel comfortable coming to your child's school? Do you feel like you belong? If yes, what does the school do to make it feel like that? If not, what does the school do to make it feel like that?*

At first, conversation was slow. Instead of a true discussion, participants were instead taking turns answering the question and recording their thoughts. After 10 minutes, the participants started to become more comfortable with one another and their interactions became more conversational. Although I was not in proximity to hear all the details of both table conversations, participants at both tables made comments about feeling comfortable but not necessarily feeling like they belonged. One of the mothers at the table of three asserted that since her child was at the school, she made sure she felt comfortable by going to the school a few times a week and being a member of the site based decision-making council. "If my daughter is there, they are gonna all know me" to which another mother at her table responded, "I know that's right." After 20 minutes had elapsed, the table facilitators stayed at their original table and the remaining members moved to another table to cross-pollinate the conversation. The dad from table one joined one of the moms from table two and the other two elementary moms from the second table joined the high-school mom at the first table. The second round began with

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each of the facilitators recapping the discussion from the previous round and allowing the new table members to add to it. Participants then engaged in discussion around the following prompt: *When you were a student, what kinds of things did your school do to make you feel like you belonged or fit in?*

Unlike the first discussion question that initially elicited singular responses instead of dialogue, the second question motivated participants to engage in an energetic conversation full of laughter and affirmations. Participants appeared more comfortable with one another as they recounted their experiences as a student. While some of the increased comfort with one another appeared to stem from their time together at the event, I feel as though the similarity in experiences they had as Black students created an increased sense of connection between the participants. I observed lots of head nodding in agreement as participants shared stories and on a few occasions all participants chimed in when a particular experience was being shared. One example of this was when one of the participants was discussing the attempt to bring in Black History she said, "We talked about the same four people during Black History Month" and the other two participants at her table chimed in chorally "Martin, Malcolm, Harriet and Rosa."

As I reflected upon the flow of the event, it made me realize that perhaps I should have started with this question. While the participants had some shared experiences as a Black parent, they all related to some of the same experiences as a Black student. I also found it interesting that while the question asked participants to discuss things their school did to make them feel like they belonged, most of the responses instead focused on what schools didn't do. Responses from the discussion questions in rounds 1 and 2 of the World Café provide participant perspectives for the answers to RQ1: *From the*

perspective of Black parents/families, what factors contribute to parent/family sense of belonging in a school community.

Although the hosting guide suggests that each table facilitator remain the same for each round, modifications were made to the protocol because of the small number of participants at the event. During the third round, the two facilitators gathered together at table one, while the two moms who knew each other joined the dad at table two. After participants rearranged the groupings for the third and final round they responded to the following prompt: *What do schools do that make or break your trust with them as partners in your child's education?* By the third round not only were participants comfortably engaging in dialogue with one another, they were also urging one another to elaborate with prompts such as "what do you mean?" and "tell me more about that."

At the end of the discussion rounds participants returned to their original table to review the table recording for all three questions. Each table then elected a reporter who shared the table recordings for each question while other participants and I asked questions and/or clarified responses. Participants then rejoined their original group to make recommendations for school leaders using the following prompt: *If you were a school leader what would you do to help increase the sense of belonging and community for Black families at your school?* Tables shared their responses then each participant was provided an opportunity to respond in writing to the following: *If there is one thing that hasn't yet been said or explored but is necessary in order to reach a deeper level of understanding/clarity about this topic what would that be?*

Throughout all three rounds of discussion questions, I was intentional with my placement in the corner of the room, letting participants know I wanted to provide them

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space to speak freely with one another. As I listened and took notes in my researchers'

journal, I heard participants share things that I had read about in other research studies

such as barriers with communication and administrators focusing on negativity. Through

these observations I also learned about experiences I had not previously read about,

particularly as it relates to the role representation plays in trust and sense of belonging as

both a parent and a student. In various equity focused professional development sessions

I have previously attended, presenters have talked about "the importance of

representation." Although I heard what they said, it wasn't until I engaged with the

participants in this study that I began to gain an understanding of what it truly meant and

the impact it has on sense of belonging. I didn't know, because as a White person, I

didn't have to know. Although I feel as though I have an awareness about my White

privilege, I had such a feeling of guilt as I listened to some of the experiences shared by

the participants. One example of this is when one of the participants talked about having

to go to a specific Target to look for hair products because they weren't carried at every

store. I have been frustrated when I go to the store and they are out of stock of a product

I am looking for; however, I have never had to worry that they didn't carry it in the first

place. When the products in a store only represent a certain demographic what message is

that sending? When the environment of a school only represents a certain demographic

through curricular resources and what they put on the walls, what message is that

sending?

    As the event came to a close, I thanked the participants for joining me and let

them know I would be sharing my findings with them after the data was analyzed. As

participants were leaving, they thanked me for doing the study and for having a genuine

interest in making changes that would look to increase sense of belonging for Black families and students.

The event was amazing, and I learned so much listening to and observing the participants. While there was a richness to the data collected from the five participants from the first World Café event, I felt as though I needed more data. Fortunately, eight of the nine other parents that had originally agreed to participate during the first session felt so strongly about the topic, they agreed to participate in a second event.

To again accommodate a day and time that best worked for the participants I polled the parents and determined that a Tuesday night would work best. As with the first event, I arrived early at the community center to set up the event with tablecloths and matching plates and napkins. During the first event I had set up five tables in anticipation of 14 participants; however, because I only expected eight participants at this event, I limited the arrangement to three tables and sat three chairs at each table. Food, drinks, and desserts were available, and I greeted each participant at the door.

First to arrive were two dads whose sons attended the same elementary school. After fixing their plates they made their way to the same table to sit together. Next to arrive was a mom who has a daughter in high school and a son in middle school, followed by a mom and a dad who have two children in elementary school and one child in middle school. The remaining three moms trickled in about 15 minutes later and had their elementary sons with them. The moms made a plate for themselves and their children and the boys joined the volunteers in charge of childcare.

Even though the event was held on a date and time that worked best for the participants, I decided to go ahead and introduce myself and discuss the consent form

while the participants were eating. Since it was a school night, I wanted to make sure I ended on time to allow everyone to get home at a reasonable time. As I discussed the purpose of the study and why I was interested in the topic, one of the moms said "This is really an important topic. I wish other school leaders would take an interest in it." Through the ice breaker I was able to determine that all of the participants were parents of students in Jefferson County Public Schools, representing one high school, one middle school, and two elementary schools. The remainder of the second event followed the same protocol, with the exception of switching the order of the first and second question based on my reflection from the first event.

When prompted to engage in the first question, all three tables began sharing recollections from when they were in school. I was seated in a chair closest to the two dads who began talking about the sports teams they played on in middle and high school and how that seemed to be the only thing others (students and teachers) knew them for. A mom at another table talked about classes that were designed at her high school with "Black kids" in mind because it was a predominantly Black school while the other two moms at the table talked about how lucky she was because they didn't have anything like that at their high school. At the third table the participants were talking about a program called Upward Bound and how they don't know how they would have made it in high school without the counselors from that program. Upward Bound is a federally funded program that provides resources and supports for students interested in college. Unlike the first session, participants immediately began engaging in conversation and recording their thoughts.

As outlined in the World Café protocol, facilitators stayed at their original table while the other participants moved to different tables for the second and third rounds. Since there were more participants, we were able to follow the protocol for the entire event. A common point of discussion at all three tables for question two was the importance of having Black staff members at the school. As with the first event, many of the parents shared how much more comfortable they felt at a school if, when they visit for the first time, they see Black teachers or administrators. Structural barriers such as metal detectors, police presence and having to show identification each time they pick up their child "even though they see me a few times a week" evoked a lot of emotion from one of the dads during the third round of discussion. One mom also discussed how frustrated she got because "Since the White principal didn't understand how Black people discipline their children, they called CPS. How is that supposed to make me trust the school?"

As with the first event, several of the parents thanked me for inviting them to participate and "caring about this issue." Three of the participants told me if I needed anything else to let them know and they would be happy to follow up with me.

