2008

African American parent groups as a context for the activation of social capital : a case of parent empowerment through transformational leadership

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Recommended Citation

Stewart, Ajamu T., "African American parent groups as a context for the activation of social capital : a case of parent empowerment through transformational leadership" (2008). *Doctoral Dissertations*. 232.
https://repository.usfca.edu/diss/232

The University of San Francisco

AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENT GROUPS AS A CONTEXT FOR THE
ACTIVATION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL: A CASE OF PARENT EMPOWERMENT
THROUGH TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

A Dissertation Presented
To
The Faculty of the School of Education
Organization and Leadership Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

By
Ajamu T. Stewart
San Francisco
May, 2008

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'd like to acknowledge my committee, Dr. Patricia Mitchell (my committee chair), Dr. Betty Taylor and Dr. Ellen Herda. Thanks for your patience and encouragement. Each of you contributed greatly to my experience at the University of San Francisco, and you will always be remembered.

I'd next like to acknowledge my wife Paula to whom this work is dedicated. Your support and belief in me was the driving force for getting it done. I hope you're impressed! The same applies to my beloved daughters Ifetayo and Ayoka.

I'd also like to acknowledge my mother, Rosalina Booker, for doing everything she could, in every way that she could, to raise six children by herself; Mr. Curtis (Pops) and Anna Marie Guinn; my male role models, Mr. Philmore Graham, Stafford Johnson (FOI), and Preston Thompson (a tough old Marine) for showing me the way to manhood; and my Uncles Noe, Robert and Jimmy for standing in the place of my father; my cheering section led by my Aunt Earline, and including my Aunts Lydia, Brenda, Loida, Molly, Lois, Pollie, Anne, Grandmother Golia Mae McNight, my sisters Angelina Gibbs and Nicole Booker, Wanda Griffin, Norkethia and Anedra Guinn, and cousins too numerous to name (you know who you are); and my brothers Sylvester, Alex, Shah, Calvin, Curtis, Ernest, Rick, Clarence, Gerl, Fred, Jesse, and especially my big brother Dehrl Pratt, who have always had my back.

Finally I'd like to acknowledge my ancestors: My Father Sylvester Stewart, Grandparents Solficio and Sarafia (Sophia) Apilado and Sylvester and Viola Stewart; Great Grandparents Rufina and Pedro Campomanes, Liberata and Maximino Apilado, Glen and Mollie Day, Madison and Emma Stewart. Ashe.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my loving wife, Paula, who believed in me before I

believed in myself. Thanks for your love, faith and support. You will always have my

undying love as I adhere to the words of our ancestors:

> If you are wise and wish to make your house stable, love your wife fully and
> righteously. Give her food, clothes and oil for her body and make her happy as
> long as you live. For she is of great value to you her husband…Pay attention to
> what she wishes, aims at and regards highly. Thus, she will remain with you.
> Open your arms to her, call her and show her your love. (The Book of Ptah
> Hotep)

It is also dedicated to my two beautiful daughters, Ifetayo and Ayoka in hopes

that it inspires them to life long learning. With love and great expectations I leave them

these words:

> Examine every matter that you may understand it. Do not say that I am learned
> but rather set yourself to become wise. Be gentle and patient, then your character
> will be beautiful. It is in the development of character that instruction succeeds.
> (The Book of Anksheshongi)

> Follow in the footsteps of your ancestors, for the mind is trained through
> knowledge. Behold, their words endure in books. Open and read them and
> follow their wise counsel. For one who is taught becomes skilled. Do not do evil
> for kindness is good. Multiply the people who the city shelters, then God will be
> praised for your donations. And the people will give thanks for your goodness
> and pray for your health. (The Book of Kheti)

> If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all. (Mark
> 9:35)

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The persistent educational achievement gap between African American students

and their European American peers is one of the key issues confronting educational

policy makers. Parental involvement has a positive correlation to high academic

achievement in the general population as well as in African American students. In a

meta-analysis of 41 studies that examined the relationship between parental involvement

and the academic achievement of urban elementary school children, Jeynes (2005) found

that "programs meant to encourage parental support in their child's schooling appear

positively related to achievement in urban children" (p. 260). According to Jeynes

(2005):

> Parental involvement may represent an important means of raising the educational
> outcomes of struggling urban students specifically. The fact that most of the
> studies that initiated programs of parental support involved struggling school
> children suggests parental involvement can be a means of reducing the
> achievement gap between these students and those more advanced scholastically.
> (p. 261)

Strategies used to sustain African American involvement in education have

ranged from adjusting meeting times to accommodate parents' schedules, to providing

meals, childcare and stipends to underprivileged parents, and conducting home visits to

reach parents who, for various reasons, do not attend school meetings or functions.

