

Low - SES Parent Involvement in Schools

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Why Question

Why do parents from lower SES backgrounds seem less involved in their children's education?



Inspiration

I have noticed a huge disparity in the way different children progress within their given schools, grade levels, and classrooms. A lot of it might boil down to the individual student, but I think we also have to **consider the impact of parent involvement in children's education**. It's clear from our readings that it's easier to pay mind to your child's intellect when you are economically stable, but still we have to wonder **what are parents doing** to support their children, and if they aren't supporting them, **what barriers stand in the way?** After all, if the teachers are not going to help, the task fall on families to pick up the pieces. However, those families often don't have the resources or means to help their kids, so who's really to blame? And what's being done?

Insider vs. Outsider Chart

SOCIAL GROUP	INSIDER	OUTSIDER
YOUNG PERSON	Jennifer Leung , 7th grader at Balfour Academy and Bigelow Middle School (Newton)	Sarah Whiteman Samantha Lasky Adele Julien Caroline Hughes
ADULT	Steve Desorias , Coordinator of Family Engagement at Parent University	-
RESEARCHER	Graciela L. Orozco, Ed.D. , co - author of “Involving Low - Income Parents in the Schools: Communitycentric Strategies for School Counselors”	Rhonda Jeter - Twilley, Harry Legum, & Frank Norton , “Parent and Community Involvement in Schools” Annette Lareau & Erin McNamara , Moments of Social Inclusion and Exclusion: Race, Class and Capital in Family - School Relationships

Background On Interview

Steve Desrosiers



- ❖ Son of a Haitian immigrant, single parent household
- ❖ Started at BPS at Murphy school, then his mom moved him to a Catholic school
- ❖ Was a METCO director for 3 years
- ❖ Coordinator of Family Engagement at Parent University

Parent University



- ❖ Responds to needs of parents in low-income communities of BPS
- ❖ Founded in 2009, spurred by activists
- ❖ Offers classes in many different topics
- ❖ Recruit parents through outreach to schools

Ruth Batson's 14 Points (1963)

PROPOSALS MADE TO BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE

1. An immediate public acknowledgement of the existence of de facto segregation in the Boston School System.

2. An immediate review of the open enrollment plan to allow transfers without present limitations. This plan to be put into operation by school opening in September.

3. In service training program for principals and teachers in the area of human relations.

4. The establishing of a liason between the school administration and colleges so that training programs may be set up for prospective teachers in urban communities.

5. The assignment of permanent teachers to grades one to three and the reduction of these classes to twenty-five.

6. The use of books and other visual aids that include illustrations of people of all races.

7. The establishment of a concentrated developmental reading program in each school in grades one through eight.

8. The expansion of the school adjustment counselor program in the congested Negro school districts.

9. The expansion of the vocational guidance program to include grade seven and the selection of qualified un-biased counselors.

10. The elimination of discrimination in the hiring and the assigning of teachers.

11. An investigation into reasons as to why Boston has no Negro principal.

12. A review of the system of intelligence testing.

13. The adoption in toto of the Sargeant report that refers to Roxbury and North Dorchester.

14. Our most important proposal is as follows: We seek the right to discuss the selection of a new superintendent in detail with Dr. Hunt.

Interview with Steve Desrosiers

“Sometimes when you come to a country you need to learn the language, but you also need to put food on the table so it’s a challenging thing....”

“We don’t train teachers like they’re social workers , but this profession encompasses all of that stuff.... And what we always get wrong from the teaching and principle side is the human relationships piece of the work.”

“One of my big messages when I present to schools and families is no, we’re partners. So you can’t just drop your kids off and walk away.”

I always tell teachers we’re in the business of relationships first —and then we can teach. Because if the trust isn’t build with students and parents, you can’t do your job successfully.”



“

My mother, she was a **single mom raising two boys** ,
having to **struggle to learn the language** and figuring
out how she's going to **make everything work** [yet
she] made sure my brother and I were well dressed,
well behaved, showed up ready to work, and made
sure that the homework was done. She was doing stuff
behind the scenes that doesn't get written about in the
books, that teacher never saw; so they're assuming
that 'when I need to you to show up to my meetings,
you're not there, therefore **you don't care** .' ”

- **Steve Desrosiers**

Key Takeaways

- ❖ When parents do not act in tangible ways, the teachers assume the parents don't care
- ❖ Parent University gives parents the confidence to be an advocate for their child
 - Parents want to advocate for their children but many barriers get in the way
- ❖ Parent University builds foundation for family engagement skills and parental education



The Rich History Of Family Engagement in Boston!

Pictured here are resources in the PU office at Boston Latin Academy

“Parent and Community Involvement in Schools: Does Socioeconomic Status Matter?”