After all data had been collected, I combined the data from both events and conducted three cycles of coding. The first cycle was inductive and utilized in vivo coding to capture the actual words and phrases of the participants (Saldaña, 2016). During the second cycle I analyzed the in vivo coding from cycle one and categorized the participant words and phrases into themes. The use of thematic coding is appropriate when analyzing people's perspectives and lived experiences (Clarke et al., 2015). For cycle three, I utilized values coding to capture the participants' beliefs, attitudes, and

values (Saldaña, 2016) regarding school actions that promote, inhibit, and oppress trust and sense of belonging. To ensure member checking, a letter was sent to the participants that thanked them for their participation in the study and summarized the main findings. There was also an invitation to provide additional feedback regarding my interpretation of the findings. Three participants, two from the first event and one from the second, provided feedback, all positively affirming the themes that were determined. They also thanked me and one of the participants from the first event suggested that I share the findings of the study with district representatives for JCPS.

Key Findings

Three cycles of coding took place for each of the questions posed during the World Café event. The themes that emerged from the first round of the WC were feeling welcome/comfortable versus sense of belonging, teacher/school actions to promote, inhibit and oppress sense of belonging, and Black culture/representation.

Themes for World Café Question 1

Feeling Welcome/Comfortable versus Sense of Belonging
The majority of the participants stated that they felt comfortable in their child's school. However, most of them noted feelings of being comfortable did not come from anything the school has done, rather the actions the parents have taken to be seen and heard. Participants also made it very clear that feeling comfortable at their child's school and feeling a sense of belonging at their child's school are not the same. One participant responded,

I do feel comfortable but not due to a sense of belonging. I'm just that parent who

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is going to make my presence be known regardless of what the school is doing.

The school doesn't do anything for parents of color to make them belong.

Additional responses recorded on the chart paper during WC that affirmed the theme were as follows:

- o "Yes, but I don't think it's because of anything school has done."

- o "I feel comfortable because my child is there."

- o "Yes, simply because I have to be there and in the know."

- o "Yes, I feel welcome, however I don't always feel that sense of belonging as a black male parent."

- o "I don't feel uncomfortable, but it feels like sometimes they are just checking the boxes."

- o "I feel comfortable because I have made it a point to make sure everyone knows me but that doesn't mean like I feel like I belong."

- o "Yes, because I value my child's success."

- o "Yes. I make myself belong by volunteering. They know me and they see what I do.

Teacher/School Actions to Promote, Inhibit, and Oppress Sense of Belonging

While many of the responses indicated actions that inhibited or oppressed a sense of belonging or alluded to no action on behalf of the school, participants did share a few actions schools take to make them feel like they belong. Those actions include authentic and down to earth teachers, open and consistent communication, encouragement for parents to be included that is extended through personal invitations from the teachers and an organized and friendly atmosphere. One participant noted the importance of schools having a friendly and smiling front office staff, "If they greet me with a smile, then it

makes me feel more comfortable." Another participant shared her experience,

> I feel completely comfortable visiting my child's school. Teachers are down to earth, great personalities and super engaged with our children and their learning. I also appreciate how organized her classroom is and that she invites me to be a part of the room by volunteering.

A common theme that emerged within actions that inhibit a sense of belonging centered around not allowing physical entrance into the building. One parent responded, "When my daughter was in private school, I didn't feel welcome because they didn't allow you in the building. If my child is there, I have to be able to come in." Another parent, whose child attends public school concurred with the following:

> No, I feel like the school doesn't want me to enter the classroom while class is going on. Maybe more parent participation will improve or help children not be disruptive. If parents are encouraged to take one day out of the month to spend with their child's class it would help.

Other actions taken by teachers and administrators that inhibit a sense of belonging for Black parents include lack of information and/or contradictory messages from administrators. Participants indicated that schools neglected to make them feel like a true part of the team in their child's education by excluding them from crucial conversations about their child, not valuing their opinion or having systems and structures that allow their voices to be heard. One participant shared the following:

> You don't ask my opinion about diversity, equity, and inclusion stuff despite it being obvious I'm one of few Black families. Don't just ask me about Black History in February, ask me to come speak other times. I have other value than

just during Black History Month. When this happens, it feels like you just want

me to write a check and keep it moving.

Another participant shared her experience about being invited to a meeting by the

principal.

I was excited at first because I thought he really wanted to hear what I had to say

but when I got there the counselor did all of the talking and the principal never

even looked up from his phone. Not even when I was talking. I was so mad I

never went back for another meeting.

When discussing her role as part of "the team" that supports her son, another mom shared

the following:

I did not always feel informed by the administration even though I was supposed

to be part of "the team" that heavily influences the decisions being made for my

son. When I did attend meetings with the administrators, I realized there had been

lots of conversations I had not been a part of including questions about teachers

and their interactions with my child. I also wasn't part of conversations about

behavior situations or the curriculum or incidents that may have influenced his

emotions and actions. To me that told me everything about the culture of that

building.

Additional frustrations stemmed from a parent who discussed inconsistent messaging

from the school:

There were always contradictory messages from my daughter's school. One

person would tell you it was ok to do something then when you did it another

person would tell you it wasn't ok. Then one person would share information with

you and the next time you would call and someone else answered the phone they would tell you they couldn't tell you. Getting contradictory messages are frustrating.

While the terms inhibit and oppress both result in hindrance and/or prevention of an action, the hardships caused by oppressive actions also include unjust exercise of authority. Examples of actions taken by schools that perpetuate hardships for Black parents attempting to belong at their child's school uncovered during this study included lack of equitable accountability, teacher bias, and an unwillingness to confront uncomfortable topics such as race and curriculum that reflects today's society and climate. When discussing a lack of equitable accountability, one participant recounted a situation that occurred with his middle school son:

The students had been asked to create a poster with visuals that described their experience at school. My son had included pictures of monkeys on his poster and when I asked him why he put those on there he said other White students had called him a monkey twice, but nothing was done about it. Yet the time my son made a bad choice and tried to pull off a girl's hijab I got an email about the situation with a PowerPoint all about Muslim culture and the expectation that I review the information with my son. Don't get me wrong, my son was in the wrong and I was happy to discuss all of this with him and give him consequences but if you are going to do that for Muslim culture why not Black Culture? When things like this happen, it feels like the school is not holding people equally accountable for all cultures.

After he shared this experience, another parent responded, "That's because they are not willing to have an uncomfortable conversation."

Allowing the status quo to continue without the willingness to be flexible and actionable will maintain structures that oppress. When discussing an attempt to be plugged into his son's school one parent shared the following sentiments about his involvement on the board of directors:

> You ask me to be part of the board yet, you still expect me to conform to your structures. Black folk are working at 8:30 in the morning and not driving 45 minutes for 30 minutes of coffee.

"Exactly," one mother responded. "At my daughter's school they do things the way they do things and expect me to be flexible. At the end of the day, I had to be flexible because I knew the school wouldn't be." After this participant shared this sentiment, another participant looked at me and said, "Shouldn't it be the school's responsibility to be flexible?" The participants all shook their heads in agreement as I also positively affirmed by saying, "Yes, which is why it is so important that I learn from all of you about what needs to be changed at the school level."

This comment prompted a discussion about the misalignment between what schools say they do and what they actually do.

> Schools want you to think they do all these things but it's not real. They spend all of this time on brochures and fliers to showcase the school but it's not really what the school is about. If you are about equity, then you got to do more than put a Black student on your brochure. It's like a bait and switch.

One parent responded, "They will tell you or advertise they are doing something just to get you to the school and you get there and nothing like that is going on."

Black Culture/Representation

Representation and the importance of understanding Black culture was a theme that permeated across all questions and all conversations. More than anything the participants noted ways in which this element was minimized or completely absent from their child's school. Participants all made mention of the lack of staff diversity that often exists at their child's school which left them wondering things like "How is inclusion implemented?" and "How do you have a White teacher teaching Black history?" When discussing the importance of representation another participant noted,

> You say diversity is part of your core values but the visuals in your school don't
> represent the Black experience and no other people of leadership looks like the
> Black families you are trying to recruit.

A lack of understanding of Black culture was also attributed to a negative sense of belonging for Black families. One participant shared, "The Black experience is not monolithic, and we shouldn't treat it as such. See each child for who they are, not just their skin color." Participants all concurred that unless you are Black, you can't understand what it is like to always worry about whether or not anyone is going to look like you when you show up to places.

Themes for World Café Question 2

School Structures that Promote Sense of Belonging

As the principal, school structures are something that I can directly influence. While this question focused on participant lived experiences as a student, I feel they have strong implications for family engagement structures. Although the responses varied, they all shared the common theme of opportunities to showcase and/or celebrate talent. One participant responded, "Some of the things I remember most were talent shows, picture day, fun times and anything the school did to let us show our talent." Another participant shared fond memories of being celebrated:

> Rewards and awards. You were rewarded and awarded for good effort, good grades, good conduct, and other things. I have a vivid memory of being rewarded with Dairy Queen blizzards for making the honor roll in middle school. I also remember the awards ceremony and being rewarded in front of other students on my middle school team at the end of the year. It was nice and motivating.