Although many of these strategies have been successful in increasing participation over

the short term, most have failed to support sustained parent involvement.

The formation of African American parent groups is one strategy for empowering

sustained parent participation. These groups have been organized by African American

parents who have the ability, resources, and desire to advocate for educational achievement and by parent advocates and educators who seek to empower parents. To date, very little research has been done to examine the dynamics of African American parent groups. As a result, very little is known about the kinds of groups African American parents are most attracted to or how norms, values, and modes of action are transmitted within these groups. Knowledge about group dynamics, organizational structures, and leadership styles that appeal to African American parents may help educators support African American parent group formation and resilience which in turn may help sustain parent involvement. This study attempted to increase knowledge about how African American parents interact with one another to create and maintain organizational structures and relationships that support sustained involvement.

<div align="center">Purpose of the Study</div>

The purpose of this study was to shed light on how African American parent groups help to motivate and inspire African American parents to sustain an active role in the education of their children. Specifically, it explored how ethnic cultural capital, in the form of family and community based networks and common cultural perspectives, was converted into social capital within African American parent groups and how this social capital was activated within the context of these groups. This study also focused on how norms, values and modes of action were transmitted to parents through group dynamics. Additionally, it explored how leader-follower relationships resulting from specific leadership styles served as social capital.

Empirical research has established a strong positive correlation between African American parent involvement and student achievement (Comer, 2005; Jeynes, 2003;

Jeynes, 2005). Data also supports the notion that parent involvement programs in

general, and African American parent groups in particular, positively affect student

achievement (Comer, 2005; Haynes & Comer, 1996; Jeynes, 2005; Slavin, 2001).

Despite promising data indicating that parent involvement might help to eliminate the

achievement gap, very little research has been done to explore how African American

parent groups help empower and sustain parent involvement. Most studies have focused

on the outcome of parenting classes; that is, the empowerment of parents through the

provision of one directional classroom instruction (Cooper & Christie, 2005; Smalley &

Reyes-Blanes, 2001). At the time of this study, there was a lack of research on African

American parent group dynamics. Additionally, very little was known about how leaders

emerge or are selected to lead these groups. This study sought to fill these gaps in the

research.

<div align="center">Background and Need for the Study</div>

Studies have consistently shown that parent involvement is a significant

determinant of educational achievement (Ginsburg & Bronstein, 2003; Jeynes, 2005;

Spera, 2005; Trusty, 1996; Yan, 1999). Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems and Holbien (2005)

reviewed several studies that linked parent involvement to several motivational

constructs, including: school engagement, intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, perceived

competence, perceived self-control, self-regulation, mastery goal orientation, and

motivation to read.

Given the strong correlation between parent involvement and educational

achievement and the persistent achievement gap between European American and

African American students, educators have been charged with the responsibility to

increase African American parent participation in the education of their children. Title I,

Sec. 1001. of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001; NCLB) states:

The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education…This purpose can be accomplished by….affording parents substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children.

The mandate to provide substantial and meaningful opportunities for parents to

participate raised the issue of how to engage African American parents of low socio-

economic status who, in a traditional sense, have not been involved in the educational

process. For the purposes of this research traditional parental involvement was described

through measurable outcomes such as participation in daily classroom activities,

established relationships with institutional agents and participation in an active support

network. Social justice advocates framed the question of parent involvement amongst

urban families as an issue of parent empowerment (Cooper & Christie, 2005; Smalley &

Reyes-Blanes, 2001). Smalley and Reyes-Blanes (2001) claimed that "promoting

African American families' efforts to become proactively involved in their children's

lives remains one of society's greatest challenges" (p. 519). Hence, from a social justice

perspective, the question, as it applies to African American parents, became: How can

educators help to empower African American parents, particularly those of low socio-

economic status, to participate in their children's education?

  The formation of African American parent groups is one strategy that educators

use to increase the participation of African American parents in the educational process.

These groups typically focus on providing parents with information about school

schedules, procedures, curriculum, and activities. These groups also provide parents with

the opportunity to build supportive social networks that help sustain parent involvement.

In this qualitative, participatory action research (PAR) study, the researcher investigated two African American parent groups. Alpha Group was organized by African American parents; while Beta Group was organized by community activists in collaboration with educators. The two groups were investigated to determine how African American parent groups empower and sustain parent involvement. Particular focus was given to how parents influence each other. Additionally, the study explored how the structures and leadership styles of each group helped sustain parent involvement. This data was intended to lead to recommendations about how African American parent groups should be organized. The implications for educational policy and areas of possible further study are also discussed.