Study by: Rhonda Jeter - Twilley, Harry Legum, and Frank Norton

- ❖ Study done in a large urban county in a Mid-Atlantic state
- ❖ Chose the schools with the lowest FARMS and with the highest FARMS for the purposes of comparisons
- ❖ PTA membership was measured on the number of PTA that paid the membership fee
- ❖ PTA attendance was measured on the number of people who attended the first meeting

Low FARMS/ High SES Schools

<u>Schools</u>	<u>FARMS</u>	<u>PTA Attendance</u>	<u>PTA Membership</u>
School 1	7.9%	60	441
School 2	8.7%	75	491
School 3	12.9%	30	483
School 4	14.6%	15	271

High FARMS/Low SES Schools

<u>Schools</u>	<u>FARMS</u>	<u>PTA Attendance</u>	<u>PTA Membership</u>
School 1	87%	50	57
School 2	91.6%	60	0
School 3	12.9%	45	102
School 4	14.6%	45	56



Results

- ❖ There is a statistically significant difference in parental/community involvement by socio-economic status
- ❖ “The larger the PTA, the more likely there are opportunities for parental/community involvement.”
- ❖ We can see that the more students that are a part of FARMS also had low PTA membership and attendance

Key Takeaways

- ❖ From this study we do see that there is a connection between parent involvement and SES
- ❖ Parents of low SES want to be involved but may not be able to afford the time or money that is required
- ❖ “Many schools that lack PTA attendance and membership are also schools with low standardized test scores. While that lack of PTA attendance and membership does not cause low test scores, it suggests that there may be a connection between parental/community involvement and achievement.”

Moments of Social Inclusion and Exclusion

Race, Class and Capital in Family - School Relationships

Annette Lareau and Erin McNamara, Temple University

- Study conducted in a Midwestern farm town of 25,000
 - 40% of children were low income
 - History of racial segregation in the town/school district
- Sample of 9 teachers, 12 black and 12 white children chosen for interviews in an elementary school
- Social class and race were confounded

Table 1. The Distribution of Children in the Study, by Race and Social Class

Social Class	White (n = 12)	Black (n = 12)	Total (N = 24)
Middle class	9	3	12
Working class	3	4	7
Poor	—	5	5

Results

- ❖ Educators believed they “enthusiastically welcomed parent involvement” and were “neutral” in it (42)
 - Accepted a narrow range of “positive and supportive” parents
- ❖ “Some white parents agreed there were problems... “ (48) and “not all the black parents had unhappy relationships with the educators” (47), but case examples show....
 - **“Some poor black parents** who were concerned about racial discrimination saw a separation between home and school and **did not seek to intervene in the school process”** (45).
 - **“None of the white parents exhibited... the wholesale suspicion, distrust, and hostility toward schools that were found among some of the black parents... the white parents were privileged in that they began to construct relationships with the school with more comfort and trust”** (44)”
 - “Mr. Gowan, an officer in the NAACP complained at a district meeting that in the Lawrence schools, **black children ‘sense negative attitudes toward their presence’ and ‘often feel like they are unwelcome participants** in the educational process”
 - “A middle -class father... thought that the parents needed to take a more active role in monitoring schooling: ‘My biggest thing is that **a lot of black people just need to get more involved**” (48).

Analysis

- ❖ Race *DOES* shape school experience/parent involvement
 - Racial discrimination persists in some areas of the town school district
- ❖ Most educators are older, white, and do not see racial inequality as a problem
- ❖ White families have less pervasive distrust of school districts, which is both good and bad
- ❖ Middle-class, white families have more advantages
- ❖ Social reproduction is not continual and deterministic, it varies

Parent Participation in Disadvantaged Schools:

Moving Beyond Attributions of Blame

Study by: Carmen Mills, Trevor Gale (Monash University Melbourne)

→ 23 individual interviews with teachers, parents and students in school district characterized by high welfare dependency and a large indigenous population

→ Assumption: lower class families' non-participation means that they value education less than higher SES families

→ Need to move “beyond explanations that understand parents' non-participation as a function of their character flaws..”

**“They
just don’t
care.”**

Lack of time & resources

“the limited time and disposable income of lower class and working - class make it difficult to supplement and intervene in their children's schooling.”

“Middle - class parents, on the other hand, often have the necessary **social and economic capital** for managing child care and transportation, hiring tutors and meeting with teachers...”

Feeling unwelcome/uncomfortable

Lower SES parents are “more likely to have had negative experiences as students themselves, and may experience feelings of insecurity and **intimidation** in school settings”

“I think some parents don't want to come because schooling for them [wasn't] particularly successful and school is like, “I don't want to go back in there” . I don't think they feel comfortable being there' (Teacher #22).