Teacher Actions that Promote, Inhibit, and Oppress Sense of Belonging

While the school structures that recognized students and promoted fun contributed to a positive sense of belonging, teacher actions that helped increase sense of belonging for the participants in this study were grounded in authentic relationships in which connections were made. Daily interactions were important as well as "having teachers who weren't afraid to connect with students." When I asked more about this statement, the participants shared the following:

> Most of the White teachers didn't live near the school and so some of them acted afraid to connect with us. Like they didn't know what to say or do. But the best

ones were the ones that took time to get to know us and make real connections.

You could tell they were genuine with their words and actions.

The role of counselor was highlighted by two different participants as having more of an impact on sense of belonging than the teachers because "My counselor was engaged with each student and knew each of us by name. She gave us the information we needed to follow our path and be successful."

If fun, rewarding, and authentic actions promoted a sense of belonging, then it only makes sense that uniformity and disingenuine behaviors inhibited it. Grouping all Black students together was a common frustration expressed by the participants, noting the lack of effort to get to know them on an individual basis. When one participant shared, "I was so frustrated when teachers called on me to represent all Black kids" every other participant nodded in agreement. This prompted another participant to say, "If you weren't a Black athlete then you weren't important." The conversation of having teachers who were genuine and those who were not continued to surface as participants discussed the importance of building relationships with teachers. One participant posited "How can you make someone feel like they belong if you are afraid of them?"

Sadly, a large portion of the responses fell into the category of oppressive actions. Several of the participants attended schools whose student body was predominantly White. As a result, so were the structures in the school. As the participants talked about their experiences in school, they recounted several factors that they didn't realize as a student were in place to "keep them down." "They put most of the Black kids in the same class, obsessed over uniforms and would call the Black kids out for things they let the White kids do, especially in the hallway." Another participant shared,

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Looking back now there were so many things I wasn't exposed to, so many things I didn't know about. For example, I was given a scholarship which I thought was a good thing, however, I now know it was my school's way of trying to diversify the school. Everything was a competition and not only was I competing with the White girls, I was also competing with the few other Black girls when an opportunity became available.

While some of the participants were able to give accounts about specific actions taken by schools, much of the marginalization stemmed from inaction from schools which perpetuated systems and structures that were oppressive from the inception as evidenced by the following responses that were recorded on chart paper:

- o "I never felt as if I belonged"
- o "I don't think any of my schools did anything to make me feel like I fit in"
- o "I'm trying to remember"
- o "I didn't feel a sense of belonging at my school"
- o "Nothing"

Representation

As with the parental experiences, representation was a predominant theme that emerged within the recounted student experiences of the participants. Being able to connect with someone that "looks like me" was a defining factor that influenced a sense of belonging for the participants and the participants that attended all Black or predominantly Black schools indicated a stronger sense of belonging than the participants who attended a more racially integrated or predominantly White school. One participant noted:

I went to a predominantly White middle school and never felt as if I belonged. In high school I attended a predominantly Black high school, and it made a world of difference. Teachers and administrators looked like me and understood my existence in this world. The programming and class settings were more inclusive, and some were even tailored for Black students.

Within the same conversation, another participant recounted the difference in his experience when he transferred from an integrated school to a predominantly Black school:

At Central, everywhere you looked there was someone who looked like you. That was motivating and provided that hope factor. You didn't have to be an athlete to be somebody. At my previous school if you weren't a Black athlete then you weren't important.

As the conversation continued, one participant shared the introspection this conversation provided for her, "I knew I was different, but I guess back then I didn't really grasp that I should have been treated differently or that others should have been more conscious about diversity."

Understanding the importance of representation, other participants who attended predominantly White schools expressed their frustration with their school's lack of attention and intention to create inclusive cultures for Black students. As the participants discussed programming that was present or absent at their schools one participant shared, "There were no affinity groups and if we hadn't asked for things like Black Student Union, it never would have happened." Another common message that emerged from this

topic was the need to expand Black history beyond Black History Month in February and to move beyond the "same four Black people in history" when discussing Black culture.

Community Not School

Although some of the participants were able to share positive school experiences that helped influence their sense of belonging at school, a common feeling shared among the participants was that their greatest sense of belonging came from church and community programs instead of school. The participants recounted common similar experiences from community programs like Upward Bound and Black Achievers that not only increased their sense of belonging but provided access and opportunities that the school did not. One participant said, "I'm trying to remember what my elementary school did to make me feel like I belonged…nothing. I had to go to church to feel like I belonged" to which another participant in the group responded, "What the community programs did, the school should have been doing."

Themes for World Café Question 3

What Schools Have Done to Build Trust

When analyzing the data to answer RQ2: *How do trust and parent/family engagement structures impact sense of belonging for Black parents/families*, it became apparent that trust is an area for improvement for schools when working with Black families. The participants were able to provide some examples that have helped them develop trust with their child's school, however, the majority of the responses indicated experiences that eroded trust or desired actions the parents wished schools would consider. For the participants in this study, trust is built with schools when there is

transparency and organization, especially when dealing with administration. Additional

factors that help build trust include school staff's ability to actively listen to parents,

remain objective, and communicate clearly using multiple platforms. Parents in this

study shared their appreciation for administrators who took time to sit down with them

and "really listen" to what they had to say. One mother in the second session shared the

importance of "not feeling judged or rushed" when she met with the principal about an

issue her daughter was having. Providing opportunities for all parent voices to be heard

was also discussed when one parent shared how much she appreciated a community

forum she attended at her child's school but noted events like that only build trust if the

school "actually takes the information gained from the community forum and does

something with it" to which another participant responded, "Yeah don't ask my opinion

then do nothing with it." When discussing communication between home and school the

participants noted the schools "can never overcommunicate" with families, noting "the

more I know the better I am able to help my child." Even more important than the

volume of communication however was consistency.

What Schools Have Done to Erode Trust

Sadly, there were no shortages in experiences when it came to school actions that

have eroded trust with the participants of this study. Factors such as lack of transparency,

unclear communication, inconsistency, and lack of follow through countered the positive

experiences previously shared that build trust. However, other factors that emerged

included ways in which administrators treated staff, staff focusing only on negative

behaviors, lack of equitable practices and staff cultural awareness. One participant noted:

Trust begins the moment you walk into the front office. You can tell how the

principal treats the staff by the way the front office staff treats visitors. They are

the face of the school and make or break how welcome you feel. If they are nasty

to you or make you feel uncomfortable it's hard to get past that. Then you see the

principal interact with staff and you see where it comes from. They are

disrespectful to the staff or treat some of the staff differently and that bleeds down

to the way the staff treats the kids and the parents.

When talking about staff actions, another participant talked about the message it sends

about a school when a staff member won't send their own child to the school, "Why

should I trust you with my child if you won't even send your own child to this school?"

Another factor discussed by the participants was when schools only focus on the

negative behaviors which often leads to inequitable consequences and discipline practices

for Black students. When discussing an experience with her son's school, one participant

noted:

As a parent that is involved with my child's school, I see that not all students are

treated equally. Don't call all the time because there is a problem. I got PTSD

from when my child was in elementary school so when middle and high school

called, even if it was a good thing, I worried when the phone rang, and I saw it

was the school.

Based on participant perspectives, inequitable actions take place because school staffs

don't remain objective and instead make assumptions based on biases:

Breaking trust occurs when an incident happens, and the administrators don't ask

questions. They just assume based on one story. Then the repercussions don't

appropriately meet the actions. When presenting an issue or incident, if the staff

can show objectivity when discussing the child's involvement, I can trust that it

may not be based on one idea or be biased.

This prompted other participants to respond, "My son feels targeted. They try to treat the

kids the same, but I know my son is still treated differently than the White kids."

Participants felt as though these inequitable actions resulted from a lack of

cultural understanding on behalf of the staff, noting "Teachers and staff don't understand

various cultures" and "have a lack of education in giving consequences to Black

students." One mother referenced her own experience growing up in church which

mirrored her own daughter's experience.

Here we sit in church all week being expected to be full of energy and call and

response with the pastor and social and talking with the other members of the

church. That's how we show we are paying attention and participating. Then we

come to school and try to do the same thing and get labeled as bad or sassy or

defiant. I want to tell the teachers "My daughter is just being a little Black girl,

not defiant."

