

Rethinking Parental Involvement: A Critical Review of the Literature

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In the current educational atmosphere distinguished by an immense emphasis on accountability as promulgated by the reauthorization of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), our nation has been occupied with refining and defining its educational goals to prepare its citizens to participate in a global economy (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). Within this context, family and parent involvement in school has remained one of the top priorities. Two examples illuminate this argument. First, in 1994, Congress established the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, which indicated in Goal Eight that, “every school will promote parental involvement in the social, economic and academic growth of children” (Anfara & Mertens, 2008, p. 58). Second, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2002) includes a specific section that focuses on parental involvement. Section 1118 of the Act requires all schools and districts that receive Title 1 funds to create a written parental involvement policy and effectively

implement these policies. However, collectively, it has been more than three decades since the *Goal 2000* reform and *No Child Left Behind* passed, and they have made slight impact on overall school improvement, especially in the context of parental involvement in urban school settings (Lewis, James, Hancock & Hill-Jackson, 2008; Yosso, 2002). Boutte and Johnson (2013) argue rural, suburban, and urban schools alike theoretically support the notion of parental involvement as an essential component to the educational success of students. However, exploring parental involvement in an urban school setting often differs from suburban and rural settings because of different social challenges (e.g. housing disparities, federal policy, poverty, public education in cities, and education policies) that prevent parents from being invited into schools (Anyon, 2005).

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contend that the allocation of funds, the quality of teachers, and how schools are funded all contribute to the ills of urban settings. Yet, the devastating reality is that many researchers, teachers, policymakers, principals, and politicians view parents of urban school children through deficit lenses (Yosso, 2002). Deficit thinking blames the oppressed for their own oppression while ignoring systemic inequities that contribute to such oppression. It also builds upon distorted stories and stereotypes that are constantly replayed in the American backdrop (Kozol, 2007).

After reviewing and analyzing the extant literature pertaining to parental involvement, I found most scholars, researchers, and schools rely on traditional Western European values and ideologies to view urban parents, which prevent them from learning *about, with, and from* families and communities from urban backgrounds (Reynolds, 2008). This critical review of literature seeks to offer readers a comprehensive examination of the paradigms through which researchers and schools typically tend to view parents. Given the intent of this article, I address three different normal strings to help educators rethink parental involvement. First, I provide a definition of parental involvement and a rationale for exploring parental involvement in urban schools. Second, I illustrate parental involvement through a positivistic lens. Third, I focus on parental involvement and how it is viewed through an ecological lens. Fourth, I illustrate parental involvement through a critical lens to help educators rethink parental involvement in urban schools. Lastly, I provide a discussion section and recommendations for educational research and practice relative to parental involvement.

Defining Parental Involvement

The historical definitions of parental involvement are still present in current academic scholarship, research, educational policies, and school discourses. According to Epstein (1987, 1991), parental involvement focuses on how schools assist *all* families by helping them create home environments that will allow them to support children as students. For example, this support includes school and classroom volunteer programs, workshops for families on how to parent, nurture, and support their children, reading nights, and school board councils. Furthermore, Goals 2000: Educate America Act and NCLB define parental involvement as,

the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including: assisting their child's learning; being actively involved in their child's education at school; serving as full partners in their child's education and being included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child (No Child Left Behind, 2002, Section 1118).



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Rationale for Exploring Parental Involvement in Urban Schools

Reflecting on historical and contemporary notions concerning the barriers and difficulties faced in urban schools and borrowing from W. E. B. Dubois's perennial question, I address the following question: "How does it feel to be a problem?" (Dubois, 1903, p. 2). Honoring Dubois' call, I turn a critical eye of analysis to critical parental involvement in urban spaces in regard to the ways parents of color are positioned within schools as "the problem." Since the voices and lived experiences of parents of color are rarely illuminated in the research, leaving the impression that parents from urban environments are *disengaged* and *detached* from their children's education, I identify the challenges



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and barriers parents of color in urban contexts face. Furthermore, I attempt to disrupt the persistent storylines (Boutte, 2012), which position urban schools, students, and parents as problematic by offering counter-perspectives, discourses, and frameworks.

