(UN)INVITED FAMILIES:
LOCATING THE INSTITUTIONAL POWER OF SCHOOL
AT WORK AGAINST THE INVOLVEMENT OF FAMILIES

by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined the interaction of families and school in a local community. Data were gathered through document analysis; semi-structured interviews with family members, community members, and school professionals; group interviews; street interviews; and observer field notes. A conceptual framework consisting of postcolonial theory, critical social theory, and thridspace theory guided data analysis. This study documented the deep and pervasive nature of school’s institutional power, and severely limited opportunities available to family members to shift the power balance in their favor. The relations of power were evident in the enactment of parent involvement policy and practices that constrained family members’ school involvement, the contradiction between school’s purpose as stated and enacted, families’ restricted access to school information and space, and the construction of family member roles through encounters with school. This study also revealed the potential of organizing to shift the balance of power in favor of families and the local community.

The form and content of this abstract are approved. We recommend its publication.

Approved: Honorine Nocon and Shelley Zion
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family of four: my wife, Dominique, (whom I’ve loved since elementary school), my son, Bryant, and my daughter, Bellamie, for giving me enough space to finish, but not enough space to fail. I also dedicate this work to my mother, Gail, my grandmothers, Gertrude and Doris, and great grandmother, Florence, for showing me how to see things through to their end.
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### CHAPTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inequity in Family Involvement</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results and Conclusions</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance of the Study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Role and Assumptions</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of the Dissertation</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Involvement and the Purpose of Schooling</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to PI</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Emergent Narrative in PI Literature: Parent Power</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Social Theory</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Colonial Theory</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thirdspace Theory</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity of Family-School Interaction: A Conceptual Model</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications of Conceptual Model for Family-School Interaction</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. METHODOLOGY ........................................................................................................... 53
   Purpose of Study ........................................................................................................... 53
   Context of Study ......................................................................................................... 55
   Study Populations ....................................................................................................... 57
   Data Sources ............................................................................................................... 58
   Data Analysis ............................................................................................................. 63
   Summary ..................................................................................................................... 78

IV. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS ................................................................................... 79
   Relations and Forms of Power ................................................................................... 80
   Data Sources and Analysis......................................................................................... 81
   Details of Finding: Relations and Forms of Power ................................................... 83
   Discussion .................................................................................................................. 99
   Purpose of School ....................................................................................................... 101
   Data Sources and Analysis......................................................................................... 101
   Details of Finding: Stated and Enacted Purposes of School .................................... 102
   Discussion .................................................................................................................. 110
   Barriers to Family Involvement ................................................................................. 114
   Data Sources and Analysis......................................................................................... 115
   Details of Finding ....................................................................................................... 116
   Discussion .................................................................................................................. 129
   Roles of Family in Response to Institutional Power of School ................................ 131
   Data Sources and Analysis......................................................................................... 132
   Details of Finding ....................................................................................................... 133
   Discussion .................................................................................................................. 140
   Discussion .................................................................................................................. 150

   vii
LIST OF TABLES

Table

III.1 Overview of face-to-face individual interview participants ........................................61
III.2 Coding characteristics for district policy documents ......................................................64
III.3 List and examples of first- and second-level codes .......................................................67
III.4 Categories of calls made to OFI ..................................................................................75
III.5 Categories of resolutions to calls ................................................................................76
III.6 Revised coding structure .........................................................................................77
IV.1 District policy documents ..........................................................................................119
IV.2 Categories of resolutions to calls made to OFI ..........................................................147
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

II.1 Adapted model of barriers to family engagement ...........................................26

III.1 Iterative-Reflexive analytic framework ...........................................................70
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The historical context surrounding the involvement of poor families of color in schools reveals a pervasive deficit view held by school professionals. Prior to the 1950s, school professionals invited parents to be involved in school to prevent and treat childhood disease. Since the 1950s, the school involvement of parents of poor households has largely been constructed to resolve the perceived deficits of their children, a perception colored by students’ poor school performance and parents’ lack of adequate effort and resources to support their children’s education. Even then, families’ low levels of social and economic resources and generally recognized ignorance about schooling were understood as responsible for their children’s defiant behavior and poor academic performance. For example, Stendler (1951) conceived of poor family members as subverting the education endeavor, stating that “slum-children” were more likely to grow up in homes where they were taught to avoid “being taken in” by teachers, were less likely to attend preschool, and were less likely to be prepared for school at home. This era also was characterized by a tightening of the school’s control over the involvement of parents. In a warning against needless parent involvement, Russell Kropp (1956) argued that “encouraging parental involvement in education merely for the sake of involvement usually achieves nothing and sometimes deteriorates the tenuous parent-teacher relations that already exist” (p. 140). Education professionals and researchers associated children’s social and academic deficiencies with low levels of parent interest in education.

The early years of parent involvement literature also reflected growing public criticism of schooling, occurring at such a rate that it was described as a “flood tide”
(Kropp, 1959). Much of the criticism of schools was directed to public concerns about teacher effectiveness, although the construction of oppositional teacher and parent roles emerged as an element of the context of schooling. The discourse of oppositional roles showed in academic journals and popular publications. In an editorial produced by a former schoolteacher, *The Saturday Evening Post* reported:

> “Teachers do the actual instructing, but it is the parents’ job to prepare their children to receive the instruction. Some parents do not realize that their child’s attitude is largely a reflection of their own. If parents do not show by their actions that they regard learning as important, no amount of teacher effort can give real motivation to the children. Co-operation with the schools is one of the most important responsibilities of the parent” (Alderman, 1956).

Facilitating the increased involvement of parents was to be accomplished through parent involvement programs, such as Project Head Start. Head Start targeted students identified as having deficits such as a poor family environment or inadequate opportunities to socialize (Foster, Berger, & McLean, 1981, p. 148), and sought to counteract those deficits by training parents in the practices of school.

In more recent years, legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 has required parent involvement in school, although the emphasis has continued to be the families of “disadvantaged and minority students” who need to be trained (*Parental involvement: Title I, Part A: Non-regulatory guidance*, 2004). The goal of this legislation was to increase the achievement of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, a goal and subsequent legislation that reinforced the centrality of student performance on
standardized outcomes and required the support and involvement of family members in advancing school values and practices.

By connecting parent involvement practices to schools receiving Title I, Part A funding, a deficit focus became inescapable in the name of equity. Title I provides “financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards” (United States Department of Education, 2004). In order for schools to receive Title I funding, there must be in place a written parent involvement policy that outlines the roles and responsibilities of school professionals and families to support the academic achievement of students (National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, 2004). This policy, however, is without enforcement provisions. The practices of schools to follow their written family involvement programs occur with varying levels of implementation based on the local school and district policies.

The purpose of the research reported here was to discover the dynamics of interaction between families and school, from the perspectives of family members, members of the community, and school professionals, and to understand the enactment of family involvement in one community of working class families of color.

**Inequity in Family Involvement**

There are indicators of inequity in the school-based involvement of family members from poor communities of color. These indicators include conceptualizations of the role of family members and the social and economic dynamics of schools in
communities. Following a presentation of the indicators of inequity in the involvement of family members in schools, I discuss the consequences of those inequities.

**School roles of family members.** There has been a singular focus on increasing student achievement as conceptualized by schools throughout most of the parent involvement literature for the past two decades, including in literature that made significant advances beyond describing parents as passive participants in their children’s schooling. For example, an ecological model of parent involvement was developed to facilitate a shift from listing the activities of involved parents to understanding how and why parents get involved in their children’s education (Barton, Drake, Perez, Louis, & George, 2004). A well-cited model of parent involvement in school identifies six levels of parent involvement: a) parenting, b) communicating, c) volunteering d) learning at home, e) decision-making, f) collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2008). Each of these levels of involvement describes parent practices to support student achievement and school success; this six-level model was developed to guide the school-level development of parent involvement programs, which is exactly what the National PTA Association did in establishing the National Standards of Family-School Partnerships (National PTA Association, 2009).

The involvement of parents in the school experiences of their children has been described as a form of power (M. W. Young & Helvie, 1996). According to the literature, the use of parent power through parent and family involvement in a child’s schooling, in concert with the current national emphasis on student performance on standardized measures, should result in student learning and academic achievement as measured by high stakes, standardized tests. The NCLB Act recognizes the power of parents as they
enact “effective practices to improve their own children’s academic achievement” (United States Department of Education, 2004) with an emphasis on reducing the achievement gap between “disadvantaged and minority students and their peers.” This role for family members, as supporters of academic achievement, has been constructed for them rather than with or by them. School construction of parent roles on their behalf increases the likelihood that family members themselves will be excluded from conversations about their roles in school, and will enter their children’s schools expected to support the aims of the institution.

Increasing student achievement on standardized measures has not been the only reason for a national dialogue on involving family members in their children’s learning. Schools also have sought to involve family members to reduce the incidences of inappropriate school behavior. The home-based involvement practices of family members have been found to reduce classroom behavior problems. For example, Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry & Childs (2004) found that family involvement in school practices at home significantly reduced occurrences of classroom conduct problems in poor children of color.

Involving family members in school for the aims of increased achievement and decreased behavior problems has come at a cost to poor and working class families of color. In particular, the involvement of these families at school has been limited by school’s practice of imposing on family members the professional practices of teachers and administrators. Also, in advancing the involvement of poor working class family members in school, administrators and teachers have developed a professional culture through which they collude against these family members as outsiders (G. L. Anderson,
While teachers often see parents as unwelcome (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006), the involvement of parents, who are at the same time outsiders, suggests that the involvement of family members in school is not as straight-forward as parent involvement policies, which focus on the impact of that involvement on students, suggest.

**Dynamics of school in community.** Although it has been argued that family involvement in learning has a measurable impact on ensuring student academic success in school (Center for Public Education, 2011), the dynamics of the local community have been shown to impact significantly the involvement of family members and the school experiences of students (Nettles, 1991; Warren, 2005). Communities with higher populations of poor and working class families also are the communities with disproportionately high numbers of low-performing students and schools (Warren, 2005). School policies and practices that “require” the involvement of low-income families of color, without acknowledging the complexities of cultural and economic diversity within school communities, risk reproducing segregation. Affluent parents organize themselves and construct their involvement in schools. The efforts of school professionals to involve low-income family members in school practices that favor White, middle class families effectively constrain or control the involvement of those parents (V. Gordon & Nocon, 2008).

Economically, culturally, and ethno-linguistically diverse communities offer challenges and opportunities to the involvement of family members in the school experiences of their children. Latino families have been found to face obstacles that result from their linguistic diversity as well as limited access to social and economic capital (Olivos, 2009). The ways in which these families support their children’s learning goes
overlooked by schools (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Yosso, 2005). Schools respond to these families by positioning the school institution as the arbiter of social and economic capital, offering language classes and leadership training that ostensibly help family members feel greater efficacy to support their children’s learning (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2010). At the same time, opportunities for equity are not unlikely to take the form of school leaders learning from the community and using the community as a text to inform their professional practice (Cooper, 2009).

Changes in the community should inform changes in school practices, although frequent or very rapid demographic shifts create obstacles to schools’ ability to respond to the shifting needs of families and the community (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009). This is the case when poor and working class families move to communities where they may be more likely to have increased access to social capital and better performing schools.

**Description of Study**

This was a qualitative study of the perspectives of family members, members of the local community, and school professionals about the purpose of school and the roles of family members in school. Over the course of one year, I conducted this study in a local community of poor and working class African American and Latino families in a major western U.S. city. I collected data through school district document analysis, in-person interviews, group interviews, street interviews, and observation field notes. Data analysis procedures led to four major findings about the interaction of families and schools. The implications of these findings were related to the work of community organizers, school-based parent involvement groups, education and school policymakers, family members, and school professionals.
Research Questions

Three research questions guided this qualitative investigation:

1. What are the understandings of family-school interaction held by family members, members of the local community and school professionals?

2. What are the roles of family members in school?

3. What is the purpose of school as understood by members of family members, members of the local community and school professionals?

Beyond uncovering and understanding perspectives, this study also sought to identify the indicators of social relationships, including the within-group relationships of individuals and the relationships of individuals to the system of school.

Methods

This study relied upon ethnographic approaches to collection and organization of information that eventually became data. I began by asking questions of school professionals, members of the community at large, and family members within the geographical community whose children were students. The contexts in which I asked questions varied from formal in-person interviews with individuals and groups as well as street interviews with community members in the neighborhood. In addition to asking questions of members of these three participant categories, I also recorded observer field notes at two study sites, one school and a community organization, collected school district policy documents that were stored and available on the Internet, and gathered and examined telephone call logs from a central office of the school district. I sought out key informants to assess the layers of the community context, sought out general perceptions
of the role of school in the community, and sought to identify potential interview participants.

Key informants can increase the dependability of qualitative studies (Krannich & Humphrey, 1996). In the case of this study, the key informants assisted me in gaining access to each of the two study sites and conducting observations in which I was able to observe the presence and involvement of family members at a school site and at a community organization. The key informant interviews led to two in-person interviews with family members, a group interview with family members (n=6), a group interview with school professionals (n=4), two in-person interviews with school professionals, two in-person interviews with community members, and street interviews with 18 community members. Additionally, in conducting interviews with three key informants, I was able to acknowledge and confront my researcher bias, which was very likely to be present, given my history in the community of study. Utilizing five sources of data allowed for triangulation in data analysis (Golafshani, 2003; Patton, 2002). A digital audio recording of each in-person and group interview was transcribed and entered into Microsoft Word; Microsoft Word, lined index cards, post-it notes, and a dry erase board were used for analysis. I used paper and pen to capture responses during each street interview, recorded observation field notes in separate notebooks for each study site, and recorded telephone call record data in a separate notebook.

Findings

Four major findings from this study reveal that the phenomenon of family-school interaction sustains or opposes the status quo of the public school. These findings also
reveal that inherent in the interaction of families and school is the issue of power and the experiences of actors in the struggle over power. The four major study findings are:

1. Power emerged in two forms in the interaction of families and schools:
   institutional power of school and individual power of families. The institutional power of school was coercive, historical, collective and pervasive, and school professionals enacted this power throughout their interactions with families. The individual power of families was resistant, confined, and subsumed. In the interaction of families and schools, the individual power of families was either co-opted or dismissed by school professionals enacting the institutional power of schools.

2. A contradiction existed in the understandings of the purpose of school held by members of families, the community, and school professionals. All agreed that the purpose of school was to give students academic skills, although community members and school professionals qualified the enactment of school’s purpose as different from its stated purpose because of the Chelsea Park community. Family members, on the other hand, did not accept that the purpose of school was different within the Chelsea Park community.

3. Family-school interaction was constrained by a context of barriers restricting family members’ access to information and to the physical space of schools. These barriers were enforced by school policies and sustained by the practices of school professionals, and as school professionals sought to involve family members, they subsequently restricted family member access to school information and space.
4. There were three school-related roles for family members, each defined in response to the enactment of the institutional power of school. Whether family members were a) present and engaged in school practices, b) co-opted school leaders, or c) collective advocates, their roles in schools were the result of their efforts being exploited by the institutional power of school.

**Results and Conclusions**

As family members became involved in the schools of their children, they encountered the institutional power of school, which required family members to be involved in schools in support of their own children. This focus on the individual children of family members limited their opportunities to develop relationships and coalitions with other family members and influence the local school more directly. School professionals, who were actors on behalf of school, occupied hybrid roles in their work with families on behalf of school: although teachers and administrators were school professionals, their membership did not give them full access to the institution of school, which existed at the level of the district. However, school professionals demonstrated their capacity to utilize their limited access to the institution in support of family members. Also, throughout this study, the school district was not evident in any person or group; instead, the district was found in school policies that were available through the Internet, which was a mediating tool.

As members of families interacted with schools, they faced barriers to the physical space of school and to school information. These barriers emerged through formal school policies developed by the district and through the school-based practices of school professionals. And although family members, members of the local community and school
professionals shared the geographic community context, their interactions with the institution of school and with local schools were restricted by school policies.

School professionals, members the community and family members held varying perspectives of the purpose of school. Their perspectives of school purpose revealed a contradiction: although many members of the community, including its families and schools, agreed with the purpose of school as stated by the district, members of the community and school professionals concluded that what was happening in school differed from what was supposed to happen. The contradiction, however, was the result of the local community context. Family members, on the other hand, reported in interviews that schools did what they were supposed to do. Family members’ expectations differed from school professionals and community members, as family members were focused on their individual child while at-large community members and school professionals spoke of the purpose and practices of school for all children.

Relevance of the Study

Given the roles of family members constructed by school, and the implications of diversity within local community contexts, the question we should be asking is not, how do we get families more involved in school? Instead, we must step away from the assumption that family members should simply be involved in school because their involvement will increase their children’s school achievement and decrease discipline problems. Stepping away from this assumption means that we must trouble the notion of school. Stepping away from this assumption requires us to disrupt the notion that families want what schools want, and achieving this is as simple as getting families to do more. In order step away from the assumed direct relation of family involvement and student
achievement, I utilize a conceptual framework that draws upon the intersections of Critical Social Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Thirdspace Theory. The emphasis on power, justice, knowledge, and history within this conceptual framework acknowledges the dynamics that emerge when individuals and groups encounter institutions. This framing positions family-school interaction as a complex phenomenon rather than a simple challenge to be solved by placing more responsibility on the families of students. This study represents an initial step toward reconceptualizing family involvement in school as a complex phenomenon that includes an overt challenge to our assumptions of consensus about the purpose of school and the roles of adults involved in the endeavor of school. Below, I provide more detail on my conceptual framework.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study draws upon three theories that, when combined, expose and challenge the practices of institutions and social systems that depend upon the subordination of individuals and groups for their status and existence. These theories include Critical Social Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Thirdspace Theory. Within this framework, the voices and experiences of people who have been subjected to the policies and practices of institutions are uncovered. This framework also encourages our collective and individual reimagining of existing social arrangements and systems, a “discourse of possibility” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). Through the use of our collective and individual imagination, challenging institutional practice is not a hopeless endeavor. Instead, it becomes the path to equity and justice for each of us through inquiry that seeks to emancipate us from established social institutions that restrict or deny our human agency. A critical lens, such as this conceptual framework, allows us
to interrogate what for many of us may appear as common sense—the way things are because they should be.

As discussed above, parent involvement in schools in policy means family members engage in practices that satisfy the expectations of schools to support the academic and social experiences of their children. What is missing from this literature is a critical discourse that problematizes the enactment of parent involvement policies and academic outcomes-focus of parent involvement literature. Critical Social Theory supports this discourse through uncovering and changing material (non-human, such as social institutions) and symbolic (interactional, such as norms and patterns) reproductive processes (Fraser, 1985). As Kincheloe and McLaren argue, Critical Social Theory “is concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy; matters of race, class, and gender; ideologies; discourses; education; religion and other social institutions; and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002, p. 90).

The school involvement practices of family members, as well as school professionals and community members, when examined through this conceptual framework, reveal the deep and extensive impact of the institution of school on parent-school interaction. Understanding the ways in which the school-related roles of family members have been constructed through the policies and practices of the institution of school can help reveal the inequities faced by family members as they interact with schools. Postcolonial theory, or postcolonialism, informs my efforts to achieve such an understanding through this study. Bhabha’s (1996) description of the impact of interaction with fixed social institutions on the identities of individuals and groups supports the
relevance of postcolonial theory to this study. In identifying the paradox of fixed social/cultural/historical institutions, Bhabha reveals that institutions effectively marginalize members of the larger populous by presenting rigidity and unchanging order while sustaining internal contradictions and disorder. Instances of contradiction and disorder lead to the ambivalence of members of marginalized groups, effectively obstructing their capacity to enact institutional change.

The third theory upon which the conceptual framework for this study is developed is Thirdspace Theory as conceptualized by Soja (1996). The thirdspace is the space of reimagination of social space, institutions, and interactions. This theory has two key aspects related to this conceptual framework: a) it provides a basis for spatial consciousness that grounds research within a geographic and social context, which is necessary to community-grounded, emancipatory research, and b) in the thirdspace, the critical socio-spatial imagination reconsiders the uses of space and the characteristics of interaction in ways that achieve grounded and sustained equity, with those who are peripherally involved in or subjected to the meaning-making and social construction of others being brought to the center and becoming co-constructors of meaning and experience. In chapter 2, I address the conceptual framework for this research in greater depth.

**Researcher Role and Assumptions**

During this study, my researcher role converged with my history in the community of study where I used to be a schoolteacher. The challenge, then, was to reduce, as much as possible, my bias as a member-researcher and accurately capture the perceptions I solicited through interview techniques. In addition, I was acutely aware of the shifting
education context, which was the result of large-scale school turnaround in the community. Following the collection of data, I attempted to conduct analysis by immediately applying the conceptual framework; this significantly skewed the analysis of data and undermined my efforts to reduce researcher bias by trying to make the conceptual framework work. In a subsequent approach to analyzing the data, I used grounded approaches, allowing patterns and themes to emerge and inform findings; this preceded my application of the conceptual framework, which I used instead to guide my interpretation of the findings. Additionally, I approached this study with a set of assumptions about the locations of power in the community’s schools. I assumed that schools had power because schooling was compulsory. I also assumed that family and community members should be able to engage in schools in ways that made sense to them. Thus, a substantial challenge for me was to reduce the biases generated by my pre-existing perspective and experiences within the community; I attempted to mitigate the influence of my assumptions and prior impressions of the community through reframing exercises and methods of data triangulation, which I describe in greater detail in chapter III.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

In chapter II, I examine more deeply Critical Social Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Thirdspace Theory. I also review the history and literature on family involvement in school alongside the trajectory of national school reform policies influenced by industry. Chapter 3 contains the detailed methodology—including changes to the study design as the iterative process of inquiry unfolded, participant selection methods, the forms and tools used, the five forms of data collected to allow for triangulation, and the method of analysis. I also describe the process of data analysis. Chapter IV is the presentation of
findings, with interpretation and discussion informed by the conceptual framework. Chapter V includes a discussion of the implications of the study and my overall conclusions. This chapter also addresses next steps for further research.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to examine the interaction between families and schools in a community located within a major Western city in the US. Additionally, this study sought to expand current notions of parent involvement in schools toward deeper and more complex understandings of the interaction of schools and families beyond perspectives reflected in research literature. As a result of these research intents, I focus this chapter on examining current notions of parent and family involvement (PI) in schools that emerge in the literature. I approach the field of PI in sections, beginning with a focused presentation of three major frames of PI: typologies, programs, and models. The discussion of PI frames is followed by a discussion of barriers to PI. Following the discussion of barriers to parent and family involvement in schools, I discuss the concept of power, both of families and of the institution of school. To conclude this section, I present the conceptual framework used to guide the analysis of data.

In the preceding chapter, I provide an overview of parent involvement literature over the past six decades. Although this history will not be repeated here, an important theme of parent involvement in schools is the emphasis on perceived deficits of children and their families. Early parent involvement programs targeted students who were identified as having 1 of 2 possible deficits; (a) a poor family environment, or (b) inadequate opportunities to socialize (Foster, et al., 1981, p. 148). Early on, poor student performance in the classroom and in socializing with peers were seen as functions of social class, solvable through social services and parent education. For example, Project Head Start, part of the War on Poverty, was developed to provide health, mental, and
social services to children from poor homes (Zigler & Valentine, 1979). More recently, PI literature of the past two decades shows that students from lower (than middle) social classes have been identified as at an even greater schooling disadvantage in recognition of the intersectional experiences of families and students. Researchers have recognized that families are not monolithic, and their experiences vary widely. Class has become confounded with race (Auerbach, 2007), ethnicity (Perna & Titus, 2005), language (Flores, Cousin, & Diaz, 1991; Rymes, 2001), and culture (Ream & Palardy, 2008).

Nonetheless, for families of color, as well as poor families, the views and practices guiding their involvement with schools has changed very little. As Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, and Hernandez (2013) note, expectations for parent involvement in schools are largely based on White, middle-class experiences, values and understandings. Ultimately, parent involvement in schools is an issue of equity.

**Parent Involvement and the Purpose of Schooling**

The role of families in schooling has been examined in relation to democratizing education through parent involvement (Mintrom, 2009), changing school climate through parent involvement (McDermott, 2008), typologies of parent engagement (Epstein, 2008; Epstein & Dauber, 1991) and parent education programs (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2010; Comer & Haynes, 1991). Research has extended our understanding of the role of parents and families in schooling beyond the relationship between home culture and parenting and students’ perceived social and academic inadequacies (Foster, et al., 1981) to include family participation in school governance and decision-making (Carlson, 2010; Christenson, 2004; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Epstein, 2011) and exploring students’ home cultures to enhance school curriculum (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). While this
body of research reflects a shift away from blaming parents and families toward forming family-school partnerships, it leaves largely unnamed and unexamined existing assumptions about the roles of families in schools, although the central assumption has been that families should be involved in schools to help students achieve school academic success (Henderson, 1987; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Jeynes, 2007; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, Chavez, & Tai, 2001). This research trend has developed a narrative about the role of families in schools and the impact of the home culture on schooling. This narrative is that for decades, schools have sought the involvement of family members to help remedy perceived family and community deficits that prohibit students from achieving school academic success.

There is extensive conceptual and empirical literature supporting the benefits to students’ school experiences of involving parents and families. Meta-analyses, survey research, and evidence-based intervention research inform our understanding of the roles of families in schools through their participation in programs, typologies and partnerships (Freiberg, et al., 2005; Henderson, 1987). However, our understanding of the roles of families in schools is limited because of the narrowed focus facilitated by this emphasis, which aims primarily, and almost exclusively, to improve student academic achievement; this focus significantly restricts research on the complex interaction between families and schools by presupposing that families should support school goals (Barnard, 2004; Barnyak & McNelly, 2009; I. J. Gordon, 1979).

The involvement of parents in schools has been identified as a predictor of students’ positive school behaviors (Domina, 2005) and academic achievement (K. J. Anderson & Minke, 2007). Positive outcomes to student academic achievement have
been associated with increased parent involvement in schools to improve student reading skills (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002) and math scores (McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004; Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010). Increased parent involvement can reduce special education placements (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999), and higher grade point averages (Gutman & Midgley, 2000). For families with diverse cultural, linguistic, economic, and structural make-up, their practices of involvement to support their children’s school achievement requires school professionals who are aware of added cultural complexities (Kohl, Lengue & McMahon, 2000; Trotman, 2001).

Additionally, parent involvement in schools to improve student achievement includes their input to benefit students’ social experiences, including improved student attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002), better social interaction with peers (McWayne, et al., 2004), and lower student dropout rates (Jimerson, Egeland, Srouge & Carlson, 2000). Throughout this literature, parent involvement takes one of three forms: parent involvement at school, parent as teacher, and parent as advocate. In each of these roles, the involvement of parents and families in schooling is conceptualized as helping to achieve school outcomes such as academic achievement and school attendance. This narrow focus is inadequate to accommodate the multiple perspectives of schooling held by teachers, families, administrators, and local communities.

Within the current context of schooling in the U.S., the involvement of parents and families in schools has often been solicited and examined in response to the challenges faced by schools that serve Black and Latino students. These challenges are racialized and include the Black-White and Latino-White achievement gaps, perceptions of poor student behavior, comparatively low rates of academic success, and students’
inadequate social skills. As school administrators, teachers and researchers have sought to respond to these challenges, often after identifying them in isolation from the subjects of inquiry, the growing body of research literature reveals a sustained perception of Black and Latino parents and families as socially and academically inadequate to support the efforts of schools. While there are exceptions, this perspective emerges in research literature on parenting, parent-school partnerships, and parent education programs.

Although family-school partnerships have been described as complex, indefinable, culturally and morally diverse, and unclear (Ravn, 2005), expanding the family-school interaction discourse has been facilitated by deeper critical theoretical approaches that challenge existing power structures and deconstruct contradictions, inauthenticies, and ideological agendas that color many existing models of inquiry (G. L. Anderson, 1998). Examining family-school interactions requires the use of individual and collective imagination supporting an imagination that enables individuals and “social scientists to look beyond the appearance of social facts toward…new social facts—the end of class society…” (Agger, 1991). This dialectical imagination (Jay, 1973) is the ability to see the world as having potential to be changed in the future, an endeavor that requires both imagination and reason (Perkins, 1985).

**Barriers to PI**

As discussed above, parent and family involvement research indicates that schools create opportunities for parent and family involvement, and these opportunities aim to achieve school outcomes. In creating opportunities for family members to be involved, schools develop and sustain organizational structures that prohibit the equitable involvement of and collaboration with diverse families (see, for example, V. Gordon &
Nocon, 2008; Harris & Goodall, 2008). In the context of schooling, the equitable involvement of parents and families is obstructed by a dominant discourse and opportunities constructed by schools (Kainz & Aikens, 2007); dominant discourse includes the focus on White, middle-class values and practices guiding PI in schools, resultantly marginalizing families of color and poor families. A dominant discourse is likely to obscure diversity in viewpoints and opportunities for diverse voices to be heard; however, a dominant discourse, such as is often reflected in parent and family involvement literature, is effective to control behavior (Kainz & Aikens, 2007).

Removing the barriers to equitable parent and family school involvement through systematic efforts is the work of change, and this is not likely facilitated by strengthening current family-school (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001) or structuring community-school partnerships that maintain and support the current dominant discourse (see, for example Sanders, 2009). To continue to sustain or create programs and opportunities to involve parents and families in supporting the work of schooling is to tinker with a fundamentally flawed system (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). And in diverse communities where resources and power are not equally distributed between schools and families (Lauen, 2007), tinkering doesn’t quite work (Deluca & Rosenblatt, 2010).

In recent research on barriers to parent and family involvement in schools, there remains a focus on the dominant discourse and practices of schooling but a lack of emphasis on equity; for example, in finding that parent and family involvement programs are effective to remove barriers obstructing access to schooling, Bolivar & Chrispeels (2011) found that parent empowerment resulted from immigrant parents learning to trust the educational system and becoming adept at school norms such as hand raising.
Tellingly, the study authors conclude that “a shift in the fundamental power relationships between parents and schools did not occur as a direct consequence of PSP [Parent-School Partnerships],” although they argue that these parents were “empowered through the program to take actions in both political and educational arenas” (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011, p. 32). That these parents were seen as empowered because they learned to participate in the dominant school culture, but not to challenge the fundamental dynamics of power or to have access to the core of the institution of school, indicates that their empowerment was constrained, and possibly was not power at all.

Research similar in its focus on barriers to parent and family involvement in schools examines the access of family members to educational and social resources (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Sanders, 2009) with a focus on student achievement and school outcomes. However, critical perspectives of parent involvement also suggest that the intersection of culture, power and knowledge results in tensions, contradictions and resistance in parent and family involvement (Olivos, 2006) as families often are aware of the well-defined limits of their participation (Olivos, 2009). Examining family-school interaction, rather than evaluating programs or defining typologies of family involvement may prove helpful to extend the current discourse and involvement opportunities for families while countering stereotypes of expected participation.

