2 Power, Relationships, and Trust in Sociological Research on Homes, Schools, and Communities

Erin McNamara Horvat and Karen Pezzetti

Now more than ever, the world needs research that sheds light on how social contexts matter in learning, teaching, student achievement, and in the development of equitable and just forms and systems of education.

Elizabeth Birr Moje (2016)

Abstract

This chapter offers a critical perspective on sociological research exploring the interactions among students' homes, schools and communities. We conceptualize each of these spaces as a unique context that influences students and, as such, must be attended to both on its own terms but also especially where each context meets, conflicts with, or exerts power over the others. We highlight three major areas of promising research in this field: first, research that attends to the tensions inherent to the struggle for power among and between these contexts; second, research that explores the foundations and practice of creating equal, communicative relationships between stakeholders from each context; and third, research that can account for the presence, absence, or impact of trust in these relationships.

E. M. Horvat (✉)
Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA, USA
e-mail: emh@drexel.edu

K. Pezzetti
Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI, USA
e-mail: pezzetka@gvsu.edu

2.1 Introduction

Above, Moje acknowledges that the social contexts that sociologists of education need to "shed light on" are *multiple*. This multiplicity means not only that each student lives in a unique social context, but further, that each young person grows up negotiating multiple social contexts; it is the interactions and relationships among and between these contexts that we must explore.

Children's educational experiences are influenced by the various cultures and expectations of their home lives, schools, and communities. It is important to keep in mind that while there are many differences across race, class, and culture, all families want children to do well in school. However, for some children, the specific cultures and expectations across home, school, and community align, working together to nurture and support the academic and social development of these young people. The educational experiences of other children, in contrast, are characterized by imbalances in power or incongruities in the realities across these three contexts. Too often, schools expect racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse families to adopt the White, middle-class, Eurocentric norms and values of schools, reinforc-

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ing a power imbalance between home and school. The contested interactions between families, schools, and communities have roots in deep tensions about how various stakeholders understand the role of schools in our society. These stakeholders have engaged repeatedly over questions such as: How, when, and where should we educate our children? For what purpose are we educating our children? What are the impacts on children when different families, schools, and communities answer these questions in different ways? And, most importantly for this chapter, how do researchers approach the study of the ways that interactions among home, school, and community influence students' experiences and achievement?

This chapter offers our perspective on some current trends in sociological research, focusing on the interactions and relationships among three different contexts: home, school, and community. Below, we offer a brief historical and theoretical overview of the literature. Rather than provide an exhaustive review, we explore the gains that have been made and the areas that have been neglected by particular perspectives. We focus on approaches that allow researchers to explore and understand the complex power dynamics and tensions that are interwoven throughout research in this area. We conclude the chapter with a review of the most recent scholarship and policy and discuss directions for future work.

2.2 Definitional Considerations

In the last 60 years, researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers have used different and evolving terms to refer to the relationship between the home and school. Cutler (2000, p. 5) described the home–school relationship at its best as a "marriage between distinct but reciprocal institutions," yet parents and teachers have more frequently been characterized as "natural enemies" (Lightfoot 2004; Waller 1932). Perhaps influenced by underlying assumptions about the parties involved, some scholars have studied *parental involvement*, while others have focused on "family–school interactions" or "home–school relationship." In the field of educational psychology, the theoretical construct *parental involvement* has been the focus of a considerable body of research in the last 30 years. This literature tends to focus on the activities and behaviors that parents do at home (like help with homework) or at school (like attend a parent–teacher conference) that may correlate positively with student academic achievement. Many studies have sought to discover what factors mediate whether or not—or how—parents engage in activities like these (i.e., Cardona et al. 2012; Davis-Kean 2005; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997; Lendrum et al. 2015; Schneider and Coleman 1993; Smith et al. 1997; Spera 2005; Wanat 2012; Widding 2012).

Some researchers have critiqued the construct of parental involvement as limited to specific forms of engagement dictated by schools. From this perspective, parents who do not show up for parent–teacher conferences or school events risk being labeled as ineffective, uncaring, uninvolved parents. These critics have proposed a different framing of the term: *family engagement* (Epstein and Sheldon 2002; Ferlazzo and Hammond 2009). In contrast with parental involvement, which focuses on what parents do (or do not do), family engagement foregrounds the responsibility of schools to nurture trusting, two-way relationships with all parents (Yull et al. 2014).