Guided by critical race theoretical framework, this particular section and article build on the belief that race is pervasive and worldwide in society, and sadly, in education. As Boutte (2012, 2013) continuously points out, the marginalization and

disenfranchisement of students of color in urban settings will persist due to the massive numbers of black and brown children who are enrolled in the schools. In contrast, this does not mean educators should become unconcerned and complacent in the process of working against the disenfranchisement of students from urban environments. Rather, recognizing the depravity of racism, its deep entrenchment in society, and its role in education can possibly help make clear that racism will not go anywhere. However, if we all make a collaborative effort and continue to disrupt racism, the disparities faced in urban contexts can be immensely reduced (Anyon, 2005; Boutte, 2012; Greene, 2013; Milner, 2012).

The past and current literature on urban environments abound with assumptions of urban students and schools as dangerous, unruly, rundown facilities, gang related activities, high attrition rates of teachers, poor test scores, high poverty levels, truancy, and lack of motivation along with a host of other negative images and depictions (Anyon, 2005; Boutte, 2012; Boutte, 2013; Milner, 2012; Morrell, 2004; Tyack, 1974). Deficit perspectives about urban schools are ranked as problematic. These issues continue to shroud how students and parents from urban environments and communities are negatively perceived. Examples of such deficit description have been widely illustrated in media, public press, including box office films like *Dangerous Minds* (1999). Movies, such as *Dangerous Minds* make it difficult to view urban environments otherwise. *Dangerous Minds* is one of the many *uplifting* stories in which the *dedicated* and *committed* teacher takes on a group of students who are often labeled *at-risk*, *disadvantage*, or *rebellious*, in particular Black and Latina/o students. To perpetuate the ideas of disorder

and unruliness, a scene from this movie opens with LouAnne Johnson, an ex-Marine, who applied for a teaching job being hired almost instantaneously to teach in an urban high school. She is told this school's student body comprises of "special kids," "rejects from hell," "kids with no interest in education," and "challenging kids." In regards to the movie's shortcomings, *Dangerous Minds* speaks to the familiar narrative of urban students as "uneducable." Most importantly, this movie will continue to be pertinent for many years because we still see how little has been done to improve the landscape of urban education (Boutte, 2012; Howard, 2014). Based upon the deficit comments and dialogic interactions I have experienced from in-service and pre-service teachers, there have been dissenters to the view that students from urban environments "are not working diligently to achieve academically" and parents from urban communities "do not want the best for their children". Given the problems cited in the academic literature pertaining to the plight of urban schools, researchers (Boutte, 2012; Howard, 2014; Milner, 2012) have found parents and students of color equally dissatisfied. For example students in urban schools face an array of issues such as (a) low academic performance, (b) disproportionate placement into special education, (c) discipline disparities, (d) literacy achievement gap, (e) highly qualified teachers, (f) disempowering curriculum, (g) low teacher expectations, (h) unorganized parent involvement, and (i) traditional curriculum where students' historical and contemporary experiences and traditions are stifled.

Greene (2013) introduced a critical framework that focuses on the ways families' roles, lived experiences, and histories of education and schooling are limited by policies and the amount of

resources they receive. Within the context of race and a changing economy, researchers of parental involvement have to situate the roles of parents within these two contexts. The change in the political economy has left families of color from low-socioeconomic backgrounds on the margins as a means to continue its economic supremacy in a global economy (Lipman, 2011). As an illustration, Greene (2013) conducted an empirical study that explored parental involvement in urban communities through the integration of family literacy practices. In addition, this study helped bridge the gap between families and schools by incorporating the voices of families and children, which served as counter-narratives to dominant discourses of privilege and marginalization. In the study, Greene provided the stories of 17 parents who participated in a parent involvement workshop for two years in an economically dispirited city in the Mid-West. The goal of the workshop was to provide a space for parents, students, administrators, and teachers to engage in dialogue with each other, build partnerships, and share stories. Furthermore, Greene (2013) contended there are major discussions, debates, and policies concerning educational reform and the allocation of resources that are still needed. Moreover, the distribution of resources has been stifled by what Greene (2013) calls "private interests," nonetheless private interests silence parents' voices. Furthermore, when it comes to resource distribution and decision-making policies, parents are marginalized. As quoted in Greene (2013), "these private interests are what Fine (1993) referred to nearly 20 years ago as a 'privatized public sphere' in which powerful corporate interests determine educational policy" (p. 13). Indeed, as others (Greene, 2013; Howard & Flennaugh, 2011; Ladson-