<p style="text-align:center">Theoretical Framework</p>

This study used Coleman's (1988) social capital theory to explore how African American parent groups may serve as a context for the activation of parents' social and cultural capital. Coleman (1988) identified three forms of social capital: obligations and expectations, which depends on the trustworthiness of the social environment, information-flow capability of the social structure, and norms accompanied by sanctions (p. 119). He explained how obligations and expectations serve as social capital:

> If *A* does something for *B* and trust *B* to reciprocate in the future, this establishes an expectation in *A* and an obligation in *B*. This obligation can be conceived as a credit slip held by *A* for performance by obligation *B*. If *A* holds a large number of credit slips, for a number of persons with whom *A* has relations, then the analogy to financial capital is direct. These slips constitute a large body of credit that *A* can call in if necessary- Unless, of course, the placement of trust has been unwise, and these are bad debts that will not be repaid. (p. 102)

Coleman (1988) cited the diamond trade as a business wherein obligations and expectations and trustworthiness of an environment enabled business to be conducted

efficiently. He described how diamond traders often exchanged sacks of diamonds to be

appraised by fellow traders without fear of being ripped off. He asserted that this was

possible because diamond traders were a close knit community with high levels of

obligations and expectations. It follows that if African American parent groups help to

develop trust in community, parents may be empowered to work cooperatively to support

their children's education or advocate for school reform.

> Coleman (1988) asserted that:
>
> An important form of social capital is the information that inheres in social relations. Information is important in providing the basis for action. But the acquisition of information is costly. At the minimum, it requires attention, which is always scarce. One means by which information can be acquired is by use of social relations that are maintained for other purposes. (p. 104).

This analysis illuminated the importance of stable social networks which act as conduits

of information. By allowing space and time for parents to meet and develop

relationships, African American parent groups may help create the networks necessary to

facilitate the flow of vital information. Furthermore, by helping parents connect with

institutional agents such as Principals, Vice Principals and Counselors, African American

parent groups may provide parents access to funds of knowledge that they would not

otherwise have access to. These networks may be particularly strong and fruitful if

African American parent groups are able to foster trust and cooperation between parents

and institutional agents.

> Finally, Coleman (1988) asserted that shared norms may constitute social capital:
>
> When a norm exists and is effective, it constitutes a powerful…form of social capital. Effective norms that inhibit crime make it possible to walk freely outside at night in the city…Norms in a community that support and provide effective rewards for high achievement in school greatly facilitate the school's task. (p. 104)

It follows that if African American parent groups are successful at promoting effective parental involvement as a norm, student achievement and schooling may be enhanced.

Research Questions

The over-arching research question was: How do African American parent groups help sustain African American parents' involvement in their children's education? This question was examined through three areas of inquiry:

1. How do African American parent group dynamics create norms, values and modes of action and transmit them to individual parents?

2. How does group membership serve as social and cultural capital to help sustain African American parent involvement?

3. What group structures and leadership styles determine the optimum social context for African American parent group sustainability?

Significance of the Study

This study was significant because it provided educators, community leaders and parents the opportunity to reflect on the strategies they used to organize themselves. Trotman (2001) asserted that "parents make a difference in the school-based lives of their children, but only when their role is meaningful, empowered, and sustained" (p. 278). Since African American parent groups have been identified as a strategy for engaging parents in effective and sustained collaboration, it follows that educators should explore strategies for organizing and supporting these groups. The knowledge gained from this study may help them devise better strategies for supporting African American parent

group formation and resilience. In turn, these groups may help to sustain parent involvement.

According to Comer (2005), "Parent participation in schools can be helpful to students, school staff, and the parents themselves….Highly involved parents can be some of the most effective advocates for education" (p. 41). This study was significant because it confirmed Comer's contention. African American parent groups not only benefited African American students but also tended to improve schools for all children.

This study was significant to students because it illuminated how African American parent groups may ultimately improve African American student's academic achievement and hopefully help to decrease the educational achievement gap. This study showed that when African American parent groups function as a bridge between the African American community and schools, students enjoy the benefits of increased family involvement. Trotman (2001) described the possible educational benefits, "substantial evidence shows that family involvement helps to improve student outcomes such as grades, test scores, attendance, and behavior" (p.278).

<center>Limitations of the Study</center>

One limitation of the study was that PAR methodology was used to address the concerns of people who were involved in or affected by localized phenomenon. PAR was a great approach to solving localized problems and improving specific programs; however, this study's results may not be applicable to dissimilar populations and circumstances. This study was conducted in a large urban school district and its results may not be applicable to rural or suburban settings. However, the themes developed here may be expanded upon with additional research.

Another limitation of the study was the amount of time that the researcher had to observe the parent groups. If the researcher had more time he would be able to observe the long term affects of parent group membership. As a result of this limitation, the researcher had to rely on parent perceptions of the sustainability of their own involvement, which may change over time.