The particular framing of the research term is not just rhetoric. Whether researchers choose to study "parents" or "families" or "home" matters; just as whether they focus on "parenting style" (i.e., Darling and Steinberg 1993), "involvement" or "interaction" or "engagement" or "relationship" or "participation" (Lewis and Forman 2002). For instance, Mallett (2004) explored the ways that sociologists conceptualize "home." She points out that both the use of "home" and "family" as sociological terms and the relationship between them are "keenly contested" (p. 73). She argues that researchers who use "home" and "family" interchangeably are usually drawing on a Eurocentric, middle-class, heteronormative conceptualization of a home as a particular kind of house a person was born in, inhabited by a nuclear family.

In this chapter, we have deliberately used the word *home* because it can encompass all individuals who support a student in the space, including parents, grandparents, siblings, extended family, and non-related caregivers. This more expansive view of the home–school relationship embedded in a community context is drawn from a collective orientation towards education. As we will see, over time, schooling and the act of providing for the education of children and youth have been at times the purview of the family, at times the school, and at other times the community. Each stakeholder has fought for the responsibility and right to make decisions that impact the education of children and youth.

2.3 Historical Antecedents

The relationship between home and school has been contested for centuries. Over the past 150 years, there have been numerous shifts in the distribution of power between these two stakeholders. Before the existence of widespread public schools, White American parents had extensive control of what their children learned and how and when they learned it. Before the mid-1800s, most children were primarily educated in the home by family members, or, for wealthier families, by tutors. Some children went to nearby neighbors' homes or dame schools for lessons. With the advent of widespread public schools in the nineteenth century, however, control over education generally shifted from the home to the school (Cutler 2000). As teachers and administrators worked to professionalize and bureaucratize schooling systems, education came to be seen as a scientific enterprise that was best left in the hands of experts. As school systems grew in scale in the nineteenth century, some educators and reformers made efforts to formalize contact between families and schools. For example, in the 1840s, report cards began to replace face-to-face communication (Cutler 2000). Parents' groups (or PTAs) first appeared in the 1880s and contributed to the institutionalization of further aspects of the family–school relationship. In the Progressive Era and then again after World War I, control and power shifted so far into the hands of the professionals that some educators began to scrutinize parenting practices and eventually to recommend "modifications in the behavior of families" through parental education programs (Cutler 2000, p. 8).

In the twentieth century, however, schools relinquished some of their power and control to parents. In the 1960s and 1970s, for example, Parents Rights Movements advocated for increased decision-making power in public schools. In 1997, the National Parent Teacher Association adopted a set of standards or guidelines for the home–school relationship based primarily on the work of Joyce Epstein. The standards highlight the importance of communication between schools and families, but make it clear that schools should initiate that communication. In 2001, No Child Left Behind stipulated parental involvement as a condition for receiving federal funding (Reynolds et al. 2015).

Today, most educators and researchers acknowledge both that children's first teachers are their families and that families should be involved in their children's academic lives. Still, despite this more welcoming attitude toward family involvement in schools, issues of power and control remain endemic to this relationship. (Henderson 2007; Lareau and Muñoz 2012). Henderson delineates four different kinds of power stances and practices that schools adopt toward families: the *Partnership School*, the *Open-Door School*, the *Come-if-We-Call School* and the *Fortress School* (p. 14). While any typology can over-simplify complex relationships, Henderson's work ably captures the different approaches taken to working with students' home spaces and the people in them. It also acknowledges the imbalance of power wielded by educators in defining these relationships. More recently, Lareau and Muñoz (2012) document the tussles over control in middle-class schools where parents are organized, engaged, and want to share control with classroom teachers and administration.

Historically, researchers studying parents and schools tended not to adopt a critical stance. What this means is that the context, power

structures, and roles that shaped parental involvement or family involvement in schools were accepted without critique or question. As Baquedano-López et al. (2013) note, normative White middle-class norms have been the default expectations for family involvement. These expectations often translated directly into differential treatment of students. There is a fair amount of recent research that explores the ways that these normative expectations for family involvement shape educational experiences and outcomes (i.e., Auerbach 2012; Cardona et al. 2012; Reynolds et al. 2015). Rist's classic (1970) study regarding teacher expectations and the way that these expectations played into academic placement as well as long-term achievement and outcomes provides an illustrative case. This seminal article marked a turning point in thinking about the impact of home influences on academic outcomes for sociologists of education. While interpretations of this article often rightly focus on the class background of the families and the impact of social class background on the teacher's placement of students, this article also illustrates the powerful role of family background and context in shaping how teachers and school agents interpret family involvement in education.