The barriers to family and community engagement in schools have been defined as the difference between what is stated (rhetoric) and what actually occurs (reality) between schools and the families and communities (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). While the rhetoric may declare that families are encouraged to be engaged in schooling, the reality
is more likely to involve unidirectional flow of support from families to schools and a
unidirectional flow of communication from schools to families. Hornby & Lafaele (2011)
identify four areas of barriers to families’ engagement in schooling, based largely on
Epstein’s (1992, 1995) overlapping spheres of influence. The areas identified are: child
factors, individual parent and family factors, parent-teacher factors, and societal factors.
Although these factors are not as discrete as this model suggests; these categories of
barriers provide a helpful basis upon which to examine more closely school-family
interaction, most importantly societal factors.

The structure and organization of school has been described as bureaucratic, thus
erecting barriers against change through parent-school collaboration (Henry, 1996). And
within the bureaucratic organization of schools, an expert/nonexpert tension emerges
between families and schools: school experts can easily identify what families lack and
the efforts of school experts to supplement for these lacks (de Carvalho, 2001). Similar
thinking that attempts to distinguish the roles of families and schools also contributes to
subject-object tensions between schools and families. Within such subject-object
tensions, families are positioned as groups to be understood by school professionals;
understanding families can support schools’ efforts to increase parent involvement in
schools, a significant difference from drawing on the capacities of parents to influence
the functioning of schools (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009).

Barriers to parent involvement in schools also emerges in various PI models.
Epstein’s (1992, 1995) model of overlapping spheres of influence suggests three areas of
social organization that interact to influence student learning: family, school and
community. Although several other models of parent involvement can be found in the
research field, the overlapping spheres of influence theory demonstrates the inherent nature of barriers erected by schools attempting to develop programs to involve parents.

Epstein reflects this notion in stating that:

“Schools make choices. They might conduct only a few communications and interactions with families and communities, keeping the three spheres of influence that directly affect student learning and development relatively separate. Or they might conduct many high-quality communications and interactions designed to bring all three spheres of influence closer together” (Epstein, 1992, p. 702).

Epstein is correct that schools make choices; however, these choices facilitate the erection of barriers between families and schools through a sustained subject-object relationship between schools and families: families are expected to passively respond to the communicative practices of schools. Further, the individualism and school-centrism facilitated by Epstein’s framework of six types of parent involvement further reveals the deeply instantiated barriers to achieving equity through PI (Baquedano-Lopez, et.al., 2013). The six levels of parent involvement, adapted by the National PTA Association as its National Standards for Family-School Partnerships (2009). The six levels of family involvement are: a) parenting, b) communicating, c) volunteering, d) school practices at home, e) decision making, and f) collaborating with the community.

In locating the barriers families face in their school involvement, Hornby & Lafaele (2011) problematize the spheres of influence to include barrier-inducing factors at each sphere. These factors are listed below in Figure 1. Identifying the barriers to family involvement at the spaces of family, society, school and the individual child allows a closer look at the various components of family and school interaction, allowing
us to think more deeply about family involvement than simply what family members can
do in support of school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Factors</th>
<th>Family Factors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Family beliefs about engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning difficulties and disabilities</td>
<td>Perceptions of invitations to engage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifts and talents</td>
<td>Current life contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral problems</td>
<td>Class, ethnicity, gender</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Factors</th>
<th>Societal Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goals and agendas</td>
<td>Historical and demographic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Processes, practices, and philosophies</td>
<td>Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward families and community</td>
<td>Economic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of different language</td>
<td>*Distribution of power</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure II.1. Adapted model of factors that act as barriers and prohibit family engagement, based on Hornby & Lafaele (2011). (Added items are marked with *.)

Another model of family involvement in schools is the School Development Program. The SDP identifies three required mechanisms or teams that involve families in schools: a school planning and management team, a mental health team, and a parent program; this model distinguishes, and thereby limits, the roles of families in schools as related to the development of children (Comer & Haynes, 1991). It is within the levels of the SDP that the barriers become clearer:

“parents…work with the parent group to develop activities in support of the comprehensive school plan. This enables all parents to feel ownership of the plan and its implementation, giving them a real stake in the outcome of school activities” (Comer & Haynes, 1991, p. 273).
In the SDP model, the third level involves “parents derive[ing] a sense of pride and satisfaction from seeing their children perform” (Comer & Haynes, 1991, p. 276).

Based on these and similar models, involving poor parents and the parents of non-White students can often take the form of imposing a structure within which parents can participate in ways recognized by schools. This phenomenon has supported the construction of barriers between communities and schools (Gonzalez, et al., 2005; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

Removing the barriers to equitable parent and family school involvement through systematic efforts is the work of change, and this is not likely facilitated by strengthening current family-school relationships (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001) or structuring community-school partnerships that maintain and support the current dominant discourse (see, for example Sanders, 2009). To continue to sustain or create programs and opportunities to involve parents and families in supporting the work of schooling is to tinker with a fundamentally flawed system (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). And in diverse communities where resources and power are not equally distributed between schools and families (Lauen, 2007), tinkering doesn’t quite work (Deluca & Rosenblatt, 2010).

In recent research on barriers to parent and family involvement in schools, there remains a focus on the discourse and practices of schooling but a lack of emphasis on equity; for example, in finding that parent and family involvement programs are effective to remove barriers obstructing access to schooling, Bolivar & Chrispeels (2011) found that parent empowerment resulted from immigrant parents learning to trust the educational system and becoming adept at school norms such as hand raising. The study authors conclude that “a shift in the fundamental power relationships between parents and
schools did not occur as a direct consequence of PSP [Parent-School Partnerships],” although they argue that these parents were “empowered through the program to take actions in both political and educational arenas” (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011, p. 32). That these parents were seen as empowered because they learned to participate in the dominant school culture, but not to challenge the fundamental dynamics of power, indicates that their empowerment was constrained by the typical subject-object relationship of families and schools.

Research similar in its focus on barriers to parent and family involvement in schools examines parent and family access to educational and social resources (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Sanders, 2009) with a focus on student achievement and school outcomes. However, critical perspectives of parent involvement also suggest that the intersection of culture, power and knowledge results in tensions, contradictions and resistance in parent and family involvement (Olivos, 2006) as families often are aware of the well-defined limits of their participation (Olivos, 2009). Examining family-school interaction, rather than evaluating programs or defining typologies of family involvement may prove helpful to extend the current discourse and involvement opportunities for families while countering stereotypes of expected participation.

As the aforementioned discussion suggests, the prevalent focus of parent and family involvement literature investigates and reinforces the passive roles of parents and families as supporters of the goals of schools. This suggests a need for research to advance a critical perspective of family-school interactions that challenges current conceptualizations of family-school interaction that also broadens and deepens our commitment to equity through the social spaces in which families and schools interact.
The Emergent Narrative in PI Literature: Parent Power

The United States Department of Education developed a handbook to support parents in their ability to support their children’s learning in school. The report, *Parent Power: Build the Bridge to Success* (2010) discusses the steps that parents can follow to achieve the goal of making education a priority for their families. These steps include: a) be responsible, b) be committed, c) be positive, d) be patient, e) be attentive, f) be précised, g) be mindful of mistakes, h) be results-oriented, i) be diligent, j) be innovative, and k) be there. Two things are clear from this model of PI:

1. Parents need to be something, presumably more than they already are, in order to be adequate supporters of their children’s learning
2. Parent power occurs in relation to parents’ *be-ing* occurring outside school. Each demonstration of the individual power of families is based in the homes of families.

A narrative of parent involvement in schools holds families as outsiders against whom administrators and teachers collude while establishing a professional culture (G. L. Anderson, 1998). However, another narrative in the literature of parent involvement in schooling has emerged in research focused on the families of Black and Latino students as well as families in poor and working class communities. For these families, targeted inequities emerge between schools (Henry, 1996; Lareau, 2003; Olivos, 2006), as teachers often see parents as unwelcome outsiders (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). While family members are consistently excluded from authentic school leadership opportunities, (Mayrowetz, 2008), school professionals sustain a status quo of influence over the function of schools. Despite this general exclusion of families from certain strata
of school functioning, White middle-class families often are welcomed into schools while maintaining their higher status and capital. On the other hand, Black and Latino families must persevere to gain similar opportunities and access (Shannon, 1996).

Research has extended our understanding of the role of parents and families in schooling beyond the relationship between home culture and parenting and students’ perceived social and academic inadequacies (Foster, et al., 1981) to include family participation in school governance and decision-making (Carlson, 2010; Christenson, 2004; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Epstein, 2011) and exploring students’ home cultures to enhance school curriculum (Gonzalez, et al., 2005). Nonetheless, current research has not completely moved away from focusing on perceived deficiencies of family structures as the reason for inadequate student participation. One such deficiency has been discovered in the number of hours a mother works, as too many or too few can be detrimental to a child’s early formal schooling (Youn, Leon & Lee, 2011). Another deficiency is found in claims that children from dual-parent households achieve higher scores on standardized tests than their counterparts from single-parent homes, and the children of parents with some college experience achieve higher scores than the children of high school graduates or non-high school graduates (Jackson, 2011).

Researchers also have established correlations between several dimensions of families and family involvement in schooling. These correlations include ethnic group affiliation and the capacity of parents and families to adequately support their children’s learning and school success. For example, Black parents have been found to be motivated to be involved in their children’s learning based on their needs to build relationships with other parents and school professionals (Huang & Mason, 2011). Similarly, in order to be
involved with their children’s early learning experiences, Latino families may require strong communication with other families (Durand, 2011). The relationship between ethnicity and need for relationships with others is under-researched. However, these dynamics are reflective of a collectivist rather than individualist identity, which provides another important lens for understanding the dynamics of interaction between schools and families.

Additionally, children from single-parent African American homes are more likely to engage in poor school behavior (Mokrue, Chen & Elias, 2011), and their parents have been found to lack parenting skills and the confidence to support their children’s development. Within Latino communities and households, parents’ educational aspirations for their children can have less impact on student academic motivation than general parent support, parent monitoring, and focused academic support. Henry, Plunkett, and Sands (2011) find that for Latino adolescents, the level of academic motivation is directly related to general parental support in the forms of praise, encouragement, and warmth, among other behaviors. Such trends in the school involvement of Black and Latino families may be due to their perceptions of schools expecting a lot from them but offering very little in return (Jeynes, 2011). While Crozier (2001) argues that immigrant and ethnic minority parents are often perceived as deficits to schooling, and what constitutes “good” parenting most often reflects the values and behaviors of many White and middle-class families, parents often are not confident to participate in their children’s development and require some form of training to parent better and support school endeavors at home (de Lara, 2011).
Often, parent involvement studies fail to interrogate the cultural responsiveness of their teachers. The body of research of family involvement continues to leave largely unnamed and unexamined existing assumptions about the dominant narrative of schooling. This narrative displays the role of families in schools and the impact of the home culture on schooling: student academic achievement is the purpose and outcome of involving families in schools (Henderson, 1987; Henderson, et al., 2007; Jeynes, 2007; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, et al., 2001). With such a narrow focus on school and academic outcomes, opportunities for more fully understanding the interaction of families and schools are significantly limited.

As discussed above, parent and family involvement research indicates that schools create opportunities for parent and family involvement, and these opportunities aim to achieve school outcomes; in creating these opportunities, schools may develop and sustain bureaucratic organizational structures that prohibit the equitable involvement of and collaboration with diverse families (see, for example, V. Gordon & Nocon, 2008; Harris & Goodall, 2008). In the context of schooling, the equitable involvement of parents and families is obstructed by the discursive and social construction of involvement opportunities by schools (Kainz & Aikens, 2007). Such a discourse is likely to obscure diversity in viewpoints and opportunities for Black and Latino voices to be heard; however, a dominant discourse, as is reflected in parent and family involvement literature, effectively controls behavior (Kainz & Aikens, 2007).

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study attempts to uncover the ways in which social experiences are constructed for individuals who encounter institutions. By framing
the complexities of family involvement in school as social, historical, spatial, and involving power, this conceptual framework counters the assumption, reflected in the literature, that parent involvement involves practices to support school aims. For many individuals who encounter the school institution, their agency or individual power is restricted by the policies and practices that are simply, and sometimes unquestionably, a part of the system. While there may be a “discourse of possibility” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011) to imagine schools as something other than they are, the social dynamics and arrangements of the institution of school within a local community can cause significant tensions and difficulties for individuals from families or the community at-large who attempt to access the institution. Recognizing this, I have constructed a conceptual framework that acknowledges three components of interaction between individuals and institutions. These three components are access, discourse, and imagination. Access involves the ability of individuals outside of the institution to influence institutional policies and practices. Discourse includes the development and maintenance of policies that determine institutional practice and the roles of individuals who encounter the institution. Imagination refers to the powerful, beautiful, and challenging practice of initiating change individually or through coalition-building. These components of interaction are informed by Critical Social Theory, Thirdspace Theory, and Postcolonialism.

There is a consensus emerging that parent involvement in schools means parents and guardians engage in practices that satisfy the expectations of schools to support the academic and social experiences of their individual children. The field of parent involvement (PI) in schools contains a robust body of empirical studies revealing specific
involvement behaviors for family members as well as typologies and models of practice for schools to utilize. The field, however, remains largely uncritical of institution of schooling and instead critiques the ways in which family members construct their roles of involvement and articulates strategies for schools to increase the supportive involvement of family members. As evident in the body of literature growing for more than six decades, there is only a short body of theory applied to research on family involvement in schools; in some instances, typologies are labeled theories of parent involvement (for example, Lewis, Kim & Bey 2011). What also is largely missing from the literature is a critical dialogue that uncovers and challenges the academic outcomes-focus of parent involvement literature. Challenging the outcomes-focus is all the more important for families and students from poor communities and communities of color, as these students struggle to succeed in school.

Research has extended our understanding of the role of parents and families in schooling beyond the relationship between home culture and parenting and students’ perceived social and academic inadequacies (Foster, et al., 1981) to include family participation in school governance and decision-making (Carlson, 2010; Christenson, 2004; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Epstein, 2011) and exploring students’ home cultures to enhance school curriculum (Gonzalez, et al., 2005). Nonetheless, current research has not completely moved away from focusing on perceiving and naming the deficiencies of family structures as the reason for inadequate student participation. Mokrue, Chen & Elias (2011) find that children from single-parent African American households are more likely to engage in poor school behavior; however, their findings fail to interrogate the cultural responsiveness of the teachers of these students. The result of this gap in their
research is that the institution of school remains faultless for the failure of students.

Similar trends in PI research have continued to emerge in several other studies (Lewis, Takai-Kawakami, Kawakami and Sullivan, 2009; Pike, Iervolino, Eley, Price & Plomin, 2006; Turney & Kao, 2009).

The body of research of family involvement continues to leave largely unnamed and unexamined existing assumptions about the dominant narrative of schooling. This narrative displays the role of families in schools and the impact of the home culture on schooling: student academic achievement is the purpose and outcome of involving families in schools (Henderson, 1987; Henderson, et al., 2007; Jeynes, 2007; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, et al., 2001). With such a narrow focus, additional interests that family members have in their children’s school experience remain on the margins. Beyond that, opportunities to re-imagine the interaction of families and schools are significantly limited.

The dominant narrative of schooling emerges in several trends in family involvement research focused on poor families and families of color, including democratizing education through parent involvement (Mintrom, 2009), changing school climate through parent involvement (McDermott, 2008), typologies of parent engagement (Epstein, 2008; Epstein & Dauber, 1991) and parent education programs (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2010; Comer & Haynes, 1991). Family-involvement research reveals that power inequities persist between schools and families from racial and economically diverse communities (Henry, 1996; Lareau, 2003; Olivos, 2006). While school professionals sustain a status quo of power over the practice and institution of school, White middle-class families often are welcomed into schools to participate in ways that
maintain their status. On the other hand, poor families and families of color must persevere to gain similar opportunities and access (Shannon, 1996). These family members must persevere again school contexts in which teachers often see parents as unwelcome outsiders (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006), and administrators and teachers share a professional culture that colludes against outsiders (G. L. Anderson, 1998).

Additionally, school distributed leadership practices seem to consistently exclude parents and families (Mayrowetz, 2008).

As an alternative to the language of parent involvement, I suggest, and will employ hereafter, use of term *family-school interaction*. Interaction indicates the social nature inherent in the literature and practice of families and schools, but is divorced from the power dynamics and assumptions inherent in related terms: parent involvement, parent engagement and parent-school partnerships. I consider this an important distinction because the distribution of power in schools contributes to systems of oppression, marginalization, and the socio-political oppression (Auerbach, 2007; M. D. Young, 1999) of poor families and families of color. A conceptual framework that challenges current models of involving families in schools can be useful to uncover, challenge, and dismantle these systems. I propose a conceptual framework based critical social theory.

**Critical Social Theory**

Critical social theories are oriented toward uncovering and changing material (non-human, such as social institutions) and symbolic (interactional, such as norms and patterns) reproductive processes (Fraser, 1985) in communities as well as in broader society. A critical social theory “is concerned in particular with issues of power and
justice and the ways that the economy; matters of race, class, and gender; ideologies; discourses; education; religion and other social institutions; and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002, p. 90). Soja (1989) argued for a more robust critical social theory that demonstrates spatial-consciousness. Further, “certain groups in any society are privileged over others and, although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely, the oppression which characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994, p. 140).

Critical social theories emerge in response to the occurrence and institution of social systems that produce between-group power relations. A helpful frame to understand the emergence of social systems of power can be found in Emerson’s (1962) Power-Dependence equation:

\[
\text{Power (group } a/\text{group } b) = \text{Dependence (group } b/\text{group } a)
\]

In a sentence, this equation can be understood to state that *the power of group A over group B is directly related to the dependence of group B on group A*. From the perspective of this argument then, the functioning of any social system or institution, in order to become permanent, will require the dependence of some less powerful group. In contemporary U.S. society, commoditized institutions such as medical and communications technologies; oil, gas and electricity; and popular entertainment, amongst countless others, are sustained by our perceived dependence and resultant behavior. Beyond the psycho-social institution of these resources, the institution of social systems such as religion, economy, education, and government are commonly accepted complexities of society that are naturalized such that any failures of the institutions are
blamed on the autonomy of individuals. By maintaining control over “people’s naturally occurring ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving,” social institutions increase in power while dependent individuals lose their autonomy (Reeve & Assor, 2011).

Such between-group dynamics, particularly in the construction and enactment of a social system, are of central concern to critical social theories. The problem at hand is the current lack of critique of the institution of school as is reflected in research literature and school policy. Given this lack of critique, the work of school, including predominant models that seek to blame students, families, and teachers for school failure, evidences school as a fixed, monolithic system that is situated much higher than the minds of those on whom it depends, but this situation occurs in such a way that the public is made to feel dependent upon the schools. This may be described as dialectical and is the reason that a critical social theory is needed to inform analysis of the interaction between families and schools. The conceptual framework developed expands on critical social theory by incorporating key components of post-colonial theory into a critical social theory. The literature of post-colonial theory is discussed in the following section.

**Post-Colonial Theory**

Post-colonial theory, or postcolonialism, refers to the socio-spatial and temporal intellectual discourse that responds to, engages with, and contests the discourses of colonialism. It can be considered the “theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath” (Ghandi, 1998, p. 4). In particular, postcolonialism acknowledges the complex and intersecting impacts of power on the ways of being-knowing-doing of people who have been exploited or coerced by the institutions. Postcolonialism refers to resistance during not only the time following colonization but also to the dominant
narratives imposed through colonizing processes (Spivak, 1988) and the designations of space that follow. Within the postcolonial frame, the voice and the identity of the dominated emerge as informative of the experiences of those who are subject to schooling. The analysis of school for equity for economically and culturally diverse communities through the lens of postcolonialism has gained traction in recent research literature. Keddie (2012) argues that de-centering the privilege of “dominant cultural frameworks that inferiorises [sic] and silences marginalized groups” is key to making visible spaces and practices of power and inequity in schooling. Similarly, Paperson (2010) applies postcolonialism to analyze the socio-spatial experiences of students from ghetto communities in Oakland, California. It should be admitted here that Paperson (2010) provides an important articulation of postcolonialism that clarifies its application to the analysis of contemporary schooling:

“If post- simply signifies after, meaning colonialism is over, then postcolonialism really makes little sense in the ghetto context. And here I echo the mistrust of the term by Indigenous scholars and other writers on neocolonialism… I can only make sense of this word through its unintended meanings. The verb form of post as in ‘keep someone posted’ refers to keeping someone informed of the latest development or news. Post+colonial studies then announce the latest development on colonialism. Or the noun post is a place where an activity or duty is carried out. Post+colonial then refers to the place, people, or cultural arena where colonial activity or duties are carried out” (p.8).

In utilizing postcolonialism to analyze the interactions of families and schools, my argument here is not that the dynamics of power between individuals and institutions
exist only in the memories of those who have been coerced or exploited by the institutional power of school. Instead, postcolonialism facilitates a discovery of the ways in which identities have been developed by family members and school professionals who are directly impacted by the institution.

In developing a conceptual framework for family-school interaction that relies on post-colonial theory, there is such great potential to dilute the temporal, spatial and social complexities of marginalization and oppression that another, more locally and narrowly situated theory may be prove convenient. However, given the historical, spatial, and socio-political nature of schooling in diverse U.S. communities, the power of postcolonialism to uncover dynamics of power and inequity is undeniably adequate. Further, relying on the explanatory power of postcolonialism to illuminate the mystification of the social institution of schooling and its collateral impact on local families and communities is necessary, given the lack of theory-based analysis of family-school interaction. To accomplish this, I have chosen to rely upon Gyatri Spivak’s (1988) description of the complexity of the voice of the marginalized and Homi K. Bhabha’s (1996) fixity-ambivalence-processes of hybridization trialectic to uncover the problem posed by the unchanging order of schooling as evident historically and contemporarily.

Voice. In her article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Gyatri Spivak (1988) challenged dominant discourse in favor of the voices of the once dominated, the subaltern. Spivak advocated for developing the discourse of the subaltern as a viable alternative to the discourse of domination—to be understood as a narrative instead of as a counter-narrative. In this way, Spivak highlights the importance of the voice of the oppressed being treated as equal in power and presence to that of the dominant. Through such a plea
as is indicated in the essay title, the dichotomy of oppressor-oppressed comes out from the shadows of dominant discourse and is confronted directly. Similarly, Edward Said (1978/1979) challenged dominant forms of inquiry through which the objects of investigation were silenced in the research:

To the extent that Western scholars were aware of contemporary Orientals or Oriental movements of thought and culture, these were perceived either as silent shadows to be animated by the Orientalist, brought into reality by them, or as a kind of cultural and international proletariat useful for the Orientalist's grander interpretive activity (p. 208).

Evident in the work of Said and Spivak is the importance of the voice of the oppressed in discovering the location and intersectionality of power and knowledge.

Another important voice in postcolonialism belongs to Homi K. Bhabha (1994), whose efforts to uncover the impact of post-colonial processes on the identities of the subaltern are also influential and enlightening. In a powerful passage, captured here in its entirety, Bhabha develops fixity-ambivalence-processes of hybridization as a trialectic:

“An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it is rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy, and daemonic repetition… For it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing and historical discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization; produces that effect of
probabilistic and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed. Yet the function of ambivalence as one of the most significant discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power—whether racist or sexist, peripheral or metropolitan—that remains to be charted” (1994, p. 66).

The process of fixity->ambivalence->processes of hybridization reveals the inseparable nature of spatiality, power, knowledge, and identity for marginalized groups. Within this sequence, key components of the impact of colonization—or sustained, systemic dominance—emerge in a way that also explains the impact of other social systems, including schooling.

**Fixity->ambivalence->processes of hybridization.** The interrelated discursive and functional notions of fixity, ambivalence, and processes of hybridization reveal the impact of institutional dominance on subjected groups and individuals. This process produces otherness in the object of colonial discourse.

Contained within the concept of fixity is the belief and practice of an institution as unchanging and powerful. Fixity results from our understanding of an institution’s past as well as our relationship to it; fixity depends upon repetition and advertisement of our need for it. Such is the case in our engendered reliance upon traffic lanes, signals and patterns according to Topinka (2011), who relies on Lefebvre’s notion of abstract space to suggest that the fixity of material space seeks to suppress difference, leading to controlled productions of space. Fixity is not without its connection to our understanding and relation to other institutions. Fischer (2011), in discussing the foreknowledge of God and the will of mankind, argues that the fixity of the past as fully accomplished is what
grounds it as fixed. In a study of the within-region fixity of countries’ currencies and output, Hill (2011) suggests that geographic fixity is necessary for meaningful comparison of countries—changing the borders eliminates the basis for comparison. In uncovering the fixity of modern social institutions, we are warned by Bissell (2011) against relying on dualisms to explain more complex social phenomena such as the impacts of knowledge, power, and space on social interactions. Without a sophisticated mode of analysis, we lend even greater power to existing institutions and social systems as alone responsible for the current state; such a view extends unambiguous victimhood to those who are subject to institutions and social systems, thus denying their indigenous agency, spatial practice and contestations.

In direct result of the arrangements of fixity (i.e., repetition, advertisement and subject-object duality) in social systems and institutions, individuals and groups are likely to experience intricate reactions that involve both support and opposition (Oreg & Sverdlik, 2011). According to Milner (2008) institutional support to individuals and groups seeking to change systemic arrangements and practices occurs when the institution will benefit. The convergence of interests explains that direction of institutional support toward less powerful groups occurs when the institution achieves its own aims, although divergent interests and interest conflicts result in institutional support being withheld from less powerful groups and individuals to maintain the status of the more powerful institution (Bell, 1980; Tate, Ladson-Billings & Grant, 1993). Whether individuals and groups face competing or co-existing reactions comprise ambivalence, an acknowledgement that a phenomenon, in this case fixity of social systems and institutions, is two things at once—somehow necessary while also reasonably
unnecessary. Within the context of postcolonialism, “the efforts of cultural elites to affirm indigenous roots while appropriating the foreign” generates in the subject ambivalent attitudes of “admiration and aggression” (Islam, 2012). Ambivalence functions as one of the most “significant discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 66), impacting the development of identities, dynamics of social interaction and uses of space.

Third in the socio-spatial process of marginalization are processes of hybridization which reflect the necessary responsiveness of members of marginalized groups to the complexities of colonialism. The phase “processes of hybridization” evokes our awareness of the multiple ways through which hybridized identities are developed. At issue in the present discussion is the impact of ambivalence on the identities of the objects of colonial discourse. In response to the ambivalence produced by the fixity of social systems and institutions, those who are marginalized must re-conceptualize their identities; re-conceptualizing allows dual participation in institutions and indigenous spaces. It must be noted here that in order to understand hybridization as open and fluid, we must resist the lure of a dualistic understanding of colonizer and colonized. Spivak (1988) cautions against this in declaring that the identity of the othered is “irretrievably heterogeneous.” Similarly, Bissell (2011) warns against colonial dualisms, including in spatial consciousness: “the hegemony of dualistic images lies at the root of the problem, blocking or masking other interpretive possibilities” (p. 211). The hybridized identities of those othered through colonial practices of fixity do not fit easily into the dualisms of us/them, subject/object, colonizer/colonized. Instead, hybridized identities are blurred.
Thirdspace Theory

Thirdspace theory—in theorizing the spatial nature of social production and as a tool for deconstructing the social arrangements of power, knowledge, and space—brings ontological and epistemological parity between often-disconnected sets of dialectics such as space-time and history-geography. Its uses are broad and varied across multiple disciplines such as education (see, for example, Gutierrez, 2008; Hurtubise, 2009), teacher education (Martin, 2011), architecture and urban planning (Soja, 1996), and the study of social media (Edirisinghe, Nakatsu, Widodo, & Cheok, 2011); despite this breadth of application, at the core of thirdspace is a departure from the binaries of social arrangements and the production of space. To some who engage the theory, thirdspace lends itself to a space that simply exists between two existing spaces; such a space has been referred to as a contact zone (Pratt, 1991). This in-between space also has been referred to as the space of colonial hybridity:

“the colonial hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory…” (Bhabha, 1985, p. 35).

While the movement toward thirdspace-as-hybridity has helped to explain the impact of colonial discourse and structures on the identities of the dispossessed, it is not spatially grounded; instead, it is conceptual, as is evident in postmodernist turns toward spatiality.

Soja’s (1989) call for the reassertion of space in the examination of the social and historical contexts of the production of culture has been referred to as the “spatial turn,” an important development in the emergence of space as central to our understanding of social phenomena. Spatial consciousness remedies the treatment of space as an
afterthought to the history of social relations. The space of social interactions is important not simply because interactions occur in space, but because understanding where something happens is critical to understanding how and why it happens (Warf & Arias, 2009). Without spatial consciousness, our understanding of social phenomena such as interactions is flat, at best.

At the core of thirdspace theory is the trialectic of history-space-social structure in the production of our lived environments. Dialectics such as space-time or geography-history, which are typified spatial binaries that emerge in fields such as science, flatten spatial consciousness. A robust thirdspace theory can be directed toward our understandings of complex phenomena such as meaningful social change that empowers oppressed groups and weakens systems of oppression. Herein lies the connection of thirdspace theory to post-colonial theory and critical social theory. The research reviewed for this conceptual model supports the notion that understanding the complexities of interaction between individuals and groups must be developed spatially and historically. Thus, the conceptual model developed here incorporates the historical-spacial-social trialectics alongside the critical social theory foci that includes power, space, and knowledge.

Complexity of Family-School Interaction: A Conceptual Model

As claimed by Warf & Arias (2009), spatial consciousness is concerned with more than where a phenomenon occurs. Spatial consciousness also explains why and how a phenomenon is produced. This level of awareness is central to a community-grounded understanding of family-school interaction. Additionally, without a theoretical foundation for understanding the locations and relations of power of family involvement in schools,
our understanding of the roles of families in schools remains centered in literature and practice. The Three Dimensions of Complexity of Family-School Interaction framework aims to de-center the discourse of the dominant in the involvement of families in schools.

The socially and discursively constructed involvement of families in schools, as evident in research and popular literature, develops a mystique of public schooling; this mystique is given life and context through flattened perspectives, such as in the argument that the most important contribution of families to schools is the support to achieve academic goals (see, for example, Diez, Gatt, & Racionero, 2011; Lewis, Kim & Bey, 2010). This mystique also is reflected in studies of school barriers to the participation of poor families and families of color (see, for example, Kim, 2009). By centering the socio-spatial and historical interactions of schools and families, a community-grounded base of family involvement literature can emerge. Community-grounded family involvement in schools resists the domination of communities traditionally and actively underserved by schools school and policy.

**Implications of Conceptual Model for Family-School Interaction**

**Postcolonialism: Implications for identity and role construction.** Utilizing theories of colonialism to examine the context of education in the U.S. has uncovered material and psycho-cultural impacts of the structural and symbol systems of schooling (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Applying a postcolonialism framework to schools and classrooms, Subedi & Daza (2008) argue that Euro-centric and US-centric biases emerge in curriculum, pedagogy, and education research. Centering their framework in a discourse of oppression and anti-oppressive struggle, Subedi & Daza (2008) articulate the impact of dominant forms of knowledge in education and society; postcolonialism is the
lens through which this critique of systemic and institutional dominance through fixity is developed. Postcolonialism in education digs more deeply into the subjectivities of international students who travel to more developed nations (Phoenix, 2009). In experiences at contact zones, students must negotiate their identities through meeting, clashing, and grappling with the dominant cultures in which they must learn to participate. Within the contact zone, there are often “contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world” (Pratt, 1991, p. 6).