Billings, 1995; Lipman, 2011) have argued, families need access to resources. Moreover, the lack of opportunity for families of color exacerbates inequity. In fact, schools need to build on the value and support of families—not try to assimilate parents into a certain culture but provide them the space to present who they are. To clarify parental involvement is not an individual responsibility, but it is a collaborative effect. Parental involvement is a partnership between institutions and families to ensure the highest level of learning for each child (Boutte & Johnson, 2013; Greene, 2013; Howard & Reynolds, 2008).

Positivistic and Ecological Parental Involvement Paradigms

Current research appears to validate the view of the traditional way of defining parental involvement and these include positivistic and ecological paradigms. Chen and Gregory (2010), Driessen, Smit, and Slegers (2005), and Domina (2005) define parental involvement as the influence the home and the school have on the development of students; and, most importantly, parental involvement equates to better school attendance, fewer discipline problems, and higher grades as opposed to their peers whose parents are less involved. As a result of positivistic and ecological models, urban parents have oftentimes been marginalized because they may not fit into these traditional frameworks. In the U.S., there is a pressing and vital need to study the historical, institutional, and cultural factors that impede the academic achievement of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). Furthermore, positivistic and ecological parental involvement models exacerbate



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the parental-school involvement gap between families and schools. More specifically, the positivistic and ecological assumptions of parental involvement do not welcome the voices and lived experiences of children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse settings.

Furthermore, the positivistic and ecological definitions of parental involvement tend to disregard the methods, cultures, and techniques of how some parents situate themselves in their children's education (Moore & Lewis, 2012). Bowers and Griffin (2011) explained:

the traditional definition of parental involvement includes activities in the school and at home. Parental involvement can take many forms, such as volunteering at the school, communicating with teachers, assisting with homework, and attending school events such as performances or parent-teacher conferences...However, viewed through this lens, African American and Latino families demonstrate low rates of parental involvement... Traditional definitions of parent involvement require investments of



time and money from parents, and those who may not be able to provide these resources are deemed uninvolved (p. 78).

Despite the number of studies, practices, and policies, urban education parental involvement still remains static and guided by assumptions listed above (Boutte & Johnson, 2014; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Moore & Lewis, 2012; Landsman & Lewis, 2011). Parental involvement is an essential tool that should work in conjunction with other efforts to improve urban education. Ideally, there must be collaboration with families, community members, and educators (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009). Hence, educators must begin to re-create robust work of utilizing families and community members within urban educational settings while moving away from the current dominant narrative and ideologies to one of, “collaboration, promise, and hope” (Boutte & Johnson, 2013, p. 167).

In their review of traditional parent involvement literature for urban contexts, Boutte and Johnson (2014) used three paradigmatic lenses: (1) positivistic; (2) ecological; and (3) critical. Before delving into an in-depth analysis of parental involvement through each particular lens, I have provided a brief overview of each lens as summarized by Boutte and Johnson (2013). The *positivistic* lens views knowledge as objective. Positivistic approach usually relies heavily on quantitative studies. Deductive logic, hypothesis testing, and the like guide researchers; furthermore, this approach often seeks to find universal or generalizable patterns of behavior (Cannella, 1997). There are few, if any, efforts made to understand and acknowledge the voices and experiences of families and community members

(Yosso, 2002). *Ecological* paradigms capture human development over time and the role of environment in shaping individual growth. The ecological theories explain the issues pertaining to parent involvement and student achievement (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Boutte & Johnson, 2013). This paradigm usually omits issues of race and class—two critical factors that play a crucial role in students’ schooling experiences. *Critical* approaches acknowledge the fact that researchers come to certain studies with certain ideologies, beliefs, and deficit-based assumptions (Milner, 2007). This paradigm critiques and challenges structures and institutions that are put in place to oppress different groups of people, while working to emancipate those who are marginalized.