The final limitation of the study was that eight of the ten African American parents in Beta Group dropped out of the group before their ten week curriculum concluded. As a result, the researcher was only able to conduct dialogues with three Beta Group parents. However, two Beta Group facilitators participated in dialogues, bringing the number of Beta Group participants to five. While this was a small sample, valuable insights were gained from Beta Group participants.

<div align="center">Definition of Terms</div>

Cultural capital refers to:

> Institutionalized, i.e., widely shared, high status signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials) used for social exclusion….It allows cultures to be used as a resource that provides access to scarce rewards, is subject to monopolization, and, under certain conditions, may be transmitted from one generation to the next. (Lareau & Weininger, 2003, p. 587)

For purposes of this study cultural capital is differentiated from ethnic cultural capital in that used it is based on middle class white culture and is used to marginalize ethnic minorities and lower class whites. Hence, cultural capital can be understood in terms of "the educational norms of the social classes capable of imposing…criteria of evaluation which are most beneficial to their children" (Lareau & Weininger, 2003, p. 588).

Ethnic cultural capital refers to family and community based forms of capital such as extended family and church based networks as well as the shared norms and cultural

perspectives of individuals residing in a particular community or belonging to a particular ethnic group. Ethnic cultural capital differs from social capital in the degree to which it is recognized and exchangeable within the dominant society. The ethnic cultural capital of oppressed or marginalized ethnic groups is often devalued by the dominant culture. However, ethnic cultural capital is a valued source of support within the communities that recognize it.

Social capital refers to the social networks, norms, values and funds of knowledge that enable the achievement of goals that otherwise would not be possible. Social capital is not evenly distributed in society. Rather, like economic capital it tends to be concentrated in the hands of dominant members of society to the detriment of marginalized ethnic groups.

Summary

This dissertation will be organized into five chapters. Chapter I is compose of background information and elucidates the need for the study, statement of the problem, research questions and theoretical framework. The significance of the study as well as its limitations are also discussed in Chapter I. Chapter II contains a review of relevant literature that establishes the theoretical basis for understanding this study's findings. Chapter III contains a description of the methodology, the philosophical basis for using the methodology, the research design, setting, participants, the researcher profile, data collection and analysis. Chapter IV contains the study findings drawn from participatory dialogues, field observations, and document analysis. Chapter V contains the discussion of the findings, conclusions and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study sought to determine how African American parent groups successfully empower African American parents to sustain involvement in education. The literature review focused on five (5) themes beginning with a review of empirical studies that establish a correlation between parent involvement and educational achievement. African American parent involvement was then examined to establish its effect on the achievement of African American students and the persistent educational achievement gap. The impact of African American parent groups on African American parent involvement and strategies for sustaining these groups was also explored. Leadership styles within African American parent groups were examined to determine how these styles affect parent's willingness and ability to sustain their involvement. Finally, alternate theoretical frameworks that may explain how African American parent groups empower and sustain African American parents' involvement in education were explored.

Parent Involvement and Educational Achievement

Studies have consistently shown that parent involvement is a significant determinant of educational achievement (Ginsburg and Bronstein, 2003; Izzo, Weisberg, Kasprow, and Fendrich, 1999; Jeynes, 2005; Spera, 2005; Steinberg et al., 1992; Trusty, 1996). Ginsburg and Bronstein (2003) studied 93 fifth graders and found that intrinsic motivation was positively related to parent involvement in surveillance of homework and reaction to grades. This relationship remained positive regardless of the positive or negative nature of parent's reactions to grades. Jeynes' meta-analysis of 41 studies found that parental involvement programs have been used successfully to improve urban

student achievement. Spera (2005) reviewed the literature on the relationship among

parenting practices, parenting styles, and adolescent school achievement. She found that

parental involvement and monitoring were robust predictors of adolescent achievement.

Trusty (1996) used a representative sample of high school seniors to demonstrate that

parental involvement was positively related to positive intrinsic attitudes, perceptions and

good behaviors on the part of students. Yan (1999) analyzed the National Education

Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) to find that parents of successful African

American students were more likely to participate at school and discuss future

educational plans with their children than parents of less successful students.

Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, and Holbien (2005) reviewed numerous studies that

linked parent involvement to several motivational constructs: school engagement,

intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, perceived competence, perceived control, self-regulation,

mastery goal orientation and motivation to read. Two studies investigating student

school engagement found that parents' participation in school activities positively

predicted students' engagement levels in school and that when parents were more

involved with their child's schooling, their children performed better academically (Izzo

et al., 1999; Steinberg et al., 1992).

Children performed better in school when parents were involved because parent

involvement was strongly correlated with student motivation. Three studies investigating

the correlation between parent involvement and student intrinsic/extrinsic motivation

provide compelling data to support this conclusion:

- When students perceived that parents valued the importance of effort and
  academic success, students had higher perceived academic competence and
  placed a high priority on their academic ability, effort, and grades.