There are a few relevant points here for our analysis of research on the family–school interaction. Rist argues that the teacher placement of students in ability groups was based on attributes rooted in family background. Thus, the home–school or family–school connection extends far beyond the notion of the PTA or report card conferences. Students are in large part products of their environment, and the most formative environmental factor in their lives is the home. There is power in teachers' perceptions of students. As this classic article illustrates, these perceptions are rooted in familial or home influences on students that are often generated in relation to a hypothetical "ideal type" of successful student, illustrating the pervasive presence and power of normative expectations for students and families (see also Rose 2016 for an extension of this argument). As Baquedano-López et al. (2013) note, these early studies—as well as later formulations that treated parent or family involvement as a one size fits all enterprise—miss an essential piece of the puzzle in understanding how families and communities' reciprocal relations with schools are shaped. They do not take into account the social context and power dynamics that surround these relationships. And while some studies in the last 20 years have begun to address power differentials, Baquedano-López, Alexander, and Hernandez contend that much of this work is still rooted in a deficit narrative about racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse parents.

Further straining the power dynamics between families and schools is the fact that each year, fewer American students are taught by teachers who share their cultural background. As the teaching force continues to be predominantly White and middle-class while the American public school student body diversifies, the power differential between home and school takes on added dimensions of race and class. While the politics of who should decide what and how students should learn in school have always been influenced by issues of race and class, we believe that these tensions are exacerbated in the present context in which parents and families are experiencing tremendous pressure to advantage their children by performing in a variety of ways dictated by White, middle- and upper-class policy-makers and educators (Baquedano-López et al. 2013; Horvat and Baugh 2015; Oakes et al. 2015).

Although a handful of recent studies question this assumption (i.e., Robinson and Harris 2014), most of the literature we reviewed for this chapter accepted as a point of departure the premise that parental involvement and a positive home–school relationship boosts students' academic achievement (i.e., Dusi 2012; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997). Epstein and Sanders (2000, p. 287) summarize this consensus: "It is now generally agreed that school, family, and community partnerships are needed in order to improve the children's chances for success in school." Generally speaking, researchers tend to study the relationships between parents and schools from either the parent side of the question or the school side. From the parent side, researchers theorize

that parental involvement helps students in the following ways: Involved parents model their value for education, which their children then adopt; involved parents better understand schools' expectations for their children, so they can help their children meet those expectations; and involved parents provide their children with extracurricular and academic opportunities that support in-school learning outside of school (Crosnoe 2015). Studies on the school side include research on the efficacy of interventions designed to reduce inequities in family and community engagement. A strong home–school relationship allows schools to better understand the particular strengths, needs and goals of children and their families. In addition, researchers have found that schools favor children whose parents are involved (Crosnoe 2015).

It is also important to note that the debate about whether parents or teachers are to blame when children or schools perform poorly on standardized tests obscures other possible responsible parties. As the government has withdrawn resources from public schooling, teachers have borne the primary heft of responsibility (and blame) for educating (and failing to educate) children. In a situation in which they have challenging jobs and limited resources, teachers look for someone else to shift the responsibility to—and parents are the available suspects. This increasing tension, aided by the implementation of high-stakes accountability measures in an environment of decreasing resources, again draws our attention to the contested nature of the home–school–community relationship**.**

In 2016, we believe it is important to note that schools' expectations for parents have increased in the last 20 years. In order to ensure that their children receive a quality education, parents must do more now. Cutler summarized the current state of the home–school relationship in the following way: "Today it would be unusual for parents to believe that they should not be active at their children's school. Educators, reformers, and even politicians have made such an issue of parental involvement that many well-meaning mothers and fathers probably feel guilty about not being more active than they already are" (Cutler 2000, p. 207). As we discuss below, this has important consequences. In particular, we fear that this trend may increase educational inequity if parents' differential capacities to meet those expectations exacerbate entrenched class and race patterns of inequality.

2.4 Theoretical Frameworks

Many theoretical perspectives have been employed in research and policy related to the interactions between family and school. In understanding the research and past practice and exploring future directions for research and policy, it is important to understand both these perspectives and the strengths and limitations they bring. Historically, there has been a separation between home and school in both policy and research. In other words, researchers who studied schools rarely explored the influences of family, and, likewise, family researchers rarely explored the powerful effects of school on family (Epstein and Sanders 2000). Often, explorations of the wider community—including the neighborhood, after-school issues and care and other community organizations and resources such as churches, recreation centers, and libraries—have been completely excluded in discussions of the home–school relationship.