Positivistic Literature on Parental Involvement

Many studies that explore parental involvement through a positivistic lens typically depend on quantitative data to unearth a particular phenomena (Cannella, 1997; Chen & Gregory 2010; Domina, 2005; Driessen, Smit, & Slegers, 2005)--- there are few, if any, attempts made to understand and acknowledge the voices and experiences of families and communities. Positivistic models of parental involvement do not attempt to learn about families in a substantive or authentic way (Yosso, 2002). There is a rapidly growing body of literature on parental involvement through a positivistic lens, which indicates positivistic parental involvement models (1) rely on Western European ideologies and beliefs, (2) make minimal attempts to learn about the community and culture of the families, (3) follow fixed policies and practices that are already in place with little or no input from families, (4) utilize stagnant and mono-cultural definitions of parent involvement in terms of



(i.e. communication styles, nurturance, care, and family beliefs about schooling), (5) do not attempt to learn about families in a substantive or authentic way, (6) adheres to *one-size fits all* model (this particular model does not acknowledge the fact that students bring prior knowledge and experiences to the classroom), and (7) home and community visits are usually static and grounded in deficit assumptions and beliefs.

Yan (2000) contended there is extensive evidence that social capital leads to better student academic achievement regardless of other social and economic factors a family may possess. Yan referred to social capital as social networks and social interactions that help to bring about educational attainment. Data for this study were drawn from the



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National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88). The NELS:88 sample was composed of eighth graders first interviewed in 1988 and follow-up surveys were conducted in 1990, 1992, and 1994. The author's data comprised data from all four waves of NELS:88 data including student and parent data; resulting in a total sample of 6,459 students, which provided subsamples of 707 successful African American students, 5,293 successful White students, and 459 other (non-successful) African American students. Yan studied three groups: the target group,

which comprised of successful African American students and two comparison groups, one which consisted of successful White students and the other non-successful African American students (2000). Yan explained how SES, ethnicity, and family makeup all contribute to the theory of social capital. Thus, the author provided four variables that highlight the social interactions and relationships in the family involvement process: (1) parent-teen interactions, (2) parent-school interactions, (3) interactions with other parents, and (4) family norms. In the study, the author found there were significant differences between Black and White families in relation to parental education, family income, and family structure. Yan (2000) contended African American students were more likely to come from *economically disadvantaged* households than Western European American students. Additionally, African American households had lower incomes, parents with lower levels of formal education, and higher percentages of single parents. In short, the author concluded that higher levels of family income were aligned with a higher level of social capital. The assumption was that family social capital is influenced by both family socioeconomic status and family makeup.

Ecological Literature on Parental Involvement

While useful in their own right, positivistic and ecological paradigms overlook how race and racism operate within society and within educational arenas. Positivistic and ecological studies fail to critique and analyze the various fixed and natural structures that impact parents, students, and communities and how the omission of race and racism perpetuate oppressive ideologies and epistemologies (Milner, 2007). Many teachers, administrators, researchers,



and policy makers have adopted the positivistic and ecological practices and policies that are valued as successful and effective practices for working with parents. However, research about parental involvement in urban spaces should focus on bi-directional and culturally responsive approaches, programs, and models (Reynolds, 2008). Thus, there is a need to illustrate what effective parental involvement should look like in urban schools.