- Greater parental surveillance of homework and parental reaction (good or bad) to children's grades was related to motivational orientation.
- Children's intrinsic motivation is more positive when they see their parents involved with their education. (Ames et al., 1993 Ginsburg and Bronstein, 1993; Marchant, Paulson, & Rothlisberg, 2001)

<div align="center">

African American Parent Involvement
And the Achievement Gap

</div>

Not unlike studies that firmly established the benefits of parent involvement in supporting educational achievement in the general population, several studies have demonstrated the benefits of African American parent involvement (Comer, 2005; Haynes and Comer, 1996; Jeynes 2003; Jeynes, 2005; Slavin and Madden, 2001; Yan, 1999). Evaluating the School Development Program, Comer (2005) found that "student academic performance, behavior, and preparation for school and life can be greatly improved when the adult stakeholders work together in a respectful, collaborative way to create a school climate or culture that supports development, good instruction, and academic learning" (p. 39). Jeynes' (2003) meta-analysis of 21 studies on the effects of parental involvement on minority youth found that "for groups consisting of mostly African Americans and 100% African Americans, the effect sizes are .44 ($p<.01$) and ,48 ($p<.01$) respectively" (p. 207). These effect sizes indicated that "African American children benefited from all kinds of parental involvement" (p. 214). Haynes and Comer (1996) evaluated the School Development Program (SDP), which involved parents as an integral part of school development. They found that parent involvement had a "significant effect on student achievement, behavior, self-esteem, and overall adjustment" (p. 5).

Jeynes (2005) analyzed National Education Longitudinal Survey (NELS) data to assess the effects of parental involvement on 2,260 African American students; his study

found that African American students with highly involved parents scored significantly higher than their peers with less involved parents in every academic category. However, when the highly involved parents had low socio-economic status, the positive affects of parent involvement were no longer statistically significant. Additionally, the study found that parent involvement was closely related to socio-economic status in that middle class African Americans were more likely to be involved with their children's education than parents of lower socio-economic status. These findings suggested that while some African Americans were effectively involved in their children's education, many, particularly those of low socio-economic status, were not empowered to participate in the educational process. Furthermore, even when low socio-economic status African American parents were involved in the education of their children, they were less affective than their more affluent peers. The current study was interested in how African American parents of different socio-economic status influence each other within the context of African American parent groups. It explored the dynamics of African American parent groups to determine how parents of different socio-economic classes create a group/social identity consisting of norms, values, and modes of action that empower and sustain parent involvement.

Diamond and Gomez (2004) studied possible explanations for differing levels of parent involvement amongst African American parents of various socio-economic classes. They found that middle-class African Americans often resided in neighborhoods close to high quality schools and/or had resources available to customize their children's educational experiences. By contrast, working-class African Americans often lived close to low quality schools and lacked resources to customize their children's education.

These findings have pressing implications in the study of parent involvement amongst

working-class African Americans:

> Working-class African American parents…face an added burden in their
> involvement because they must negotiate more challenging educational contexts
> (i.e., lower quality schools that parents perceive as less responsive to their
> involvement) and engage these educational context with fewer resources than
> their middle- class African American counterparts. (p. 385)

Given the vastly different context in which African American parents of different

socio-economic status operate, it was not surprising that there were various orientations

toward parent involvement across socio-economic classes. Diamond and Gomez (2004)

found that while both middle-class and working-class African American parents adopted

educational orientations that were supportive of schools, the way that parents supported

schools differed based on their social class and the educational context. The researchers

observed that middle-class African American parents, for the most part, customized their

children's educational experiences by moving into neighborhoods with good schools,

utilizing magnet schools, or paying for private schools and were "pleased with the

education that their children were receiving and perceived schools as encouraging their

involvement" (p. 410). By contrast, black working-class parents, who lacked resources

necessary to customize their children's education "were often unhappy with their

children's schools and perceived some resistance to parent involvement" (p. 410).

As a result of their satisfaction with their children's schools, middle-class African

American parents often assumed a supportive posture toward their children's schools.

On the other hand, Diamond and Gomez (2004) observed that "black working-class

parents were not pleased with the school environment and positioned themselves as

supportive of school improvement and worked to create quality within schools they were committed to supporting" (p. 410).

This implications of the Diamond and Gomez study suggest that socio-economic background is directly related to parent empowerment. The high probability that middle-class African American students attend better schools than their peers from working-class families may help to explain differences in parent involvement levels across socio-economic class.