Within the present conceptual framework for analyzing the interactions of families and schools in culturally and economically diverse communities, postcolonialism informs the identification and critique of social relations that impose upon and hybridize the identities of those who are subject to arrangements of power. This framework extends the current discourse by drawing the attention of researchers to the families and communities surrounding schools. In this way, the domination of communities through compulsory schooling can be resisted through community-grounded research.

**Critical Social Theory: Implications for perspectives of the purpose of public school.** Although postcolonialism informs analysis of the impact of social and discursive power and domination on the identities of marginalized people and communities, this framework intends to support efforts to change the complexities and disproportionalities of schools in economically and culturally diverse communities. Relying upon critical social theory, this conceptual framework moves beyond identifying relations of power, knowledge, justice, and space toward seeking hope and change. Kincheloe & McLaren (2011) point out this distinction as key to critical theories:
“New poststructuralist conceptualizations of human agency and their promise that men and women can at least partly determine their own existence offered new hope for emancipatory forms of social research when compared with orthodox Marxism’s assertion of the iron laws of history, the irrevocable evil of capitalism, and the proletariat as the privileged subject and anticipated agent of social transformation” (p. 287).

Critical social theory draws the attention of researchers to features of social space, including the social production of knowledge, space, systems and institutions. In attending to these features of social space, inquiry becomes deeply grounded in the socio-spatial context. Such grounding enlightens researchers, supports emancipatory agendas in research, and resists dominant forms of knowledge such as economic determinism and ideology (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). This grounding also supports the aim of critical social theory to understand oppressive and emancipatory knowledges within local and contextual practices (Leonard, 1990; Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010). This perspective suggests a close examination of the interaction of families and schools in economically and culturally diverse communities.

**Thirdspace theory.** Schools are powerful. In American society, schools are one of “the single most effective tool[s] of the twentieth century for keeping the social order intact while appearing to offer equal opportunity” (Smith, 1995, p. 138). Schools effectively maintain power, influence, and credibility over the lives of children, and often their families as well—a phenomenon that is glaringly evident in urban communities. Because the housing patterns of neighborhoods and neighborhood schools generally
follow the same social class lines, students in urban areas most often experience learning environments with classmates from similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

With the perspective provided by thirddspace theory to understand the historical, social, and spatial features of social space and interaction, thirddspace theory has application to the intersection of geography and politics, including discourses of power, hegemony and the oppression of marginalized groups (Anzaldúa, 1999; Moje, et al., 2004). Thirddspace theory enables critical analysis of the first and second spaces of social production. For example, relegating certain dominated groups to less powerful social roles is a first space function of dominance, and their responses to this relegation, whether in a form such as resistance or in hopes of what could be, is a function of the second space. This theory has two key aspects key to this conceptual framework: a) it provides a basis for spatial consciousness that grounds research within a geographic and social context, which is necessary to community-grounded, emancipatory research, and b) in the thirddspace, the critical socio-spatial imagination reconsiders the uses of space and the characteristics of interaction in ways that achieve grounded and sustained equity, with those who are peripherally involved in or subjected to the meaning-making and social construction of others being brought to the center and becoming co-constructors of meaning and experience.

Conclusion

This research does not hold the assumption that the purpose of including families in schools is to improve student academic achievement. With such a narrow focus, opportunities for re-imagining the school involvement of families may be significantly limited. Instead, this research aims to explore the perspectives of family and school
members related to spaces of family-school interaction beyond programs, typologies, and partnerships. Although the aforementioned assumption is prevalent, it restricts the potentially powerful contributions of otherwise marginalized families to change the material and symbolic reproduction of their societies. Examining family-school interactions, as intended in this research, aims to support an imagination that enables individuals and “social scientists to look beyond the appearance of social facts toward…new social facts—the end of class society…” (Agger, 1991). This dialectical imagination (Jay, 1973) is the ability to see the world as having potential to be changed in the future, an endeavor that requires both imagination and reason (Perkins, 1985).

As an alternative to the language of parent involvement, I suggest, and will employ hereafter, use of term family-school interaction. Interaction indicates the social nature inherent in the field of literature and practice of families and schools, but is divorced from the power dynamics and assumptions inherent in related concepts: parent involvement, parent engagement and parent-school partnerships. Such a distinction is crucial here because the distribution of power in schools contributes to systems of oppression, marginalization, and the socio-political oppression (Auerbach, 2007; M. D. Young, 1999) of families from economically and culturally diverse groups. With this in mind, the current study aims to challenge current models of involving families in schools by uncovering and dismantle these systems and their associated assumptions.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of Study

Involving family members in school to support their children’s academic achievement is a research-based practice that reflects the expectation for family members to participate in school in ways that are determined by schools, whether the location of activity is the school or home. Family member involvement in school activities has been found to produce home-school overlap that supports student learning (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). Research further suggests that we can be more confident that students will achieve better when their family members are involved in school-based programs for family involvement (Jeynes, 2012), although family-school partnerships may lead to better academic achievement than including family members in school programs (Kim, Coutts, Holmes, Sheridan, Ransom, Sjuts & Rispoli, 2012). On either side of this debate is an orientation to the involvement of families that does not question the phenomenon; instead, research perspectives attempt to better understand how to get family members to become more involved in school. Our opportunity here is to question whether the phenomenon of school involvement of family members can be broadened beyond the focus on academic achievement to reflect a deeper connection to families and the community such that their interests inform schools.

Through this qualitative study, I sought to understand how different adults who were connected to the involvement of families in school perceived the interaction of families and school. These adults included family members, school professionals, and community members. I also sought to understand how these adults understood the roles
of family members in school and the purpose of school—my aim was to revisit the understandings of the role of family members as supporters of the aims of school (Epstein, 2010) and school purpose as the instruction of students, preparation for the workforce, or preparation for responsible citizenship (Mitchell, Gerwin, Schuberth, Mancini & Hofrichter, 2009). In order to discover these perspectives, I developed and revised a set of research questions:

1. What are the understandings of family-school interaction held by members of families, the local community and schools?

2. What are the roles of family members in school?

3. What is the purpose of school as understood by members of families, communities, and schools?

These questions were refined during the process of conducting the study as I became clearer that family-school interaction was broader than what families and schools did to one another. The research questions were refined through early analysis of participant responses to interview questions that indicated two unnecessary research questions (In what ways do families and schools interact? In what ways do families and community members identify and respond to efforts to engage them in schools?). Early analysis also informed the formation of an additional research question (What is the purpose of school as understood by members of families, communities, and schools?) as additional important information emerged in interviews. Refining the study questions also opened up the possibility that this study could inform possibilities for new perspectives of the interaction of families and school, perspectives that are grounded in equity and in local communities.
Context of Study

The context of this study was in major city in the Western US, Metropolitan City. Metropolitan City was made up of almost 80 neighborhoods, each identified by housing development patterns and population growth trends. The Chelsea Park neighborhood was selected for this study, providing geographic boundaries for the study. The neighborhood contained one high school (grades 9-12), two middle schools (grades 6-8), three schools for students in grades K-8, and 8 elementary schools (ECE-5th grade). The middle schools connected to Chelsea Park High School were in an adjacent neighborhood. The Chelsea Park community was selected because of the recent school reform efforts the community was experiencing as well as its diverse residential population.

Chelsea Park had just over 30,000 residents, with nearly 9,000 students enrolled in schools throughout Metropolitan City. Residents were from multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds with its resident majority made up of Latino and Black households. In addition, approximately 12% of households were at or below the national poverty income level and the proportion of residents with less than a 12th grade education (29.52%) was similar to the proportion of residents with a high school only education (26.85%) and with some college, but no degree (24.26%).

In addition to the geographic and demographic contexts of Chelsea Park, I also was interested in the school policy context, evident in the school reform efforts occurring in the community. Within the school reform context of this study, family-school experiences at the elementary school level supported the study emphasis, although school reform was not the central research topic. Family-school interactions were closely related to child and community development in child development literature (Bronfenbrenner,
1986; Henry, 1996), and the involvement of families has been shown to decrease as children grow older (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Grodnick & Slowiaczek, 1994); thus, studying family-school interactions at the elementary school level was emphasized because of the elementary grades’ broader and more immediate implications for families, the community and schooling as well as the research field.

The school reform context was revealed by several articles published by the local newspaper prior to and during the time of this study. The newspaper revealed that the school district was engaged in school reform efforts described as “forward thinking” despite the attempts of local community groups to boycott the district’s efforts (2/28/11). The paper also characterized the school reform efforts of the district as part of a “drastic turnaround plan prompted by low performance in the region” (8/11/11). As Metropolitan Public Schools pushed “an aggressive reform plan for Chelsea Park-area schools in an effort to fix the chronically low-performing programs” (9/29/2010) at five schools, there was wide support from school officials and some community members, and little apparent support from the wider community. The response of many in the community was evident in the “fiery speeches, impassioned pleas and heartfelt statements” that “were aired for hours Thursday night” before the Board approved “the largest school turnaround plan in district history” (11/19/10). It was within this context that data was collected for this study.

Two study sites were selected for this study. One study site was an elementary school, Alcorn Elementary School. Alcorn was included because it was not experiencing school reform at the time of this study; it was selected because its administration and staff were willing to participate in this study. The second study site was a non-school
community organization, the Metropolitan Center for Kids. The Center was included for this study because of its history in the community, high number of participating youth, and location in the center of Chelsea Park. Selecting one school site and one community site was done in an effort to avoid limiting voices and perspectives to adults involved in schools as well as to include family members who may not have been actively involved at school.

**Study Populations**

Participant selection for this study occurred first through key informants and then through convenience sampling. Four key informants were contacted for this study because of their affiliation with a school or the community. Linda was the principal at Alcorn, Ebony was an organizer for a community-based education advocacy organization, Brian was the Director of the Metropolitan Center for Kids, and Susan was a former teacher in Chelsea Park and the parent of a student who recently graduated from Chelsea Park High School. Convenience sampling using a “snowball” approach followed the key informant interviews, allowing me to identify additional study participants. Linda shared the names of teachers whom she thought would have been interested in participating in the study, but she allowed me to attend a faculty meeting when I asked her for an opportunity to invite all members of the school faculty to participate in the study. I was able to share information about the study and distribute information sheets and my contact information. From this, five teachers volunteered to participate in the study.

Similarly, Brian volunteered to recommend family members to participate in this study. He invited family members to participate in a group interview during a community
event at the Metropolitan Center for Kids. Six family members participated in a group interview that occurred at the Center.

Susan helped me identify community hubs where street interviews could be conducted. Her recommendations were based on her history in the community, and based on her suggestions, I conducted street interviews with 18 community members near a Safeway grocery store and strip mall as well as a Family Dollar strip mall in Chelsea Park. My interview with Ebony, a community organizer, did not result in the identification of opportunities for additional study participants.

**Data Sources**

The collection of data for this study began with district documents from the Metropolitan Public School District website. In addition to the district documents, I collected observation field notes at both study sites and conducted three forms of interviews; face-to-face individual interviews, group interviews, and street interviews with individuals. I also accessed the record of telephone calls made to the Office of Family Involvement for Metropolitan Public Schools; these were calls related to schools in the Chelsea Park community over an 18-month period.

**District documents.** Over two months during the fall, I accessed 382 policy documents ranging in topics from Basic Commitments of the District to Support Services policies to School-Community Relations. Of these multiple policies, I conducted a basic search for those policy documents that discussed the district’s mission, families and parents, school space, and achievement. There were seventeen documents that fit these criteria.
Observation field notes. I collected observation field notes at both study sites over two months. My observations at Alcorn occurred at afternoon pickup or morning drop-off for three days during this period. My observation of the school pickup and drop-off lasted 15-20 minutes. I also observed a Science Fair event, School Collaboration Team meeting, and a meeting of the Active Parents Organization. These observations lasted between 45-90 minutes, depending on the planned length of the meeting. My observation notes included: a) time of arrival, b) location, c) estimates of entry/exit traffic, d) numbers of persons present, e) observable characteristics and types of persons present, f) structure of program or event, including speakers and roles, and g) departure time.

At the Metropolitan Center for Kids, my observations also occurred over two months. My observations at the Center included activity in the lobby between adults, and between adults and children. On two occasions, I observed a staff member leading the afternoon education program; each of my observations lasted 20 minutes. I also observed a two-hour parent night in recognition of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and a community meeting to help parents select schools for their children; this was a two-hour observation.

Following each observation, within ten minutes of departing the study site, I used the recording device to capture my recollections of events, uncertainties, possible initial meanings, and, where appropriate, possible connections to other field experiences. Each audio recording lasted between two and eight minutes, and supplemented my handwritten field notes through a wide range of reactions. These impressions and questions were used during data collection to identify potential next steps.
Individual interviews. Questions for face-to-face interviews with individual members of families and schools were developed based on the Research Questions. The interviews were conducted following a general interview guide approach (Turner, 2010), which is a somewhat structured interview approach guided by interview questions while allowing for flexibility. As the interviewer using a general interview guide approach, I was able to ask each participant the same interview questions, although the order of questions may have been altered based on my interaction with the respondent and the directions the interviews took. I conducted eight in-person individual interviews with community members, family members, and school professionals. The interviews ranged in length from 30-84 minutes, and each interview was recorded using a digital recording device. The interviews were conducted at locations requested by study participants. Interview participants, along with brief descriptions of their roles in the community, are included in Table 3.1. The interview question guide is included in Appendix B.

Group interviews. Questions for the group interviews were developed along with the questions for in-person individual interviews; group interview questions also were based on the Research Questions. I conducted two group interviews. The first group interview included six persons and occurred at the Metropolitan Center for Kids and included family members; these family members were five mothers and a father. The location of the first group interview was determined by convenience, as the Center provided a closed-space away from all other activity. This interview lasted 66 minutes and was recorded on a digital recording device. The interview was later transcribed for analysis. The second group interview occurred at Alcorn Elementary School in an intervention classroom and included three teachers and the school psychologist; the
intervention classroom was the location requested by the participating school professionals.

Table III.1 Overview of face-to-face individual interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Participant Description</th>
<th>Interview Length</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brian Robinson</td>
<td>Director, Metropolitan Center for Kids (Center)</td>
<td>83 min.</td>
<td>Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda Dominguez</td>
<td>Principal, Alcorn Elementary School</td>
<td>84 min.</td>
<td>Alcorn School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebony Torres</td>
<td>Community Organizer (self-identified)</td>
<td>67 min.</td>
<td>Local Coffee Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilio Garcia</td>
<td>Parent, Alcorn Elementary School</td>
<td>33 min.</td>
<td>Local Coffee Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany Simon</td>
<td>Parent, Metropolitan Center for Kids</td>
<td>40 min.</td>
<td>Community Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Matthews</td>
<td>Community Activist (self-identified)</td>
<td>53 min.</td>
<td>Participant’s Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriett Davis</td>
<td>Teacher, Metropolitan Center for Kids</td>
<td>40 min.</td>
<td>Alcorn School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison Lawrence</td>
<td>Teacher, Alcorn Elementary School</td>
<td>30 min.</td>
<td>Alcorn School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interview lasted 54 minutes and was recorded on a digital recording device.

The interview also was later transcribed for analysis. The group interview question guide is included in Appendix B.

**Street interviews.** The third interview procedure included street interviews conducted over four days in the Chelsea Park community. Questions for the street interviews were developed along with the questions for in-person individual and group interviews; these questions were based on the Research Questions. Street interviews occurred at high-traffic public places, outside of the local Safeway and Family Dollar stores, as well as outside of a local barbershop. During the street interviews, I invited passersby to “answer a few questions about schools” in the community, explaining that the interviews would take “just a few minutes, probably no more than three.” I conducted
street interviews with all interested and willing patrons. The total number of street
interview participants was 18 over the four days, which is approximately one-eighth of
the total number of passersby who might have participated in the street interviews. I
wrote out summary participant responses to each question on individual question guides.
The interview question guide is included in the Appendix C.

**Telephone call logs.** The fifth data source was telephone call logs that I accessed
through the school district’s Office of Family Involvement. I requested the call log
following document analysis and interviews with family, community and school
members. I was granted access by making a direct request to the district Parent
Involvement Specialist through an email. The telephone log contained a record of nearly
every telephone call made to the office from parents and members of the community with
concerns or complaints about schools in the district. Not every telephone call was logged
into this system; calls that were easily answered by district employees, including school
calendar inquiries, were answered by the staff member but not recorded in the log. To be
specific, through personal communication with a liaison, I learned that:

“Only the calls that require follow-up from our constituency team get logged into
[the system]. If our front-line staff members can answer the question on the spot,
they will do so. Sometimes it is a matter of redirecting their calls to another
department such as Human Resources. Some questions that come in are about
school calendars, school closures, basic policy questions, phone numbers, etc.”

After an initial meeting with parent liaison from the Office of Family Involvement, I was
granted permission to access the call log containing information from August 2010-
January 2012. This included the records of 74 telephone calls.
Data Analysis

Data for this study were analyzed iteratively over six months, requiring several revisions to a very non-linear process. The research questions guided initial analysis of the data, which occurred directly on the district policy documents and interview transcripts using content analysis techniques. The topic of each research question was used to discover big ideas, or major themes, in participant responses to interview questions. Research question topics also were used to discover big ideas in district policy documents. The research question topics were: a) role of participant, b) role of family, c) purpose of school, d) why family-school interaction, e) how family-school interaction, and f) context of family-school interaction. Each of these deductive topics was treated as an initial code and applied to the district documents and interview transcripts.

I narrowed the list of early information categories to three descriptive codes that appeared to contain the key themes regarding family and community involvement in the school district. Descriptive codes require little interpretation as they attribute a class of phenomena to a text segment (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It seemed necessary to narrow this list of early information categories in order to build more directly on a more focused set of indicators that emerged. These codes were a) role of family, b) purpose of school, and c) school space. Examples of these categories are included in Table III.2.
Table III.2. Coding characteristics for district policy documents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Information Categories</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Policy Document Name</th>
<th>Text Segment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role of Family</td>
<td>This document category addresses, directly or indirectly, the forms and opportunities for involvement of family members in the practices of school at the district, school or classroom level.</td>
<td>Parent Involvement</td>
<td>…believes that parents (including those who are economically disadvantaged, have disabilities, have limited English, have limited literacy, are of any racial or ethnic minority background, or are parents of migratory children) are partners with teachers and other staff in the education of their children and that parent involvement and empowerment are essential at all levels throughout the school district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of School</td>
<td>Documents in this category indicate a stated or understood purpose, mission, or vision of schooling, including at the district, school or classroom level.</td>
<td>Policy Framework for Accelerating Gains in Academic Achievement for All Students</td>
<td><em>We will lead the nation's cities in student achievement, high school graduation, college preparation, and college matriculation. Our students will be well prepared for success in life, work, civic responsibility, and higher education.</em> To fulfill this vision, the Board expects the district to accomplish the following mission: <em>…provide all students the knowledge and skills necessary to become contributing citizens in our diverse society and to compete in the 21st century global economy.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Space</td>
<td>Documents included in this category designate specific uses of school district buildings, including access protocols and policies, restrictions, and descriptions of intended use.</td>
<td>Visitors to Schools</td>
<td>In order to insure that no unauthorized persons enter buildings with wrongful intent, <em>all visitors to the schools shall report to the school office when entering, receiving authorization before visiting elsewhere in the building.</em> This will not apply when parents have been invited to a classroom or assembly program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Following this first attempt at getting the “lay of the land,” I extracted big ideas that emerged through constant comparative analysis. Constant comparative analysis (Boeije, 2002) allowed me to form categories through comparing and contrasting participants’ responses to questions. Comparison and contrast of participants’ responses to interview questions occurred through steps to fragment and connect ideas in the texts. I developed a series of concept map images that allowed me to identify connections and disconnections between responses to interview questions. An example of the concept map is included in Appendix A.

The transcript linguistic context surrounding statements about the big ideas made by study participants determined the nature of connections and disconnections. These connections and disconnections were triangulated through comparison to observation field notes and digital recordings following observation and interviews. An example of a disconnection emerged in a participant’s response to a question about her history of being involved with her children’s schools: this family member initially stated that “Oh, it’s great for me because me, myself, teachers and administrators, we’re all on the same page when it comes to my kids’ education.” Later, this family member says about her son’s experience in school that “it’s like you’re taking this child with these issues and putting him into a regular environment and you’re expecting him to excel. And that’s just not going to happen.” For these sorts of responses within an interview transcript, I used arrows and question marks on the concept map.

The next step in my data analysis was the comparison between interview transcripts and participant response to interview questions. I attempted to analyze the interview transcripts by hand, using margins first, and then index cards as I continued to
generate initial codes from the district documents. Throughout each interview transcript, I used the margins to identify descriptive topics of respondent’s comments (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This analysis required little inference (Carspecken, 1996), as it was close to the primary record of the interview transcripts. For example, when participants discussed their role within the local community or school, whether voluntarily or in response to a particular question, the label “Role-Comm” or “Role-Sch” was written in the margins. Engaging in low-level coding in this way helped me to identify segments of text that were applicable to each of the research question categories and to capture additional ideas that emerged during the interviews. Based on each research question category, which provided initial codes to analyze interview data, I developed a second level of codes from the individual and group interviews. This resulted in 11 descriptive codes at a second coding level. These codes focused on connecting responses according to emergent themes, between and among study participants, and helped to elucidate possible response clusters that were emerging from the data. Both levels of codes are reflected in Table III.3.

In applying codes, I tried to make connections between responses in order to identify themes or categories beyond these levels of codes. What seemed to be missing from my analysis was the meaning that codes should generate. In order to dig a bit deeper into my data, I utilized an analytic framework developed by Srivatava & Hopwood (2009).
Table III.3. List and examples of first- and second-level codes of in-person and group interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial codes</th>
<th>Second-level codes</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understandings of Interaction</td>
<td>Interaction in Setting of School</td>
<td>“So let me give you an example. CSAP night that we did with parents, teaching parents about how to prepare their kids for CSAP night, not just to bed early and all that, which the skit—not just that. That’s what people say they do with parents. That’s a simple thing. That’s like, basic. We had parents working with their kids on CSAP items.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction in Practice of School</td>
<td>“All their friends are on the bus, get to go to the Metro Center and hang out. And they’re doing tutoring at the Metro Center. Like right now, they have tutoring Monday and Wednesday. So I take advantage of everything. I go to. I can’t afford. I’m a single mother.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Family Members</td>
<td>Complexities</td>
<td>“I just think it’s a central part of a neighborhood, especially this neighborhood. Because I think all the schools allowed the kids to be able to go get the support they might need in regards to what they’re not getting at home, they can get it in school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constraints</td>
<td>“They’re mostly relying, I think, on word of mouth. I hope that many of them are going to the school and making a visit. But…I don’t know realistically how many people are doing that. So that would say to me that they’re not necessarily relying on the school or the district for information. I think that it’s hard to get useful information from the district. To get it, you have to go to a website, which means that you have to have a certain…level of computer knowledge.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>“The goal is to build their knowledge capacity, their leadership capacity to advocate for themselves, for their own child, and really for all children in a public school system. So that if they move from Chelsea Park to Detroit or New Orleans or Chicago and there’s an issue with that school, then they can organize themselves and get that thing taken care of.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table III.3. cont’d.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of Family Members</th>
<th>Options</th>
<th>“…we had a meeting with somebody who could translate…I said, ‘Tell her that she’s welcome to come in my classroom. She can observe. She could do something with me. She could work with her child.’ She came in. She’s been in twice now.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of School</td>
<td>Neighborhood/Community</td>
<td>“…giving something to do with some educational setup—opposed to out on the street running around. It keeps those kids out of the bad elements.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Society</td>
<td>“I think ideally a school is creating students that are prepared for the future, so not just prepared for the world today, not being just able to navigate the world today and get into a college, but are teaching them to be fully formed people.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
<td>“I think, for me, the purpose, I think school is to kind of help nurture what is already there because I think at homes there’s some foundation that’s laid.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students &amp; Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Well, you know, the purpose of public education is to help—I’m going to speak to my level of students here—to help our students become successful in life. And they have to do that with the tools of the trade. And the trade is reading, writing, arithmetic, right? If you don’t have those tools, you can’t make it in life. And so our job is to help kids become proficient and advanced, in my opinion, in all those major content areas so they literally can leave here prepared for middle school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schooling</td>
<td></td>
<td>“So the purpose of public education is to make sure that it levels the playing field so that everybody can have an opportunity to live well…in this country… I believe that they believe that that is the purpose of the schools out here, even though it’s not happening… My friends say their purpose is doing just what they’re doing: putting out kids who can’t go to college, can’t go to a two-year college, can’t get a job. Because as soon as they can’t fill out the application, even one line, the boss says, ‘You’re disqualified right there.’”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflexive and iterative analysis required that I acknowledge my interpretation of data according to “theoretical frameworks, subjective perspectives, ontological and epistemological positions, and intuitive field understandings” (Srivatava & Hopwood, 2009). Srivatava and Hopwood (2009) developed a “practical iterative framework” for analyzing qualitative data, consisting of three questions:

1. What are the data telling me?
2. What is it I want to know?
3. What is the dialectical relationship between what the data are telling me and what I want to know?

I found this framework useful to continue data analysis across the documents, in-person individual interviews and group interviews and to integrate street interviews into the analysis. In order to continue the analysis of data in a reflexive, iterative manner, drawing upon the multiple levels of inquiry, I generated an analytic model connecting the levels of inquiry with the various sources of data, as shown in Figure III.1. This analytic model required a component that would acknowledge the emerging constructs as they were related to the interaction between the home, school, community, and district. Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) Ecological Systems Theory seemed apt for this level of analysis of the broader context of study.
In recognition of these differences, I analyzed the data further. When I asked participants to explain why family members should be involved in schools, the responses of family members would focus on sharing responsibility (“well they shouldn’t put the responsibility on schools because you have to think about the fact that you are the parent and the best example is going to be you”) while the responses of members of schools would focus on the education and professional experiences of family members (“well I think that depends on their background and what their own experiences have been, you know”). Subsequently, data for this question was coded into two themes: roles and responsibilities or qualifications and criteria. When I asked participants to describe the purpose of school, their responses would focus on the idea (“I think ideally a school is creating students that are prepared for the future, so not just prepared for the world today, not just being able to navigate the world today and get into
a good college, but are teaching them to be fully formed people”), or the perceived actual, in which the outcome differs from the purpose (“so the purpose of public education is to make sure that it levels the playing field so that everyone can have an opportunity to live well, or to live, you know, comfortably in this country. I would say the outcome is not that”). Responses to the question of the purpose of school fell into the categories of ideal/should be and actual/as is.

Another significant decision at this stage of the study resulted from the realization that I had not adequately refined the research questions to frame the information that this study was intended to elicit. While the original research questions were connected under the conceptual umbrella of family-school interaction, they were not developed adequately to uncover the systemic arrangements of family-school interaction. Nonetheless, in the analysis of data, systemic arrangements of family-school interaction emerged. What became evident in the data I analyzed was that the components of the interaction of families and schools included space, contextual nature of roles, and understanding of the purpose of school.

Outliers emerged in participant responses during in-person individual and group interviews as participants shared their perspectives of others. For example, during a group interview, one family member criticized other family members as less inclined to be involved in their children’s schooling (“We don't have those kind of parents anymore. Parents need to be fully involved in what their children's doing, whether it's here, whether it's at the school. I mean you get those parents that may have vacation time, take a day off, well they'll lay up and watch TV all day instead of walk in here and see what my child is doing at school”). In another interview, a school member described her efforts
to engage family members as at a higher level than her colleagues (“It's hard for people to be able to do the work with people that they don't know or feel comfortable with. And I think that's one of the biggest problems”). In order to understand this phenomenon better, I looked into Carl Jung’s (1936) theory of archetypes.

**Jungian archetypes.** An archetype is one’s collective, often unconscious, understanding of people in definite forms (Jung, 1936). An archetype also may be a broad, generic form of a person, such as a damsel in distress, hero, or mother figure. For example, the traditional Hero archetype aims to be perceived as in engaged in some mythic quest. The use of the archetype construct has found footing in other fields, so I did not consider it too great a stretch to consider it as a tool to analyze these data. The professional-as-hero archetype has been discussed in other professions, such as Law and Medicine. In analyzing the lawyer hero archetype in film, Elkins describes the hero as “great warriors, engaged in epic courtroom battles, facing mean-spirited foes, and prevailing in the name of justice” (Elkins, n.d.). In an online web log, Dr. Anthony Youn (2011) characterizes the god complex of many physicians by posing the rhetorical question, “So what causes some doctors to think they are on par with God?” He goes on to elaborate that it is likely the result of having “the power to make life or death decisions for their patients gets to some doctors’ heads. Physicians are the ones that, with a pen, can write an order for a patient that saves his or her life.”

I identified four archetypes initially: the Exceptional Self, the Compensating Educator, the Inadequate Other, and the Advocating Community Member. Each of these archetypes seemed to help explain the patterns of responses from study participants. However, upon further analysis, I discovered that two were shared across each category
of participant. These two were: Exceptional Self and Inadequate Other. I discuss these archetypes further in Chapter IV.

**District call log.** In analyzing the study data, I recognized that the broader voices of family members were not included in the data I collected. Only those participants who were accessed through key informant interviews and convenience sampling were involved, and I considered the implications of keeping a much broader population of family members silenced by not including them in this study. I viewed these implications as undermining the purpose of this study, which was to understand the interactions of family members and schools. I sought to gain access to the record of telephone calls made to the district, as these telephone calls would reflect the broad array of concerns for which family members called the district.

I was granted access to the telephone call log developed and maintained by the Metropolitan Public School District Office of Family Involvement (OFI) for the date range August 2010-January 2012. I limited my search to the nine elementary schools in the Chelsea Park community and closely reviewed each of the 74 telephone calls that came in during this 18-month period. This was also particularly helpful because neither the format nor the questions included in the street interviews provided access to specific interactions between families and schools in the Chelsea Park community. The telephone call logs provided details of specific interactions between families and schools. For example, a parent called OFI because her daughter was “attacked” by four boys and a school employee, a paraprofessional, did not respond to the attack. After speaking with the principal who asked the offending students to write letters of apology to the girl, the child’s mother contacted OFI to seek an alternative, more severe consequence for the four
boys. The telephone call log was a running record of telephone calls made by members of families and communities within the Metropolitan Public School District. While not every call into the OFI was recorded in the call log, logged calls provided necessary contribution to this study.