More recently, researchers have expanded their lenses to include a more holistic view of home and school that, for the most part, acknowledges the overlapping influences present as well as the important role played by the wider communities in which families and schools are situated (Epstein 1987; Epstein and Sheldon 2002; Epstein 2013; Epstein et al. 2013; Smith et al.1997). Below, we review some of the significant theoretical perspectives that have informed sociological research on the relationships and interactions between schools and families. In doing so, we highlight the contributions of some scholars and inevitably miss others. As noted previously, researchers operating from a psychological perspective have produced a rich literature on the role of parent involvement in student achievement (see, for example, Hoover-Dempsey

and Sandler 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al. 2001). A thorough review of this body of literature is outside the scope of this chapter (see Kim and Sheridan 2015 for an excellent foundational overview of this work). In contrast, our goal in this chapter is to shine a light on some of the seminal ideas that have informed sociological research in this area.

2.4.1 Social Capital

Without question, one of the concepts most central to any understanding of communities and schools is social capital. Mentioned by almost all of the major researchers in the field, social capital refers to the value of the relationships of an individual or group. James Coleman (1987) explored the social capital found within and surrounding families, as well as in the relationships between families, communities, and schools. His work with Thomas Hoffer and Sally Kilgore (1982) on social capital in Catholic schools found that the community support and shared values that inhered in these environments were critical to their success. Coleman's work is foundational to the understanding of school–home–community relations, as it brought significant national attention to the role of culture in both schools and in families as an important variable. Though the findings of the Coleman Report are often misunderstood, and his work was often over-simplified to be understood as simply finding that family background matters more than money in achieving school success, a more careful reading of Coleman's work finds a groundbreaking focus on the relationships among family background, community resources, the effects of social class, and school success.

Coleman and his colleagues' focus on the role of social capital in understanding school success highlighted the relationship between the family and school as a key variable in understanding schooling outcomes. Others in the field drew on this foundational work. James Comer (1995, 2015), who came to work in school improvement from a background in psychiatry in the early 1960s, adopted a developmental whole-child approach. Comer and his team at the Yale Child Study Center were asked to work with high-poverty low-performing schools in New Haven, CT. They adopted what we might now call a strengths-based approach that emphasized the role of social capital in school improvement (Comer 1995). Comer notes, "the social capital needed for school and life success is not provided in most public schools serving non-mainstream families" (2015). Moreover, Comer acknowledged not only the importance of connections as an aspect of social capital but also the trust embedded in these relationships. Comer's School Development Model thus included a strong emphasis on the construction of trusting relationships across and among students, parents, teachers, and a wide array of actors in the surrounding community. Comer's training was in psychiatry and his model, therefore, logically focuses on the importance of attending to the psychological and individual developmental needs and safety of children as they proceed through school. However, unlike his predecessors from the field of psychology, Comer emphasized the development of trusting relationships—social capital—in his model for school improvement.

Like Coleman's school improvement model, Epstein's (Epstein and Sanders 2000; Epstein et al. 2013) far more recent work on school, family, and community partnerships draws on the concept of social capital. Epstein's "theory of overlapping spheres of influence" highlights the capacity of educators, parents, and community members to work together in the service of students. Epstein's description of "school-like" homes (p. 36) in which a family's expectations of children at home are similar to the expectations of teachers in schools acknowledges the importance of consistent values and expectations across these spheres.

While both Comer and Epstein acknowledge the power of social capital in their models, neither takes a particularly sociological view. What we mean by this is that the work does not focus

on what some see as the inherent conflict between schools and families, nor does it provide an analysis that accounts for the differential amounts of power that people from different social classes and positions in society can wield. As some scholars have noted, the work often downplays the role of conflict or tension between parents and schools (Lareau and Horvat 1999; Lareau and Muñoz 2012; Lewis and Forman 2002). In addition, we argue that this work does not sufficiently account for the importance of particularly class but also cultural, racial, and ethnic differences in shaping home–school–community relationships.