<div align="center">The Impact of Parent Groups</div>

Cooper and Christie (2005) evaluated a University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) partnership with the Parker Unified School District. This parent training program, called the District Parent Training Program (DPTP), was designed to "educate and empower" urban school parents. DPTP was a curriculum based education program that strived to "inform parents about curriculum content, instruction, subject matter frameworks, academic standards, and assessment" (p. 2253). DPTP also aimed to "inform parents about the impact of school reform in their district, to foster positive teacher-parent interaction, and to encourage parents to become school volunteers and community leaders…" (p. 2254).

DPTP was part of the University of California's effort to increase the enrollment of under-represented, disadvantaged minority students in the wake of Proposition 209, which eliminated affirmative action in California schools. Parker Unified School District served a low socio-economic and working class community that was approximately 80% Latino. Most of the remaining 20% were African Americans. It was classified as a "Title I" school district because of the high rate of poverty among its students' families and the

large population of English language learners. To ensure that poverty did not impede

parent participation, parents were provided childcare and meals (breakfast and lunch) as

well as a $150 stipend upon completion of the thirteen (13) week program.

Using social justice evaluation designed to give voice to the least powerful

stakeholders, the evaluators found that parents and school administrators often differed in

their definition of parent empowerment. Many parents believed that empowerment is

defined by the ability to change or improve the educational system while educators and

administrators often believed that parent empowerment should enable parents to support

the status quo.

> Data suggest that although most DPTP parents associate empowerment with
> exerting power within the school system and having the ability to spark
> substantive reform, district and school leaders advocate more conservative
> action…They would like parents to assist teachers with classroom instruction or
> serve as an active parent patrol. (Cooper & Christie, 2005, p. 2262)

These conflicting points of view made some power holders feel threatened; prompting the

Superintendent to suggest that the university offer assurances to district employees to

"remove threats of parents taking over the district" (p. 2266). Although eighty percent of

the program participants were Latina women, many of whom spoke little or no English;

similar divergent attitudes have been shown to exist between African American parents

and educators. As previously discussed, Diamond and Gomez (2004) observed that

working-class African American parents often positioned themselves to create change in

schools that they found to be unsatisfactory. Given this fact, it is unlikely that African

American parents are any more willing than Latina parents to relinquish leadership roles

in the school environment

The reluctance to share power with parents for fear of them taking over the educational process is a significant impediment to parent empowerment. Yet for educational equity to be realized, parents must be empowered to support the education of their children. Educators must understand that parent empowerment will result in a broader distribution of power among educational stakeholders.

DPTP encouraged self-determined action on the part of parent participants. This was evident in the fact that each site had its own parent director and parent site coordinator who implemented the program at their site. These individuals planned activities in accordance with the needs of their peers. Cooper and Christie (2005) "observed parents in both roles being very attentive to parent participants…being very dedicated to the DPTP and willing to put forth a great deal of time, energy, and occasionally, their own limited funds to help maintain the program" (p. 2263).

Friedlaender (1999), describing the benefits of horizontal relations, that is, relations between peers of similar power and resources, asserted that:

> Participation skills should be modeled for parents by peers who engage them in horizontal relations that allow them to learn without fear of being silenced, alienated, or embarrassed…Horizontal relations allow all participants to be valued and participate in ways beneficial to them…To the degree that horizontal relations are possible, social capital is nurtured (p. 4).

DPTP seemed to have harnessed the potential of horizontal relationships. Several parents lauded DPTP for offering participants "a 'safe place' to convene…Others stressed that the program has provided them…a valuable social network" (p. 2265).

The social capital accrued by parent participants in DPTP empowered them to support and advocate for their children and to develop action plans to solve school wide problems. Furthermore, since each school site was run by parents for parents, it could be

argued that parents were organized for self-determined action. Cooper and Christie (2005) reported that "the…existing cadre of parent leaders may be one of the program's most important assets given their commitment to ensuring that the program continues to benefit other parents and the PUSD as a whole" (p. 2263).

On the other hand, it should be noted that the parent director and the parent site coordinator were each paid $2000 to organize and implement the thirteen (13) week program. Additionally, meals and childcare were provided to DPTP at a considerable cost. Given this situation, it is doubtful that DPTP parent groups would continue if funding were discontinued. Furthermore, it is unclear to what extent parents were dependent on external funding for meals and childcare to enable their participation. A lack of financial resources, especially in some urban school districts, may make the sorts of comprehensive family services provided by DPTP less of a long term possibility. Without these support services however opportunities for long term partnerships with parents may be limited and parent empowerment impeded. The provision of meals, childcare, and stipends to support parent participation, as seen in DPTP, is a luxury that few school districts can afford. Likewise, providing teachers and other personnel to support parent empowerment programs may be difficult. As a result, educational leaders may need to tap community and government resources to support parent empowerment programs.