When discussing the lack of cultural awareness, participants noted that a common

reaction for some White teachers was to claim, "they don't see color." "If they don't see

color then they don't see me or my child. I need them to see that I am Black to better

understand what that means." Another frustration the participants shared about White

teachers when dealing with Black students and families is when they transition into

"White Savior" mode, attempting to "save the Black kids." One participant shared:

Stop trying to be the White Savior. Quit trying to save all the Black kids. We

don't need you going to other White teachers talking about ways to save my child.

When dealing with Black families sometimes everything doesn't need a response.

Quit trying to immediately act and fix the problem and just listen.

The need for increased awareness was not reserved solely for White teachers.

One participant shared how her daughter was treated differently by an older Black

teacher with lighter complected skin. She noted that this teacher "picked at the darker

toned students." This experience prompted a conversation about colorism. Colorism, as

defined by the Oxford online dictionary (Oxford, n.d.), is prejudice or discrimination

against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically among people of the same ethnic or

racial group. Despite the variance in skin tone, all of the participants agreed unanimously

that "colorism is a real thing." One participant discussed her lived experiences of trying

to avoid being "one of those Black girls" all through school just to fit in. She recounted:

I remember never wanting to wear braids when I was growing up because I didn't

want to be seen as one of *those* Black girls. Black girls are usually thought of as

loud and aggressive. Being darker skinned made it more difficult. I remember

trying so hard to hide my Blackness just to fit in.

Representation

Not surprisingly, the role of representation surfaced yet again in the final

discussion prompt of the event. When discussing decisions that led to school choice for

her daughter, one participant shared:

When I go somewhere, anywhere, the first thing I do is look to see how many

Black people there are to see if I belong. When I was looking for a school for my

daughter one of the first things I did was go on the school's website and see what

the administration looked like and what the teachers looked like. I needed to be

sure there was someone there at the school who would be able to look out for her

based on an outward appearance. If it's an all-white staff, then I don't feel

comfortable that there is anyone there who understands my child.

In addition to being able to see themselves in the staff, participants also noted the

importance of having curricular materials and resources that are up to date and reflect the

students that are in the school. One participant summarized the feeling of the group when

she stated, "Representation is a real thing. We have to be able to take our kids

somewhere they don't feel intimidated."

While the findings from each of the questions generated some variance in

responses and themes, there was also overlap which produced three common themes.

The common themes that were threaded throughout the study were representation,

cultural understanding and appreciation and respecting family and community assets.

The next section will outline the findings when filtered through values coding.

Discussion around these themes will be highlighted in chapter 5.

Values Coding

To capture the values, attitudes and beliefs of the participants, values coding was

applied during cycle three to each of the questions from the World Café event. Table 4.1

displays individual values that emerged.

World Café Questions		
WCQ1: Do you feel comfortable coming to your child's school? Do you feel like you belong? If yes, what does the school do to make it feel like that? If not, what does the school do to make it feel like that?	WCQ2: When you were a student, what kinds of things did your school do to make you feel like you belonged or fit in?	WCQ3: What do schools do that make or break your trust with them as partners in your child's education?
Values Coding		
genuine/authentic	connection	respect
representation	representation	cultural representation
parent advocacy	community support	follow through
inclusive	cultural understanding	equity
courage	opportunity	communication
judgmental/exclusive		visuals

Table 4.1

An analysis of the codes in this table affirms the feelings and beliefs of the participants in this study as it relates to the research questions. Schools that are inclusive and have a commitment to equity as evidenced by representation in staffing, curriculum and visuals is something that the parents in this study highly value when determining their sense of belonging. When attempting to engage with schools, it is important that staff members, especially administrators, build connections with Black families by being genuine and respectful. Those relationships can be enhanced when schools value parents and community support as partners and provide opportunities for them to engage with one another. There is a belief on behalf of the parents in this study that trust is enhanced with consistency and follow through.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings gained from investigating the perceptions of Black parents about systems and structures that promote, inhibit, and oppress trust and sense of belonging at their child's school. Participants assembled at a community location to engage in a World Café event and share their lived experiences as a student and parent. Data were analyzed through three cycles of coding to determine themes and values. Themes that emerged included teacher/school actions that promote, inhibit, and oppress trust and sense of belonging and representation. Values, attitudes, and beliefs that emerged as important to the participants based on their responses include authentic relationships grounded in connection and mutual respect, representation in staffing and curricular resources and cultural understanding and appreciation. The findings from this chapter will be discussed and connected to the literature and theoretical frameworks in Chapter 5 and implications and recommendations will be made.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Combatting the achievement and opportunity gap for Black students continues to be a targeted mission of school improvement plans across the nation. Parent involvement has been shown to positively impact the student achievement of Black students (Barnard, 2004; Castro et al., 2015; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003; Jeynes, 2005; Wilder, 2014), yet Black parents continue to encounter barriers when attempting to engage with their child's school (Kim, 2009; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Latunde, 2017; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016; Louque & Latunde, 2014; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Yoder & Lopez, 2013). Inequitable practices that stem from a lack of cultural competence and appreciation inhibit trusting relationships between families and school which are the cornerstone of effective family engagement practices (Epstein, 2010; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Failure to investigate and acknowledge the biases that exist in family engagement systems and structures could further marginalize the opportunities for both Black students and families. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how the perceptions about family engagement structures influence the sense of belonging for Black families at their child's school and utilize the findings to make recommendations to school leaders about ways in which they can create more equitable and inclusive family engagement practices.

This chapter includes a discussion of the findings of this study and connects the discussion with the literature and theoretical frameworks outlined in chapter 2. The

chapter concludes with implications and recommendations for myself, schools, districts, policymakers, and future research.

Discussion of Findings

Trust and Respect

When discussing factors that promote a sense of belonging at their child's school, participants mentioned trusting relationships as a foundational element. Trust and respect are vital ingredients of meaningful family partnerships (Epstein, 2010; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013); however, trust between African American families and schools has historically been compromised by racial microaggressions (Reynolds, 2010) and feelings of marginalization (Hill et al., 2018b). Therefore, it was imperative that the impact trust has on sense of belonging for Black families at their child's school be investigated.

The findings of this study confirm the research studies discussed in the literature review. When examining a sense of belonging with students, Cook-Sather (2002) found that when students were invited to share their perspective, it empowered their sense of shared responsibility and increased their sense of belonging. Feedback from the participants in this study, affirmed the same to be true with sense of belonging for parents. Enlisting the voices and perspectives of Black families, with the intent of utilizing the feedback to guide decision making, increases trust and respect (Williams & Barber, 2007), both of which are foundational elements for effective family engagement structures (Constantino, 2015; Epstein, 2010; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

When discussing sense of belonging, one of the first themes to emerge was a need to differentiate between feeling comfortable and feeling like part of the school

community. Feeling comfortable equates to being allowed in the space, whereas belonging is associated with being invited into the space. This aligns with Barton et al.'s (2004) assertion about the critical role space plays when dismantling barriers to equitable family engagement structures. Participants reported that a warm welcome (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Howard & Reynolds, 2008) and a smiling face in the front office helps support feelings of being comfortable at their child's school. Being invited to belong to something is often predicated by an authentic relationship that is grounded in trust and mutual respect. Personal invitations (Latunde, 2017; Uwah et al., 2008) and encouragement from the staff (Henderson et al., 2007) enhances the willingness of families to engage in a successful partnership with schools.

The parents in the study shared that trust and respect can be developed in a variety of ways, one of which includes effective communication. Participant recommendations included, "Clear and consistent communication across multiple platforms and avoid using a lot of big words that parents don't understand." This recommendation aligns with the desires of previous studies who posit effective two-way communication should be clear, free of educational jargon and not focus solely on negative student issues (Fan et al., 2012; Leatherwood, 2017; Louque & Latunde, 2014; Kim, 2009).

Other ways in which schools have worked to build trust with the participants in this study include transparency and organization, especially when working with administrators. The parents indicated that they trust principals who can remain objective and unbiased when dealing with students. Consistency and follow through were other elements that help develop trust. One participant shared, "Having a principal or teacher who invites feedback from Black parents, and does something with it, makes me feel like

I can trust them." The parents also noted the critical role the principal plays in establishing trust. "The leader sets the tone. If the principal trusts the students and the teachers, they will usually trust the principal back. As a parent I notice these things." As with the findings of Ma's study (2003), teachers and administrators play a critical role in establishing a safe and trusting environment.