The Iterative-Reflexive Analytic Framework in Figure III.1 guided my analysis of the phone call logs. I developed a list of descriptive codes for the various documented reasons for calls made by family and community members from Chelsea Park to the Metropolitan Public Schools District. The research question categories—purpose of school, role of families in school, and interaction between families and school—were not adequate to organize what the telephone call log data revealed. However, it was apparent that family and community members made calls to the district (OFI) after having an experience at school that provoked them to pursue recourse. The data revealed that calls were made to express concerns about the policies of schools and practices of members of schools. After reviewing each of the 74 telephone calls made to the OFI, low-level descriptive coding informed five categories of calls: a) family or community member access to school; b) interpersonal interaction between school person and a non-school person; c) school policy; d) school environment; and e) the academic program. These categories are described in Table III.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>No. of calls</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Example from field notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Family or community member calls to express concern about a perceived barrier to accessing the school building.</td>
<td>1/23/12: Parent concerned about gates to parking lot being locked. Wife has “handicap” and needs access, but this has not happened even after contact with principal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Family or community member called to express concerns about a negative interaction that occurred between a school person, such as a teacher, office staff member, or administrator, and a non-school person such as a child or family member.</td>
<td>1/5/12: Parent thinks Assistant Principal is rude and not a people person. Complains that administration was not chosen well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School policy</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Family or community member called to express concerns about a school policy that was inaccessible or that affected a child’s education experience.</td>
<td>5/12/11: Child wrote on bookcase. Parent concerned about change in status of offense from Type 1 “damage to school property” to Type 3 “damage to school property-including graffiti with a price range from $500-$5000 in damages.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School environment</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Family or community member called to express concerns about the environment of the school, including student safety, well-being, or overall school experience.</td>
<td>11/15/11: Son, grade 3, jumped three times in a week. Threatened by fourth graders: “we’re going to f’g kill you.” Daughter, 4th grade, hit by student—went to hospital for concussion check. Other daughter, 5th grade, teased for weight. Para told 4th grade daughter that 3rd grade brother is “freaking coo coo.” Principal has not intervened.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic program</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Family or community member called to express concerns about school’s support of child’s academic performance, including access to special education services.</td>
<td>4/19/11: 3rd grade child at 1st grade level. School recommended summer program, advised against retention, but parent wants disability testing. School social worker suggests emotional damage from retention. Parent also (and husband) has learning disabilities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table III.5. Categories of resolutions to calls made to OFI between Aug. 2010-Jan. 2012 for elementary schools in Chelsea Park community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolution category</th>
<th>No. of calls</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Contextualized example from field notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting with school</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>The issue was (to be) resolved through a meeting with the school principal, school psychologist or other member of the school administration. This does not include meetings with district personnel.</td>
<td>Issue: 3/23/11: Daughter “attacked” by four boys. Parent not responsive to treatment of their daughter (Environment). Resolution: Boys are Hispanic [sic]. Parents think it was racially motivated. Parent thinks principal lied about boys writing apology notes which daughter did not receive. Meeting was requested but was not held—father thought it would be pointless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family member resolved</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>The issue was resolved by the concerned family member, without the direct involvement of a member of the school. This often occurred when family members were not satisfied with the response of the school or OFI.</td>
<td>Issue: 5/23/11: Child is bullied. Parent feels teacher calls for her child’s behavior but does not respond when she is being bullied. (Environment) Resolution: Parent withdrew child. Principal is willing to meet with parent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not resolved or resolution not available</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>The resolution to the issue was recorded in a journal that was not available, or no resolution to the issue was recorded.</td>
<td>Issue: 9/7/11: Parents feel daughter is treated unfairly at school. (Environment) Resolution: Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School or district policy reinforced</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>The issue was (to be) resolved by the invocation or reinforcement of a school or district policy.</td>
<td>Issue: 8/31/11: School secretary continues to call parent about child, who is being home schooled. (Interpersonal/School Policy) Resolution: School will not withdraw child until formal Home School Office paperwork is completed. Child was eventually registered for homeschool.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additionally, the call log recorded the various resolutions to each of the recorded calls. Through low-level descriptive coding, four categories of resolutions were identified: a) a meeting with a member of the school; b) reinforcement of the school or district policy; c) issue was not resolved or resolution was not included in the log; and the d) family member resolved issue independently. These resolutions are described in Table III.5. Examples provided are drawn from researcher field notes.

Wrapping up these steps of analysis required some efforts to find the alignment among the data. This was the final push toward generating findings, and it required triangulation. Triangulation involves the use of different sources of information in order to increase validity in a qualitative study (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011). Also, triangulation of methods seeks to corroborate findings across the various biases and strengths of the data collection method (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), while avoiding assumption of correspondence of data. Triangulation led to a revised coding structure, which is included in Table III.6.

Table III.6. Revised Coding Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes from Documents</th>
<th>Codes from Calls</th>
<th>Codes from Interviews</th>
<th>Combined/Revised Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role of Family</td>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Complexities</td>
<td>Power of Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Constraints</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Options</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of School</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Schooling</td>
<td>Power of Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Program</td>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Purpose of School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space</td>
<td>Access</td>
<td>School Setting</td>
<td>Access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>School Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

My purpose in developing this study has been to understand the perceptions of family-school interaction held by members of schools, families, and a local community. Eliciting the perceptions of various members of families, school and communities was intended to shift the lens away from academic outcomes of schooling to the perceived characteristics of a social phenomenon with important implications for our society and the ways in which we conduct the endeavor of school. To be specific, schooling is compulsory, and the involvement of family members is required, but the practice of school is created for, rather than with, family and community members. In studying this phenomenon, several perspectives emerged, indicating the complexity of family-school interaction. In the next chapter, I articulate the study’s findings and apply a socio-critical lens to the data in order to uncover the multiple layers of complexity of family-school interaction.
CHAPTER IV
PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the four major findings of this study. These findings reveal that the phenomenon of family-school interaction both sustains and opposes the status quo of the public school. These findings also reveal that inherent in the interaction of families and school is the issue of power. The four major study findings are:

1. Power emerged in two forms in the interaction of families and schools:
   institutional power of school and individual power of families and family members. The institutional power of school was coercive, historical, collective and pervasive, and school employees enacted this power throughout their interactions with families. The individual power of families was resistant, confined, and subsumed. In the interaction of families and schools, the individual power of families was either co-opted or dismissed by school professionals enacting the institutional power of schools.

2. A contradiction existed in the understandings of the purpose of school held by members of families, the community, and school professionals. All agreed that the purpose of school was to give students academic skills, although community members and school professionals qualified the enactment of school’s purpose as different from its stated purpose because of the Chelsea Park community. Family members, on the other hand, did not acknowledge that the purpose of school was different within the Chelsea Park community.

3. Family-school interaction was constrained by a context of barriers restricting family members’ access to information and to the physical space of schools.
These barriers were enforced by school policies and sustained by the practices of school professionals, even as they sought to involve family members in school.

4. There were three school-related roles for family members, each defined in response to the enactment of the institutional power of school. Whether family members were a) present and engaged in school practices, b) co-opted school leaders, or c) collective advocates, their roles in schools were the result of their efforts being exploited by the institutional power of school.

Throughout this chapter, in order to present and support these findings, I provide an analysis informed by the multiple data sources used for this study. For each finding, following the presentation of data sources and analysis, details are discussed and examples are provided. Additionally, a discussion follows each finding with explicit connections made to the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 1. A conclusion brings this chapter to its end.

**Relations and Forms of Power**

In this study of the interaction of families and school, power emerged in two forms. The institutional power of school was evident in the historical and current coercive policies of the school district and the related practices of school professionals as they interacted with the families of their students. The institutional power of school also was apparent in the oppositional practices of family members, as the power of family members emerged in response to the enactment of the power of school. These forms were the institutional power of school and the individual power of families.
The concept of individual family power was conceptualized by the U.S. Department of Education (2010), as parent power. Parent power emphasizes the behaviors of family members in support of their children’s learning outside of school. The steps to accomplish the goal of the parent power program, which is to make education a priority and a legacy for the family, include: a) be responsible, b) be committed, c) be positive, d) be patient, e) be attentive, f) be precise, g) be mindful of mistakes, h) be results-oriented, i) be diligent, j) be innovative, and k) be there. In addition to the location of these practices outside of school, the emphasis of the parent power concept highlights the inadequacies of families. This conceptualization of parent power emerges in the data I gathered for this study; in an effort to emphasize the individualistic nature of parent power, I have renamed it individual power of families.

Both forms of power demonstrated characteristics related to their enactment. However, the involvement of family members as a form of power was evident in this study as constrained by the institutional power of school. The characteristics of the forms of power and the features of their enactment guide the discussion of this finding.

**Data Sources and Analysis**

In the process of conducting this study to understand the interaction of families and schools, 17 documents were collected from the website of the Metropolitan Public Schools, face-to-face interviews were conducted with three school professionals, two family members, and three members of the local community, and field observations were conducted at two sites in the community. Each of the school district policy documents revealed the forms and relations of power between schools, families and the community; those documents inform this finding. Additionally, this finding is informed by a group
interview with four teachers from Alcorn Elementary School, a group interview with six family members at the Metropolitan Center for Kids, in-person interviews with two family members, an in-person interview with one community activist and an in-person interview with a community organizer. Observations at the school site and the site of a local community organization conducted over a period of three weeks also reveal the forms and relations of power and inform this finding.

These data were analyzed iteratively using coding practices that informed the identification of patterns and themes. The initial codes of “power,” “influence,” “telling,” “restricting,” “resisting,” and “opposing” were narrowed into the themes of “power of school” and “power, non-school.” After repeated attempts to apply these codes to the data, and after revisions to the codes, the systemic and coercive nature of school power became clearer, as did the resistant and confined nature of the power of families. During the analysis of power relations, a pattern of responses became apparent in which study participants demonstrated parallel ways of describing themselves and others. To better understand this pattern, a separate step was utilized to analyze these data. I developed an additional set of codes to isolate and understand the ways in which study participants described themselves differently from others. This subsequent analysis led to an additional feature of this finding, that study participants saw themselves as exceptional while perceiving others as inadequate. This feature of the finding provided further evidence of the institutional power of school, and is discussed in detail following the initial presentation of this finding.
Details of Finding: Relations and Forms of Power

Through this study I found that the power of schools differed from the power of families with children enrolled in school. While the institutional power of school was evident in policies of the school district, including the articulation of consequences for the violation of some of the district’s policies, it also was evident in the practices of school employees as they interacted with members of families. On the other hand, the power of families was not evident in the policies of the district or in the practices of school employees, even when those policies ostensibly supported the engagement of family members. Members of families enacted the institutional power of school when they were involved with school; their individual power was excluded from the school context, both by policy and school practice. The individual power of families was enacted through their resistance and the establishment of boundaries.

Institutional power of school. The institutional power of school was revealed by the policy documents of the school district as well as in-person and group interviews. Field observations also uncovered the practices of schools that indicated the arrangements of school power. A total of 17 district policy documents described the parameters of school practice and the involvement of members of families and the community. These documents included guidelines for the conduct of family members on school property and at school meetings, the involvement of family and community members in decision making committees, and the role of family members in the development of school curriculum. The institutional power of school to involve members of families was coercive; coercion refers to the practices of school that attain school aims
through the involvement of families while constraining the involvement of members of families and the community, which are less powerful (Marcuse, 2010).

Coercive school power to control the involvement of family members was evident in a district document entitled “Public Conduct on School Property.” The policy states that:

The Board of Education encourages and depends on full parental engagement as a strong component of student achievement. Further, the Board affirms and recognizes all parental rights to advocate for their children, to seek clarification and express opinions about curriculum matters and school governance, as well as to seek resolutions to safety or other issues that interfere with their child’s right to receive a quality public education, without fear of retaliation in any form. However, it is the responsibility of staff to ensure a safe and secure school environment conducive to learning, and therefore require the operation of schools to be free of any conduct intended to obstruct, disrupt or interfere with teaching, research, service, administering or disciplinary functions or any other activity sponsored or approved by the Board. As such, parents are required to comport themselves on school grounds according to the guidelines delineated above.

In the event that a parent / legal guardian is found to violate this policy of conduct on school property, he/she may be restricted from the otherwise free access normally afforded to parents and legal guardians to ensure the safe and orderly operation of the school. In that event, a written communication will be provided to the parent or guardian.
Similar policy guidelines with specific attention to constraining the involvement of family and community members in schools were found in the “Visitors to Schools” policy, the “Parent Involvement” policy, and the “Community Use of School Facilities” policy.

The historical nature of school’s institutional power was evident in community members’ descriptions of the context in which the involvement of members of families and the community were constrained by the school district. For example, Ebony, a community organizer, described the school district’s practice of designating schools in Chelsea Park for turnaround as an exercise of power over the community. She states that:

There has been a lot of efforts to turn around schools prior to actually going through turnaround that have failed. And so it builds a distrust. It's these people who generally don't live in this community, don't understand the community, only come here unless it's to make some kind of judgment or make some kind of change or say that we're going to do things very differently or we're going to take this out or we're going to do this and not do it without having a real connection to those families and to those parents and really getting their input. So there's a divide there.

Additionally, Susan, a community activist, described a pattern of the school district’s exercise of its institutional power over the Chelsea Park community as evident in turnaround efforts that did not include families:

What you may not be aware of, Antwan, and I'm aware because I've been in this from the ground floor of it, MPS does not want community input. And they have various really criminal, I would say, fraudulent ways to make it seem as if they
are involving families and community in the decisions. But they're not. They
basically make a plan, come to you as a community when the plan is a done deal,
ask for your opinion, and if your opinion is against what they want, they simply
go ahead and do it anyway. That's what they did with this first turnaround.

The district’s turnaround processes for several schools in Chelsea Park were exercises in
institutional school power. Supporting Ebony and Susan’s descriptions of the school
district exercising institutional power by constraining the involvement of members of
families and the Chelsea Park community in the practices of school, the local paper
reported that “opponents [of school turnaround] question whether the turnaround
decisions were made too quickly, without incorporating community input or without
giving the schools time to improve before being slated to close” (3/25/11).

The institutional power of school also was a collective phenomenon, as it was
shared by school employees who engaged in practices that confined the behaviors of
family members to those that were consistent with the aims of school. Each school
employee indicated their complicity in enacting the confining practices of school
institutional power when they described the ways in which members of families were
taught to be involved in school. In her description of involving families in school, Linda,
the principal at Alcorn, stated that the responsibility to qualify members of families to be
involved at school was the collective responsibility of school employees if these family
members did not have adequate professional experience:

So those are the kinds of things that I think schools aren’t good at is providing the
structures for parents to understand how to get involved and how they can really
maximize their support for kids. We're too general. You want to volunteer? Well
for what. And so we have to help them. So we've tried to become more - and we're still working on it. For example, we had a group of parents who were organizing parent volunteers. Well the challenge was to me that I pretty much ran out of time. I work with them as much as I can but with my goal of overall improving student achievement, I got to be in the classrooms, I got to be working with teachers, but I still want to spend time with parents because it's important to me. And when I have to no longer be leading the parents and helping grow them and helping them learn how to do some of the work - because a lot of parents don't come in here knowing how to do all this work. You know some parents do, especially if they have professional experience. Other parents who don't have feel uncomfortable. There could be language, different languages spoken. So there's a whole different level of engagement and involvement that a principal has to do and the school has to do.

The institutional power of school was pervasive, with subtle and nuanced evidence emerging throughout the school, in communication to members of families, and during school events. Observation field notes, collected over several weeks, indicated that school’s institutional power was revealed directly and indirectly during a School Collaboration Team meeting and a standardized test preparation event for family members. During a School Collaboration Team meeting, for example, a community member described the power of school to betray the trust of the community. The observation field note from this meeting is partly transcribed below:

There is some discussion about district disappointment re: inadequate spaces at AES, distrust with the district re: use of bond issues such as at Global View HS.
In claiming that the community “got stung” by voting in support of a bond issue, a community member was referring to a ballot issue to request additional taxpayer dollars in support of constructing a campus shared by five charter schools for grades K-5, 6-8, 9-12 in addition to K-12. During several months leading up to the election, however, the sign on the land stated that the land would be used for a “Future Global View High School.” The Global View community is directly adjacent to Chelsea Park and many Chelsea Park community members would likely have chosen this new neighborhood high school for their children.

During a standardized test preparation event at Alcorn, I observed a conversation between Linda Dominguez, principal at Alcorn, and a teacher at the school. Linda asked the teacher, Mr. Lee, to direct family members’ attention to a school ratings website as way for “parents to thank us for our work” with their children. Also, she asked Mr. Lee to make family members aware of the website so that they can “comment on the great things happening” at Alcorn. Linda’s effort to have a teacher encourage family members to make positive comments about the school’s work with children served to reinforce the status of the school through coercing family members to somehow return the favor of service they have received from the school.

**Individual power of families.** Members of families were found to possess individual power that differed significantly from the institutional power of school; this was a form of power that was resistant to the collective institutional power of school, confined to individual family members rather than shared amongst members of families,
and external to the school context. Individual family power emerged through four in-person interviews, one group interview, 12 street interviews and analysis of a record of 74 telephone calls.

Resistance as a form of the individual power of families included the practices of family members to reject or oppose the practices of school employees to constrain the involvement of family members. Examples of this form of power were shared in a group interview with six family members at the Metropolitan Center for Kids and in an in-person interview with another family member. During the group interview, Megan expressed her resistance to the institutional power of school wielded by her son’s teacher during a telephone call. Megan described the conversation, interlacing her frustrations and resistance, in which the teacher’s access to the institutional power of school allowed her to actively constrain Megan’s efforts to challenge the teacher’s classroom practice:

Well this week I received a call from his homeroom teacher. And it was a really quick snappy call, real disrespectful, not "hi how are you doing" - boom to the point. “Well I just want to let you know that your son told a girl that she was growing a moustache.” Okay, he probably did say that, don't get me wrong. But the kind of child that I have, he's real mellow tempered. It takes a lot for him to even lash out at someone. He's never been in a fight. He's a real good student, real active in sports, you know. So I said, "So what did the other child do to prompt him to do this?" "Oh, I don't know. I'll research that tomorrow." But you're calling me telling me what he's done because some child had told you that, not knowing that this incident started early on in the day. So she don't know it but I know that. I did my homework...He didn't push or beat her down or anything
like that. And I told the teacher, I said - she goes, "Well I don't like the fact that he's making a student feel very uncomfortable." I said, "Uncomfortable?" I said, "Uncomfortable to me would be if he was bullying her, putting his hands on her, threatening her." I said, "But just saying that she's growing a moustache, that to me is not an appropriate word. You need to use a different word." So she got defensive. "Well if you don't like the way I'm handling things then you can just talk to somebody else." I mean she was so rude to me, like I couldn’t get one word in. And I was like, "Are you going to call the other child's parent?" "I'll handle it the way I think I should handle it." You know, it was really like snappy rude. And all the other kids came in, wanted to - most of the kids go here that go there. "She slammed down the phone…after you got off the phone. We knew you was talking to her." I mean you know they tell everything. Yeah, they were sitting right in the back room during the conversation so they heard all - they heard the whole conversation. They heard everything. So they knew the whole story. They wanted to fill me in on the story. You know and it's like that's not cool with me, you know? So I called the administrator and they didn't call me back yet, so now tomorrow I have to be present. I have to act like a mother, not a teacher but like a parent you know, because I'm just not happy with that.

Megan rejected the teacher’s assumptions about her son and challenged the teacher’s lack of adequate information; she also expressed frustration that the teacher was “so rude to me, like I couldn’t get one word in.” However, Megan’s resistance to the teacher’s enactment of the collective institutional power of school was limited to a telephone call to
the school’s administrator. Alternative routes for Megan, and for other family members in Chelsea Park, to overcome the school-based enactment of power were inaccessible.

Analysis of the school district’s telephone call records revealed that the individual power of families was confined by the pervasive institutional power of school, despite the efforts of family members to overcome school’s power. Through analysis of the 74 telephone calls made to the district’s Office of Family Involvement (OFI) during an 18-month period, it became clear that family members’ efforts to resist the enactment of school’s institutional power by school employees were effectively confined. Members of families attempted to overcome the enactments of power by school employees through contacting OFI; of the 74 telephone calls made to the Office, none of them resulted in a meeting with district personnel. A total of 35 were to be resolved through a meeting with local school’s administration, six were resolved by the family member withdrawing their child or complaint, eight had no recorded resolution, and 28 were resolved by reinforcement of the school or district policy.

In one representative example of confinement of the individual power of families as reflected in the telephone records at OFI, a family member allowed her child to move in with a neighbor to avoid domestic violence in the home. The anecdotal record of this telephone call, as captured in observer field notes, is described below:

8/20/10 (call date) – Registration (category) – parent had child move in with a neighbor because of domestic violence in the home. Social worker came to confirm but was not let in. Son was admitted again to former school although he should have been choiced into a different school. Also, principal said ‘her student was not welcomed’ at the former school. Resolution: OFI will inquire but cannot
override decision, meetings, and conversation related to enrollment.

Recommended to enroll in another school. This is what happened.

As members of families enacted their individual power to resist the collective institutional power of school, the pervasive nature of school institutional power confined their efforts. In addition to the individual power of families being confined to the local school context, family members’ efforts to enact their individual power were subsumed by schools when the efforts of families were to the school’s benefit.

In-person interviews and group interviews with school employees and families revealed that the individual power of families was subsumed under the larger agenda of schools. This occurred when members of families sought to influence schools to adjust their practices to meet the needs of their children. Participants described the ways in which schools subsumed the individual power of families under the priorities of school, a practice that sustained school’s institutional power.

One of these family members, Emilio, described his efforts to oppose Alcorn’s failure to respond to the bullying his daughter experienced, efforts that became subordinated to the priorities of the school as he eventually directed his efforts toward supporting the school’s technology program. As Emilio described his interaction with his daughter’s school, he revealed that his resistance to the school’s practices was mitigated once it was clear that his interests aligned with the interests of school:

My daughter was bullied. The school didn't seem to be adhering to the standards set by the school district. I did a lot of research, what I could do. And I figured the best thing that I could do is to be involved, to be there for them, to
demonstrate to the staff that I wasn't just going to let them know, hey a problem exists, but I was going to be part of the solution.

There was a lot of resistance up front, and I think there was a lot of resentment. Initially, when my daughter was bullied it was my first wakeup call that I really needed to do something to help the school. So I did a lot of research, and I presented a lot of options to the administration. And I shared with them that I didn't feel that they were what doing what was aligned with the district. And they were not happy.

But after a time they changed… And I've gotten to a point where I'm comfortable to say that they come to me for advice… I have a close relationship with most of the teachers and the principal. And I've been asked by her to help integrate technology in her school.

Emilio discovered that as a family member who was resistant to the practices of school, he was not successful in shifting the practices of the school. Consequently, he allowed his individual power to resist to be subsumed by a broader need of the school that was identified by the school principal.

While other family members, such as Tiffany and Megan, described experiences in which their efforts to influence school on behalf of their children were subsumed under the priorities of schools, school professionals also described such practices. For example, Linda, Alcorn’s principal, described the way in which she influenced family members’ desires in the school’s decision-making processes, ultimately arriving at the conclusion that the principal considers best for the school.
If I had to cut a grade level, I show them all the numbers of the kids at each grade level. This would be this many classrooms at first grade, this would be this many classes in the second grade at 32 a classroom, at 28 a classroom. You know whatever that is. They could literally say, "Hey, you know what? I'd rather have high classrooms and keep the drama teacher." Or, "No, we want a lower class size and we want to get rid of that." Because I let them know you can't have it all; you can't tell me you want drama and low class size. It’s not going to work. And also, by the way, where am I going to put those other kids? Which kid am I going to tell they can't come here that belong in this community? So you know I helped them with that. I helped them understand the big picture, and then they helped me make those decisions. Yeah, I guide them, sure I do. I mean I'm not going to let them go down a path that I think is a path of no return. I'm going to give them my very best, what I think. And if they don't agree with it, I need to go along with that and so does the school and we move forward. So that's kind of what -- that's the most thing that any school would have on that.

In her discussion of the ways in which the School Collaboration Team made decisions, Linda demonstrated that the individual power of family members could be subsumed under the institutional power of school through the actions of school professionals. Her comments also demonstrated that the individual power of families functions only within the context provided by school.

**Institutional power of school revealed through perceptions of self and others.**

An important phenomenon that emerged in the analysis of power as participants described its enactment was that individual members of families, schools and the
community displayed parallel patterns of describing themselves and others when
discussing their participation in the interaction of families and school. Members of
families, school and the community consistently described some aspect of their
involvement with family-school interaction by separating themselves from their peers; in
many cases, this indicated a “me vs. them” dichotomy in which the participant described
him/herself as the exception. Such a pattern emerged in Tiffany’s description of other
family members blaming schools for their children’s poor school performance in contrast
to her being “on top of it” and “really good friends with the principal.” This pattern also
emerged in Linda’s portrayal of the district’s expectations of parent involvement as
“minimal” and her colleagues as principals who “don’t know how to do to this work,”
while she characterized her own work as high level:

It’s hard for people to be able to do the work with people that they don’t know or
feel comfortable with. And I think that’s one of the biggest problems. I mean the
district can mandate that everybody will have a parent group. The district can
mandate that everyone’s going to have whatever. But it’s not about mandating to
me. I don’t do things because they’re mandated—well certain things I have to—
but I do things because to me it’s the right thing to do. So when they say – when I
talk to principals about active parent engagement or I talk, you know we were the
spokesperson at a district parent engagement thing because they wanted us to
model – us with some other schools – people could not even conceptualize what
we do. It’s that high level.

Another, similar phenomenon emerged in the responses of family members,
members of the local community and school professionals as they described others whose
behavior they described as inadequate. For example, as Alexis, a teacher at Alcorn, described the low involvement of the family of one of her students, she explained how she had “one particular child that I’ve never met his mom and we’re already eight weeks away from the end of the year.” Within its context, this comment demonstrated that the teacher placed a judgment on the involvement of this child’s family. The discussion of the behaviors of others as inadequate also emerged in Ebony’s characterization of the members of families in Chelsea Park. In sharing her thoughts about family members, Ebony articulated the view that family members did not possess adequate information to choose schools for their children:

I think any person has enough expertise to say, “Well, that seems like a good school,” but they don’t. They often don’t know what they’re basing that on, other than my neighbor told me it was good, my cousin told me it was good. I looked at the district website; it seems good. But getting to that next layer beneath that, going any deeper than that surface level is really difficult for a parent.

In recognizing the patterns of describing one’s self as the exception and characterizing others as inadequate, I engaged in additional analysis intended to understand better the breadth of the pattern as well as to qualify its implications. This supplemental analysis was motivated, in part, by the Jungian theory of the psyche, particularly the collective unconscious, which refers to the reservoir of experiences shared by all members of the human species (Boeree, 2006). According to Jung, an archetype is one’s collective, often unconscious, understanding of people in definite forms (Jung, 1936). The archetype also may be a broad, generic form of a person, such as a damsel in distress, hero, or mother figure.
In the context of this study, participants shared the emergent communicative patterns of exception and inadequacy across the family, school or community groups. As a result, the potential of the collective unconscious, as characterized by Jung, provided a lens through which I was able to engage in further analysis of study participants’ practices of referring to themselves in relation to others, whether to highlight their own exceptionalism or to label the inadequacies of others.

Analysis of these patterns involved identifying characteristics of the perspectives shared by study participants who gave voice to the phenomena. Drawing upon the contexts in which study participants described themselves or others, I noticed that as family-school interaction occurred in Chelsea Park, it was impacted by static perceptions rather than deep, interpersonal interactions. I also noticed that study participants relied upon a set of criteria through which they judged the behaviors of others. It was not clear, though, that these criteria were openly discussed with those who were scrutinized.

Identifying these two patterns proved helpful to my understanding of the subtle and overt perceptions informing the interaction of families and schools. The pattern that emerged in participants’ descriptions of themselves as exceptions to the behaviors of their peers I named the Exceptional Self. The Exceptional Self was deeply connected to one’s behavior or participation with others and reflected a belief that the self is not responsible for failure or inadequacy. In other words, the self was more than adequate while the other must strive to become adequate. Family members, members of the local community and school professionals adhered to the archetype of the Exceptional Self in their responses to interview questions, especially when asked to discuss broader social practices in which they were involved. Although their responses may have sought to set them apart as
atypical and notable, the resulting implication was that their counterparts—whether members of other families, school professionals, or community members—were lacking or inadequate by comparison.

The pattern that emerged in the designation of others as not meeting a set of criteria I named the Inadequate Other. The Inadequate Other is a general characterization of a person as in need of some skill or ability broadly understood as common, and typically it is something that the Exceptional Self is assumed to possess. The perception of particular skills and abilities as basic and common to all supports the designation of another who may be without these skills or abilities as inadequate. Thus, the person who identifies another as inadequate holds a perception of her/himself as not judging, but simply stating the obvious. No category of study participant failed to identify the Inadequate Other. This archetype was evident in comments made by family members about school professionals and the community, by community members about school professionals and families, and by school professionals about members of families and the community. The presence of the Inadequate Other also uncovered perceptions that undermined solidarity, which was evident in comments made by study participants about members of the same study participant category. Family members commented on the inadequacies of other family members and school professionals discussed the inadequacies of other school professionals. Thus, it became apparent that family members were not a solid unit within the community, and school professionals were not unified representatives of the school institution.
Discussion

Postcolonial theory provides a lens through which the interaction of families and school can be more closely examined, including uncovering the clash of power between the institution of school and individual families. The two forms of power that emerged in the interaction of families and schools correlate directly to the interaction of the dominant and the oppressed in postcolonial theory. Although conceptualizing the nature of public school as colonizing may seem problematic, even unpatriotic, this study demonstrates that there are significant correlations between colonized nations and members of families and local communities as they interact with the institution of school. These correlations suggest that individual family members are oppressed by the institutional power of school, and their oppression is to the advantage of school. Members of families were only allowed to participate in school on the school’s terms; their power was confined by school practices and subsumed under school aims. The resultant dynamics of the institutional power of school and the individual power of families were that family members were forced to relinquish their power in order to be involved in school, as the school institution oppressed rather than facilitated the enactment of individual family power.

Also, members of families remained separated from one another, despite attempts of community members to organize them. It is not unreasonable to suggest that family members thought it a waste of time to try to organize coalitions with members of other families, given the district’s history of pursuing its own goals at the expense of family members. As Bhabha (1994) contends, fixed social institutions are perceived to be unchanging by members of oppressed groups; and this perception allows fixed
institutions to be further instantiated. The collateral impact of fixity is that it leads to
ambivalence for those who are oppressed by the institution. Ambivalence refers to an
acknowledgement that a phenomenon, in this case the institution of school, is two things
at once—somehow necessary while also reasonably unnecessary. Thus, family members
continue to enroll their children in schools in the community while expressing
tremendous frustration at the practices of school.

The result of ambivalence is the development of hybridized identities. In the case
of families subjected to the institutional power of school, hybridity emerges in seeing
oneself as exceptional and therefore not fully disempowered by school. Hybridity allows
individuals to be two things at once: a family member, but better than other family
members; a principal, but more effective than other principals. The Exceptional Self
serves to preserve one’s perception of one’s individual power while acknowledging that
the institution subsumed the individual power of others; those who were exceptional were
allies of the school all along.

It was not the case that only members of families engaged in the practice of
setting themselves apart from others whose individual power was subsumed by the
institution of school. School professionals and the community also described themselves
as exceptions while their peers were inadequate. As family members, members of the
local community and school professionals responded to the subsuming of their individual
power by the institutional power of school by pointing out the inadequacies of their peers,
they demonstrated that the institutional power of school co-constructs with individuals
the disempowerment of others, and the power of school obstructs the formation of
coalitions by members of families and the community. Another component of the way the
institutional power of school is instantiated and supportive of the disempowerment of
individuals is the academic focus of school purpose.