Greene (2013) noted many studies and parental involvement models fail to acknowledge how families define parental involvement, the roles and responsibilities of parents and teachers, the resources parents possess, or how schools view certain families through a deficit lens. For example, the work of Joyce Epstein has been widely used in parent involvement efforts. In 1995, Epstein created a framework to assist schools in building partnerships. Her research focused on examining school programs, school climate, and community partnerships as modes to create strong partnerships to aid all children excel in school and in life. Epstein summarized the theory, framework, and parameters that have assisted the schools in her research on constructing partnerships. She suggested her framework and model could be used in elementary, middle, or high schools that were interested in improving and increasing parent involvement. In this conceptual article, Epstein (1995) outlined six types of involvement and caring: (1) parenting (assist every family with establishing home environments to support children as students), (2) communicating (design successful forms of communication between home and school in regards to school programs and children's progress), (3) volunteering (create and recruit parent help and support), (4) learning at home (provide material and concepts about how to help

students at home with school work and other curricular decisions), (5) decision making (incorporate parents in school decisions and creating parent leaders and representatives), and (6) collaborating with community (identify and incorporating resources and services from the community to increase school programs, family practices, and student learning and growth). Epstein (1995) explained the importance of a caring educational environment and how this particular environment can improve academic excellence, good communications, and productive interactions. The author presumed if children feel cared for and challenged to work hard, they would be more likely to become better students who would try their best to learn to read, write, and learn other essential skills to remain in school. This conceptual work falls under an ecological paradigm. Within this conceptual model, race is absent, and the model focuses on how parents need to work with the schools. Further, it does not focus on the roles and responsibilities the school has to the students' families. Greene (2013) argues Epstein's model surmises the educational field to be an equal playing field between families and schools. It does not acknowledge the roles that ideology and hegemony play in decision-making and policies.

Critical Literature on Parental Involvement

Because positivistic and ecological frameworks studying parent involvement have disregarded race and racism, these studies have excluded the voices of culturally and linguistically diverse people (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Due to the various oppressive structures, African American parents are often viewed and blamed as the problem even





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school but within the school as well. There is a void in the literature that does not illuminate the resistance parents may encounter from teachers and school officials because of their (parents) race and socioeconomic status (SES). Race and SES are two variables that have stifled and disenfranchised students and parents' relationships with schools (Anderson, 2007; Anyon, 2005). Indeed, racial disparities permeate institutions and various social structures in this country. Race demarcates access to housing, jobs, knowledge, education, resources, social mobility, and other opportunities (Anyon, 2005; Kozol, 2005; Milner, 2007). Kozol (2005) highlighted the complex intersection of race and SES. Research shows many impoverished areas are separated by race: "Racial isolation and the concentrated poverty of children in public school go hand in hand, moreover, as the Harvard project notes" (p. 288). The voices and the experiences of African American parents from low SESs are particularly absent in the academic literature (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Lareau, 2000). Much of the existing literature suggests that regardless of the socioeconomic status, students and parents of color still encounter micro and macro aggressions of racism (Kozol, 2005; Lareau, 2000). Many educational institutions overlook parents of color who are middle-class (Lareau, 2000).

There is an increase of African American people who are moving into more affluent neighborhoods; however, in these more affluent schools, the academic performance of middle-class students of color still falls short compared to their White counterparts (Anderson, 1988; Anyon, 2005; Jackson & Boutte, 2009; King, 2005; Lareau, 2000). Evaluating parental involvement through a critical lens moves beyond deficit perspectives of parents in urban settings by uplifting the voices and experiences of parents and students of color.

Because middle-class African American parents and students are overlooked in the academic literature concerning underachievement and parent involvement, Howard and Reynolds (2008) examined the school experiences of middle-class African American parents and students. Howard and Reynolds (2008) draw upon the intersection of race and class to be used in their analysis. In addition, critical race theory enabled the authors to incorporate counter-storytelling as a methodological tool, which allowed them to capture the voices of the parents in this study. Howard and Reynolds (2008) contended issues of race and racism remain possible reasons in understanding this phenomenon. The authors illustrated how most literature centered on parent involvement fails to problematize the roles of race and class in parenting practices with schools. Therefore, when race and class are part of the analysis, there is a paucity of scholarship that focuses on upper-class families of color. Further, the data were collected from a number of individual and focus group interviews with African American parents whose children attended predominately White, suburban schools.