Feeling valued (Latunde, 2017; Posey-Maddox, 2017a) is another element that emerged under the theme of trust with the parents in this study. "When you belong your opinion matters," one participant noted. By creating conditions in which the opinions and input of Black families is welcomed, even when it differs from their own, schools send the message that they are genuinely interested in establishing equal partnerships to support student success. Commonalities of staff members that the parents in this study trusted included those who were genuine and authentic. "They took time to get to know me and my child and they listened instead of just trying to tell me something all the time."

The participants in the study also discussed ways in which schools have eroded their trust, which has negatively impacted their sense of belonging in their child's school. When there is a lack of diversity in representation of the school staff, it can be challenging for Black families to see the school as a safe place for themselves or their children. Therefore, it was not surprising that representation surfaced when discussing trust.

> If I don't know anyone when I go to a school the first person I am going to look for is a person of color that looks like me. They are most likely gonna be the first person I trust because I know we have something in common.

Participants in this study also felt as though a lack of diversity in representation led to a lack of understanding about Black culture which aligns with previous studies (Reynolds, 2010; Thompson, 2003a; Weiss et al., 2009). When educators lack awareness and/or appreciation of other cultures, their biases can lead to actions that breed mistrust with Black families. Some of these actions include a laser-like focus on negative behaviors which makes parents feel like their child(ren) are being targeted and inequitable discipline and consequences of Black students. Participants noted that when they feel like the staff "has it out" for their child and are unwilling to "get both sides of the story" it makes it hard to trust them. These findings align with the feelings of marginalization and lack of trust in schools experienced by participants in previous studies (Hill et al., 2018b; Lareau & Horvat, 1999) in which they feared their child would be treated unfairly in school.

Parent involvement has been negatively impacted for Black families by ways in which they have been treated by school personnel (Brown & Brandon, 2007; Delpit, 2012; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016). When school personnel are perceived as insensitive, condescending, and judgmental it can hinder trust and lead to alienation of interaction between families and schools (Abdul-Adkil & Farmer, 2006). The data from this study aligns with these findings in that the participants in this study noted certain treatment from school staff, especially administrators, negatively impacted their trust and sense of belonging at their child's school. Biased perceptions and actions on behalf of school personnel left participants in this study feeling devalued and mistrusting. Ways in which trust and mutual respect have been compromised for the parents in this study include; when school staff dismisses their

concerns, reacts without listening or fails to consider more than one point of view, and fails to see parents as value-added partners.

Cultural Understanding, Appreciation, and Representation

When working with Black Families it is important to consider historical implications that have created marginalized conditions for family engagement. Historically African Americans have experienced oppression as a result of the perceptions and assumptions of schools (Brandon & Brandon, 2007; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016; Yosso, 2005); therefore, the historical factors and/or conditions that have negatively impacted family sense of belonging for the participants in this study was analyzed. To answer RQ3: *What historical factors and/or conditions have negatively impacted parent/family sense of belonging to a school community,* it was necessary to investigate the lived experiences of the participants by asking them to reflect upon their experiences as parents and as students. Implications with negative connotations that surfaced in both settings centered largely around a deficit versus asset mindset with Black students and families, a lack of cultural understanding/awareness of Black culture, and a lack of care/commitment to create inclusive systems and structures.

Another major theme that occurred for this study included a focus on representation and cultural appreciation. The participants in this study could not emphasize enough how important it is to have staff members who look like them at their child's school to feel like they belong. When searching for schools for their children, the participants discussed looking at the staff page on school websites to make decisions about where they would send their children. Touring schools and noting diversity in staff

and diversity in representation of curricular resources and materials on the walls inside the school was an important factor when considering a sense of belonging.

Being in an environment where very few people look like you inhibits a sense of belonging (Booker, 2006; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). When the participants were students, they were looking for affinity groups with people that looked like them. Now as parents, they are doing the same thing. While staff representation was a primary factor, experiencing curricular material and content that was presented through a White lens prevented participants from seeing themselves in the curriculum as well (Finn, 1989; Harper, 2007). When the majority of the teaching and leadership staff are White, awareness of the need for affinity groups and culturally responsive practices may be absent. Instead of investigating a lack of engagement of Black students and families, schools were quick to assume or blame without conducting an internal review of the Eurocentric practices. This also led to a deficit mindset that focused on what Black students and families couldn't do instead of focusing on their assets to develop a more inclusive environment. Black student achievements are often reserved for the athletic arena which sends the message that unless you are an athlete, you have no value.

The participants noted "color-blindness" as another oppressive factor. When schools don't see color, they don't see the individual talents and needs of each student and instead expect all students to fall in alignment with the traditional practices that were created through a White dominant ideological lens. When considering historical implications for sense of belonging, schools should be considering the following: Are schools creating or increasing the gaps?

Other factors that threaten effective home/school relationships include teacher lack of cultural understanding about ways in which parents who don't look like them engage with their child (Reynolds, 2010; Thompson, 2003a; Weiss et al., 2009). Parents in this study cited examples such as calling CPS because of discipline procedures and adopting a White Savior mentality trying to "save all the Black kids" instead of listening and providing support for the parents. Parents in this study also indicated concerns about racial injustices similar to those cited in a study by Lareau and Horvat (1999). These injustices included an equitable approach to celebrating holidays for all cultures, only focusing on Black history in the month of February, and only celebrating the contributions of the same four Black Americans.

Practices that affirm racial and ethnic identities (Booker, 2006; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005) were another theme that emerged. Because representation is a part of one's identity, schools that emphasize the relevance of a student's culture increase their sense of self-worth, self-esteem, and sense of belonging (Harper, 2007; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015). Participants discussed the importance of representation and the impact it had on their sense of belonging at their child's school. Schools with diverse staff, diversity in curriculum, and intentional implementation of affinity groups for Black students were look-fors when participants were choosing a school for their child and/or determining if they or their child belonged to the school community. When schools create conditions in which families can see themselves (Finn, 1989) or emphasize the relevance of their culture (Harper, 2007) it helps validate their identity and self-concept and sends the message that their cultural capital is valued and appreciated (Allen & White-Smith, 2018; McGowan-Robinson, 2016).

Parent Recommendations for Increasing Sense of Belonging for Black Families

Based on the results from this study, one could question, "If respect and trust are the essential elements of family engagement models, what measures are in place to ensure trust and respect are being developed with all families?" In addition to honoring the lived experiences of the participants, this study sought to include the participants in developing proposed solutions to the challenge centered around inhibited and oppressed sense of belongings. Participants were invited to share suggestions about changes and recommendations for ways in which schools could increase sense of belonging for Black families, which provides insight into RQ4 of this study. The parents in this study expressed sincere appreciation for investigating this topic. A school's lack of awareness, insight, or care/desire to make change is one of the most oppressive actions currently in place to perpetuate the marginalized sense of belonging for Black families. When discussing recommendations, one participant noted, "Instead of blaming us or expecting us to always follow their rules, maybe more school and district leaders could listen to what we have to say."

As a practitioner and researcher, I want to know what those who are most impacted have to say so that I can look to realign family engagement practices at my own school and make recommendations that can positively impact that active voice and sense of belonging for Black families in my district and other districts across the nation. As previously mentioned in chapter 4, participants noted the importance of school leadership. When discussing the role the principal plays, one participant highlighted the importance of authentic and genuine leadership. "If you're not real or organic people will

see that. You can tell when the principal has their own agenda versus when they are looking out for the school."

Participants also felt strongly about the need for increased opportunities for Black families to have a presence in the school. "Make sure Black students and families are represented and can see themselves in all aspects of the school." One participant noted, "Schools should ask themselves; what opportunities are they providing for Black parents to get plugged in?" Having a mutual understanding and common commitment to ensure these opportunities exist would help develop relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) between school and families. To help increase relational trust and impact social relationships between home and school participants from this study suggested that schools should "be intentional about having Black families in the building by sending personal invitations and then following up with them if they don't show up."

While a variety of recommendations were made, taking time to understand Black culture without assumptions and creating structures with equitable representation was a theme that was threaded throughout the study. One participant in the second session noted,

> Inclusion is important. Letting kids know that they matter, no matter who they are or where they come from. Increasing family events to get parents and guardians in the building. If they have buy-in, the connection between school and family will be strengthened. Everyone should be all in, and for the same reason.