**Purpose of School**

A contradiction existed in the understandings of the purpose of school shared by
family members, members of the local community and school professionals: the stated
purpose of school differed significantly from school as it was enacted in the community
of study. The stated purpose of school was the development of academic skills in students
along with preparing children for adulthood. School’s enacted purpose, however, was to
accommodate for the inadequacies of children from Chelsea Park in addition to providing
academic skills. The stated purpose and the enacted purpose differed because of
characteristics of the local community.

**Data Sources and Analysis**

A total of five in-person, two group, and 16 street interviews as well as two
policies of the local school district informed this finding. In in-person interviews, three
community members described both a stated and enacted purpose of school.
Additionally, three school employees indicated differences between the stated and
enacted purposes of school during in-person interviews, while one teacher indicated a
difference during a group interview. Family members’ understanding of school as stated
but differently enacted emerged during a group interview in which two family members
described a perspective that differed from the dichotomy described by members of the
community and school professionals. No family member identified a difference between
the stated and enacted purpose of school during an in-person interview.
I analyzed interview data iteratively in two rounds. The first round of analysis involved identifying patterns of participant responses to the question, “What is the purpose of school?” A second round of analysis involved developing a concept map, a visual image of connections amongst themes. It was through this visual image that the relationship between participant responses became apparent. The supplemental feature of the distinction made by study participants, the distinction between the stated and enacted purposes of school as a result of the local community context, was identified during the development of the concept map and the use of arrows to identify the relations of understandings held by participants. A concept map is included in Appendix A.

**Details of Finding: Stated and Enacted Purposes of School**

Family members, members of the local community and school professionals described the purpose of school in ways that were consistent with the school district’s description of the purpose of school. The school district developed an “official” statement of the purpose of school, which was “to provide all students the opportunity to achieve the knowledge and skills necessary to become contributing citizens in our diverse society” (Mission Statement, 1997). I considered this statement official because of the district’s significant philosophical and pragmatic influence over schools. The district’s influence over the practices of schools was described in its Comprehensive School Accountability System (CSAS), which articulated the relationship between the district’s mission and school practice:

Student achievement is the primary measure of performance of all schools and departments under the CSAS. The District will incorporate multiple measures, including measures of performance other than student achievement, where it is
possible and where it will improve the quality of performance information. The CSAS will inspire all MPS employees and students to make their best efforts to improve their performance (2007).

As indicated in the mission statement, both the development of academic skills and preparation for adulthood were components of the stated purpose of school. Within the context of the institutional power of school, this was school’s stated purpose.

Within the setting of in-person, group, and street interviews, I asked study participants to describe the purpose of school through a direct question, “What is the purpose of school?” In general, study participants described the purpose of school as facilitating students’ development of academic skills and preparation for adulthood. As school professionals and the community described the purpose of school, they offered a distinction in the enactment of school’s purpose, indicating that the difference between the enacted and stated purposes of school were the result of characteristics of the local community context. Although one family member made a similar distinction, members of families identified the purpose of school based on the needs of their children, and were less likely to describe a different enactment of school’s purpose.

According to school professionals, the purpose of school was to give children academic and social skills, although they qualified students’ increased need for these skills because they lived in Chelsea Park. For example, Harriett, a teacher at Alcorn, described the purpose of school as intended to “make our future.” In elaborating this idea, she described schools as intended to provide character education and to help students become good citizens, an important goal for children in the community who “need so many different things from us.”
Other members of Alcorn’s staff echoed Harriett’s views of the academic purposes of school, qualified for children who participate in the context of the local community. Allison described the purpose of school as intended “to support our students…to make sure that our students thrive and achieve academically; also socially and emotionally,” a role she considered uniquely contextualized by Chelsea Park and the challenges faced by families there. Allison shared that she felt lacking because she and other teachers at Alcorn were not “trained in psychology or how to work with kids sometimes with certain issues.” The principal at Alcorn, Linda, qualified her description of the purpose of school within the context of the additional needs of students in Chelsea Park:

Well, you know the purpose of public education is to help - *I'm going to speak to my level of students here - to help our students become successful in life.* And they have to do that with tools of the trade. And the trade is reading, writing, arithmetic, right? If you don't have those tools you can't make it in life. And so our job is to help kids become proficient and advanced, in my opinion, in all those major content areas so they literally can leave here prepared for middle school, prepared for high school, prepared for college and/or anything else they choose. And I want our students to have that same opportunity—that they have an opportunity to choose, not if they go to college but which college. That's the purpose of public education, that it be fair for everybody…You know, not just saying, *"I want to go to Harvard"* and they can't do algebra. There's no way they’ll do that if they can't do algebra. So it's getting them all those little,
scaffolding their life so that they have the vocabulary that they need, especially poor kids don't have that vocabulary. [italics added for emphasis.]

In describing the purpose of school, Linda, like other school professionals, confirmed the district’s statement of school’s purpose while also qualifying it for children in the local community. Similarly, community members, distinguished between a stated and an enacted purpose of school.

The local context of Chelsea Park was implicated by community members’ descriptions as presenting obstacles to schools achieving their purpose. Thirteen community members identified features of the local community context—such as a lack of stability and guidance making it harder for children, family members who were too busy with work, and children who were out of control and had no respect—as obstructions to schools’ efforts to achieve their purposes of helping students develop academic skills and preparation for adulthood. These perspectives of community members that identified aspects of the local community context echoed the perspectives of school professionals who qualified their descriptions of the purpose of school.

Through street interviews, community members described the purpose of school in ways that were consistent with the academic emphasis of the district’s Mission Statement, although these perspectives were less likely to corroborate the district’s focus on citizenship. One community member did include citizenship in describing school’s purpose, stating that the purpose of school was “to educate our children to pursue whatever potential or gift or mandate or purpose they have. Be the best they can be. Be a productive citizen of country and community.” However, other members of the community who participated in street interviews focused more broadly on preparation for
adulthood as a purpose for school. For example, one community member described a
dual purpose in stating that schools “need to give a foundation so you can do things, like
get jobs.” However, when asked to describe whether schools were achieving their
purpose, community members very often shared that schools in Chelsea Park were not
achieving their purpose.

Of the 18 community members interviewed during street interviews, three
indicated that schools were achieving their purpose. In one such interview, a community
member stated that schools were achieving their purpose because “teachers are doing
their jobs.” However, twelve community members responded that schools were not
achieving their purposes. One community member responded “Not really. I like school
uniforms, but kids are getting lost in the testing focus, which doesn’t show learning.”
Another community member stated that schools were not achieving their purpose because
his child was bullied at school and he believed that “there was a lack of classroom
discipline and low teacher preparedness.” For these community members, what was
supposed to happen in school differed from what was actually happening in schools.

Through in-person interviews, community members described the purpose of
school as providing access to opportunities that may not reach children through the
resources of the local community; however, schools in Chelsea Park may not adequately
accomplish this purpose. In one example of this perspective, Brian, director of the
Metropolitan Center for Kids, described the purpose of school as giving children access
to “opportunities galore,” because the children in Chelsea Park needed access to
opportunities, since “some folks, I feel in this neighborhood, that feel like because of the
kid's circumstances, they lower the bar for them…They lower expectations for those kids
and the kids live up to the lower expectations.” In Brian’s view, while the purpose of school is to bridge gaps in the community, schools in Chelsea Park also lower expectations for students, who then live up to them. He elaborates on this by describing a time when he was on the School Collaboration Team (SCT) of a school in the community and “some of the teachers did not want to put the kid's writing up on the wall it was so bad. They got what they expected. Now it's a turnaround school.”

Two other community members described the purpose of school as intended to improve the opportunities available to children in Chelsea Park, although their descriptions of the limitations faced by these children was a result of systemic inequities that disproportionately impacted the community rather than inadequacies of the community. The distinction that emerged in these interviews suggested that while the enactment of school’s purpose differed for Chelsea Park, there also were broader district practices that caused the enactment of school purpose to differ in other communities. While there were no district policies confirming this possibility, Ebony described the purpose of school as intended to develop “functioning, effective and well-educated community members…that are prepared for the future.” In articulating this viewpoint further, Ebony stated that schools in other communities were more effective at helping children learn to interact and improve this world. And when I see schools that are really high-performing, they're doing that in some way or another. And it looks different at every school. And they may not be sitting them down and saying, “It's really important for you to be a good person and give back to your community.” But high-performing schools are also providing lots of opportunities for volunteerism.
Susan, another community member, described the purpose of school as to level “the playing field so that everybody can have an opportunity to live well, or to live, you know, comfortably in this country.” Within the context of Chelsea Park, however, Susan articulated that the outcome of schooling is different from its intended purpose. In fact, Susan says that she refuses “to think that anybody's motive would be to squash a group of people or a group of children. So I believe that they believe that that is the purpose of the schools out here, even though it's not happening, okay?”

While school professionals and the community members identified a stated purpose of school and an enacted purpose of school that were contextualized by the experiences of students and families in Chelsea Park, members of families described the purpose of school as contextualized by the needs of their children. Thus, for family members, their understanding of the purpose of school was not a dichotomy of school as stated and enacted; for them, the purpose of school was to give their children academic skills that complemented the life skills that they were learning at home. This was the only purpose of school.

In describing the purpose of school, family members were aware of perceptions that the local community context presented additional needs for students. However, these family members did not accept perceptions of the purpose of school as differently enacted for students in Chelsea Park. Instead, family members expressed their understanding of the purpose of school as enacted in ways that were consistent with its stated purpose; in this way, family members effectively troubled the dual and dichotomous purposes of school that members of communities and school professionals described.
During a group interview, Tiffany, the parent of two students, described the purpose of school as helping children acquire academic skills while supporting the further development of lessons learned at home:

I think the purpose of school also is helping me to educate them, to give them a skill that they need to be able to be out in the world and be successful. Now you as a parent, you're trying to rear your child that way. And they take on that role of being the teacher. So at that point - the purpose of school is that kids will be in there learning, you know. Then I expect for my kids to be getting a quality education, not just be passed by just because.

Another family member, Megan, described the purpose of school within the context of her parenting; this included reinforcing and contributing to the way she was raising her children. Thus, for Megan, teachers were supposed to build upon her parenting practices:

I think for me, the purpose I think school is to kind of help nurture what is already there because I think at homes there's some foundations that's laid, which a lot of time they can't just go and say, "When my family did this at home." It's kind of nurturing what they already have. So it comes out. And I think when they teach, the kids kind of get, depending on what they're teach and how they teach it. Because there's some things that my kids have stuck to that they know. They know the way the teacher taught it, they got it, and so I don’t expect them to raise my kid. I heard some parents say, "They better raise my kid." No. I don’t want you to raise my kid. Whatever I done already sewed into her, I need it to come out in the right way. And I need it to be proper. So when she get out, we still - you
know from here on up, it's going to the next level. Every level, you're going up. Because if you here and you still stuck what was the point of her coming here?

These perspectives of the purpose of school were shared by each of the family members included in this study, with the exception of one family member. Emilio, the parent of three students, described the purpose of school in a way that was consistent with the school district’s dual focus on academic skills and preparation for citizenship. Emilio stated that:

From my view, being a responsible citizen goes far beyond just going to college, doing a lot of things. Because people can go to college and not be responsible citizens. In my view, their primary purpose for responsible citizenship has to do with the whole student and their ability to choose whether or not they want to go to college. So yes, they have an obligation to meet that goal, but that shouldn’t be the end all.

Emilio provided a perspective of the purpose of school that differed from the perspectives of other family members. According to Emilio, the purpose of school was to prepare children for adulthood, while other family members understood the purpose of school as to provide children with academic skills. He was the only family member who viewed the purpose of school as preparation for college and citizenship, and his viewpoint demonstrated that his interests converged with the interests of the institution of school. The interest convergence concept is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

**Discussion**

The dichotomous relationship of the purpose of school as stated and enacted can be understood through the theories of thirldspace and postcolonialism. These theories lend
themselves to explaining the relationship of individuals to institutions (thirddspace theory) and the meaning-making practices of those who are directly impacted by the enacted power of institutions (postcolonial theory).

A significant consequence of the singular purpose of school as stated by the school district was the ambivalence and hybridity of school professionals. Postcolonial theory provides critical insight into the understandings of school professionals that the stated purpose of school is differently enacted, particularly because school professionals function professionally as actors on behalf of the institution although they once were students, and likely oppressed by the institution. As postcolonial theory reveals, former oppressed members of social systems occupy a hybrid space, and subsequent hybridized identities, as they negotiate the spaces between the institution and society. This hybridized space has been called a “floating buffer zone” (Spivak, 1988). I discuss this in more detail below.

School professionals did not question the two purposes of school as their role as the institution’s actors met the reality of their practices within a local community context. Although they recognized the district’s stated mission, and integrated this mission into their description of the purpose of school, school professionals also indicated the failure of the one-size fits all belief included in the mission.

As Bhabha (1994) explains, fixity of a social institution leads to ambivalence of those who are external to and subjected to the coercive power of the institution. School professionals are both subjected to the institution, as actors, and external to the institution, as their responsibilities as district employees are carried out at satellite locations to which the district sends its policies for enactment. As school professionals
described the dichotomous nature of the purpose of school, their status as external and subjected to school became evident. The responsibility of school employees was to fulfill the school district’s mission, which was not developed to differentiate school’s purpose in response to variations among communities and families. Instead, school professionals accepted this responsibility as a component of their work, resultantly protecting the institution from the instability of change.

Members of the community acknowledged the dichotomous nature of the stated and enacted purposes of school. Each of the community members who described the dichotomous nature of school’s purpose engages in a zone that is between the school and families within the community, a zone of engagement that demonstrates Gyatri Spivak’s (1988) critical question, “can the subaltern speak?” In their attempts to facilitate access and provide voice to members of families whose resistance power was confined or subsumed by the institutional power of school, community members are buffers (Guha, 1982; Spivak, 1988) in a floating buffer zone. This “floating buffer zone,” (Spivak, 1988) allows community members to leverage their understanding of the school institution on behalf of family members. However, their understandings of the function of the institution and their perceptions of what constitutes adequate responses from families leaves members of the community sometimes working alone. Ebony’s description of her efforts to organize family members and support them in becoming involved in their children’s schools provides an example of community members working alone. Ebony stated that her goal was to

get people up to a big policy piece, understanding what’s happening in the legislature because that’s where the big decisions are made that trickle down to
the state house, that trickle down to the district, that trickle down to the school, that trickle down to the individual classroom and ultimately affect the individual child. But that’s a really long staircase, right? And I think parents often get stuck here with their individual child for whatever reason. They’re working two jobs, there’s no missing family. They have a lot of kids and they have foster kids, and they’re taking care of their cousin’s child as well.

As members of families demonstrate, school professionals and the community held the dichotomous view of school’s purpose as stated and differently enacted. Only one family member identified a difference between the stated purpose of school and the way in which it was enacted. This family member, a mother named Megan, described this distinction by locating the inconsistency with families. She stated that

I heard some parents say, “They better raise my kid.” No. I don’t want you to raise my kid. Whatever I done already sewed into her, I need it to come out in the right way. And I need it to be proper. So when she get out, we still—you know from here on up—its ones who want to be, every level, you’re going up. Because if you here and you still stuck, what’s the point of her coming here?

Although Megan was the only family member who articulated a difference between the stated purpose of school and its enactment, the difference was the result of family members’ conflicting expectations for school. Otherwise, family members accepted the stated purpose of school, expecting school to give their children academic skills and preparation for adulthood. These family members did not acknowledge that the Chelsea Park context generated a need for different enactment of school’s purpose. Critical social theory uncovers the perspective of family members who have accepted
their state as subordinated or powerless. As Kincheloe & McLaren (1994) state, “certain groups in any society are privileged over others and, although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely, the oppression which characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable.” Family members demonstrated accepting the practices of school as they are, and they offered limited descriptions of the practices of school.

Consistent with Critical Social Theory, the restriction of resources through institutions of society—including religion, economy, and government, in addition to school—is a commonly accepted complexity of society that has become common such that failures of an institution can be blamed on the autonomy of individuals. By maintaining control over “people’s naturally occurring ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving,” social institutions increase in power while dependent individuals lose their autonomy (Reeve & Assor, 2011). The coercive power of the institution of school, then, can be enacted to confine or subsume the individual power of families in diverse communities, as it elicits their support of school’s aims through participating in practices focused on their individual child while limiting their access beyond the scope of the local school.

**Barriers to Family Involvement**

Another finding of this study was that the interaction of families and school was constrained by a context of barriers restricting family members’ access to space and information; these barriers were historical and institutional in nature. The barriers that family members faced were enforced and sustained by school policies and practices to
involve families; as schools enacted practices to involve families, they also restricted family members’ access to school space and information.

**Data Sources and Analysis**

The data for this finding included in-person interviews, street interviews, group interviews, district policy documents, telephone call records, and observation field notes from observations. Barriers to family members’ access to school physical space were described in in-person interviews with two school employees and a group interview with family members. These barriers also emerged in the records of five telephone calls made by family members to the district Office of Family Involvement. Barriers to family members’ access to school information were identified by two school professionals during in-person interviews and emerged in four district documents. In-person interviews with two community members also revealed these barriers. Additionally, telephone call records revealed that eight calls made to OFI were because family members’ access to school information was restricted. Observation field notes at two school meetings revealed that information was withheld from members of families.

Analysis of these data began with an observer comment captured during an observation at a school meeting. The comment *what other decisions are made for them?* followed an observation of a discussion between the principal of Alcorn and members of the Active Parents Organization (APO) in which the principal asked APO members to tell other family members about one event rather than the multiple events they wanted to consider. Following my return to this comment during analysis of data, interview transcripts and street interview notes were examined for similar indicators of information restricted by school. As patterns emerged, I developed a coding scheme, which included
the following codes: a) access school information, b) access restricted, c) information filtered, d) decisions made, e) opportunity for decision-making. Also, I analyzed observation notes and telephone call logs provided by OFI using the codes. These data also were analyzed further as the codes were too narrow and unlikely to reveal a set of useful categories. Therefore, in a second analysis of the data, I coded with the following codes: a) institutional barrier to family, b) individual barrier from school member, c) physical barrier to family member access, d) family context as barrier to school, e) family context as opportunity for school power, and f) school practice ignores family context.

**Details of Finding**

Barriers obstructing family members’ access to the space of school were the result of the institutional power of school. The characteristics of these barriers included a) the constrained involvement of families and the community in the practices of school by restricting information and access to specific times and events, and b) the designation of school physical space and the restriction of access to this space for members of families and the community. The institutional power of school to constrain the involvement of families and the community in the practices of school was revealed by the statements made by members of families, school, and the community during in-person and group interviews. Additionally, the power of school to designate uses for school space and restrict the access of members of families and the community was revealed through school district policy documents.

The enactment of school institutional power to restrict family member access to school information was revealed during in-person interviews, records of telephone calls made to OFI, and observation field notes. The specific practices that restricted the access
of family members to school information that was relevant to the experiences of families were the result of school professionals adhering to school district policies as well as intentional efforts to limit information available to families. Discussion of restricted access to information follows a discussion of restriction of family member access to school space.

**Designation and restriction of school physical space.** The institutional power of school was evident in the district’s designation of appropriate uses of school physical space and the articulated restrictions placed on family and community member access to schools buildings and classrooms. School policies described guidelines for family and community member access to school buildings and classrooms, while the practices of school professionals constrained family and community member access to school buildings and classrooms. For example, the school district’s policy of visitors to schools demonstrated the school’s institutional power over the designation of physical space:

The Board encourages parents and other citizens of the district to visit classrooms at any time to observe the work of the schools. The Board believes that there is no better way for the public to learn what the schools actually are doing.

In order to insure that no unauthorized persons enter buildings with wrongful intent, all visitors to the schools shall report to the school office when entering, receiving authorization before visiting elsewhere in the building. This will not apply when parents have been invited to a classroom or assembly program.
Additionally, more broadly than the district’s Visitors Policy, three other district policies demonstrated the institutional power of school over the designation of school space and restriction of access to school space for members of families and the community.

The policies described in Table IV.1 uncover the use of school power as a mechanism to determine the ways in which members of families and the community access school space; the Public Conduct on School Property policy describes penalties to members of families for failing to access school space in ways consistent with school policy. Similarly, the Parent Involvement policy and the Alternative Grade Level policy describe specific practices for family members to be involved in school space.

Each of these school district policies demonstrates the institutional power of school to constrain the ways in which family members participate on school grounds. While the policies may appear benign, such as the “Parent Involvement” policy, it was through an in-person interview with a classroom teacher that the restrictive nature of volunteering emerged.
Table IV.1. District policy documents demonstrating institutional power of school to designate and restrict access to school space (italics added to emphasize institutional power of school over family and community member access to school space).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Policy Document</th>
<th>Policy segment containing focus on school physical space</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Conduct on School Property</td>
<td>It is the responsibility of staff to ensure a safe and secure school environment conducive to learning, and therefore require the operation of schools to be free of any conduct intended to obstruct, disrupt or interfere with teaching, research, service, administering or disciplinary functions or any other activity sponsored or approved by the Board. As such, parents are required to comport themselves on school grounds according to the guidelines delineated above. In the event that a parent / legal guardian is found to violate this policy of conduct on school property, he/she may be restricted from the otherwise free access normally afforded to parents and legal guardians to ensure the safe and orderly operation of the school. In that event, a written communication will be provided to the parent or guardian to inform them of the restriction in the building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Involvement</td>
<td>Parents/Guardians are asked and encouraged to be involved in their children's learning and education by: &quot;participating in training opportunities&quot; that will include but are not limited to: strategies/reinforcing learning at home, discipline and understanding cultural differences; &quot;valuing diversity and the need for equity in each child's learning; &quot;participating in site-based leadership and decision making; &quot;volunteering in their children's schools; and &quot;supporting and engaging in developing partnerships within the Metropolitan community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Grade Level Organization in Neighborhood Schools (K-8 Policy)</td>
<td>The district believes parental and community support and involvement within the schools is critical to the success of students in the district and the delivery of the educational program, and increased parental and community support is fostered and enhanced by parents having the opportunity for their children to attend school close to home as well as the ability to select from among the numerous educational offerings of the district and to participate in site-based governance.</td>
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</table>
Allison described her challenges with having family members volunteer in school, which does not indicate an overt policy against family involvement, although it does identify the policy layers that are not included in the policy documents included on the Internet.

Allison stated that

Volunteering - this has been a little bit more different because we have had an interest in volunteering but for logistical - trying to do - you have to do background checks and all this. And then if someone doesn't have papers it just gets - because we try to have parents volunteer out on the playground to increase the safety outside. So we have some that will come. And we have special vests that they wear. And we had training on what their duties would be outside. But it kind of seems hard to keep that going just because all the red tape you need to go through to keep that going. But I know a lot of teachers at the back-to-school night have a sign-up. If you ever want to come into class or there's something you're interested in helping out with or teaching, if you have any skills you want to share with our kids.

Allison revealed that the institutional power of school was arranged to invite family member involvement without disclosing details of the procedures to become involved. These procedures served to restrict access to the classroom for some family members.

The “Public Conduct on School Property” policy defined acceptable behavior on school grounds and specified consequences for family members who behave in ways that were not consistent with the policy. Similar behavior guidelines were not developed for community members or others who may have accessed school property. Also, the “Alternative Grade Level Organization in Neighborhood Schools” policy described
family member access to school choice as an opportunity for all family members, although information access was restricted to those with Internet access, as this was the only way provided by the district for family members to learn about and select schools for their children. In addition to the school policy documents limiting access to information for family members, the practices of school professionals served similar ends.

School district policies gave school professionals access to school power in order to actively constrain the access of family and community members to the space of school. As school employees invited family members into classrooms, their goal was to have family members participate in the practices of school. In other words, access required conformity to school sanctioned roles and behaviors. For example, Allison, a teacher at Alcorn, stated this clearly when she told me that she loved “inviting them into the classroom and sharing with them what we're doing and showing them ways that they can do the same kind of strategies at home with their kids.” Each member of school described their practices to invite families into school space in their efforts to introduce or augment engagement in school-related practices of school in the homes of students. In another example, Harriett, a teacher at Alcorn, described her efforts to collude with other school professionals to coerce a family member to become involved her classroom:

I don't know if she was avoiding. They said mom never was involved. I had a student teacher who spoke Spanish, had her call. We got a hold of the aunt. Mom wouldn't return calls. Was she just tired of it? I don’t know because that day of the meeting she actually did not show up. But one of the ladies, because she's the parent that did the translating knew where the mom was. And they were over
here at the rec center doing something for the English class. And she called and said, "You need to be at a meeting." And the mom said, "I didn't know about a meeting." And that wasn't true but once she got there, it was like let's make her think that we're together. We're not beating her up saying, "Your son's not doing this." It's like what can we do together to make him more successful. We care about him. So I think - and the people around me was like don't make her feel like we're beating her up. And so was that what turned her around? Was she tired of getting phone calls saying, "Your son's not working"? I don't know. But so far, so good.

Harriett’s discussion revealed that school professionals may go to various lengths in order to involve family members in school practices.

Through the practices of school professionals, the institutional power of school was extended toward the homes of students, further subsuming the individual power of families under the aims of school. It was not only the practices of individual teachers to use invitations as an act of school power. At Alcorn, teachers were expected to invite family members to school in order for them to support school practices. Linda, Alcorn’s principal, described her expectations for family-school interaction in her description of the family involvement practices of one of the school’s teachers:

Like for her back-to-school night, it really blew my mind. Not only did we have the big one for the whole school, she held one before that, had invited all her parents and explained what her expectations were in a nice way, and what they'd be learning this year and how they could help their kids at home. And then she's the one that started having these classes with parents during the day like
periodically to show them how to help with time. Time is hard in second grade, telling time, how to help with money. That's another hard one. She literally had - these are Spanish-speaking parents - come and you know dads with "Jose" on their shirt and would be showing up because a…kid said, "You need to be there. My teacher said so." So it was packed, babies crying and the room packed. Well now we're doing it by entire grade levels and how we're doing it school-wide twice a year. So that grade level still does it more often. Allison, she does more than everybody. But now we're doing it as a whole school twice a semester - once per semester, excuse me. So and it's a little different. But I wanted you to see - now she's like at the highest level, all right. Then I have some that are still feeling uncomfortable when they do that. They're doing it but they don't invite that many parents. Somehow I notice they don't have as many parents in their room as the other school. So I'm figuring it's going to take them a while to get to that point. But Antwan, not everyone here is at as high a level as I am in parent engagement but I'm really working on that. I'm really hoping that some day it will be like that. I want to sustain it but I don't know what will happen really.

School professionals did not discuss family-school interaction occurring at locations determined by family members, although two school professionals discussed participating in home visits, a practice in which school professionals visited the homes of students’ families in order to extend the practices of school to the homes of students.

Records of telephone calls made by members of families and the community to the Office of Family Involvement revealed that school power to control access to space caused problems for family members. Five telephone calls made to OFI were to make
complaints about restrictions of callers’ access to school property. For example, a family member called OFI in response to a conduct letter that she received from her children’s school. The letter informed her that she was no longer allowed to come to the school after she argued with a member of another family while on school grounds (3/7/11). Another family member called OFI to complain about having been locked in the gate at her child’s school after she dropped off her child. The family member noted that a school staff member saw her and proceeded to lock the gate (4/14/11). Although institutional power allowed schools to determine the use of school physical space, members of families and the community sought to resist this power when they experienced the school-imposed restrictions of their access to school space. Nonetheless, consistent with district policy, the resistant power of these family members was subsumed under the power of school and these family members often were denied access to school space.

**Restriction of family member access to school information.** As members of families attempted to access school information that was related to their experience with school, they encountered several barriers erected by school policy and practice. Four interviews, eight telephone call records, and two field observations provided information for this finding.

Access to school information was restricted for family members who did not have ease of access to the Internet, which was the location of school district policies and enrollment information. Within a community of poor and working class families in which the average annual wage was $18,227 and annual household income was $52,142, it was unlikely that many family members were able to easily access the internet from their homes. According to the United States Census Bureau, within this income range, 41% of
families nationwide access the internet at home and 10% use the library to access the internet (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Hence, if family members must access school information through the Internet, families in Chelsea Park are likely to face significant access obstacles.

Ebony identified the challenges of family members to access school information, including during their attempts to select schools for their children. The school district utilized a school selection process that many perceived as replacing traditional neighborhood schools. The school selection process presented challenges to families, according to Ebony, for two reasons: a) first, the process was new and complicated, and b) the information families needed to select schools for their children was available only online. Naming this challenge, Ebony described her efforts in Chelsea Park to help families gain greater access to the information they needed rather than rely on an informal information network:

It's a complicated system. It's hard to get really good information about what to do. I think we also saw a need for helping folks really understand what a good school is. I think I get that question a lot. And they say, "Well you, you should know. Tell me. Here are the three schools I like. Which one would you chose?"

Parents ask me that question all the time. And I'll give them my honest opinion, based on what I've seen and working with that school. But it shouldn’t be based on my opinion. The purpose was to get tools into their hands that were going to enable them to ask questions and uncover whatever it is they're looking for in a particular school because it's going to vary from family to family based on their needs and their individual child, but empower them to be able to do that in
any school district in the country and help them just again a level of expertise in how to make a really good choice.

So I can comfortably navigate that website, you can comfortably navigate that website. The first time I went to that website, I was like this is the most ridiculous website I've ever seen. How are you expected to find anything? And I think if you're thinking about a working parent, in particular, they don’t have time for that. So I think that there’s some limited information available from the districts. I think a lot of - I hope a lot of parents are going to the school. But again, if they're often coming to someone like me and saying, "What do you think? You're the experts" - and really I wouldn’t consider myself an expert on quality schools - then that suggests to me that they're really talking to their friends, they're really talking to their family and that's the information they're using to make a decision.

It varies from person to person. But I think the average person is very focused on the needs of their child and however difficult it is, will eventually figure out what to do. And sometimes for them it's like beating their heads against the wall if they have a real problem. It's hard to know who to go to and how to get help and how to get to the next level. So if I meet someone and they have a particular need, then I'll do what I can to figure out who exactly is the person that can solve this problem for them. But on the broader scale, my focus is on bringing them together in groups, because there's strength in numbers, and get them working on one issue together and changing it for that school and for that school community.
Limitations and restrictions placed on family member access to school information allowed schools to sustain their institutional power. Susan, a community activist, also described the implications of restrictions to family member access to school information. She identified school performance information, an important component of family member participation in school selection processes, which was not easily available to members of families.

Anyway, so we've been trying to get information out on what's happening. Because most people, lay people especially, don't know what's happening in the schools. They don't know what's happening with the corporatists and the charters. And so we've simply been trying to inform them so they can make informed decisions. Because most of them hear that [various charter schools] are good - are good fits for our children. And so they think - at the beginning they thought that anybody's kid who wanted to go to ____ could go. And anybody's kid who wanted to go to ____ could go. And they were like highly upset when they found out that it's a lottery. And before the lottery - we're trying to let them know that before the lottery they look at your kid's score and behavior and they choose who they want to put into the lottery. So we are trying to inform our neighborhood so they know, so they're informed about what's going on because they don't know. So that's where we are.