The authors' findings highlighted that most of the parents believed in the importance of their



involvement in their child's education. But, the parents seemed to have different perspectives about how involvement should be implemented. The parents in the study stressed the importance of being informed about the happenings of school life. Several participants in the study revealed the lack of engagement between the home and the school. The data analysis revealed that parents want to be allowed to question, critique, and challenge the school and the schooling experiences of their children. For the parents who are engaged with the school, they find themselves in positions where the decisions, rules, and expectations are already negotiated without their voices. The lack of a collective voice has made it easier for schools to ignore parents as one vital resource for educational change. Howard and Reynolds (2008) elaborated on the interplay of race and class when it comes to parent involvement. Many parents expressed how they still encountered racism as they work to advocate on behalf of their children despite their socioeconomic status. The authors of this study explained the plethora of scholarship on the lack of parental involvement from African American families from low-income environments and recommended that scholars begin to capture the voices and the experiences of more affluent African American families and their children's education, which may illustrate the fact that race does not disappear as people move up the socioeconomic ladder.

Discussion

This literature review on critical parental involvement was conducted through three paradigmatic lenses and proved the relationship between schools and families warrants scholarly

attention using critical race theory as a tool of analysis and examination. Schools' positioning of Black parents in the discourse of parental involvement is consistent with macro perceptions of Black people. Accounting for these broader societal notions of Black parents, Reynolds (2010) asserts,

Educators often assume that Black parents' culture, values and norms do not support or complement the culture of education; thus, many educators, along with policy-makers, have come to accept the idea that Black parents are more of a deficit to their children's educational development than an asset (p. 148).

Like the broader societal discourse, Black parents are positioned as deficient (both in their presence and in their capabilities) in educational spaces and discourses. This pervasive negative stereotype must be interrupted and disrupted. Moreover, the stories and experiences of parents of color in relation to schools give rise to the important questions about the roles educators play in interrupting school practices and policies that continuously oppress parents and students of color. Thus, a critical race theoretical framework was employed for this review of literature.

Over a decade ago, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced critical race theory (CRT) to the field of education. It served to advance theory and research where race was concerned (Milner, 2007). Furthermore, critical race theorists emphasize that racism is and has been a primary component of U.S. culture, life, and law; thus, any efforts to eliminate racial inequities must be situated in the socio-historical legacy of racism (Delgado & Stefancic,



2000; Howard, 2014; Reynolds, 2010). Utilizing CRT as a theoretical lens for examining the literature on parental involvement is imperative because race has been and remains untheorized in the field of education (Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009). It is through this lens of race and all of its ramifications CRT confronts racial inequities and subjugation in institutional, legal, and educational spaces. Although there are studies that explore race, the field is lacking the conceptual and analytic tools to push the field of education forward.

Critical race theory in education is an evolving conceptual, theoretical, and methodological construct that works to disrupt and to examine race and racism found in the educational system (Milner, 2007). Further, the theory can enable an interrogation of how Black parents feel race and racism have influenced how schools position them as well as the schooling experiences and educational results for their children (Reynolds, 2010). CRT also serves as a theoretical framework to disrupt and to dismantle notions of meritocracy, neutrality, colorblindness, and fairness in the education of people of color (Yosso, 2002). Critical race scholars explore race along with other forms of subordination and the intersections of racism, classism, gender, and other forms of oppression. Reynolds (2010) and Yosso (2002) illustrate how these ideas are particularly important as it relates to African American parental involvement in schools as we see transparently the likelihood of this particular group encountering oppression and marginalization pertaining to issues of race, class, and gender.

The beauty of CRT is that it blurs the boundaries of theory and methodology (Cook, 2013). It insists on the acknowledgement of experiential knowledge of people of color and their communities

(Bell, 1992). Counter-storytelling is a methodological tool that gives rise to the voices that are unheard and silenced throughout U.S. schools by countering the status quo, dominant ideologies and beliefs (Prendergast, 2003). CRT has several tenets. Counter-narrative is a tenet of CRT that can help illustrate a rare depiction of parents and communities' relationships and barriers with schools. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) exerts that counter-narratives challenge and counter dominant narratives while uplifting and elevating the voices of oppressed groups. Reynolds (2010) contends, "as Black parents attempt to understand and contend with racial micro-aggressions that may be evidenced in school policies and practices, researchers can assume a critical role by providing them voice, a space to express their experiences" (p. 157).