Not accustomed to being part of decision making processes: “feelings of **disempowerment** (particularly for women), resulting from the exclusionary nature of the political process and institutions and from their lack of experience in formal decision making”

Feelings of inadequacy

“link between low academic achievement and feelings of inadequacy that deter parents from” involvement

“they wouldn't feel that they'd be able to communicate with teachers, they see the teachers as well - educated [people] (Teacher #20).”

they don't feel their input is important/ beneficial: “they've done their degrees and know what they're doing about that kind of thing. Sometimes some of them feel that **we're not qualified** to offer that kind of advice. (Parent #20)”

Lack of cultural capital & 'interconnectedness'

“middle - class parents speak about education in the same language as the teachers; they have similar expectations of the education system; they have the same views on what one needs to do in order to achieve within the educational system'. In contrast, for some parents, the school may be 'an instrumentality of a dominant government and a symbol of an alien culture' (Gilbert & Dewar, 1995)”

Interview with Balfour 7th Grader

Lives in Boston with her two parents and brother. Attends Bigelow Middle School in Newton, MA as a Metco student.

Q: Do your parents know your teachers well?

A: “Depends on the teacher, but mostly yeah.”

Q: Do you think your parents care a lot if you get good grades?

A: “Yeah definitely” [How can you tell?] “How I know they care is if I get A’s my Mom will buy me stuff from Amazon... like she’ll say if you want to get or do this then get good grades...”

Q: So your dad went to Balfour?

A: “My dad, uncles and my dad’s cousin went to Balfour. My dad, my uncle Richard, my uncle Kenny and my dad’s cousin all went to Northeastern.”



Reflections/Takeaways

- Debunks myth that low SES parents “don’t care”
- Shows important of cultural & social capital
 1. Parents had knowledge about how to apply to METCO
 2. Dad went to college and thus is preparing her to one day attend college
 3. So many of her relatives went to Balfour → helped her get into a after-school tutoring program

“Involving Low - Income Parents in the Schools: Communitycentric Strategies for School Counselors”

Patricia Van Velsor, Ph. D. and Graciela L. Orozco, Ed. D, San Francisco State University

BARRIERS TO LOWINCOME PARENT INVOLVEMENT

“**Work** often prevents low - income parents from devoting time to their children’s schooling. ”

“According to Eccles and Harold (1996), parents’ confidence in their own **intellectual abilities** is the most salient predictor of school involvement. ”

“**Responsibilities** of caring for children and elderly parents also interfere with low - income parents’ abilities to become involved. ”

“low - income African American parents’ **racism awareness** was positively related to at - home parental involvement while inversely related to at - school involvement. ”

Article is about barriers to low-SES parent involvement and communitycentric strategies to enhance parent involvement

“Involving Low - Income Parents in the Schools: Communitycentric Strategies for School Counselors”

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COMMUNITYCENTRIC STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE PARENT INVOLVEMENT

**Learn About the Families of the
Children in the School**

**Learn About the Community Where
the Students Live**

**Help Parents Address Community
Concerns**

Provide On - Site Services for Parents

**Offer In - Service Training for School
Personnel**

Utilize Parents' Cultural Capital

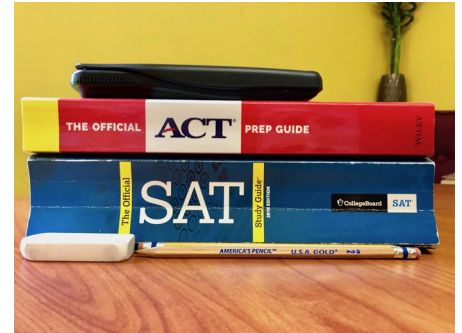
Key Takeaways

- There is a variety of reasons regarding why low - SES parents are not involved in school. Some are more obvious like work schedules or extra responsibilities but some are less tangible like confidence or even something like racial awareness
- A lot of parents take note of how teachers and other school staff reach out to them, as many of them believe it is up to the teachers to reach out
- Some teachers and school staff hold beliefs about low - SES parents that can make it less likely for them to reach out

Outsiders Looking In

Ways our own parents' involvement has benefited our education

- ❖ SAT tutors
- ❖ College counselors
- ❖ PTA president of elementary school
- ❖ Located in well - funded school districts
- ❖ Chaperone on field trips
- ❖ Drive us to tutors, sports, & extracurriculars



Applying the effects of SES to being a “community teacher”

- SES *does* play a large role in families’ involvement in children’s education
 - By understanding the effects this has on families, we will be able to create a stronger relationship with parents and families in the community
- We are more keen to the ways that inequities are reproduced throughout generations, more able to educate others about moving past “blame” as an explanation
- We feel more aware of the ways in which we ourselves have benefitted from our parents’ involvement in our edu. through their access to economic, social & cultural capital

Research Process

What is one thing you learned from the process of doing this research?

- ❖ How interrelated issues of race, class, language, etc. are and how involvement in schools depends on a myriad of confounding variables

What you enjoyed, found engaging, challenging, surprising, rewarding...?

- ❖ The history of BPS schools
- ❖ Social justice work of so many people and organizations like PU
- ❖ Conducting the interviews
- ❖ Realization that *we* can be advocates and community leaders



Follow Up Question

Why don't schools/
teachers increase
efforts to involve
parents considering
all the proven
benefits of doing
so?



***Thanks for
listening!***

Comments? Questions?

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