In our view, this theoretical difference stems from fundamentally different theoretical formulations of social and cultural capital. Comer, Epstein, Coleman, Putnam, and others view social capital as a readily shared commodity within families and communities. Bourdieu's conceptualization (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), which provides the foundation for Lareau (2000, 2003) and her followers' work, takes a more critical stance. In Bourdieu's formulation, all forms of capital (social, cultural, symbolic) are not created equal. They are the product of the family social class background and are—and this is the important point—differentially valued by dominant societal institutions, including schools. As Lareau (2014) notes in explaining the central finding of her seminal 2003 work, "the key issue was not the intrinsic nature of parenting itself, but rather the uneven rewards dominant institutions bestowed on different types of strategies." Research like Lareau's represents a move away from simply examining best practices or from attempting to build relationships across overlapping spheres of influence in a child's life to include a focus on the powerful ways in which some displays and activities are accorded value by dominant and powerful institutions, most notably schools, and others are not. This acknowledgement of the differential power accorded forms of social and cultural capital by dominant institutions lays the groundwork for a more critical approach (i.e., Auerbach 2012; Baquedano-López et al. 2013; Reay 1999; Reynolds et al. 2015; Williams and Sanchez 2012).

Central to the critical work investigating the relations between home, school, and community is a deeper and more nuanced exploration into the factors that promote strong relationships across these stakeholders using this concept of social capital. The work of the Consortium on Chicago School Research (Bryk and Schneider 2002, 2003; Bryk et al. 2010) explored the important role of trust in these social relationships. We review the practical implications of this work in subsequent sections, however, here we note the theoretical sophistication of this work that focused explicitly on the notion of relational trust as a key variable in promoting positive relationships across stakeholders. This work both valued the resources that promoted trust and school success that reside in low-income communities and implicitly recognized the power of parents and communities in advancing school reform in relationship with school agents. With careful, detailed and extensive data collection, Bryk and Schneider identified the components of relational trust: respect, personal regard, competence in core role responsibilities, and personal integrity. They show that the benefits of developing trust across these domains are vast. This work illustrated that trust is the "connective tissue that binds individuals together to advance the education and welfare of students" (Bryk and Schneider 2003) and provided a theoretical and empirical base for further development of critical research and practices to bridge the divides across home, school, and community.

These more recent theoretical developments that place power at the heart of the analysis and use a more contextualized and inclusive notion of "family" that includes relevant actors from the home and community provide a theoretical foundation for understanding collective parental and community engagement in schooling. We hope that future research continues to shift away from an "all players are equal" over-generalization and

toward a stance that recognizes the power inherent in institutions and takes seriously the unequal distribution of power across race and social class.

2.4.2 The Importance of Power: A Critical Approach to Family–School Relations

Recent scholarship has translated these theoretical notions into a reconceptualization of the home–school–community relationship incorporating notions of power and privilege into the analysis. In an excellent critical review of the literature on parent involvement in schools, Baquedano-López et al. (2013) identify and describe five ways that academic discourse and public policy have framed the relationship between parents and schools. Baquedano-López and her colleagues contend that although several of these tropes seem like common sense, each also is drawn from a White middle-class American worldview and hides a deficit view of nondominant parents and families, specifically low-income families, families of color, and families who are immigrants. We understand Baquedano-López, Alexander, and Hernandez' use of the term *trope* as a deliberate choice meant to signal the accepted, common, and often overused nature of the stories or narratives employed to explain the relationship between parents and schools. Instead of the term *narrative*, which could also signal an agreed-upon point of view or story that gives meaning to a particular set of circumstances, the authors use *trope* to indicate that these viewpoints are widely held, often unquestioned, and embedded into the shorthand of the lexicon. In this context, the use of the term trope implies a cynical and critical approach to the narratives used to explain family–school relationships that highlights the taken-for-granted nature of these viewpoints. Because so much of the research and practice on parent involvement in schools takes as an underlying assumption one or more of these tropes, we briefly review them here.

Several of the tropes discussed below fall into the first and largest discursive frame: *Parents as Problems*. Although current programs and policies are eager to avoid deficit discourses, underlying much of the new rhetoric remains a view of families, particularly nondominant families, as ineffective at preparing their children for school and life. From this perspective, poor child-rearing practices and so-called "broken homes" are responsible for national and international achievement gaps and the perceived decline of American public schools.