Smalley and Reyes-Blanes (2001) analyzed a parent leadership training (PLT) program, provided by a community-university partnership, in an urban school district in Central Florida. PLT attempted to reach out to low socio-economic class African

American parents and delineated some of the challenges to African American parent involvement as follows:

1. School personnel intimidate some parents.

2. Prior tumultuous school experiences deter others.

3. Many simply fail to recognize the importance of their involvement.

4. Still others, who would like more involvement, find meeting times inconvenient or lack school-setting participation experience (p. 520).

Despite these challenges, PLT was able to recruit 37 parents of which 24 completed all five (5) sessions of the course and graduated. Like DPTP, PLT provided child care and meals to parents. Parents were given certificates of completion and t-shirts as recognition for completing the program. However, no stipend was given for attendance. Smalley and Reyes-Blanes asserted that, "leadership strategies must provide avenues for citizens to actively participate in problem identification and solutions and to establish an infrastructure for future community problem solving" (p. 512). African American parent groups, if organized for sustainability, may constitute this infrastructure. However, despite the fact that some PLT parents requested monthly follow-up sessions with the PLT facilitator, it was not clear that parents were organized for sustainability. While PLT was affective at preparing parents to more effectively lead their families in support of education and to some extent in preparing parents to engage in school site collaboration with educators, it did not prepare parents to organize themselves into a sustainable network or organization.

Preparing parents to organize themselves was not a stated goal of PLT. Smalley and Reyes-Blanes (2001) stated that the immediate goal of PLT was to "enable parents to

rediscover their leadership skills to assist their children in both school and community"

(p.524). This approach to parent empowerment, while well intended, seemed to embrace

a deficit evaluation of African American parents. This deficit evaluation was evident in

the way researchers developed PLT classes. The university based researchers who

developed PLT were members of a twenty (20) member interagency team that provided

an array of services to the community. Therefore, the researchers relied on positive

feedback from their interagency team to develop, implement, and evaluate PLT. While

interagency collaboration and feedback were valued, there was no parent input into the

development process. Researchers, with positive feedback of interagency team members,

determined the content and pedagogy of PLT classes. Although some members of the

interagency team may have come from similar cultural and socio-economic backgrounds

as parents, this did not guarantee that parents' perspectives and concerns were accurately

assessed. Parents were not engaged in dialogue with PLT leaders about their needs,

challenges or concerns. Paulo Freire (1997) describes the essentiality of dialogue:

> To substitute monologue…for dialogue is to attempt to liberate the oppressed
> with the instruments of domestication. Attempting to liberate the oppressed
> without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as
> objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the
> populist pitfall and transform them into masses which may be manipulated.
> (p. 47)

He also describes the necessity that parents (as students) be active in the creation of the

infrastructure for future community problem solving:

> Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both
> Subjects, not only to the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to
> know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain
> this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover
> themselves as its permanent re-creators. (p. 51)

Freire's comments seem to imply that an open critical dialogue between parents and researchers holds the possibility of discovering the capacity of parents as "permanent re-creators" of the infrastructure for future community problem solving.

There is abundant evidence that African American parent groups can provide the infrastructure for future (and current) community problem solving. Haynes and Comer (1996) assessed the School Development Program (SDP), an educational reform program designed to "rebuild learning communities by connecting the significant adults in children's lives through a collaborative process of systemic reform and school improvement" (p. 502). From the SDP perspective, "education…is a holistic process in which significant adults, parents, school staff, and responsible members of the community, work together to help children develop along multiple pathways" (p. 502). SDP relied heavily on site based management, utilizing the organized input of parent teams to successfully transform more than 1,000 schools into positive learning communities. More than two-thirds of SDP schools were dysfunctional, high-minority, low-income, elementary schools with minimal or negative parent involvement. Comer (2005) asserted that SDP's "long experience (more than 25 years) has established that parent participation in schools can be helpful to students, school staff, and the parents themselves" (p. 41). He further concluded that, "parental involvement in School Development Program schools not only improves teaching and learning; it can also transform families' lives" (p. 42).

SDP was based on three (3) structures: a School Planning and Management Team, a Student and Staff Support Team, and a Parent Team (p. 40). The Parent Team implemented a "year long, school wide schedule of activities designed to support

instruction and to create positive relationships in the school" (Comer, 2005, p. 40). Importantly, the SDP had three (3) guiding principals: no-fault problem solving, consensus decision making, and collaboration.

SDP was an example of a comprehensive school reform model that involved parents in the creation of knowledge through dialogue. Parents were involved in every facet of institution building. Furthermore, parents were organized for sustained action. While there was initially a staff liaison assigned to the Parent Team to help parents gain organizational skills, as parents gained the skills necessary to carry out their own programs and participate in the larger school environment, the staff liaison became less active (Comer, 2005).