In addition to interview data describing limitations to family member access to school information, records of telephone calls made to the district’s OFI revealed that family members frequently faced barriers to information that was necessary to their involvement in school. Eight telephone calls made to OFI were to complain about or to
seek resolution to the attempts of family members to access school information about enrollment procedures or discipline practices involving their children. A district-wide student database system was used to support communication between school and home allowing family members “to be informed and proactive in your student’s education” (Infinite Campus, 2013). Family members throughout Metropolitan Public Schools were given login credentials to access real-time information about their children, including grades, discipline records, approaching assignments and attendance records. A family member called OFI to inquire about her child’s suspension from school, as there was no record in the district-wide student database system regarding her child’s suspension (4/4/11). Although this family member sought information that the school was supposed to provide, this information was not made available to her through the district system intended to facilitate this access.

In addition to the telephone calls made to OFI by family members whose access to school information was restricted by school practice, my observation field notes also indicated restrictions to information facilitated by the practices of school employees. During a meeting of Alcorn’s School Collaboration Team, family members, members of the local community and school professionals discussed staffing and budget scenarios for the following school year. During the discussion, the school’s principal presented scenarios based on enrollment projections from the district. One of the scenarios was to split a Language Arts class so that the responsibility for transitioning native Spanish speaking students to English was divided amongst two teachers rather than one. The members of SCT approved this scenario rather than developing other scenarios, which they were able to do. In my in-person interview with Harriett, a teacher at Alcorn and
also a member of the SCT, she revealed that this scenario actually was developed for her
so that she could maintain her job without having to split language instruction between
two grades:

So the Leadership Team is a group of teachers and Linda and the union rep who
make decisions. So, for example Linda - I think went to budget today or next
week she goes maybe. So the Team sat down and said, "This is what the teachers
want as far as staffing next year...So then she takes that information to SCT and
then see what the parents want. And then the SCT votes. The one where I was - it
was a self-fulfilling prophecy. I was covering myself because I don't want to do a
4:5 split again. And Linda knows that. And so yeah, I was fighting for my own
job at that one.

I noticed a similar restriction on parent access to information during an observation of the
Active Parents Organization meeting at the school. The principal asked members of
families and the school to limit the number of event opportunities they shared with
families at the school, because she “did not want to tax the families too much.”

Discussion

Critical Social Theory can facilitate understanding the practices of the school
institution to restrict family member access to school space and information. Critical
Social Theory seeks to uncover the practices of institutions that serve to reproduce the
arrangements of power, and in the case of school, reproduction of power is achieved
through bureaucracy. Bureaucracy emerged in this study as a mechanism to sustain the
power of school and to instantiate the marginalized state of family members, evident in
district policies and practices prohibiting access to the institution beyond the location of
the local school. As family members made telephone calls to the district in order to disrupt the practices of members of the local school, they were advised to return to the local school, an enactment of policy that protected the institution while restricting access to school information related to the families’ individual children.

In the efforts of school professionals to follow district policies, their practices also disrupted the attempts of community members to coalesce family members to challenge the practices of schools. As Ebony explained, most family members in this community were encouraged to focus on the needs of their own children, as their attempts to access and influence school practices became like “beating their heads against the wall.” Their experiences in attempting to access schools and school information, despite invitations from school and a technology system intended to facilitate their access to school information, resulted in family members having neither the time, interest, nor energy to devote to organizing.

Similarly, school practices to restrict family member access to school space served as a constant reminder of family member status as members of a less powerful group. The institutional power of school allowed schools to enact penalties to family members who did not engage in school space in ways that were consistent with district policies. However, school policy did not appear to constrain the practices of individual teachers who were rude to parents, or school employees who sought to control the flow of information. The individual efforts of school employees acting as agents of the institution were effective to reproduce dominant-subordinate power arrangements between the institution of school and the members of families and the community.
The local school context, as was evident at Alcorn, demonstrated an instantiated practice of restricting family member access to school space accomplished through practices of inviting family members to school; this was a conundrum. School professionals invited family members to be involved in their children’s classrooms, yet their opportunities for involvement were focused specifically on classroom practices or attendance at school programs. Also, the Visitors to School policy expressed an open invitation to family members to visit school, but clarified that a classroom teacher must first invite them. Family members were effectively prohibited by policy from visiting the school unless a member of school invited them. As Allison and Harriett disclosed, inviting family members to be involved in the classroom focused specifically on soliciting parental support toward student compliance in behavior and academic practice. In these ways, family members faced barriers established by school policy and the practices of classroom teachers. These barriers served to prohibit family members from obstructing the goals of the institution. In this way, invitations to school space served to control family members’ presence at school and sustain their status as members of the less powerful group by keeping them on the margins.

**Roles of Family in Response to Institutional Power of School**

This study uncovered three school-related roles for family members, each defined in response to the enactment of the institutional power of school. Study participants were asked to describe the role of family members in school, and their responses revealed that roles for family members were understood as reactions to the practices of school. Whether family members were a) present and engaged in school practices, b) co-opted school leaders, or c) collective advocates, their roles in schools resulted from their
individual family power being constrained or subsumed under the institutional power of school through its policies and the practices of school professionals.

**Data Sources and Analysis**

The finding was informed by responses of study participants to the question “What is the role of family in school?” I asked this question in eight in-person interviews, two group interviews, and 18 street interviews. Not every participant responded to this question during group interviews, as the discussion format frequently involved only some participants responding to questions. In addition to interview questions asked of participants, six school district documents revealed the role of family members in school as conceptualized by the school district.

The process of analyzing the data gathered and related to the role of family members in school occurred in two steps. The first step of analysis included identifying patterns of responses to the question, “What is the role of family in school?” which informed the development of descriptive codes. While descriptive, these codes did not reveal much about the sets of relationships between participants and responses. As a next step in analysis, the patterns of participant responses to this question were compared against a set of a priori codes that emerged from the literature of parent and family involvement. These initial codes included: “parent,” “communicator,” “decision-maker,” “practitioner of school at home,” “community collaborator,” and “volunteer.” In this second step of analysis, it became clear that these a priori codes were consistent with the responses of school professionals, although they were not consistent with the ways in which family members and members of the community described the role of family members in school. In another step to analyze the data, I developed a concept map in
which emergent patterns of responses related to the institutional power of school and the individual power of families was captured. The development of a concept map allowed me to identify relationships among individual participant responses according to their participant category (i.e., member of family, member of community, member of school). A version of the concept map is included in Appendix A.

In developing a concept map to understand the perceptions of the role of family members held by community members, family members, and school employees, the relationships between participants and responses became clearer, as did gaps in responses and outlier responses.

**Details of Finding**

During individual interviews and group interviews, study participants discussed their perceptions of the roles of family members in schools. The roles of family members constituted a core topic of this study, related directly to the Research Questions, which were:

1. What are the understandings of family-school interaction held by members of families, the local community and schools?
2. What are the roles of family members in school?
3. What is the purpose of school as understood by members of families, communities, and schools?

A specific question to solicit study participants’ perspectives of the roles of families in school was asked of each study participant during in-person interviews with individuals and during group interviews. Broadly, the role of family members was
described as practices in relation to the school, either internal and confined or subsumed by school, or external resistance that was not based on direct contact with the school.

**Parents as present and engaged in school practices.** Several study participants and school district policy documents described the role of family members as supporters of their individual children through involvement in programs and events offered by the school. A significant distinction emerged in participants’ responses, however. Community members shared perspectives that family members should use their power to ensure that schools fulfilled the stated purpose of school, which was to provide the development of academic skills and preparation for adulthood. Family members, on the other hand, described the role of family members in school as supporting the efforts of school in achieving school’s stated purpose. The distinction between family members working to ensure or support the efforts of school was important in understanding perspectives of the role of family members in school.

The participation of family members was constrained so that it directly affected persons such as students and other family members. Family member involvement in school was restricted from impacting the school space, employees, practices, or policies. The district’s Parent Involvement policy documented the specific ways in which family members were expected to be involved in their children’s school. The policy specified that “Parents/Guardians are asked and encouraged to be involved in their children's learning and education by” adhering to a specific set of expectations, including:

a) understanding and respecting the mission and values of the school;

b) respecting teachers and supporting school staff as partners in the education of their children;
c) demonstrating respect for the school as a whole, including the faculty and staff; 

d) understanding school procedures and opportunities to contribute or receive support; and 

e) participating in training opportunities that will include but are not limited to: 

strategies/reinforcing learning at home, discipline and understanding cultural differences; participating in site-based leadership and decision making; volunteering in their children's schools; and supporting and engaging in developing partnerships within the Metropolitan community.

The details of this policy demonstrated that the district’s view of the role of family members was to support schools in achieving their goals of developing academic skills and preparing students for adulthood.

In the street interviews, eleven of the 18 study participants indicated that the role of family members in schools was to be involved in the practices of school in order to support their children. For example, one person interviewed on the street did not identify a specific role for family members. This community member suggested instead that they (family members) “keep kids in schools, on the right track and giving them a good foundation for work and to help them get a job.” Additionally, several study participants specifically identified helping with homework (n=6) or being physically present at school (n=6) as the roles of family members in school.

In-person interviews revealed that members of families and the community understood the role of family members as ensurers or supporters of school achieving its stated purpose. For example, community organizer Ebony discussed several opportunities for family members to ensure that schools were developing students’
academic skills and preparing them for adulthood. In response to the question, “If you were speaking to a parent, however, and that parent simply said to you, ‘Why should I be involved in schools at all?’ How would you respond to that question?” Ebony stated that family members should utilize their power to ensure that the practices of school were consistent with the stated purpose of school:

When you think about it, a child spends what, eight hours a day, six to eight hours a day in a school building, longer if they're involved in some extra-curricular thing, maybe ten hours a day. That is a lot of time that someone else is in control of what's going on with your child. It's a lot of time and you're not there.

So how do you ensure that your child is getting their needs met just on an individual level, just on a day-to-day their basic needs are being met in that building, but also their future needs are being met? How are they being prepared for that next level? If they're in elementary school, how are they being prepared for middle school? And if you don't know that, it's really hard for you to, when they get to be a senior in high school and they're taking their exams, SAT, ACT what have you - to get into college and they can't get in because they can't get high enough scores, I mean what are you going to do then? Because it's too late. You really only have one chance with their education. They're only going to be young once and if you miss the opportunity now to real have an impact on how they're performing, you're never going to get it back. They can't start from the third grade over again.

Ebony’s response revealed an understanding of family members’ individual power to remain involved in order to ensure that schools achieve their stated purposes. The larger
group of family members, however, did not share this understanding of the role of family members in school.

A small number of street interview participants also described the role of family members as ensuring that schools fulfilled their stated purpose. One member of the community responded that family members should keep teachers from mistreating kids and grouping them into one group. Another community member described the role of family members as attending meetings to “see what’s really going on.”

Family members identified their role in school as being present and engaged in the practices of school. However, their descriptions of family involvement in school revealed their exceptionalism alongside the inadequacy of other family members. For example, Tiffany, the mother of two children in Chelsea Park, described the role of family members as supporters of the practices of school, explaining that family members who were not involved in school practice were misled to believe that schools may not be achieving their stated purposes, and that a dichotomy of stated and enacted purposes of school existed:

I think that they might tend to be more dissatisfied because they think the schools aren’t doing what they need to be doing but they really are. And I just think, you know, they don't see - a lot of parents don’t see it as a two-way street. It's like you have to be involved in order to, you know, get whatever involvement or level of, you know, production you want out of the schools and administration. Because if you don't talk to them, they're not going to know what your issues and what your problems are.
Similarly, during the group interview at the Metropolitan Center for Kids, two parents commented directly about the role of family members; other family members involved in the group interview did not respond to this question posed to the group. The comments of these two parents demonstrated a perspective of the role of family members as supporters of the stated purpose of school. One family member, Hilary, provided a response to the question, “What is the role of family in school?” in which she identified the inadequacy of other family members who were not involved in the practices of school:

Parents need to be fully involved in what their children's doing, whether it's here, whether it's at the school. I mean you get those parents that may have vacation time, take a day off, well they'll lay up and watch TV all day instead of walk in here and see what my child is doing at school. Talk to the teacher because each child is different. Each family is different. Her family may go through some things that my family may never go through. But each child is different and they need to establish that rapport. But more importantly as a parent, we need to have a relationship with that teacher. That teacher is your child's parent while you're away.

Stephanie, another family member who participated in the group interview, shifted the dialogue toward family members supporting the practices of individual school teachers. While this was consistent with family members as supporters of the stated purpose of school, the nuances of Stephanie’s response indicated a more specific focus on the individual needs of each student. Stephanie stated that “I think they need to tell us
what they need, what they want, how they want it and then be willing to be flexible because whatever you put in is what you going to get out.”

School professionals also described the role of family members as supporters of their children through being present at school and enacting school practices at home. For example, a teacher at Alcorn Elementary School, Harriett, described the role of family members as responsible for supporting their children in academic practices. Harriett’s characterization of this role for families demonstrated a perception that the role of family members was to partner with school employees, which required the directing of their individual power toward school practices:

Again, they're [parents and teachers] a team. If the parents are encouraging their students to do that 30 minutes of reading a night and check their homework and just showing an interest that I care about how you do in school. Because a lot of parents say, "I don't know how to do the math" it's okay. It's okay but if you see your student sitting there working on it and you can't help them and they've tried. First of all that tells me that they weren't paying attention in class that day because that's homework. But we tried and then I know they made the effort. It makes such a difference. And what they expect from me is I think transparency. Tell me if my kid's not doing the homework. I want to know. Tell me if my kid's doing great too. They want to know what's going on with their kid. They don't want surprise, get a report card and they're failing kind of thing. They like it. And I've heard parents say that in feedback and stuff is they want to know what's going on. School district documents also described the role of family members as supporters of their individual children. This role was evident in 5 district policy documents, and was
contained in at least one phrase in each of the documents reflecting this perspective. The policy documents describing the role of family members as supporters of their children through involvement in programs and events offered by the school were a) Visitors to Schools, b) Public Conduct on School Property, c) Preschool Council, d) Parent Involvement, and e) Alternative Grade Level Organization in Neighborhood Schools (K-8 Policy). All of these documents defined the role of family members as supporting their children’s academic success by participating in school in ways that aligned with the school’s stated purpose. Descriptions of these policy documents can be found in Appendix D.

Discussion

School’s extension of the opportunity for family members to be present and engaged in the practices of school convinces family members to compromise their voice in order to participate in their children’s school. While school involvement was a voluntary act of individual family members, the school district’s policies articulated specific roles for family members to be present and engaged in the practices of school. The parents demonstrated agency in their involvement in school in ways sanctioned by the school, but that agency was co-opted by the schools. In these roles, family members were invited to support school employees in supporting the school institution. The language of school policy guiding family member involvement in school identified specific actions for family members, each targeting specific school practices while excluding others. Community members also discussed in street interviews specific practices for family members to be involved in school. Additionally, school professionals
and family members identified behaviors for family members to help schools achieve the
aims of the institution through being present and engaged in school’s practices.

This role for family members, being present and engaged in the practices of
school, was an example of family members appropriating the practices of the institution
in order to ensure the institution’s success, even at the disregard of other family members
who were not involved in similar ways. As a postcolonial theory perspective suggests, the
impact of individual encounters with dominating social institutions is apparent in the
individual’s hybridized identity as well as in their adoption of the institution’s values. As
I described above, only a small number of study participants described the roles of family
members as ensuring that school achieved its stated purpose. Although resistance to fully
adopting the practices of the institution may have allowed family members to uncover
and make visible the spaces and practices of power and inequity in schooling, their status
as the Inadequate Other marginalized their stances. In fact, it was only in the responses of
community members that the role of family members as ensuring that schools achieved
their stated purpose was discussed. However, as family members devoted their efforts to
practices that were constructed by the institution of school, their complicity in
maintaining the power of the institution went unquestioned by other supporters of school.
Subsequently, family members and community members who understood the role of
family members as ensuring that schools achieved their stated purpose may be looked
down upon as unsupportive of schools or of their own children.

Parents as co-opted school leaders. As study participants described the roles of
family members in school, multiple references to the SCT were made. The School
Collaboration Team was the decision-making committee required of all schools in the
district, a collaborative team with “representation from parents, community, faculty, administrators and classified staff” (School Collaboration Teams). The district policy describing the function of the SCT at each of the district’s schools specified the aim to enhance “student achievement and school climate by engaging the school community in collaborative efforts supporting the school and District's goals;” in addition to my observation of the SCT meeting at Alcorn and in-person interview with Linda, five study participants discussed the School Collaboration Team during in-person interviews and four school professionals described the SCT during a group interview. In total seven school professionals, one family member, and two community members discussed the SCT when describing the role of family members in school.

The School Collaboration Team formalized school’s institutional power to subsume the power of families by funneling the voice and involvement of family members toward school-based efforts to support the school and district’s goals. Because of this, although the goals of family and community members may have been similar to those of the school and district, the designation of responsibilities and practices of the SCT eliminated opportunities for the voices of the community and families to emerge. Additionally, the district policy did not specify community membership in the SCT to members of the local community; instead, members of all groups that made up the community of the district were eligible to join the SCT. Ebony’s description of the role of family members in school-based decision-making named this clearly:

I think there should be a parent voice. So it's mandated by the state that there have to be these SCTs in public schools. And I think I've seen a lot of SCTs that don’t function. They're either completely toxic environments where folks who
don’t really have a stake in that school performing well are there to run their political agenda or whatever, whatever it is, they get involved or they're not properly run. Or you know there's multiple things that can go wrong with these SCTs. And they're actually not being a strong parent voice in that building. And I think it's incredibly important.

Co-opted school leadership reflected the role of family members as participants in school decision-making toward enactment of the school’s goals rather than the goals of the family or community. Thus, despite the opportunity to participate in a school-based committee such as the SCT, the participation of members of families and the community was limited to supporting the aims of the school. Emilio, who described the way members for Alcorn’s SCT were chosen, identified the focus of SCT participation to accomplish the aims of school:

There's something called the PTA, which is run by two - most - two people, my wife and a lady who works in the office. And they raise funds. They have a series of fundraisers for the school. And all the money gets kind of put into a pot where the principal makes all the decisions. Now I trust her ability to make decisions. I trust her wholeheartedly. However, the parents don’t have a voice in that. The SCT is, for me, seems like it's usually handpicked, people that are handpicked that may be going with what the administration wants. And there's nothing wrong with that because I believe the administration is doing things that are for the best interest. Now, the Active Parents Organization, that's open to everybody, and everybody has an opportunity. So there's a lot of people that choose not to, but I would say that everybody has an opportunity to have a voice,
to have a say. And whether they speak English or not. Because we have plenty of folks that are part of that group that can translate.

School professionals did not share the perspective of co-opted family member involvement in decision-making. Harriett, a teacher at Alcorn, described the role of family members in school decision making as partners with teachers. This perspective was supported by Allison, another Alcorn teacher, who described the role of family members as informing some parts of the work of the school, as the school planned “out the whole year based on what the parents said they wanted.” Four teachers who participated in the group interview at Alcorn also described the SCT. These teachers described the role of family members in school decision-making by identifying the forms of enactment of these roles in organized activities such as the SCT, parent constituency groups, and completing school surveys.

Although teachers at Alcorn perceived the roles of family members in school decision making as occurring within open opportunities in which their voices informed school practice, the principal at Alcorn, Linda Dominguez, described the role of family members in decision making at the school in a slightly different way. Linda stated that parents drive hiring and budget decisions for the SCT, but contextualized the partnership roles of family members as requiring her administrative guidance: “But they literally would sit with us and we would say, ‘Okay, this is how much money we’ve got.’ And I always recommended them first, here’s what I recommend, what do you think.” Linda also mentioned during our interview that she guided family members who participated in SCT so that they did not go down a “path of no return” while helping her “make those decisions.” Through this discussion, Linda corroborated Vincent’s (1996) critique of
school governmental efforts to involve parents in decision making as coopting, intended to reinforce school agendas by confining decision-making roles to “approve or slightly modify previously made administrative decisions (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011).

Parents as organized advocates. Members of the community, as well as school professionals, held a perception that the role of family members in school was to collectively act against the institutional power of school. Street interviews revealed that members of the community considered individual family members capable of resisting the institutional power of school through their own efforts; however, there were no actual examples of this resistance. Also, telephone call logs demonstrated that family members felt capable of responding on their own to the power of schools, although their efforts to do so were constrained by school policy. In-person interview data revealed that organizing family members to coalesce their efforts could disrupt the institutional power of school. Although interview data uncovered only one instance of the collective power of family members enacted by members of families and the school to disrupt school institutional power, the power of organizing was corroborated by an additional five members of families and the community.

The perspective of family members as able to utilize their individual power to advocate for their children emerged during two of the street interviews. As I described in the previous section, two community members described the role of family members in schools as participating in schools and attending meetings to “see what’s really going on” and keeping teachers from mistreating kids and from errantly grouping them together. Telephone calls made to OFI gave further evidence of the efforts of individual family members to disrupt the power of school.
Although family members attempted to resist the institutional power of school through their individual efforts, records of telephone calls made to OFI demonstrated that family members’ individual efforts would not disrupt school power. For example, a mother contacted OFI because the school’s administration reduced her son’s kindergarten schedule from full time to part time without a meeting with her. The mother decided to withdraw her son after OFI informed her that they were unable to overturn the administration’s decision.

Of the 74 telephone calls family members made to the Office to voice complaints or concerns about their interactions with schools, none of them resulted in disruption to the institutional power of school. In fact, each call was resolved in one of three ways. The resolutions were: a) family members were instructed to meet with the administration at their child’s school, b) family members were reminded of the district’s policies, or c) family members resolved the issue on their own, such as through withdrawing their child or no longer pursuing the complaint. In some instances, no resolution was available in the telephone call log. Table IV.2 provides characteristics and examples of these responses family members received to their attempts to disrupt the power of school.
Table IV.2. Categories of resolutions to calls made to OFI between Aug. 2010-Jan. 2012 for elementary schools in Chelsea Park community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolution category</th>
<th>No. of calls</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Contextualized example from field notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting with school</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>The issue was (to be) resolved through a meeting with the school principal, school psychologist or other member of the school administration. This does not include meetings with district personnel.</td>
<td>Issue: 3/23/11: Daughter “attacked” by four boys. Para not responsive to treatment of their daughter (Environment). Resolution: Boys are Hispanic [sic]. Parents think it was racially motivated. Parent thinks principal lied about boys writing apology notes which daughter did not receive. Meeting was requested but was not held—father thought it would be pointless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family member resolved</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>The issue was resolved by the concerned family member, without the direct involvement of a member of the school. This often occurred when family members were not satisfied with the response of the school or OFI.</td>
<td>Issue: 5/23/11: Child is bullied. Parent feels teacher calls for her child’s behavior but does not respond when she is being bullied. (Environment) Resolution: Parent withdrew child. Principal is willing to meet with parent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not resolved or resolution not available</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>The resolution to the issue was recorded in a journal that was not available, or no resolution to the issue was recorded.</td>
<td>Issue: 9/7/11: Parents feel daughter is treated unfairly at school. (Environment) Resolution: Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School or district policy reinforced</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>The issue was (to be) resolved by the invocation or reinforcement of a school or district policy.</td>
<td>Issue: 8/31/11: School secretary continues to call parent about child, who is being home schooled. (Interpersonal/School Policy) Resolution: School will not withdraw child until formal Home School Office paperwork is completed. Child was eventually registered for homeschool.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The collective power of members of families to disrupt the institutional power of school occurred in response to school overcrowding. Linda, principal of Alcorn, described her role in organizing family members to oppose the practices of school that were causing hardships at the school:

I had 38 kids in some classrooms. And they were getting - teachers were getting mad at me. Parents were getting mad at me. So I brought everyone together and I said, "Now tell me which kids am I going to tell can't come to this school? How am I going to --" So then I went to the district and I started screaming. I was screaming at the district before they even were screaming at me saying, "This is ridiculous. How could you expect us to have this many kids in the classroom, that many kids go through a lunchroom, to have those lunch times?" It was getting longer in the day having lunch, earlier and longer because I had so many kids. How are we going to get them through their specials rotation? I mean it was becoming really a challenge. And finally the district, I went to the district. They'd say, "Well Linda, you just have to make it work." It was like - and then I come back here and get beat up? Finally I told parents, "You know what, I need your help. I need your help to come talk with me to people in the district without you telling that I asked you to help me do that because I'll get in trouble." I used parents as advocates for our school. And man, they started calling and we asked people to come from the planning department here. We asked our instructional superintendent that was very - I had to use that very carefully. That's my boss. And we had to listen to parents. Parents were screaming and yelling at the district. And I had to kind of calm them down. But what it led to is them
building _____ Academy where our ECE and K Kids go. That was their response.

But our parents helped make that happen.

As Linda demonstrated, collective effort of family members to resist the institutional power of school required a scope of concern beyond the individual efforts of family members. Instead, family members’ collective efforts to resist the institutional power of schools would be more effective, even if those efforts were organized by individual school professionals. What this demonstrated was that school professionals also were able to oppose the policies of school in support of family members while remaining school employees. As Linda pointed out, the interests of family members converged with the interests of an individual school professional who was willing to utilize her role as a member of the institution to challenge institutional practice on her own behalf as well as on behalf of families. The convergence of interests is an important component of the interaction of families and schools, and I discuss it further at the conclusion of this section.

Ebony also identified the need for collective efforts of family members to impact the institution of school as she described her goal in working with families. Ebony stated that she aimed to “build their knowledge capacity, their leadership capacity to advocate for themselves, for their own child, and really for all children in a public school system. So that if they moved from Chelsea Park to Detroit to New Orleans or Chicago, and there’s an issue with that school, then they can organize themselves and get that thing taken care of.”
After describing the relationship between schools and families in Chelsea Park as “a very toxic, broken relationship,” Susan also identified collective resistance as the way to disrupt the institutional power of school and to effect change in MPS:

And so right now, if parents are informed, I think we need to get a revolution of sorts. And some people are afraid that we mean a real revolution with real fighting. But right now it's all meaning words and the proper channels for us to do this. And knowledge. So we're trying to do that because I think parents see the big picture, maybe we can get them to come out and try to effect change in MPS, although MPS is aware of my little group. And they're making sure that, to the best way they can, that we're not listened to. It's really getting kind of scary.

Susan’s description here makes it clear that a community gathering is not the same as community organizing. In describing the efforts of the school district as scary, Susan was referring to the district’s recent history of engaging school reform efforts without the support or buy-in of the larger community. As members of Chelsea Park heard the district’s turnaround announcements in meetings held throughout the community, they openly responded that they were against the changes. However, their efforts were not organized and the school turnaround efforts occurred as the district planned.

Discussion

This finding demonstrates that the institutional power of school constrained the construction of roles for family members by co-opting their power or eliminating opportunities for the enactment of the individual power of families through school policy. The data suggest that the institution of school sustains a social order that protects its existence. From the perspective of Thirdspace theory, the existing social order, one in
which institutions are developed and maintained can be described as the first space. The first space is society’s institutions and arrangements as they are (Soja, 1996), relying largely on the coercion and exploitation of a less powerful group. In contrast, the second space of production exists in the imagination of members of less powerful groups as they envision new social arrangements, particularly with a redistribution of power and a reorganization of social institutions to honor their voices and power. Both the first and second spaces of production result in disproportionate distribution of power amongst groups and their members.

Two of the roles of family members, as supporters (or enforcers) of school practices or as co-opted school leaders, allow the institution of school to maintain its institutional power and status as a fixed entity in society. These roles serve the aims of school while allowing family members to feel meaningfully engaged in the practices of school through supporting their children’s learning, developing relationships and partnerships with teachers, and making decisions that impact the school. However, these roles also position family members as complicit in the current arrangements of society and supporters of the first space of social production. On its own, Postcolonial theory is inadequate to explain these arrangements, as members of families who assume these roles are not participating in a post-colonial environment. Instead, they develop their practices of involvement with schools in a current colonized state. In other words, family members who act as supporters of school’s systems and practices allow the institution of school to maintain its fixed state as family members adapt their involvement accordingly.

However, the data presented above suggest that members of families may be able to resist the institutional power of school through their collective organizing. There also
is the possibility that family members may be able to challenge school fixity through access to the district facilitated by a school professional such as the principal. As the data demonstrate, it is a significant challenge for family members to challenge the institutional power of school on their own. The barriers are layered and numerous as well as overt and subtle. While there was only one example of family members successfully challenging and changing the practices and policies of school, community members demonstrated a wider awareness of the power of organizing. The data for this study showed that organizing family members to utilize their collective resistance power to disrupt the institution of school required the involvement and vision of someone who saw things as they were and as they could be, someone who also was a school professional with access to the district. The involvement of an organizer such as Ebony or Susan or Emilio had the potential to challenge the first space of social production through collective buy-in of family members to challenge the institution. However, the realization of this challenge needed to be facilitated by a person who was both inside and outside of the institution. This inside-outside position occupies the position of hybridity, engaged on behalf of families at the contact zone (Pratt, 1991).

Linda’s work to organize families to reduce class sizes at Alcorn demonstrated the second space of social production on a local scale, as her efforts sought to challenge the enactment of school institutional power at the level of the local school. It also was the case of interest convergence as she sought to convince the district to respond to class overcrowding. In education, interest convergence stresses that equality and equity for people from marginalized groups will be pursued and advanced when that interest converges with the interests, needs, expectations, and ideologies of the dominant
institution (Milner, 2008). This was evident in Linda’s admission that parents were getting mad at her because of over-populated classrooms. The second space of social production, though, relies on those with less power imagining social arrangements that are to their benefit. Linda was able to envision and communicate a second space of social production that was to benefit several members of a group that was less powerful than the institution of school. However, it is more likely the case that the district responded favorably to the request of family members and the school principal as their interests converged with the interests of the district. A press release from Metropolitan Public Schools revealed that construction of ____ Academy that relieved classroom overcrowding was “part of the 2008 voter-approved General Obligation Bond, including dozens that were not part of the original scope of bond projects but were made possible thanks to $90 million in savings from strong cost management and favorable market conditions” (7/11/11). This press release reveals that Linda’s interests may not have been enough to instigate institutional change. Instead, the access to additional economic resources for the school district led to the new school being built. This insight clarifies the role of interest convergence in family-school interaction.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that the institutional power of school relies on significant control of the interaction of families and school through practices of coercion, restriction and exploitation. School policies effectively coerce and exploit the involvement of family members toward the aims of school. These data also reveal that school institutional power is sustained through school policies and practices that are intended to restrict the access of family members to the core of the institution. The
records of telephone calls made to the district Office of Family Involvement reveal the practice of restricting family member access to the institution through developed district policies and the practices of the institution’s actors; the practices of school employees at the local school level also serve to reinforce the policies of the district that protect the status of the institution as it has been fixed in society. However, as Linda’s involvement demonstrates, family members may be able to effectively challenge the practices of the institution through collective efforts facilitated by a school professional.