Second, Baquedano-López and her colleagues identify the trope *Parents as First Teachers*: The literature and policy on early childhood education takes as a beginning point that parents are their children's first teachers. The creation of federally-funded programs intended to close the "school readiness gap" often begins with the assumption that nondominant parents are failing at this role, and therefore require training and intervention to perform the "right" (i.e., middle-class, White, Eurocentric) kinds of behaviors and interactions with their children.

A related trope is *Parents as Learners*. Baquedano-López and her colleagues argue that many family literacy programs sponsored by programs like the Workforce Investment Act, ESEA, and the Head Start Act draw on a decontextualized understanding of literacy that assumes that some parents need support in gaining fundamental tools and understandings so that they can assist their children in school. This perspective ignores the home literacy practices that families may already be engaging in and prioritizes those practices valued by the dominant culture.

Increasingly prominent in the legislation and literature is the frame of *Parents as Partners*. While the rhetoric of partnership implies equal footing, a closer look at legislation like Title I reveals that while the term "partner" is used, the mandated parent's role is passive and relegated to surveillance activities such as "monitoring attendance, homework completion, and TV watching" (Baquedano-López et al. 2013, p. 155). The limits of these prescribed activities suggest that, from this perspective, the ideal parent's role may be more like that of a "compliance officer" or "watchdog" rather than a partner (Baquedano-López et al. 2013, p. 155).

The final trope, *Parents as Choosers and Consumers*, highlights the role of parents in an

increasingly privatized, market-based model of education wherein parents are expected to make decisions like choosing which school their children will attend. Baquedano-López and her colleagues argue that this frame is limiting in that it relegates parental involvement to the act of choosing from a limited set of options. Furthermore, the discourse of choice often hides underlying structural inequalities. As Baquedano-López et al. contend, "the mechanisms of choice create a hierarchical system of inequitable distribution that harms nondominant families when that choice does not contest neighborhood segregation, racialized tracking, or inequitable resource/opportunity provisions, and existing systems of power harmful to nondominant peoples" (2013, p. 156).

Many other recent empirical studies have brought a critical lens to the study of home–community–school relationships that questions the assumption that families must always adapt to schools' values and expectations. For instance, a recent study focused on a course that preservice teachers take that is intended to help them develop family-centered involvement practices, reframing the issue of creating positive home–school–community relationships as at least partly the responsibility of teacher education programs (Amatea et al. 2012). Evans (2014) explored the ways that diverse parents made use of a community-based organization, instead of the local school, in order to meet some of their children's educational needs, highlighting parents' commitments to their children's education as well as the important role of community-based organizations in furthering those commitments. Jefferson (2015) studied the administrative and institutional barriers that prevented parents from fully participating in a school-turnaround process, even when some of these practices and policies were intended to foster parent participation. Jefferson's work highlights the complexities of enacting policies that are, at least superficially, designed to support home–school relationships.

As another example of recent critical work, Yull et al. (2014) used Critical Race Theory as a conceptual framework as they conducted focus group interviews with middle-class parents of color in a Northeastern urban school district. In conversation with the parents, Yull and her colleagues discovered that the parents saw the racism and the cultural incompetence of the school staff as a barrier to their effective engagement with the school. As the study was conducted as part of a larger community-based participatory action research approach project, the team of university-based researchers shared the parents' concerns with the school district administrators and collaborated to revise the district's strategic plan. We find research like this to be exciting for several reasons: First, it genuinely takes up the concerns of parents of color, and second, the collaborative, action research design means that not only does this study contribute to the research literature, it also seeks to immediately improve the conditions for home–school interactions in this community. Indeed, universities ought to consider themselves part of the communities that can contribute both to individual student academic success and the creation of positive learning environments and school cultures (McAlister 2013).

2.5 New Developments in School, Home, and Community Connection Research: Escalating Demands on Parents and Community Organizing

In recent years a growing body of research on school choice (Buckley and Schneider 2003; Henig 1995; Goyette 2008, 2014; Kisida and Wolf 2010; Ravitch 2010, 2013) has demonstrated the escalating demands on parents. As school choice options increase, so, too, do parents' responsibilities. For most of the twentieth century, the only real public school choice that families had was the choice they could make through moving neighborhoods. Many families who could afford to do so moved to areas with schools with better reputations (Coons and Sugarman 1978). In the twenty-first century, however, with the rapid expansion of charter schools, magnet schools, citywide admission

schools, themed schools, and others, the number of schooling choices families must make for their children has increased dramatically. While some families still live in districts where the only cost-free option is to send children to the local neighborhood school, a growing number of American parents—including White, middle-class suburban parents—must use their social networks and "do their research" (Altenhofen et al. 2016) in order to ascertain which schools to apply to.