Because many of the participants noted several examples of feeling misunderstood due to a lack of cultural competence on behalf of the school staff, a recommendation made by several of the groups was the need for school leaders to "make intentional decisions that

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increase staff awareness about Black culture." For one father, this starts with the school

leader increasing his/her own awareness and understanding:

> Increased accessibility and engagement opportunities with school leadership.
> Principals need to make time in their schedule to interact and learn about and
> from families that don't look like them. As a leader you must forget what you
> already know and be open to new ideas.

> In addition to learning about Black culture, participants made recommendations

for structural changes. Instead of focusing on family engagement structures that are so

formal (Kim, 2009) like parent-teacher conferences and PTA meetings, the parents in this

study suggested school leaders should embed more opportunities for Black students and

families to celebrate their talents. Participant ideas for this included talent shows, fun

family events like dances and having Black parents in the building on picture day.

> Black families go all out on picture day so having Black moms there so the Black
> kids, especially the Black girls, have someone they know can help them make
> sure they are all good would be helpful.

These suggestions aligned with Tus' (2020) study that discussed the positive impact

family engagement structures that focus on recognition, appreciation, and familiarization

can have on the self-concept of parents.

   In addition to increasing cultural competence and creating spaces and structures

that honor the cultural wealth of Black families when developing family engagement

structures, schools should partner with local churches and other community organizations

in which Black families are already connected to (Latunde, 2017). One group

recommended that schools, "be intentional about partnering with organizations that can

provide resources for Black families, then make sure the Black families know about

them."

During both sessions, participants offered a variety of suggestions. Although she

nodded her head in affirmation of the suggestions made, one mother in the first session

vulnerably shared the following:

> I think understanding the totality of what most/many black families go through
>
> and understanding their way of life has to be taken into consideration when trying
>
> to engage them more. I think many black parents care about the quality of
>
> education their children receive but may be overworked, stressed, or
>
> overwhelmed by other life challenges that it makes it harder for them to give their
>
> children's school the level of engagement they are seeking.

Connections to Theoretical Framework

Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres posits that student success is maximized

when all three spheres work in tandem with one another (Epstein, 2001). Lack of family

sense of belonging could stifle successful triangulation of home, school, and community.

In this study the relationship between the three spheres was examined through a Critical

Race Theory lens. Examining the counter-narratives of the Black parents in this study

allowed me to determine ways in which race and cultural capital influenced a sense of

belonging at their child's school. Based on the data gathered from the participants in this

study, there is coherence between community and family spheres for Black families.

Many of the families cited community programs and spaces as the only place that

promoted a sense of belonging for them. Community partners acknowledge and value the

cultural capital Black families bring to the table. In addition, they are grounded in

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respectful relationships and effective communication that honors Black culture and representation. Historically educational systems and structures have not valued the cultural capital of Black parents but have instead made assumptions about what they think is best for family engagement based on educational expertise of the school staff. Racialized assumptions operate from a deficit mindset and tend to blame Black parents instead of valuing what they are already doing to support their child (Reynolds, 2010; Yosso, 2005).

When school structures are created through the lens of the dominant ideology it can create oppressive conditions and reduce cultural capital for Black families (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Black families' sense of belonging is hindered when they are expected to conform. Based on Bourdieu's Theory of Structural Constraints, these systems and structures can result in unequal access for parents whose culture and lifestyle are not congruent with the school's culture (Huang, 2019). Parents in this study cited structural constraints such as time, inconsistent communication, power differentials asserted between administrators and Black families when attempting to work as a team, and lack of governance to gain the voice of Black families as factors that have led to an unequal sense of belonging for Black families. As with Yoder and Lopez (2013), participants were left feeling marginalized and powerless when they attempted to advocate for their child. These findings also point towards practices which reinforce racial and class hierarchies that position Black parents as receivers of family involvement instead of framers of family engagement (Barton et al., 2004). Race and racism are embedded in the U.S. systems and structures (Bell, 1995) and since school structures replicate societal

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structures it can be purported that inequitable family engagement structures that expect

Black families to conform are also grounded in racist decisions.

An inability to find common ground inhibits the home/school relationship

(Sheehey & Sheehey, 2007). The findings from this study indicate a school's

unwillingness to revise their systems and structures to meet the needs of Black families.

Schools don't always honor the accumulated experiences of the parents but instead

assume their professional thinking is superior. Howard and Reynolds (2008) cite lack of

urgency and pressure from policy makers as the culprit for stagnant, Eurocentric family

engagement structures.

Because environmental context and an individual's experiences can influence

their sense of belonging (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) school structures and staff actions play a

major factor in the oppressive microsystem of school/family partnerships. When

examining family engagement systems and structures through a CRT lens based on the

lived experiences of the participants in the study, the findings suggest that oppressive

actions still exist and inhibit the sense of belonging of Black families.

Barriers for family engagement identified in the literature mirrored some of the

barriers identified by the participants of this study. Of the five barrier categories

identified by Yoder and Lopez (2013) the majority of the barriers in this study fell into

the marginalization category. Participant examples of marginalization that aligned with

the participants in Fan et al's., (2012) study were focusing on negative behaviors and

actions, not understanding Black culture, lack of representation and an expectation that

families conform to traditional school centric structures and practices. Participant

responses also mirrored those of Leatherwood's (2017) narrative in that schools are quick

to call home about for negative reasons, often without having all of the information about

the situation or without considering multiple perspectives. Concerns of racial bias and

discrimination (Hill et al., 2018b) surfaced in the results of this study, especially

concerning inequitable discipline procedures. Some of the participants in this study felt

as though their child was targeted by teachers because of the color of their skin.

Other ways in which oppressive systems surfaced in this study include teacher

bias, lack of equitable accountability for staff and students, and an unwillingness to

confront uncomfortable topics such as race and curriculum that reflects today's society

and climate. When schools are allowed to maintain a status quo that validates the efforts

and ideology of traditional forms of involvement, the cultural disconnect widens. A lack

of accountability exists for schools to ensure equity centered practices prevail for students

and families. Schools are often quick to blame Black parents for not conforming to

school-centric practices, labeling them as uninvolved. Because school structures often

mirror societal structures (Bourdieu, 1973) schools continue to operate using Eurocentric

practices. Failure to take an assets-based approach in which the cultural capital of Black

families is better understood, appreciated, and embraced will continue to perpetuate

marginalized systems and structures.

Implications for Myself as a Leader

Wanting to belong is a basic human need (Maslow, 1962). Associating with

others and feeling connected as a part of something satisfies the need for safety and

security. While my attempts to belong have ranged from being chosen for the winning

softball team when I was eight to "fitting in" with the popular girls in high school and

beyond, my sense of belonging has never been compromised because of the color of my

skin. As an adult woman, I have had to learn to navigate "the good old boys club" in the workplace and overcome the inferiority complex that is bestowed upon women to ensure men, particularly White men, remain at the top of the pyramid and continue to create systems and structures that are filtered through a White male dominant ideological lens.

Despite the frustration and obstacles these structures have created, they have never caused me to feel a sense of inhibition or oppression that the participants in this study described. As a White student, I never had to worry about whether there would be other students that looked like me in my class or school. As a White parent I have never had to worry about whether there would be teachers that looked like my child at her school or understood our culture. Being White affords a multitude of advantages that we often don't recognize or acknowledge as privileges because we've never had to experience the oppression associated with being a person of color. White privilege, if left unconfronted, could continue to perpetuate systems and structures in society that inhibit and oppress students and families of color.

"To form connections with others, we must first have a sense of self," (Buchanan-Rivera, 2022, p. 84). To achieve this, we must invest in more work with our own identity. As a White educator and researcher, I am afforded the privilege of not having to think about my identity in the way the participants of this study have had to think about their identity. Most societal and education systems were established with me in mind. Prior to engaging in this study, I never gave much thought to this notion and as a result, designed family engagement opportunities through my White, school-centric lens. When mostly White families would show up to our events, I made excuses about why I thought our

Black families didn't show up, but never looked inward and thought that the White design might be part of the problem.

Being the principal of the same school for 16 years has allowed me the opportunity to build trusting relationships with hundreds of students and families. Despite these relationships, it never occurred to me that my Whiteness could be alienating families. Through the findings of this study, I was able to reflect and see the role I have played in perpetuating systems that further marginalized families and inhibited a sense of belonging by expecting them to conform to our structures. It is because of the opportunity this study afforded me to engage with participants and learn from their lived experiences that I have made and will continue to make changes to our family engagement systems and structures to create more equitable practices and identity affirming spaces.