The institutional power of school influenced all parts of this study, as it was pervasive throughout the school district, the local school, and the perceptions of school employees, families, and the community. This influence was an unexpected feature of this study’s design, as I originally conceptualized the interaction of families and school more broadly than a specific community. However, the pervasiveness of school’s institutional power throughout the entire study context makes the theories of this study all the more relevant and powerful. Postcolonial theory’s emphasis on the discourses of power and the discourses that challenge and engage institutional power on behalf of individuals and groups that are subjected to institutions directly informs our understanding of the interaction of families and school. Postcolonial theory also helps explain the ways in which members of family and the community have appropriated the dominant discourse and practice of schools as a tool to navigate their involvement with school. Because family and community members have responded to the institutional practices of school in this way, they have “clipped their wings” to actively and productively resist schools power enacted over them and their children. A powerful example of someone appropriating the dominant discourse of the institution of school in
support of family members challenging the institution is Linda’s hybridized practice. Without Linda’s hybridized practice utilized to provide family member access to the institution, the indigenous agency of the community would be denied to those who are subject to the exercises of institutional power. Linda’s support of families is made more complex by her deficit perspective of the community, which emerges in her identification of the unique needs of family members at Alcorn who require additional help. To understand this better, the dualism of colonizer/colonized must be avoided; hybridized identities are often open and fluid, or “irretrievably heterogeneous” as Spivak (1988) denotes.

Linda’s willingness to utilize her capital as a school professional on behalf of family members demonstrates both the postcolonial perspective of the floating buffer zone (Spivak, 1994) and the therspace perspective of the contact zone (Pratt, 1991). The floating buffer zone, as Spivak (1994) argues, is the socio-spatial location of those who are capable of navigating both the institution of power as well as the shared spaces of those who are dominated by institutional practice. In these zones, the individual who acts on behalf of the institution and attempts to act on behalf of those subjected to the power of the institution must grapple with the tensions and conflicts. Pratt (1991) defines contact zones as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (63). Pratt, similar to Soja, hooks, Bruyneel, and Bhabha, describe the contact zone or boundary as the place where the subaltern, those who are “othered” by the dominant, deconstruct the ways in which they were represented by creating “self-representations.”
Throughout the development of this study’s findings, Critical Social Theory has informed the analysis of each finding and the findings overall. In particular, the Critical Social Theory perspective seeks to uncover social reproduction by uncovering the ways in which institutions such as school are able to reproduce the social arrangements of power and justice. As this study demonstrates, the institutional power of school is reified by the practices of school to confine and subsume the power of individual family members, resulting in their complicity with the institution, even in their collective resistance. This is evident in family members’ practices of involvement in school events, partnering with school employees, and becoming involved in school decision making committees. Each of these school-based activities rewards family members’ involvement by reducing family-school conflict and allowing family members to participate in fulfilling the mission of school on behalf of their children. The power of these forms of involvement to reproduce the first space of production in which the institution of school exhibits significant power over the families of its students is far-reaching. School remains a fixed institution in our broader social system, it perpetuates societal inequities, and its fixity leads families to develop ambivalent roles that may acknowledge the enactment of institutional power while suggesting that resistance may not be worth the effort. And for those families that attempt to resist on their own, their efforts are confined or subsumed by school’s institutional power.

The biggest opportunity for members of families, school, and the community to disrupt the enactments of school institutional power begins with pursuing the shift from the first space of production to the second space of production. This shift will allow members of families and the community to inform the policies and practices of school.
However, the risk of making such a shift is that those who once were oppressed can easily adopt the practices of the oppressor. This would only lead to a cycle of oppression through which the relations or scales of power simply shift from one group to another. Instead, a possibility of moving away from the first space of social production toward the second space of production would be pushing this movement even further toward the thirdspace. This possibility will be discussed in the next and final chapter of this study.
CHAPTER V
IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to understand the interaction of families and schools in a major city located in the western U.S. The perspectives of a small number of school professionals, families, and members of a local community were collected and examined for this study. In gathering the perspectives of family members, school professionals, and community members, I aimed to situate family-school interaction within a particular spatial context, bounded by zip code and contained to a single geographic community, within a societal context connected by residential and professional membership status. The decision to bound this study socially and spatially was guided by Critical Social Theory (Carspecken, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011), which was a component of the conceptual framework. Research in the field of parent involvement in schools consistently lacks a critical perspective (Auerbach, 2007) and adequate theoretical substantiation. Thus, this study investigated the various perceptions of the interaction of families and schools by relying on Postcolonial Theory (Bhabha, 1994) and Thirdspace Theory (Soja, 1996) in addition to Critical Social Theory; these theories rounded out the Conceptual Framework and informed the study design. Also, these theories were utilized to inform the analysis that generated the four major study findings.

Investigating the perceptions of members of families, school and the community reflects a community-grounded approach in which I, as the researcher, must remain aware of the dangers that can emerge when conducting education research that is not mindful of the need to “circumvent misinterpretations, misinformation, and
misrepresentation of individuals, communities, institutions, and systems” (Milner, 2007). Engaging in education research that questions how school-based programs and policies involve families may help schools satisfy NCLB legislative requirements for parent involvement. However, this form of research effectively narrows the role of family members to supporters of school, bypassing the broader access issue of family involvement in the schools beyond the achievement of school aims for their individual children. Approaching investigation of the interaction of families and schools in this way also avoids attention to the institutional power of school, which emerged in this study as important to the findings due to its significant implications for the entire study context and all of the interactions between school and families. With this in mind, I conducted this study with the assumption that the various perspectives of family and community members were comparable in importance to the perspectives of members of schools. I also broadly questioned the purpose of family involvement in school beyond the achievement of school aims; thus, I was willing to ask questions to elicit people’s perceptions of the purpose of school. Although this study included a relatively small sample, the perceptions gathered indicate a divergence between a school and its surrounding community. These two considerations, equity among stakeholders as a core element of family–school interaction and questioning the purpose of school, were important to the study design and conduct. I also utilized a critical approach to examine the interaction of families and a school; doing so allowed me to uncover the dynamics and locations of power within the study context, the points of access or barriers to family member involvement in a school, and the perceptions and enactment of roles within a particular community and its particular set of school-family relations.
Further, a focus on family-school partnerships, which is a major theme in the current field of family involvement, is much too narrow to understand family-school interaction, as the partnership emphasis undermines the possibility of educational equity through its focus on maintaining the power relations between school and families. This study provides a case in point; there was no evident family-school partnership within the community of study. In this study, the location of power remains with the institution of school, and family members are expected to react to school’s overtures and invitations for the involvement of families on the terms of the school and the school district. Below, I discuss the limitations associated with this perspective.

To be clear, while NCLB legislation requires the development of a parent involvement policy for schools to receive Title I funding, the requirement does not include enforcement provisions (work, P. E., & Education, I., 2003). Thus, schools are expected to develop policies for family involvement without any expectation that the relations of power can be shifted toward family members. This study has looked at those policies and their enactment in one school community.

In considering the implications of this study and my conclusions, I provide a reminder of my epistemological perspective of schooling. Schools are social institutions with colonizing practices in racially, ethnically, and economically diverse communities. Because of the histories of families and students of color in a post-de-segregation system of schooling in the U.S., it would be irresponsible and ahistorical to think of the institution and endeavor of school as the “great equalizer.” With this perspective in mind, the two sections of this chapter are: Discussion of Findings and Study Implications. In the Discussion of Findings section, the four major findings are discussed collectively, with
the associated discussion informed by the Conceptual Framework. In the Study Implications section, I discuss the implications of this study for the work of parent-teacher organizations, community members, school professionals, family members and education policymakers. In addition to these two topics, this chapter also includes a presentation of the limitations of this study and concluding remarks.

**Discussion of Findings**

This study was designed to uncover the nature of family-school interaction within a single residential community, relying on the perspectives held by members of families and school professionals within the community as well as other self-identified community members; in addition, this study examined the policies of the local school district in order to understand the policy context of family-school interaction as developed by local policymakers and practiced by members of schools. The aim of this study, then, was to utilize a critical theoretical and analytic perspective that did not rely on traditionally accepted family involvement models and considered the interaction of families and schools as an issue of education equity. In order to emphasize the interrelationships between the four major findings, four key lessons that emerged from the data analysis will guide the Discussion of Findings. These key lessons are that:

1. School is a relatively fixed social institution. As such, its policies, actors and philosophies reinforce its position and status while also constraining family members from disrupting school’s position and status.
2. The purpose of school as stated by the district was corroborated by the adults involved in this study. However, the enactment of school practice was in
contradiction to stated purpose of school because of the local community context. Thus, context is an important feature of family-school interaction.

3. While the individual power of families has been conceptualized and named by the United States Department of Education as parent power, this form of power is limited to the practices of family members that support school aims for student achievement. In this way, the experiences of families in school does not support them as possessors of their own power, particularly as power is defined as the capacity to influence the behaviors of others (Handgraaf, Van Dijk, Vermunt, Wilke & De Dreu, 2008).

4. Adults who interact with schools judge their behavior and the behavior of others in terms of the policies and practices defined by the institution of school; in doing so, there is decreased likelihood that family members can be organized in any efforts to influence school. One possible exception is through interest convergence with school insiders who can mobilize the power of parents.

In the sections that follow, I will explore these four themes in relation to their meanings for the interaction of families and school. Thereafter, I will discuss the implications of this study for community organizers, parent teacher organizations, school teachers and administrators, education and school policymakers, and family members.

**School as a relatively fixed social institution.** This study demonstrates that the institution of school occurs at the level of the historic institution as well as across the district; however, the institution is not clearly located in the practices of a single school campus. This became apparent in the responses I received to the question, “what is the
purpose of school?” All study participants responded by describing a phenomenon with implications for larger society, but no study participant responded by discussing the purpose of a particular school building. However, in describing particular instances in which they interacted with school, study participants discussed their experiences with individual school professionals. From this, it became apparent that the school district in this study is part of a pervasive institution at the larger historical and societal levels although its aims are carried out at the level of the district and at specific school sites. At the specific school site, the school district employs actors whose behaviors promote the values of the entire district. Family members have access to the school building, while not having access to the school district, a larger, more powerful historical and social institution. Similarly, school professionals have different levels of capital within the institution of school at the level of the district. Teachers were able to develop and implement practices that fulfill the values of the institution, although they did not have access to the institution and were unable to instigate change across or within the school district. The school principal, on the other hand, has greater institutional capital, granting them access to district-level employees who are able to make decisions that impact the functioning of the institution. There is bureaucracy within the school district that sustains the status of the institution of school as a relatively fixed social entity with local campuses in which its aims are enacted. Below, I discuss the limitation associated with under-clarified definition of the school institution.

**Purpose of school in context.** A major lesson from this study is that although there may be shared understandings of the purpose of school, this purpose is qualified for a community in which achievement is low and where schools have not been successful.
In such a community, school has the added purpose of compensating for family members who are perceived as not knowing how to enact school practices at home, family members who believe that schools should meet the needs of their individual children, and students who do not know how to participate in school and interact with their teachers in ways defined by schools as appropriate.

In this study, school professionals, community members, and family members agreed that the purpose of school was to help students achieve academic skills while preparing them for adulthood. I found this to be a fascinating construct because members of the community and school professionals qualified the purpose of school in the local community as requiring some special consideration. Their views were that the purpose of school in the local community differed from the purpose of school in other communities. The difference is that the economic and cultural context of the community presented challenges that changed the way school was enacted. This suggests that, within the context of this study, there emerged a deficit view of the local community and a broad view of families and students as inadequate to achieving the purpose of school without additional support. This lens of the purpose of school also was consistent with the broad-sweeping school reform efforts occurring in the community. The school reform context involved multiple schools in the community experiencing major changes, despite resistance from families and members of the community. Within this context, the voices of family and community members did not alter the plans of the district. In all cases, with one exception, school professionals were not able to alter the plans of the district, either.

The inherent problem with the idea of a qualified purpose of school is that it will lead to sustained inequity; each school’s purpose will differ significantly based on
perceived needs, deficits, and assets of the community as defined by the institution. While some schools are more successful at achieving national standards for student achievement, and others may be more successful at preparing students for adulthood, as defined by college or career attainment, other schools may perceive that there is added, challenging work to do because of the disconnection between the practices of school, the families of its students, and the local community. Nonetheless, qualifying the purpose of school based on the local community context allows the institution of school, school professionals, and family members to lower their expectations for students and families in these contexts without any change to conceptualizing the practices and purpose of school. School remains fixed, as the location of the problem is with families and the community rather than with the institution of school.

**Power relations.** Another important lesson from this study is that the institution of school exercises its power and individuals are not fully able to shift the distribution of power on their own. Power is defined as a capacity to influence the behaviors of others (Handgraaf, Van Dijk, Vermunt, Wilke & De Dreu, 2008). Within the context of family-school interaction, school exercises its power through the development and enactment of policies that determine the involvement of members of families and the practices of school professionals. In this study, the power to influence behavior belonged to the institution of school and its actors; this took on the form of families being invited or coerced to support the aims of the institution in order for their children to be successful in school.

I began developing these findings around power relations by claiming that family members possessed individual power, as this seemed consistent with perspectives of
family member involvement in school. My assumption was informed, in large part, by the language of parent power utilized by family partnership proponents such as the United States government. In examining the enactment of family power, however, it became clear that the family members included in this study do not have power in the formal sense: the ability to directly influence the practices of the school in which their children are enrolled. This is especially true in the context of family interaction with the school system. Family members do have the “power” to choose from a very narrow set of options, such as selecting the schools their children attend and participating in school on school terms, among other opportunities to respond to the practices and policies of the school district. The parent power focus of the U.S. Department of Education reflects eleven principles that parents should adopt as exercises of their power: a) be responsible, b) be committed, c) be positive, d) be patient, e) be attentive, f) be precise, g) be mindful of mistakes, h) be results-oriented, i) be diligent, j) be innovative, and k) be there (United States Department of Education, 2010). I did not discover in this study evidence corroborating the school involvement of families as demonstration of their capacity to influence the practices of school on their own.

Because the school district described the purpose of school as the development of academic skills and preparation for adulthood, family members were expected to engage in school in support of this purpose; efforts to engage differently, such as in direct challenge to the fidelity of school’s enactment of district policy, were directly rebuffed or not acknowledged by school employees. School policies instantiated the purpose, as defined by the school district, even more deeply by articulating consequences for family members who did not comply. Essentially, the local school was able to restrict the access
of family members, subsume their interests under the aims of school, and limit the involvement of family members to those that maintained the school status quo.

If we categorize the practices of family members that are in support of school as a form of power, then the power of parents and families is legitimized for those whose practices align with the institution. However, for those family members whose past experiences, current social and cultural context, and work and family responsibilities disrupt or contradict the practices of the school institution, their only options are to become aligned with school or resist. Resistance, however, is not very productive as an individual endeavor. Organizing with other family members may provide greater leverage for family members to influence the practices and policies of the institution of school, as this study demonstrated that individual efforts to resist were rebuffed. There is potential for family members to collectively organize with the help of an at-large community member or school professional with institutional capital; however, as this research demonstrated, community members were not successful in organizing families, and the school professionals held a deficit view of the families and students they served.

**Individuals’ Perceptions of Self and Others**

It also became apparent during this study that the influence of the institution of school was even more far-reaching than its policies suggested. While school policies targeted the behaviors of family members, family members’ responses to school policies showed that their self-perceptions, and their judgments of others, were formed in response to school policies. As I talked with family members, community members, and school professionals, their descriptions of their own efforts were positioned in opposition to others. For this study, this comparison took on the form of an Exceptional Self in
which individuals from each participant category described their own, unique roles and practices as exemplary and good as compared to their peers or colleagues whose roles and practices were inadequate. School professionals and community members described themselves as really good at their work compared to others who were less good. For them, taking on the Exceptional Self was a way to display greater professional ability. Family members who took on the Exceptional Self, however, demonstrated a different outcome.

As family members described themselves as good parents who engaged with schools correctly, compared to other family members whom they described as poorly engaged, they took on the identity of the institution in order to legitimize their interactions with schools. Their taking on the identity of the institution was reflected in family members utilizing the school institutional lens of appropriate family involvement practices to diminish the behaviors of other family members. A clear example of this was Tiffany’s description of herself as “best friends with the principal” while describing other family members as uninvolved parents who blame schools whenever something goes wrong. This dichotomous perception came at the cost, however, of family members not partnering with other family members in support of their children at the local school, or in unified opposition to the dominance of the institution of school. Community members were aware of this and attempted to organize family members as activists opposed to the institution or as advocates working together in support of the local school. However, community members were not able to organize these family members to effectively counter the power of the institution of school. This was something that a school professional was able to do.
Implications of the Study

This study sought to understand the interaction of families and school by uncovering the perspectives of a relatively small number of family members, community members, and school professionals in a single community. In developing an understanding of family-school interaction as a phenomenon, this study provided evidence that family-school interaction is distinct from other categories of family involvement in school. A major distinction of family-school interaction is its departure from the default emphasis of the family involvement literature on school aims focused on academic achievement. Family-school interaction necessarily troubles the notion that the purpose of school is to achieve the aim of the institution, which is to provide academic skills for children in preparation for their adulthood. This is a widely-accepted understanding of the school purpose. However, this view of the purpose of school effectively marginalizes dissenting perspectives, particularly those of family and community members who have different hopes and expectations for school.

In developing the implications of this study, I acknowledge that it is a formidable challenge to tease out larger-scale meaning from a relatively small sample size; nonetheless, the implications below indicate opportunities to better understand and respond to the institutional practice of marginalizing the voices of family and community members whose views of school purpose are inconsistent with the policies and practices of the school institution. In the following section, I discuss the implications of this study for the work of parent-teacher organizations, community members, schools and school professionals, family members, and education policymakers. Implications are linked to an
over-arching finding, which is that although school policy invites the involvement of family members, their involvement is constrained by school practice.

**Parent-teacher organizations.** One implication of this study is directly related to the formal school organizations in which family members and school professionals interact. School-based parent-teacher organization provided a space for family members to become connected to one another and to learn about the context of a local school. Although several models of parent-teacher organizations exist, I will draw upon the National PTA Association to elaborate on the implications of this study for such organizations.

The National PTA Association adopted a six-standards framework as its National Standards for Family-School Partnerships. These standards include:

1. Welcoming all families into the school community
2. Communicating effectively
3. Supporting student success
4. Speaking up for every child
5. Sharing power
6. Collaborating with the community

This framework builds upon the work of Joyce Epstein (1995, 2001), whose six levels of parent involvement identified the roles of family members in school and sought to expose and reduce the barriers that schools erect by only acknowledging the involvement of family members as participants in school programs. This has proved to be a helpful framework to support schools in recognizing the various ways that family members become involved in their children’s learning.
An important opportunity for parent-teacher organizations is to rethink their practices and goals. For example, National PTA Standards as well as Epstein’s framework, maintain a narrow focus on what parents can do in support of school. Instead, parent-teacher organizations should consider the roles of family members more broadly than based on specific practices that support the status quo organization of school. A starting point for this work is to question the role of “sharing power,” which Epstein refers to as “decision-making.”

In their roles at the contact zones between the institution and the families their schools serve, school professionals can dismantle the enactment of school policies that marginalize family members and partner with family members to co-construct authentic opportunities for family members to be involved in their children’s school. School professionals also can advocate for the institutional power of schools to shift toward the local community and the families of students.

This study revealed that decision-making roles for family members served only to co-opt their participation in order to help schools achieve their aims. For these family members, co-optation was not a true sharing of power as they were involved in low-impact decision-making on topics previously filtered by the school’s principal. As an alternative, parent-teacher organizations should actually share power by sharing voice on all aspects of school that family members are willing to be involved in. Rather than thinking for family members by restricting opportunities for them to be involved, their involvement should be supported by school professionals with capital and access to institutional school power, leveraging that power in support of the equitable interaction of family members.
**Community members.** This study also involved community members whose roles afford a significant opportunity for family-school interaction. At-large community members can be an effective resource when they are involved in the phenomenon of family-school interaction. This study demonstrated that community members might be motivated by a deep sense of care and concern for the well being and thriving of their communities—a feat to be achieved through successful schools. A disposition of care for the community, both its present and future states, allows community members to establish trust with family members while thinking broadly about the impact of school policy on the experiences of family members. Their perspectives, informed by understanding school policies and the voices of family members, bring vital information to the phenomenon of family-school interaction.

First, because family members may face a contradiction between invitations for school involvement and constrained or restricted opportunities to be involved, community members can support family members in remaining engaged while responding to contradictions. For those family members who are unaware of school policies, which can be a challenge when access to information is restricted, community members can provide information access.

Second, community members have the potential ability to generate unity within the local community in support of equity in family-school interaction by organizing groups of family members. Community members at large occupy a unique position between schools and families, as they do not have to be focused on an individual child and/or be complicit with the institution of school. Because of this in-between position, community organizers and activists can work strategically to leverage their social capital
within the community to draw together family members and mitigate the enactment of the Exceptional Self and the Inadequate Other in the views of family members who have come to rely on these archetypes for their own legitimacy. In doing so, community members can support family members in identifying their own legitimacy as family members within a community that do not have to borrow legitimacy from being complicit with the school institution and delegitimizing their peers. In another sense, community members can use their social capital to mitigate the “crabs in a bucket” phenomenon that occurs between family members interacting with schools. The “crabs in a bucket” analogy refers to individuals diminishing the importance of others who achieve success beyond theirs. Community members also can draw upon their positions outside of the institution to generate buy-in from family members who resist the power of school, while drawing upon their understandings of school practices to generate buy-in from family members who align with the institution. Achieving these ends would require that community members acknowledge and develop their hybrid roles.

In these ways, community organizers and activists can become effective agents for helping broaden the views of family members beyond their own children toward considering the endeavor of school for all children within the community. Building coalitions amongst family members in this way can impact schools as well as the local community. The impacts to the community, which occur through the efforts of community members to build coalitions amongst family members, might include the organizing of the voices of family members to respond to practices of school reform—whether in resistance or in support. Additionally, community members can support
family members in being informed about changes within the local school district as well as at their child’s school.

**Schools and school professionals.** For school teachers and principals, two distinct points of action emerge from this study. School teachers are able to leverage their individual relationships with students and their families to create new spaces for family members to be involved in the education of their children. School principals, on the other hand, are able to utilize their institutional capital to build new understandings of the purpose of school based on the insights and values of their students’ families. Both school teachers and principals can rely on their students’ families to reconceptualize the purpose of school so that the practices of school rely less rigidly on district policy and more so on the values and history of the members of the local community. In this way, the practices of schooling can shift to focus on the education of the community’s youth, which involves their development within a situated context.

To be specific, school teachers and principals can provide access to school space and information while seeking family member buy-in. School professionals can communicate interactively with family members to learn what they identify as the needs of their children. Family members are likely to be concerned with their entire child rather than academic performance alone. Thus, when teachers and administrators combine the insight of family members with best practices based on empirical research, the opportunities to ground family-school interaction in the values and interests of the local community can be broad. Such a combination of family members’ knowledge and wisdom, combined with educational experience, research, and scholarship, can lead the way to new purposes of public school.
Family members and school professionals working together to make the endeavor of school about educating children and children’s learning, rather than academic achievement in isolation, may be able to effectively shift the balance of power in favor of families and local communities. For example, in response to events such as school co-location during school reform processes, school professionals can share important information with family members about the implications of school reform decisions. If this is the case, which this study suggests is likely through Linda’s negotiation of a meeting between family members and the local school district, then the concept of parent power can reflect the actual power of family members influencing the educative school experiences of their children. However, the challenge to this work is that interests must converge rather that conflict or diverge. Achieving this shifting power and creation of new understandings of school requires school professionals’ navigation of information and interests in support of re-conceptualized family power. The challenge, however, is that instigating institutional change on behalf of family members and the community is undermined by deficit perspectives, an inability to deeply understand the interests and needs of the community and its families, and a lack of both institutional and community credibility. Although hybridized agency is open and fluid, maintaining fluidity in the zones of contact demands the balancing of interests of multiple voices, a tremendous challenge for school professionals.

More specific to the implications of this research for the work of school principals, there is an added opportunity to build upon their access to the institutional power of school on behalf of the collective families of their students. District policies that require schools to include decision making bodies made up of family and community
members can be utilized as points of leverage for school principals who wish to be deeply and meaningfully connected to the community. This will require, however, that school principals develop and maintain an assets-based focus on the local community and its families rather than focusing on deficits. An assets-based focus should become integral to the local school culture. In some of the most challenging schools, this would require principals to look beyond the few family members who already are active and work to build greater involvement and participation from less active family members in order to tap into their community-based local knowledge and values. Accomplishing this would require two significant steps. First, principals will have to build relationships with community organizers and activists, rather than relying on formal organizations and special interest groups for community support. Additionally, school principals will have to challenge deficit perspectives of the local community and its families held historically by the institution of school and often by district and school personnel. Deficit perspectives undermine equity and lead to interactions with family members that seek to repair them. Seeking to leverage local assets will provide a broader range of access to family members who can provide people power to support the deep integration of schools into the community as well as critical lenses about the work of schools.

**Family members.** An implication of this research for family members stems from the ways in which invitations to be involved in schools require family members to focus on their own children. Focusing on one’s own child diminishes the collective power of family members, and this is effectively accomplished through school-based invitations for family member involvement in school.
This study revealed that the policies and practices of a school district to involve family members to participate can exist alongside policies that specify penalties for family members who do not participate in schools in ways that are consistent with the values and behaviors of the institution. Awareness of this contradiction is important for family members to develop and maintain in their interactions with school. In response to school policies, family members can work together, with at-large community members, and with school professionals to develop coalitions and relationships to combine family members’ efforts to support their own children and to bring attention to contradictions in family involvement policies and practices. Combining efforts can lead to more productive interactions with schools that satisfy family members as well as schools. Combining efforts can also build toward active attention directed toward school policies that are supported by the institutional power of school, which severely restricted the individual power of families. By combining efforts, family members can reverse the practice of diminishing the value or ignoring the efforts of other family members whose behaviors do not align with the values and practices of the institution. Instead, family members can strengthen the school-community relationship by bringing a collective, community focus into their involvement with schools rather than focusing on their individual child. Additionally, family members can improve their children’s school experiences by broadening their perspective to think of the well-being and school success of all children. Developing a perspective that recognizes and seeks to support each of the children enrolled in a school can challenge the individualistic focus generated by school invitations to family members to support their own children.
**Education policymakers.** Education policy is developed at the federal and state levels as well as within local school districts. This study focuses on education policy within local school districts that involves the work of local school boards and district superintendents. As this study suggests, school board members and district superintendents should take care to craft policies that are informed by a broad array of constituents, including community members and family members. Crafting district policies that are informed by family and community members requires the development and enactment of community engagement strategies that involve broad representation of impacted communities and the prioritizing of family and community member voices and perspectives. Contradictions, such as that between parent involvement policies and school practices, can prevail when these constituents are not involved in the development of school district policies.

Developing school district policies that are informed by the community can provide meaningful collaborative opportunities that will increase buy-in from the community as well as reduce the dominance of school institutional power over family and community members. Achieving this, however, depends upon including family and community members beyond those who are routinely or likely to be involved—a result of historical practices of marginalization that increase the likelihood that family members who do not conform to school norms and values will remain on the margins. The onus to involve family and community members in processes to develop policies belongs to school districts, and careful steps must be taken to avoid practices of exclusion.

If policymakers engage more broadly in the development of education policy through policymaking *with* the community and families rather than *for* them, then
policies can become tools to achieve equity. Further, in developing policies through meaningful engagement with local community members, policymakers can facilitate the re-distribution of institutional power through co-constructing the purposes of school and the roles of family members and school professionals. In doing so, family members less likely be marginalized by their interactions with the institution of school and schools would be shared with the communities they serve. This should be the aim of community-grounded schools.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study must be considered in light of several limitations related to the meaning of power as it was conceived for this study, participant sampling, the study context, and presence of researcher bias. I discuss each of these below.

Power. This study is limited by its conceptualization of an institutional and individual power dichotomy. I utilized a critical definition of power as a capacity to influence the behaviors of others (Handgraaf, Van Dijk, Vermunt, Wilke & De Dreu, 2008). This lens acknowledges that power exists in the broad array of interactions between individuals, groups, and social systems, and the presence of disproportionate power owned and exercised by dominant social groups and their institutions significantly impacts the nature of interaction. This view of power, consistent with a critical theoretical perspective, assumes that dominant groups and their institutions oppress marginalized groups and, particularly, individuals in situated interactions although the forms of power and specific relations will vary. Alternate views of power may uncover greater and more nuanced complexity in its dynamics, particularly those views that consider the agency of the individuals and groups who act to subvert institutional and social power structures.
These alternate views inform an interesting opportunity for further study. However, in this study, available data showed those attempts of individuals to alter systemic power ineffective. Ineffective attempts to alter systemic power do not align with power as it has been conceptualized for this study. This conceptualization of power is not intended to indicate that family members do not have agency. Defining power as the capacity to influence the behavior of another intends to locate the relations of power as they are situated and enacted in the community by family members who are interacting with their children’s school. Further, the particular relations analyzed here have been considered in a particular social and geographic community at present and in very recent history. This analysis does not take into account temporal and social lenses on the enactments of power, which may demonstrate shifting processes of power relations between families and schools. In relying upon a binary relationship between individual and institutional power, there is a missed opportunity to examine power more broadly than in situated actions in a present context, which aligns more directly to the experiences of a specific sample of family members. In a subsequent study, I would examine power in more depth, with attention to social and temporal scales as well as a broader view of the efforts of multiple family members across time, such that the enactment of family members’ power could be better understood within the context of the interaction with the institution of school over time.

**Sampling method.** A challenge of conducting a study of this size and scope is that the sample size may be too small to achieve adequate variation of participants, responses, and experiences. Because the group of study participants was not larger, I did not achieve information redundancy or thematic saturation. Because of this, each of the
findings must be held considered with this limitation in mind. For example, it is a reasonable critique of this study that there may be a wider variety of school experiences of family members in response to school invitations. Similarly, there is likely a broader range of roles of family and community members than those that emerged in this study, particularly in communities of different racial, ethnic, and economic contexts.

What mitigates, to a degree, the limitation of the sample size of interviewees is triangulation of that data with the phone logs and archival policy records. Each of the data sources utilized for this study became vital to the overall study, including each of the findings. At times, I relied more upon analysis of policy documents, such as to understand the school district’s stated purpose of school. At other times, I relied more heavily upon interview data, such as to understand themes in the experiences of school professionals or family and community members in their interactions. In particular, the telephone call records emerged as a particularly salient data source, both as tools for triangulation as well as sources of the voices of a wider range of family members. As such, each of the data sources contributed significantly to my analysis of data and development of findings.

Another limitation of this study, related to sampling method, is in the limitations associated with the key informant interviews, particularly given the short time frame guiding identification of key informants and their relatively limited interviews. The use of key informants in this study was limited in that my interviews with key informants did not occur “intensively over an extensive period of time for the purpose of providing a relatively complete ethnographical description of the social and cultural patterns” of the community context (Tremblay, 1957). Although I began with key informants to
understand the study context and identify study participants, the perspectives of key informants were highly contextualized by their roles in the community and school as well as their perspectives of school and school reform in the community of study. This led to tumultuous waters to tread, as each of the key informants provided a distinct perspective of the study context, and at times, these perspectives were conflicting. Without extensive interaction with the key informants over time, this study has the added limitation of potentially inadequate depth.

However, given the multiple roles of the key informants for this study, I made the conscious decision to interview key informants whose roles varied rather than multiple members of one constituent group. I sought out key informants with direct school connections as well as key informants who were embedded in the local community but were not directly involved in schools. This decision was made in order to extend the breadth of the study across the community context while accessing multiple layers of the community and schools. Also, each of the key informants provided access to different components of the study context and participants. With a school professional key informant, I was able to access other school professionals; a community activist provided access to sites in the community where community members were likely to be accessible; a community organization director was able to provide access to family and community members. Additionally, the use of multiple data sources, along with the key informant interviews, provided a rich overall set of data.