Including CRT in future research to evaluate parental involvement enables educators to capture the experiences of people of color. Critical race theory critiques and challenges racial micro-aggression in schools as it relates to families and communities of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). African American families can reposition themselves in a space that allows them to examine their experiences; they can become powerful rather than powerless. In addition, this space allows parents of color to reposition their stories against dominant narratives and paradigms. Schools and educators need to recognize the role they play in the



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manifestation of these micro/macro racial aggressions (Ford, 2013). In conjunction, professional development addressing issues on cultural incongruence between families/communities and schools are needed. In addition, educators cannot disregard issues of race and racism. Often race and racism are portrayed as awkward and taboo topics (Au, 2009); however, educators cannot deny the existence of these two socially constructed variables that transpire in the relationship with schools and parents and students of color. A critical gaze of parental involvement adds to the body of literature while shedding light on the specious claims that are infused throughout the educational arena pertaining to parents of color.

Recommendation for K-12 Practices and Educators

Educators often deplore the lack of visibility of African American parents' presence in schools and participation in school activities. Often times they question whether African American parents care about the educational success of their children and if they promote the importance of learning outside of school contexts (Fields-Smith, 2005; Noguera, 2001; Yan, 2000). The issue to understand and to recognize parents of color lack of visibility in schools is clouded by deficit views from which schools view parents of color without considering the structural and systemic inequities that are described as *fixed* or *natural* practices. As I conclude this section, I would like to suggest the intent is not to belittle schools, educators, or researchers since all have a reciprocal goal of improving parent involvement. However, in actuality, both educators and families have different

roles in some ways. By this I mean parents can assist schools with helping teachers incorporate their students' culture, language, prior experiences, struggles, and knowledge into the classroom. Therefore, schools and families should work together to ensure cultural and academic excellence from all children (King, 2005).

Critically responsive parental involvement practices welcome parents' stories and experiences in relation to schools. More specifically, critically responsive parental involvement practices give rise to the important questions about the roles educators play in promoting school practices and policies that continuously oppress parents and students of color. Capturing the parents' voices and lived realities illustrate a rare depiction of parents and communities' relationships and barriers with schools. Moreover, critically responsive parental involvement practices can provide healthy, corroborating, supportive, and emancipatory ways to engage and to connect families and communities to schools. Further research necessitates extensive and long-term efforts to examine how critical parental involvement is culturally responsive to families and communities whose culture is often devalued in schools (e.g., minoritized groups). Hence, educators must be advised on how to carefully investigate daily routines that children engage in (Boutte & Johnson, 2013; Lee, 2008).

Further, scholarship that deepens our understanding of critically responsive parental involvement practices in K-12 schools which have demonstrated success with working with families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may offer models for programs, schools, and colleges dedicated to building two-way relationships with parents (e.g., parents take on leadership roles and



contribute to curricular decisions). Therefore, schools need to create robust relationships and partnerships with parents and community members. These relationships can serve as potential avenues for discussing pressing and difficult issues such as race.

On the basis of the evidence currently available, it seems fair to suggest that schools create dynamic and fluid definitions of parent involvement. Similarly, dynamic definitions of parent involvement are based on immersion within the culture and community as an approach to learn through and about families and communities. Parents are invited to voice their opinions and give their input on school policies. Furthermore, critical responsive parental involvement practices view students' culture as strength rather than a weakness. These strength-based norms and practices are interactive and grounded in building on students' assets and prior experiences.

This review of literature was written from the viewpoint of what educators need to do in urban contexts and how we may reorganize our efforts to engage and reengage families and communities from urban backgrounds. From the countless scholarship, task forces, articles, reports and efforts such as parent workshops to educate parents, rhetoric abounds. Furthermore, parental involvement should include robust, validating, cooperative, and liberating practices that engage and unite families and communities to schools across lines of race and class.

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