As a White educator I have to be more cognizant of the implicit messages my lack of cultural proficient decision-making sends. I must take deliberate actions to ensure students and families understand that I see them, welcome them, and honor the assets and cultural wealth they bring. I must also be willing to compromise and challenge the status quo of not only my own beliefs, but the beliefs of my staff, to create more equitable and inclusive family engagement practices.

I know I am not alone in this work. Therefore, in addition to disrupting the inequitable practices at my own school, I feel an obligation to share the results and recommendations with other leaders in my district. To impact change, we must get comfortable being uncomfortable and that starts with understanding how our identity impacts decisions we make. When evaluating our family engagement systems through an

equity and inclusion lens we must ask ourselves, "What is present?" and "What is absent?" While examining identity we must grapple with our biases and face how that shows up. We must be willing to acknowledge that racist systems still exist, even in our own school. We must work to unpack the historical context that gave life to those systems and begin to change the narrative of school structures by creating identity affirming spaces (Buchanan-Rivera, 2022) not only for students but for families as well.

Implications for School and District Leaders

Findings from this study indicate that Black students and families are already plugged in with one another and community resources. Instead of expecting families to conform to the structural norms of schools that were created through a dominant ideology, schools should uncover the assets of their Black families and community partners, learn from them, and alter family engagement structures to be more inclusive. Altering family engagement structures to be more culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) will help increase sense of belonging for Black families by helping them see themselves in the governance and actions of the school and increase their confidence and self-efficacy (Epstein, 2010; Rodriguez et al., 2014). To help support this approach, leaders should investigate the Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) Framework as they shift from analyzing what parents should be doing to conform with the school and instead honor the experiences and resources of Black families. Space is viewed as an integral element of the EPE Framework because those who inhabit the space help guide and influence the decision made within the space (Barton et al., 2004). By providing intentional space at the school for Black families it not only sends the message "You belong here" but also "We honor the cultural capital that you bring into the space" when

co-constructing family engagement structures. Schools should ask themselves, ""How are cultural differences being accounted for to ensure trust and mutual respect aren't being impacted by racial biases?" Schools should also engage in mirror work (Buchanan-Rivera, 2022) to create identity affirming spaces for families and ultimately identify affirming family engagement structures. Mirror work forces us to examine beliefs and assumptions and is a "critical part of cultural responsivity" (Buchanan-Rivera, 2022, p. 7). To help adopt an assets-based approach, school leaders should also work with local organizations that already serve Black families (Loque & Latunde, 2014) to help bridge the cultural divide and build trust.

A theme that permeated this study was the importance of representation. Students and families need to be able to see themselves in the school. Recommendations for school leaders include engaging in an inclusion walk of their building. Examine how welcoming the environment is, paying close attention to evidence of appreciation for cultural differences. When looking at the walls, curricular materials, and resources, are all students and families represented? When developing programming and promotional materials, which students and student interests are represented? Diversity in representation should also be considered with staffing and hiring practices. Leaders should consider what protocols they have in place for recruiting and retaining applicants of color and how their commitment to diversity is showing up in interview panels and questions.

If an environment of diversity and inclusion is going to exist within a school, the tone must be set by the actions of the leader. This starts with increasing expectations around cultural awareness and appreciation through an examination of implicit biases. If

left unchecked, teacher biases, assumptions and perceptions towards parents can negatively impact trust and parent self-efficacy (Kim, 2009). Because self-esteem has been recognized as the most important predictor of sense of belonging (Ma, 2003), confronting factors that impede it is a moral imperative for schools. Leaders should also provide support through cultural competence training to help staff better understand the cultural wealth of the students and families they serve.

The findings from this study also have implications for districts and policy makers. If more equitable family engagement structures are going to be successfully enacted by schools, then district and state leaders and policy makers must create sustainable action steps. A plausible first step would be to start with and expanded definition of school engagement to move the expectations beyond showing up at school. Creating equity informed family engagement standards would help guide schools. If schools are going to place the same emphasis on family engagement as they do academic achievement, then priority standards for equitable family engagement practices need to be created by all states. Additional recommendations include drafting policies that hold schools accountable for enacting more inclusive family engagement policies, possibly even requiring schools to have affinity groups for family engagements. Finally, adequate funding must be allocated to ensure these action steps are not only prioritized by sustained.

Implications for Future Research

Several studies have investigated barriers that inhibit family engagement with Black families (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Yoder & Lopez, 2013) but have not directly investigated sense of belonging as a precursor. Based on the

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findings of this study, many of the barriers faced by Black families at their child's school impact their sense of belonging. Sense of belonging is a foundational element for human behavior; therefore, if schools don't create systems that promote a sense of belonging for Black families it could be hypothesized that family engagement will continue to be inhibited and oppressed.

Recommendations for future research include conducting a similar study with additional participants to gain more insight into other systems and structures that may be further oppressing an already marginalized community and gaining additional insight into recommendations for change. Most of the participants from this study were parents of elementary students. Because the levels of prolonged family engagement decrease at the middle and secondary level (Want et al., 2014), it may be advantageous to investigate more with parents in that role group.

Based on the feedback from the participants in this study, the recommendations center around the need for revising family engagement practices to ensure they are more culturally responsive. Additional recommendations for future research include investigating the perceptions about family engagement systems and structures through a CRT lens with staff. Since 79.3 percent of the nation's public-school teachers are White (Spiegelman, 2020), gaining insight into the role bias and privilege play into school-centric family engagement practices would be advantageous in helping develop cultural competence training to addresses biases and create more inclusive and equitable family engagement practices that promote a sense of belonging for Black families. Additional recommendations with schools include investigating staff willingness to modify family engagement structures.

Conclusions

Black families want to be engaged with their child's school, but traditional, school-centric family engagement structures often inhibit and oppress their sense of belonging, which impacts their opportunity to engage in a partnership with the school. Schools must begin to disrupt the inequities that exist for not only students but families as well. When schools move towards a model of culturally relevant family engagement that values the cultural capital of Black families it will help validate their identity and self-concept and establish more trusting and effective partnerships (Allen & White-Smith, 2018; McGowan-Robinson, 2016). Schools must be a place in which all students and families can see themselves represented in the staff, curricular materials, and resources.

White educators must increase their awareness about the roles race and culture play in educational and societal structures and be willing to confront and dismantle racialized systems. Schools must stop expecting families to conform to traditional, antiquated ideas of family involvement and instead begin to create spaces that invite Black families and community members as co-constructors. School leaders set the tone for their building; therefore, it is imperative that they begin to analyze their current systems and structures to determine if they are doing school TO families or WITH families and which families their current structures are effectively including.

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SENSE OF BELONGING FOR BLACK FAMILIES AT THEIR CHILD'S SCHOOL: AN
ACTION RESEARCH STUDY EXPLORING THE FACTORS
THAT PROMOTE, INHIBIT, AND OPPRESS

Participant Consent

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE:
Dear Parent/Guardian,
My name is Jill Handley and I am a longtime educator committed to improving opportunity and
access for students of color. I am working under the direction of Dr. Mary Brydon-Miller in the
College of Education at the University of Louisville. I am a doctoral student at the University of
Louisville. I am conducting a research study about sense of belonging for Black families at their
child's school. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information that will help you
decide if you will give consent to participate in this research.

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY:
The following is a short summary of this study to help you decide whether you want to be a part
of this study. The purpose of this study is to investigate how the perceptions about how schools
engage families influences the sense of belonging for Black families. You will be invited to
participate in an event with other Black families to talk about family engagement and sense of
belonging. I do not anticipate any risks to you during these conversations and I want to assure
you that there are no right or wrong answers. Participants will record and share their ideas and
have access to hearing and seeing the results of the conversations from all participants.

STUDY PURPOSE:
The purpose of this study is to investigate how the perceptions about how schools engage
families influences the sense of belonging for Black families at their child's school. The goal is
to make recommendations to school leaders about ways they can make sure their engagement
practices are inclusive, so all families feel a strong sense of belonging at their child's school.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS:
If you agree to participate, you will be one of 15 - 20 participants who will be participating in
this research.

PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY:
If you agree to participate in the study, you will join other Black parents/guardians at AMPED
Community Center located at 4425 Greenwood Avenue, Louisville, Kentucky, 40211 to discuss
family engagement and sense of belonging at your child's school. As you socialize and discuss
different ideas with different groups of parents/guardians, you will record your answers and each
group will share their ideas and recommendations for improvement. I will record the share
session in order to conduct an analysis of all responses later. The event will last approximately
2 ½ hours. Food will be served, and childcare will be available.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time; there will be no penalty.