Another limitation of this study, inherent in the use of a convenience sampling strategy, is that multiple voices were excluded from the sample. I used a convenience sampling approach to access a broad range of study participants who were affiliated with
a school or community organization. However, there were other community organizations, including churches and education advocacy groups, that could have been included in this study as well. The limitation that the convenience sampling technique imposes, particularly in the application of convenience sampling at a particular study site, is that alternate voices may be missing from this study. Also, the times that I visited community sites to conduct street interviews may not have been times when many members of the community were present at the location. Such a limitation also means that important voices may have been excluded from this study.

While the total number of in-person study participants ($N=35$) also reflects a study limitation, a total of 17 people were included in the group interviews and face-to-face interviews with individuals. Another 18 people were included in the street interviews, which sought to elicit a broader range of perspectives for this study. Additionally, I analyzed 74 telephone calls and made several observations at both study sites. Analyzing telephone call records provided an opportunity to learn about the school interactions of a broader range of family members.

The third limitation of this study related to the sampling techniques is the representation of study participants from different demographic groups. The community of study included residents from Latino and African American groups as well as a smaller proportion of White, Asian, and Native residents. The limitation of the sampling techniques that I used is located in the absence of voices of family members from different racial and ethnic groups. My sampling and interview methods did not include identifying study participants as members of different demographic contexts, although nearly all study participants from families or the community appeared to be Latino and
African American. This includes the street interview participants. Similarly, at the school site, all but one of the school professionals was a White female. The school principal self-identified as Latina during my interview with her. Without intentional attention devoted toward understanding the perspectives of members of demographic groups, whose experiences in school may differ significantly from others (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Olivos, 2006), this study is limited. Identifying and interviewing family members from different demographic groups represents a potential direction for future research.

**Study location.** The location of this study imposes another significant limitation. I conducted this study in a community context that has been locally described as urban, although its urban designation is the result of its racial and economic composition rather than its population density. The community in which I conducted this study had 30,348 residents (based on available 2010 statistical data) and an average household income of $52,142, which was approximately $3000 lower than the city average. Also, this was not an urban context as compared to other major U.S. cities that are much more densely populated and containing more substantial income disparities. The local community context includes school reform efforts that are disproportionate compared to other communities within the city. Thus, this study is limited by a narrowly-defined urban context within a broader city education landscape in which community-school contexts vary widely. In considering the district, i.e., phone logs, policies, and even the school’s enrollment area, versus the limited spatial context of the families, this analysis is actually engaging different spatial contexts. Thus, the generalizability of the findings of this study, even to other school and district communities is significantly limited.
Another limitation imposed by this study is the shifting context imposed by the district’s school selection process. The policies for family members to select schools for their children permitted them to enroll their children in schools outside of the community. The community in which I conducted this study had the largest under-18 population in the entire city, although nearly twenty-percent of school-aged children enrolled in schools outside of the community. This lack of school and community alignment was not adequately examined in this study, and the likely consequence is that family members who decided to enroll their children in schools outside of the local community were absent from this study. Although a small number of those family members were included in the street interviews, their relative absence is a limitation to this study.

**Researcher bias.** The fourth major limitation of this study is the critical stance utilized to examine family-school interaction. Unlike completely grounded approaches to understanding social phenomena, I entered the research context utilizing a critical perspective seeking to understand the forms of power relations between school and families. I did not assume that the context of school was completely balanced and equitable for families. Nor did I assume that the institution of school is benign. On the contrary, I assumed that inequitable power relations would be present, favoring the dominance of school as an institution of the dominant culture. The associated data collection procedures and discussion of findings were heavily influenced by this perspective, from which I did not aim to depart during the conduct of this study. Instead, I embraced this critical lens, and utilized a more grounded approach to the development of study findings. The limitation of this perspective is that possibilities of hope and building upon nuance and complexity may be subordinated to understanding the forms of
institutional dominance. This is not to deny the discourse of what is possible. Instead, this study identifies the relations of power between schools and families as a step toward exploring and examining possibilities and nuances at multiple levels. Such opportunities for further study are discussed in greater detail below.

**Contribution and Opportunities for Further Study**

In spite of the limitations of the study, the contributions of this study are:

1. Exposure of the ways in which school policies marginalize family members, which occurs in contrast to the invitations extended to family members to be involved in school.

2. A demonstration of the ways in which power relations between school (at the levels of the local school and school district) and families occur through the contradictions between school district policy and local school practice.

3. An analysis of the individualism that emerges as family members navigate the constraints and opportunities of being involved in their child’s school. A form of the individualism of family members emerges through their emphasis on their own children, which is encouraged by school, district, local, state, and federal policies and guidelines. A second form of the individualism of family members emerges in the ways in which they talk about themselves compared to other family members. Both of these forms of family member individualism inform future research opportunities for education researchers, equity implications for policymakers, and organizing principles for community organizers.
4. An understanding of the potential role of school professionals as supporters of family members’ access to the institutional power of school while meaningfully supporting the work of schools to help students develop academic skills.

5. A connection to existing critical perspectives of schooling, by specifically highlighting the ways power relations are played out between schools and families in this situated context.

6. Exposure of the ways in which the practices of school create contradictions for family members as they attempt to be involved in schools.

The focus of this research could be meaningfully expanded based on further study intended to incorporate voices that are missing from this study. These voices include the representative perspectives of family members from the different demographic groups that make up the study context. By directing attention to these family members, the implications of race, ethnicity, and income for the interaction of families and schools can be investigated and better enhance our understandings of the phenomenon of family-school interaction. Also, this study could be duplicated in other contexts in order to investigate which aspects of the power relations suggested here hold across contexts and which do not. This would allow us to better understand the role of context in family-school interaction.

Further investigation of the perspectives of key informants to understand the locations and practices of school institutional power in the local community, as well as the ways in which family members enact their agency and power, also would be a useful addition to this research. In investigating the institutional power of school through the
perspectives of key informants in schools and the community, our understanding of the true complexities of family-school interaction would be enhanced. This work also would further trouble the unquestioned acceptance of the purpose of school as academic achievement and preparation for adulthood reflected in the current literature of the field and enacted through school practice. Key informants would provide powerful insights into the perspectives of family and community members whose voices can inform our understanding of the endeavor of public schooling in such a way that schools are more directly informed by the local community context. Key informants also can broaden our understanding of the institutional complexities of school and the social complexities of the community, while helping us to identify leverage points for building collaboration amongst family members. In doing so, key informants can inform our understanding of how to use family and community coalitions as opportunities for school professionals, such as principals, to mitigate the imbalance of power by bringing the voices of the community to the school district, which is a space that this study found family members are unable to access on their own.

Further examination can be conducted to deepen our understanding of the hybrid roles of school professionals. As the individualism of family members is reinforced by school practices that reinforce policies and marginalize families, the efforts of school professionals to advocate for families are undermined by deficit perspectives of families and the community. In cases when school professionals really believe that their work is altruistic and motivated by deep concern and care for students, deficit perspectives of families or the community may counter school professionals’ efforts to meaningfully involve families or the community. The field of parent and family involvement in school
can gain important theoretical and conceptual depth through research into the complexities of practice as hybridized individuals at contact zones between the institution of school and the local community. This research agenda can inform more nuanced understandings of the power relations between the school institution (at the local, district, and socio-historical levels) and members of families and the local community.

The local school and social context in which I conducted this study was impacted by a school reform climate in which several schools were designated for school turnaround because of consecutive years of low academic performance. The designation of schools for turnaround was a tumultuous process in which community members and family members were resistant and oppositional to the turnaround decisions. Nonetheless, school turnaround occurred and family members had to navigate a rapidly shifting education climate in order to select schools for their children. The process of designating schools for turnaround, despite opposition and resistance from the community, suggests a broader arena for the types of power relations described in this study, one that is also an opportunity for further research.

**Conclusions**

I began this research in an effort to understand the phenomenon of family-school interaction, a phenomenon that I conceptualized more broadly than family involvement, which emphasizes family member support of the institution of school. I conclude this research with an explication of the complex nature of family-school interaction that involves school professionals and community members as hybridized actors on behalf of the institution of school and the families within local community contexts.
Through face-to-face interviews with individuals, group interviews, street interviews, document analysis, and observation field notes, the perspectives of members of families and a local community as well as school professionals were collected and analyzed for this study. While it was not clear that family members wanted to focus on the larger endeavor of school, these perspectives revealed that family members focused on their own children because the larger institution of school prohibited their focus on the institution. Community members who sought to co-develop a broader lens on the institution in their work with family members were not successful on their own.

The study methods informed four findings which revealed that the parent and family involvement policies and practices of schools act to restrict family members’ access to being involved in their children’s schools despite invitations for their school involvement. There is a contradiction in school’s practice of inviting families into schools to support school aims, while restricting family member access to the institution. This contradiction, which is embedded in school policies and evident at the local school level, must be resolved so that the school supported and encouraged involvement of family members in school is responsive to the voices and perspectives of family members alongside the voices and perspectives of school professionals.

Engaging members of families in schools often appears to be in reaction to poor academic trends such as achievement gaps, attendance patterns, test scores, and discipline records. Such reactions are likely to result in dependence on existing systems and structures, and from this it is unlikely that family engagement in any form can dismantle oppressive systems characteristic of existing family-school interaction, or result in meaningful change. However, critically re-imagined interactions between schools and
families in ways that actually empower and truly involve family members may have power to change the system. Referring to the school involvement of family members as a form of power is inadequate, as it fails to acknowledge the institutional power of school that controls the context within which family members interact with school. As school professionals, community members and family members collectively and individually interact with the institution of school, there is a tremendous opportunity to imagine and pursue a new school endeavor that is deeply grounded in the local community and its families. While achieving this will require coalitions built across schools, homes, communities and societies, allowing the current supporters-only emphasis of family involvement literature and practice to continue will only lead to further narrowing of the practices of school and more deeply isolated students whose participation in society is facilitated by an institution that intentionally marginalizes their families and communities.
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APPENDIX A

CONCEPT MAP IMAGE
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDES
Key Informant Interview

Research Question: *What is the purpose of schools as understood by families, community members, and members of schools?*

*What understandings do families have of their roles in local school design?*

*How and why do family-school interactions occur?*

*How do families and community identify and respond to efforts to engage them in schools?*

Key Informant Interview (School Principal, Community Leader)

Question Guide

1. Describe your role at this school and in the Chelsea Park community.
   a. What brought you to this school and community?

2. How would you describe the relationship between families and schools?

3. What types of interactions occur between families and schools?
   a. What are the roles and relationships between families and schools? (probe for role construction and roles of families in school design)

4. In what ways do district policies and practices regarding family involvement influence practices of involving families at this school?

(for principal only):
   a. Are there family involvement practices at this school that you would describe as innovative? (probe for purpose of schooling and role of families)
   b. At this school, what are the characteristics of families that you would describe as the most involved (the least involved)?
   c. Which school personnel are most effective at involving families? In what ways?

(for Community Leader only):
   d. How do you perceive the efforts of schools to involve family and community members?
   e. For what types of things are family and community members invited to be involved?

5. How would you describe the overall purpose of public schooling?

6. From your perspective, what is the purpose of school in a community such as Chelsea Park?
   a. What role or roles do school teachers and administrators have achieving in this purpose?
   b. What role or roles do family members hold in achieving this purpose?
Semi-structured Interview

Research Question: *What is the purpose of schools as understood by families, community members, and members of schools?*

*What understandings do families have of their roles in local school design?*

*How and why do family-school interactions occur?*

*How do families and community members identify and respond to efforts to engage them in schools?*

Semi-structured Interview (community agents, parent school leaders)

Question Guide

1. How do you see your role as a member of this community?
2. What is the relationship between schools and families in Chelsea Park?
   a. Is this similar to or different from your perception of the relationship between schools and families in other communities? (probe for perceptions of community characteristics)
3. What are some reasons for families to be involved in schools? (probe for opportunities and purposes for family involvement)
4. What opportunities exist for families to be involved in schools?
   a. In what ways do families respond to these efforts? (probe for family members’ responses to engagement efforts)
5. To what degree are families and members of the community involved in school decision-making?
6. What is the purpose of schooling?
7. From your perspective, what is the purpose of school in a community such as Chelsea Park?
   a. What role or roles do school teachers and administrators have achieving in this purpose?
   b. What role or roles do family members hold in achieving this purpose?
Group Interview

Research Question: What is the purpose of schools as understood by families, community members, and members of schools?
What understandings do families have of their roles in local school design?
How and why do family-school interactions occur?
How do families and community members identify and respond to efforts to engage them in schools?

Group Interview (family members, parent school leaders)
Question Guide
1. Please introduce yourselves to other group members by telling us your name and your connection to this school and community. How long have you been a part of this school and/or community?
2. What do you see is the purpose for school?
3. What do you see as the relationship between school and the families of its students?
4. To what degree are you or other members of this community involved in the school?
   a. How, or why not? (probe for response to efforts to engage family and community members in schools)
5. What opportunities are there for you and other members of this community to be involved in this school?
   a. How do you respond to these opportunities? (probe #2 for response to efforts to engage family and community members in school)
   b. How are families and members of the Chelsea Park Community involved in determining what type of school this is? (probe for roles in school design)
6. Thinking about the family-school connection that we just discussed, what are some other things that may be helpful for me to know?
Street Interview

Research Question: *What is the purpose of schools as understood by families, community members, and members of schools?*

*What understandings do families have of their roles in local school design?*

*How and why do family-school interactions occur?*

*How do families and community members identify and respond to efforts to engage them in schools?*

Unstructured “Street” Interview (family members, parent school leaders)

Question Guide

1. How would describe the purpose of schools?
2. What is the relationship between schools and the families and communities where they are located?
3. From your perspective, what is the role of families and other members of this community in determining what types of schools there are?
4. What is your sentiment about the schools in Chelsea Park? Do you see this sentiment as similar to that of others in this community?
APPENDIX C

STREET INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE
Street Interview Questionnaire

Research Question: What is the purpose of schools as understood by families, community members, and members of schools?

What understandings do families have of their roles in local school design?

How and why do family-school interactions occur?

How do families and community members identify and respond to efforts to engage them in schools?

Unstructured “Street” Interview

1. Are you a member of the Chelsea Park community? ________
   a. If yes, in what way?

   b. If yes, are you a family member of a student who attends a Chelsea Park area school? ________

   c. If yes, for how long have you been a resident of Chelsea Park? ________

2. In a single word (or phrase), please complete the following statement: Schools in Chelsea Park are _____________.
   a. Why did you choose to describe schools in Chelsea Park in this way?

3. What role do families and the community have in schools in Chelsea Park?

4. In general, what is the purpose of schools?

5. If you were to give schools in Chelsea Park a grade for achieving this purpose, what grade would you give? ________
   a. Why?

6. If you were to give Chelsea Park families and the community a grade for achieving this purpose, what grade would you give? ________
   a. Why?

Thanks. Hand out flyer with more info, in case they are interested.
APPENDIX D

LIST OF DISTRICT POLICIES AND BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Policy Document</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Comment Sessions</td>
<td>Provides guidelines for community members who wish to make public comments during School Board meetings. Guidelines include length of time allotted for individual or group public comments, type of language prohibited, and Board authority to alter time allotted for public comment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool Council</td>
<td>Provides guidelines for Preschool Council membership, duties, and meeting frequency. Preschool council must include two parents of preschool children and two members of the local business community, among others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Use of School Facilities</td>
<td>Provides a general guideline for use of public school facilities for non-school events; stipulates that buildings and facilities are “available to the community for the use of responsible organizations or groups of citizens when school is not in session.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board of Education</td>
<td>Articulates the vision and mission of Metropolitan Public Schools, including its emphasis on preparing students for “success in life, work, civic responsibility, and higher education.” Also includes 5 Core Beliefs held by District.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Retention or Acceleration of Students Elementary and Middle School Procedures</td>
<td>Provides procedural guidelines for acceleration or retention of students in elementary or middle grades, typically K-8. Also describes parent’s right to determine whether her/his child is retained or accelerated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitors to Schools</td>
<td>Provides guidelines for parents and other citizens of the district to visit the school and classrooms. Also clarifies that the guidelines are somewhat different when parents are invited by school personnel. Also discusses prohibition of use of controlled substances on school campuses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Concerns and Complaints</td>
<td>Provides guidelines for members of the public who have concerns and wish to file formal complaints or grievances. Also describes “the proper channeling of complaints involving instruction, discipline or learning materials.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Schooling</td>
<td>Provides guidelines for children to receive academic instruction under arrangements for home study. Includes specific procedures for parents/guardians to follow in making these arrangements. Also includes academic requirements to be met for on-going home schooling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Conduct on School Property</td>
<td>Describes actions and behaviors that are not permitted on school property. Contains a section with the header “Restriction of parents and legal guardians from school grounds.” Also describes conditions under which parent/guardian restriction from school property may be lifted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary School Initiated Design</td>
<td>Articulates legal context under which school design can occur; also defines school design as “to the educational program offered by a school, including but not limited to the subject matter taught,”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comprehensive Accountability System</strong></td>
<td>Describes a major emphasis of the District as leading the nation in “student achievement, high school graduation, college preparation and college matriculation.” Describes accountability system as setting standards for students, employees, schools and departments including principals, teachers, managers and other employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Life/Sex Education</strong></td>
<td>Describes the role of schools in providing family life education to students; articulates that the primary responsibility belongs to “parents,” and schools, churches, and other community agencies should support parents in this. Also provides guidelines for teacher training prior to providing family life education to students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative School Committees</strong></td>
<td>Provides guidelines for the presence of Collaborative School Committees at every school in the District, including membership (representation from parents, community, faculty, administrators and classified staff), purpose and scope of these Committees. Also provides guidelines for what the Committees will and will not do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Involvement</strong></td>
<td>Describes parents and guardians as the partners of teachers and other staff in educating children. Describes the roles of Central Administration and local school personnel in working with parents and guardians. Also describes the roles of parents and guardians in working with schools. Also describes briefly a district-wide parent advisory council, to be approved by Superintendent, tasked to make recommendations to the Board regarding parent involvement strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Use of School Facilities Procedures</strong></td>
<td>Provides guidelines for determining the use of school facilities by organizations within the community, including restricted facilities such as classrooms and teacher work rooms. Also categorizes community agencies District School Organizations, Not-for-Profit organizations, and Commercial private. Provides rental fee structures for each and care of facility guidelines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational Philosophy/School District Mission</strong></td>
<td>Describes the mission of the Metropolitan Public Schools as “to provide all students the opportunity to achieve the knowledge and skills necessary to become contributing citizens in our diverse society.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alternative Grade Level Organization in Neighborhood Schools (K-8 Policy)</strong></td>
<td>Provides guidelines for configuration of schools that do not maintain traditional neighborhood school designs. Provides guidelines for consistent implementation of school program in alternative grade level organization schools as in traditional schools. Also discusses school choice as evidence of parent and community support.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

( Participant Recruitment Letter )
Study Information Sheet

Study Title: Spaces of Family-School Interaction

Principal Investigator: Antwan Jefferson

You are being asked to be in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. A member of the research team will describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don’t understand before deciding whether or not to take part.

Why is this study being done?

This study plans to learn about people’s perceptions of family engagement in schools in the Chelsea Park Community of Metropolitan City.

You are being asked to be in this research study because you are a member of the Chelsea Park Community and because you may have a connection with elementary schools in the Chelsea Park Community.

Up to 112 people from your area will participate in the study.

What happens if I join this study?

If you join the study, you will be interviewed by a researcher. You will be asked to share your thoughts and opinions about family engagement in schools in this community. You also will be asked to discuss your school-related experiences as a member of the school and greater Chelsea Park community.

The interview will last one and one-half hours. In this study I will be recording the group interview. I will use an electronic recording device. I will keep this information secure and private. I will store it for 7 years. At the end of that time, I will destroy it.

What are the possible discomforts or risks?

You may feel uncomfortable in the interview and are free to leave at any time. This study may include risks that are unknown at this time.

What are the possible benefits of the study?

This study is designed for the researcher to learn about the opinions that people hold about the engagement of families in schools. This study also is designed for the researcher to learn about the relationships between schools and families in the Chelsea Park community.

There may be risks, as discussed in the section describing the discomforts or risks.

Will I be paid for being in the study?

You will not be paid for being in this study.

Will I have to pay for anything?

It will not cost you anything to be in the study.

Is my participation voluntary?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you choose to take part, you have the right to stop at any time. If you refuse or decide to withdraw later, you will not lose any benefits or rights to which you are entitled.
Who do I call if I have questions?

The researcher carrying out this study is Antwan Jefferson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints later, you may call Antwan Jefferson at .720.432.9256. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

You may have questions about your rights as someone in this study. You can call Antwan Jefferson with questions. You can also call the responsible Institutional Review Board (COMIRB). You can call them at 303-724-1055.

Who will see my research information?

We will do everything we can to keep your records a secret. It cannot be guaranteed. Both the records that identify you and the consent form signed by you may be looked at by others.

These include:

- Federal agencies that monitor human subject research
- People at the Colorado Multiple Institutional Review Board (COMIRB)
- The United States Food and Drug Administration (US FDA)
- Regulatory officials from the institution where the research is being conducted who want to make sure the research is safe

The results from the research may be shared at a meeting. The results from the research may be in published articles. Your name will be kept private when information is presented.

Agreement to be in this study

I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I understand the possible risks and benefits of this study. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I choose to be in this study: I will get a copy of this consent form.

Signature: ____________________________________________

Date: ______________

Print Name: ____________________________________________

Print Name: ____________________________________________

Investigator: ____________________________________________
APPENDIX F

RECRUITMENT FLYER
**Family-School Interaction**

Research to Understand the Interactions Between Families and Schools in the Chelsea Park Community

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**About the Study:**
This study is being done to understand the interactions between families and schools in the Chelsea Park community. Understanding these interactions can help educators and members of the community respond to the learning needs of students in the Chelsea Park community. The best way to understand how schools and families interact is to ask. This study involves educators, community members, and family members. This will be done through individual and group interviews.

If you are interested in participating in this study, or if you have questions about this study, contact information is provided below.

**Basic Eligibility Criteria:**
Be an adult member of the Chelsea Park Community
Be willing to share your thoughts about families and schools in the Chelsea Park Community

**Time Commitment:**
Face-to-face interviews will last 60-75 minutes
Group interviews will last 75-90 minutes (refreshments will be provided)

**Location of Research:**
Chelsea Park Community

**Principal Investigator:**
antwan jefferson, Doctoral Candidate, University of Colorado Denver

**Contact:**
(email: antwan.jefferson@ucdenver.edu / phone: 720-432-9256)

**COMIRB protocol number:** 11-1157
As an early career researcher and educator, I bring to my work an interest in adapting qualitative inquiry strategies to understand the school experiences of families and communities in geographic areas immediately surrounding, impacting and contextualizing schools. I utilize critical social theories that are community grounded to discover and explore the locations of knowledge, power, justice, and space within geographic communities, with particular interest in family and community involvement in schools, the professional preparation and development of teachers, and the practices of schooling.

EDUCATION

Degree Details
University of Colorado Denver,
Ph.D. - Educational Leadership and Innovation
Emphasis: Family-School Interaction
Anticipated 5/2013
Degree Details
Brown University, Providence, RI
M.A.T. - Emphasis: Secondary English Education
05/2000
Degree Details
Morehouse College, Atlanta, GA
B.A. - Emphasis: English
05/1994

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

08/10 to current
Instructor, Urban Community Teacher Education,
School of Education & Human Development University of Colorado Denver
Denver, CO
My responsibilities include teaching two to four courses per semester in the Urban Community Teacher Education program and one fall course in Continuing and Professional Education, course development and refinement, site professor duties at local comprehensive high school in support of teacher candidates, regular participation in program and affiliate faculty endeavors, and the development and development of Professional Learning Days for teacher candidates enrolled in the Urban Community Teacher Education Program.

01/07 to 08/10
Director, Christian Vocational Training School
Aurora, CO
My work in this capacity included identifying and training volunteer instructors; developing 35+ courses for a religious adult education program serving 500+ adult learners; developing assessment and feedback processes to instructional and administrative improvement; developing and maintaining course and enrollment management programs; and regular instruction of courses.

06/04 to 01/07
Youth Pastor
Colorado Christian Fellowship
Aurora, CO
My work in this capacity included developing a series of programs and religious activities for middle and high school students and young adults. It also included providing training and leadership to adult volunteers and coordinating various resources to the families of more than 100 teens and students.

07/02 to 06/05
English Teacher
Montbello High School
Denver, CO
My professional responsibilities included teaching courses in Composition, Introduction to Literature, American Literature, English Literature and African American Literature to students in grades 9-12. The students with whom I worked were from diverse social and economic contexts, and were largely identified as Latino and Black. My responsibilities also included developing and coordinating a social and academic program for male students from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds.

08/00 to 06/02
English Teacher
Maury High School
Norfolk, VA
My responsibilities included teaching Composition and British Literature to students in grades 9, 12. This included teaching college preparation courses, remedial courses, and introductory courses to students from diverse racial, ethnic, and economic contexts.

05/00 to 07/00
English Teacher
Central Falls High School
Central Falls, RI
My work here included developing and teaching a curriculum for a multi-grade (i.e., 9-12) summer Language Arts program.

PUBLICATIONS IN PREPARATION & REVIEW


COURSES TAUGHT
University of Colorado Denver, School of Education and Human Development
UEDU 5010: Social Foundations and Cultural Diversity in Urban Education
Urban Community Teacher Education
2012, Summer, Fall
2011, Summer
2010, Summer, Fall

UEDU 5020: Co-Developing Culturally Responsive Classroom Environments
2012, Spring, Summer, Fall
2011, Summer

SPED 5030: Data-Informed Decision Making for Diverse Learners
2013, Spring
2012, Spring
2011, Spring, Fall
2010, Fall

IPTE 5910: Site Professor: Internship and Site Seminar- Montbello High School
2012, Spring, Fall
2011, Fall

CLDE 5180: Working with Families and Communities
2012, Fall

REFEREED RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

April 2012
Arnold, S. Gutierrez, C. Jefferson, A., Sobel, D. Enriching the student's world through school, family, and community partnerships, for Presentation at CEC [Council for Exceptional Children] 2012 Annual Convention and Expo (Denver, CO)

April 2012

April 2012

November 2011
Sobel, D., Elliott, L., Jefferson, A., Daily, N. Maximizing a wealth of online resources with culturally responsive graphic organizers. Presented at Teacher Education Division (TED) Conference (San Antonio, TX)

October 2011
Jefferson, A. & Zion, S. Exploring Teachers' Perceptions of the Families of Urban and Diverse Students: Connecting Perceptions to Practice. Presented at Colorado Association for Bilingual Education (CABE) Fall 2011 Conference (Denver, CO)

July 2011
Jefferson, A. Theorizing the Thirdspace of Family-School Interaction. Presented at Sixth International Conference on Interdisciplinary Social Sciences 2011 [New Orleans, LA]

April 2011

**INVITED PRESENTATIONS**

January 2013

October 2012
Jefferson, A. *Use Your Imagination: ReThinking the Interaction of Families and Schools in Diverse Communities.* Teachers of Color and Allies Summit. Boulder, CO.

October 2012

July 2011

April 2011

April 2011

**INVITED PANELS**

April 2013

November 2011
Denver Justice Conference

September 2011
Center for Culturally Responsive Urban Education: Equity in Education Film Festival

**WORKSHOPS AND INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS**

Practitioner Tools


Course Development
2012-2013
University of Colorado Denver, Office of Continuing and Professional Education
Led design of new course: CLDE 5810: Working with Families and Communities

2011-2012
University of Colorado Denver, Urban Community Teacher Education Program
Collaborated with Lead Instructors to refine and develop UCTE 5020: Co-Developing Culturally Responsive Classroom Communities

2010-2011
University of Colorado Denver, Urban Community Teacher Education Program
Redesign – Collaborated with Lead Instructors to refine and develop UCTE 5010: Social Foundations and Cultural Diversity in Urban Education and SPED 5030: Data-Informed Decision Making for Diverse Learners

FACILITATED TRAININGS

2012-2013
Teachers Working Together To Develop and Implement Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Practices. Co-Facilitated multi-day Professional Development training for faculty at Bruce Randolph Middle-High School.

2011-2012
Transforming Schools for Social Justice Self-Study Team Training - Facilitated one full-and one half-day trainings for Professional Development School self-study team

2010-2011
Transforming Schools for Social Justice Self-Study Team Training- Co-Facilitated two full- and two half-day trainings for two Professional Development Schools self-study teams

2010
Littleton High School (Littleton, CO) Co-Developed and led 3 day training for all high school faculty (75) on Culturally Responsive Practices. With Shelley Zion, Suzanne Arnold, Jenna Ream

2007-2010
Christian Vocational Training School (Aurora, CO) – Developed training materials and delivered training through facilitation of six full-day volunteer faculty training and orientation meetings.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

2012-current
Council for Exceptional Children

2011-current
International Society for Interdisciplinary Social Sciences

2010- current
American Educational Research Association
Division G – Social Contexts of Education
Research Focus on Black Education SIG
OTHER INDICATORS OF SCHOLARSHIP

Funded Grants


Unfunded Grants

SERVICE
School of Education and Human Development, University of Colorado Denver
2012-current
Member: Diversity Committee, School of Education and Human Development
Member: University of Colorado Denver Association of Lecturers and Instructors
Urban Community Teacher Education Student Support Coordinator

2011-2012
Urban Community Teacher Education Student Support Coordinator

2011-2012
Member: Urban Community Teacher Education Course Renewal Team

2011
Participant: Teacher Education Course Alignment Retreat

2010-current
Member: Urban Community Teacher Education program faculty
Member: Urban Community Teacher Education Collaborative and Site Councils

Local Community

2013
Strand Organizer, Planting the Seed Conference

2012
Facilitator, Black Male Initiative Summit
Denver African American Philanthropists
Facilitator, Circle of Greatness African American Male Program to Develop Social and Academic Resiliency
Q Cities Conference Advisory Board
Denver Justice Conference Advisory Board
2011
Co-founder, Co-facilitator, Denver Street Psalms Initiative

2010-2011
Board Chairman, Global Change Network, USA

2007-2011
Board of Directors, Colorado Christian Fellowship, Aurora, CO

2005-present
Member, Global Change Network, USA

2003-2004
Program Coordinator, National Urban League of Metropolitan Denver – Montbello High School

2002-2005
Director, Minority Aptitude Clinic, Denver, CO

2000-2005
Co-Director, Minority Aptitude Clinic, Norfolk, VA

2001-2002
Norfolk Public Schools BELL Award for Instructional Excellence

2000-2002
Friends for Family Mentoring Program, Chesapeake, VA

1999-2000
Pre-College Enrichment Program, Providence, RI
Howard R. Swearer Center for Public Service, Providence, RI

1997-1999
Effective Means of Encouraging Responsibility in our Global Environment (EMERGE), Atlanta, GA
Atlanta Area High School Lecture Series, Founding Member

1995-1999
Emma & Joe Adams Center for Public Service, Atlanta, GA