Previous research has found that parents consider a number of criteria when deciding which school to send their children to, including the following factors: academics (Schneider et al. 1996), extracurricular activities (Harris and Larsen 2014), social networks (Schneider et al. 1996; Cucchiara 2013a, b), safety (Stewart and Wolf 2014), location (Goyette 2008, 2014), and the racial demographics of the school (Altenhofen et al. 2016). In weighing these factors, it appears that parents engage in a multi-step decision-making process that involves steps such as consulting with friends who are parents and/or education professionals, researching prospective schools on the internet, and visiting prospective schools (Altenhofen et al. 2016; Harris and Larsen 2014). This growing list of activities engaged in by parents in selecting a school are part of an ever escalating constellation of activities that are increasingly expected of parents.

Horvat and Baugh (2015) divide these escalating pressures related to school choice into three inter-related categories. First, parents are experiencing increased pressure "to secure a viable educational setting for their child." Horvat and Baugh explain that in previous iterations of our schooling system, schools and teachers have been the first to blame when children are not learning. Increasingly, however, parents are seen as the responsible parties for sending their children to "failing" schools. Second, Horvat and Baugh describe the increased competition to secure a seat in a high-performing school. Researchers have documented phenomena such as parents camping out in front of schools in order to register their children, engaging in schemes to demonstrate that they are residents in the catchments of desired schools, putting children on waitlists years before they enter a particular school/grade, and becoming intensely emotionally invested in charter school lotteries. Finally, many of these non-traditional public schools require parents to be involved in particular ways that schools specify, such as volunteering a certain number of hours per year, or becoming organizers, fundraisers, or activists in the service of the school. Perhaps ironically, many of the proponents of school choice programs use as their most formidable argument the desire to increase family engagement in the education system, to make public education more accessible and democratic (Coons and Sugarman 1978). Research has also examined the nature of parental involvement.

Some scholars (Lareau and Muñoz 2012; Horvat et al. 2003) have noted the individualistic nature of most research and policy related to parental involvement. These scholars find that most research has examined the effect of individual parents on their child's educational experiences and has largely ignored the collective nature of some parental involvement in schools. Other work has explored the tension between the individual aims of parents to advance their own child's educational success and taking actions that benefit children collectively (Cucchiara and Horvat 2009). In this era of increasing demands on parents and a political climate that calls for parents to advocate for their children, a broader approach that includes the study of parents working together collectively to effect education reform is vitally important. In addition, we have seen a rise in the incidence of community organizing for educational reform. This collective approach and efforts to document and promote community organizing as a strategy for reform are most effectively captured by the work of Mark Warren and Jeannie Oakes and their colleagues (Oakes and Rogers 2006; Warren and Mapp 2011).

Building on the early seminal work in this area by Dennis Shirley (1997), Warren and Mapp (2011, p. 5) note: "Community organizing offers a fresh approach to addressing educational failure as a part of a larger effort to build power for marginalized communities and tackle issues associated with poverty and racism inside and outside

of schools." The perspective offered by community organizing builds on many of the theoretical notions discussed earlier, namely social capital—the paramount importance of power and trust in relationships—as well as a contextual strengths-based approach to school improvement. Warren and Mapp's book provides powerful examples of community organizing to improve schools from around the country. The authors find that community organizing is a relational process that "brings a powerful bottom-up thrust to education reform efforts" (p. 251). This approach not only focuses on schools but also on the communities in which schools reside, and works to address "educational failure as a part of a larger effort to build power for marginalized communities and tackle issues associated with poverty and racism inside and outside of schools" (p. 5).

The community organizing paradigm brings a strengths-based approach to school reform and community involvement by recognizing and valuing the assets to be found in all communities, including low-income communities. The approach "takes power seriously" (p. 251), attending to historic mistrust in the building of relationships in the community and clearly recognizing the differential power accorded to institutions and individuals. Lastly, this approach is community- rather than parent-focused. Providing for the effective education of children and youth is a collective community endeavor, at times requiring professional facilitation to build the capacity for collaboration. As Oakes and her colleagues (2015) note, it takes the investment of time to build the required relationships and develop common understandings so that effective collective action can be taken.