RISKS AND INCONVENIENCES:
There are minimal risks and inconveniences to participating in this study. These include: You may be uncomfortable at first sharing ideas with other parents/guardians you don't know and the study might be considered an inconvenience. You may also experience a negative emotion when recounting an experience that was unpleasant.

SAFEGUARDS:
To minimize these risks and inconveniences, the following measures will be taken: An icebreaker activity will take place at the beginning of the event to allow participants to get to know one another better. Because the time of the event may coincide with lunch/dinner, food and childcare will be provided. In addition a counselor will be on site if you would like to talk to someone should you have negative emotions that stem from sharing an unpleasant experience.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
Total privacy cannot be guaranteed. I will protect your privacy to the extent permitted by law. If the results from this study are published, you will have the opportunity to decide if you want to have your name included or if you want your name kept private. The recording of the group share session will be viewed by myself to analyze participant responses.

BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY:
The possible benefits of your participation is to enhance your voice as a parent/guardian and provide perspective and recommendations for ways in which sense of belonging can be increased at schools for Black families. The results of this research will be shared with other school leaders and can help guide the design and implementation of inclusive family engagement systems and structures to increase the sense of belonging for Black families at their child's school.

ALTERNATIVES:
Since participation in this study is voluntary, the alternative to participating is to choose not to participate.

CONTACT INFORMATION:
If you have questions about the study, you can ask me now or anytime during the study. You can also call me at (502)767-5983or email me changemaker.handley@gmail.com You may also contact Dr. Mary Brydon-Miller by email mary.brydon-miller@louisville.edu If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the IRB Office at University of Louisville (502)852-5188 or by email: hsppofc@louisville.edu. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Acknowledgment and Signatures

This document tells you what will happen during the study if you choose to take part. Your signature and date indicate that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in the study. You are not giving up any legal rights to which you are entitled by signing this informed consent document though you are providing your authorization as outlined in this informed consent document. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

_____   _____
Participant Name (Please Print)   Signature of Participant

_____   _____
Printed Name of Person Explaining Consent Form   Signature of Person Explaining   Date Signed
                                                                            Consent Form (if other than the Investigator)

_____ ____   _____
Printed Name of Investigator (PI, Sub-I, or Co-I)   Signature of Investigator (PI, Sub-I, or Co-I)

CURRICULUM VITAE

Jill Handley

2405 Brighton Drive, Louisville, KY 40205   ♦ (502) 767-5983 ♦ jill.handley@jefferson.kyschools.us

PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Innovative educational leader focused on supporting teachers, and engaging with students, families, community members and colleagues to meet learning objectives and drive student progress. Committed to providing empowering leadership through equity and inclusion.

EDUCATION

Doctor of Education: Educational Leadership and Organizational Development, 6/2023
University of Louisville - Louisville, KY

Rank 1: Instructional Leadership and Supervision K-12, 05/2007
University of Louisville - Louisville, KY

Masters of Education: Elementary Education, 05/2001
University of Louisville - Louisville, KY

Bachelor of Science: Elementary Education & Learning and Behavior Disorders, 05/1997
University of Louisville - Louisville, KY

WORK HISTORY

Assistant Superintendent of Multilingual Learners, 6/2023 to Current
Jefferson County Public Schools - Louisville, Kentucky

Principal, 08/2007 to 6/2023
Kenwood Elementary – Louisville, Kentucky

Instructional Coach, 8/2004 - 08/2007
Jefferson County Public Schools - Louisville, Kentucky

Elementary Regular Education and Special Education Teacher, 8/1997 - 8/2004
Jefferson County Public Schools – Louisville, Kentucky

Handley, J. Host & Producer. *Be The Leader You Deserve Podcast.* 6/2020 - Present

https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/be-the-leader-you-deserve/id1522933343

Handley, J. (2022). Becoming a certified family friendly school. *Kentucky Teacher*, July 25.

Handley, J. (2022). Using data to change the narrative. *Envision Equity*, *May*, 8-10.

PRESENTATIONS

"Preparing School Leaders to Serve EL/ML Students and Families," *TESOL 2023: International Convention & English Language Expo*. Virtual, April, 2023.

"Full Plate Empty Cup - Individualized Professional Development that Supports The Whole Teacher,"*2023 ASCD Annual Conference: Elevate.* Denver, CO, April, 2023.

"MTSS for Families: Creating Sustainable Systems That Elevate Family and Community Engagement," *2023 ASCD Annual Conference: Elevate.* Denver, CO, April, 2023.

"From Deficit to Asset Model: Providing Equity, Inclusion, and Agency for Multilingual Learners," *KY TESOL State Conference.* Louisville, KY, March, 2023.

"Cultivating A Distinguished School of Inclusion - Our Journey To Success," *2023 National ESEA Conference: Lift Up*. Indianapolis, IN, February, 2023**.**

"Creating a Collaborative Environment with Families & Communities to Become a Certified Family Friendly School," *EdCamp Kentucky*. Virtual, January 2023.

"Triaging Teacher Burnout - Coaching, Individualized PD & Self-Care," *Learning Forward 2022 Annual Conference.* Nashville, TN, December 2022.

"Creating a Collaborative Environment with Families & Community," *NCFL Families Learning Conference Regional Meetup.* Nashville, TN, November, 2022.

"Creating a Collaborative Environment with Families & Community," *ASCD Leadership Summit: The Adaptive Leader.* National Harbor, MD, October, 2022.

"Creating a Collaborative Environment with Families & Community Stakeholders to Remove Barriers and Enhance Their Voice," *NAESP 2022 PreK - 8 Principals Annual Conference*. Louisville, KY, July, 2022.

"From Deficit to Asset Model: Providing Equity, Inclusion, and Agency for Multilingual Learners," *NAESP 2022 PreK - 8 Principals Annual Conference*. Louisville, KY, July, 2022.

"Triaging Teacher Burnout: Cultivating a Culture of Support & Continuous Improvement," *NAESP 2022 PreK- 8 Principals Annual Conference*. Louisville, KY, July, 2022.

"Triaging Teacher Burnout: From Lightly Toasted to Third Degree," *2022 ASCD Annual Conference: Recharge and Reconnect.* Chicago, IL, March, 2022.

"Triaging Teacher Burnout: From Lightly Toasted to Third Degree," *ASCD Leadership Summit.* Virtual, January, 2022.

"Triaging Teacher Burnout: Supporting Teachers Through Coaching, Individualized PD and Intentional Time for Self," *EdCamp Kentucky.* Virtual, January, 2022.

"Always Take the Cupcake," 2021 *National ESEA Conference: Educating for Tomorrow.* Virtual, February, 2021.

"Avoid Burnout: Creating and Cultivating the Culture You Deserve," *REACH Whole School Reform Conference*. Virtual, January, 2021.

"Inclusivity - The Primary Language of ALL Students: Successful Strategies for ELL's," *EdCamp Kentucky*. Bowling Green, KY, November 2019.

"Always Take the Cupcake: Recipes of a Successful School," *NWEA Fusion Annual Conference*. St. Louis, MO, June, 2019

FEATURES

Gonzales, L. & Vodicka, D. (2021). Pandemic-learned measures for engaging families. *AASA School Administrator Magazine*, *August*, 40-44.

Handley, J. Guest. "You will move mountains: The Kenwood Elementary School success story." Charting New Paths in PreK - 12 Education. 2022 July 6. http://bit.ly/3WOfvNa

Harp, L. (2021). After a year of pandemic, schools see fronts for moving ahead. *Bright Spots*. https://prichardcommittee.org/bright-spots-pandemic-elementary/

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- 2023 David L. Clark Scholar
- 2021 National ESEA Distinguished School Award - Kenwood Elementary
- 2021 Family Friendly School - Kenwood Elementary (first school in the state to earn recognition)
- 2021 School of Success with Solution Tree - Kenwood Elementary
- 2019 State and National School of Character - Kenwood Elementary
- 2017 Hilliard Lyons Principal of the Year

SERVICE MEMBERSHIP

Board Member, 08/2021 - current
Imagination Library Louisville - Louisville, KY

Member, 04/2022 - current
Louisville Latin Educational Outreach (LLEO) - Louisville, KY

ENL/ESL Advisory Board, 09/2022 - current
Indiana University Southeast - New Albany, IN

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

- National Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals (NAESP)
- Kentucky Association of School Administrators (KASA)
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)
- Learning Forward Professional Learning Association