This approach has implications for leadership and teaching. While community organizing is not usually led by teachers, teachers and school leaders can be powerful allies in this work. As Oakes and her colleagues argue, the strategies of community organizing—"building relationships, forging common meanings about teaching and learning and taking action together" (p. 349)—are key elements to creating strong ties to students' homes and communities. Cooper et al. (2011) argue that leaders must enter these relationships with a "spirit of humility and an openness to the full emotional presence" of the families. In addition, leaders and teachers must adopt a Freirian stance that positions them as "no longer the sole possessors of knowledge and power" (p. 781). This practical advice to teachers and leaders from a community organizing perspective clearly has roots in the sociological tradition that acknowledges the power at work in institutions and individuals that shapes educational outcomes. The focus on the importance of building trusting relationships to advance educational aims draws on the key tenets of social capital.

2.6 Directions for Future Research: Relationships and Context

We see potential for future work in further exploring the relationships between and among schools, homes and communities. Indeed, we must redefine the way in which research is conducted and policy is drafted to acknowledge the differences inherent across geographical contexts as well as expand our work to cross the boundaries of homes, schools, and communities. With federally funded programs such as Promise Neighborhoods, modeled on the Harlem Children's Zone, there is wide acknowledgement that improving the educational outcomes of children and youth must be a multifaceted and inclusive endeavor that cannot be confined to particular spheres—home, school, or community. Both the Harlem Children's Zone, a groundbreaking approach begun in 1997 to end the cycle of poverty in New York City that provides comprehensive services for an entire neighborhood, and the Promise Neighborhoods that have followed in its wake, take as gospel that the needs of communities, families, parents, children, and students must be addressed in a seamless fashion to provide every child the opportunity to thrive.

In order to improve educational outcomes for all students, we must find ways to promote productive relationships across homes, schools, and communities. Here, we use the word relationship—as opposed to "interaction" or "involvement"—purposefully. As Crosnoe (2015) and

Pomerantz et al. (2007) note, there is growing evidence that all home–school connections and interactions are not, in fact, positive. Greater attention needs to be paid to developing an understanding of the important nuances that influence the effectiveness of these relationships. In addition, as Crosnoe contends, relationships and "congruence" across these contexts do not necessarily need to be a function of direct interaction. Congruence between what is done at home and what is done at school matters. Ideally each of these spaces reinforce and build on what is done in the other. As a goal, Crosnoe introduces the concept of "mutual engagement" in which families and schools mutually reach out to one another. How and under what conditions this relationship of mutual engagement can be built are critical research and policy questions. Such investigations must recognize as a starting point that communities, homes, and schools vary. Context matters. Determining how to build relationships across these varying contexts is another area worthy of the attention of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.

Increasingly, building these relationships means expanding beyond the traditional boundaries of home, school, and community. Efforts in Philadelphia, currently the poorest major city in the nation, provides a case in point. In an effort to create opportunities for children to thrive in the city, Philadelphia local government has passed a beverage tax to fund quality Pre-K education across the city, has funded community schools that provide wraparound services to students, families, and communities, and has partnered with local industry and higher education partners to advance career and technical education and career access. Each of these core initiatives spans across school, home, and community. None are targeting a single sphere alone. This approach acknowledges the strength in a concerted strategy across these spheres to improve outcomes for children and moves beyond stand-alone efforts to move the dial on educational outcomes or career competence simply by "engaging parents." Like efforts at the national level such as Promise Neighborhoods, these signature programs of the city's mayor are multi-faceted and address the needs of children from a combined school, home, and community perspective.

The capacity of Philadelphia and other urban centers to improve the opportunity for children to thrive depends on increasing our capacity to work seamlessly across these spheres without becoming mired in dated debates about control while providing educators, families, and activists with the cultural and educational training and tools to work effectively across disparate cultural contexts. We see the potential for work in the area of educator training and development. As we have illustrated, educators are a powerful presence in the lives of students and their families. Recognizing the power they wield, we advocate for research and training for our predominantly White and female teaching force that makes clear to teachers the power that they hold and provides multiple pathways for working to create trusting relationships across the race, class, and ethnic differences. As many others (Oakes et al. 2015; Crosnoe 2015; Kim and Sheridan 2015) have noted, intentions matter. Adopting an open, curious, and respectful stance to the development of these relationships is a significant first step. Articulating the need to work across traditionally separate spheres of influence (home, school, community) affecting children and young people and providing pathways for seamless support across these spheres so children can thrive must become the work of educators, researchers, and policy advocates.

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