Slavin and Madden (2001) assessed Success for All (SFA), another highly successful comprehensive school reform model that emphasized parent involvement. SFA was used in approximately 1800 schools in 48 states and served over one million children. Most SFA schools were high-poverty, Title 1 school wide projects and about two thirds of SFA children were African American or Latino. SFA focused primarily on reading comprehension, providing schools with research based curriculum and instructional strategies. It also provided one-to-one tutoring in reading. A key element of SFA was the family support team:

> A family support team works in each school to help support parents in ensuring the success of their children, focusing on parent education, parent involvement, attendance, and student behavior. This team is composed of existing and or additional staff such as parent liaisons, social workers, counselors, and vice principals. (p. 7)

SFA has been effective at reducing the educational achievement gap between African American students and their European American peers:

A Texas statewide evaluation of 111 SFA schools found that while the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills reading achievement gap was diminishing for all students in Texas in 1994-98…it diminished significantly more for both African American and Latino students in SFA schools. (p. 1)

In a study of educational achievement gap reduction conducted in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, even more dramatic results were achieved. Researchers found that while the achievement gap had grown for students in control schools, it was no longer statistically or educationally significant in SFA schools. These findings raised hope that the educational achievement gap can eventually be eliminated through the creation of learning communities. However, more study should be done to determine how, and to what extent, parent involvement impacts SFA schools.

Friedlaender (1999) examined the efforts of an urban middle school in Southern California to increase parent involvement. The school dedicated a classroom to house a Parent Center. The Parent Center was designed to "function as a site for parental development and participation" (p. 9). Additionally, two parent representatives were employed, under the direction of a Title I Coordinator, to facilitate parent involvement. The parent representatives, an African American and a Latino, were purposefully selected to represent the schools demographics. At the time of the study, the community was shifting from a predominantly low socio-economic African American population to a predominantly low socio-economic Latino population. Despite the school's apparent commitment to developing parent leadership, neither parent representative received adequate training. As a result, the Parent Center "lacked…skilled parent leadership to give it direction and to build solidarity" (p. 8).

As in the DPTP example, redistribution of power was an inescapable issue in empowering parent participation at the middle school. While parent meetings and classes

helped to inform parents about school policies and provide parents with skills to

collaborate with school personnel, because the program used "one-way learning (from

school to parent) these efforts preserved the vertical relations between home and school"

(Friedleander, 1999, p. 9).   Friedleander (1999) concluded that:

> Parental development in the area of coalition building and deliberation
> skills…would have provided opportunities to reduce power inequities and to
> allow two-way learning to occur between parents and educators. This could
> strengthen both educators and parents and contribute to the building of
> community". (p. 9)

These observations illustrated the need for educators to embrace the idea of parents as

capable leaders and role models and to design programs that enhance these capabilities.

Friedlaender (1999) concluded that "Administrators need to have the will to honor,

respect, and respond to parents' request and contributions…Committed parents and

parent representatives have little power and receive few rewards when they face an

unresponsive traditional-minded administration" (p. 35). The data suggested that

engaging in efforts to empower parents from a deficit perspective, the belief that parents

are incapable of self-organizing, limited the efficacy of the parent empowerment

programs.

     Each of the aforementioned studies affirms the effectiveness of parent groups in

general and African American parent groups in particular in helping to empower and

sustain parent involvement and by extension raise student achievement. The current

study sought to elucidate the best methods for organizing said groups.

Strategies for Sustaining African American Parent Groups

     Barrera and Warner (2006) suggested that "schools have an opportunity to help

students and their families by forming collaborative relationships with public and private

agencies that provide family support services" (p. 1). They suggested relationships with

"public health and human services agencies, local businesses, higher education systems,

youth serving organizations, and religious, civic, and other community based

organizations" (p. 1). The parent involvement programs discussed above all embraced

this notion of collaborative community building. DPTP and PLT were examples of

relationships between institutions of higher education (University of California Los

Angeles and University of Central Florida, respectively), and local school districts that

helped to sustain parent groups. Outreach to parents to participate in the Parent

Leadership Training provided by the University of Central Florida to parents of a central

Florida school district was facilitated by a twenty (20) member inter-agency team that

provided a plethora of services to families of the effected community. These services

included "guaranteed college funding: scholarship acquisition coaching: Head Start and

day care programs; the Family Service Center; parent workshops, forums, and resources;

YMCA programs; health screening; television coverage; stepped-up police attention; and

strong school support" (Friedleander, 1999, p. 523). SFA provided a Parent and Family

Support Team at every school, consisting of counselors, social workers, psychologist and

vice principals, to empower parent participation and support families. Comer (2005)

stated that providing "mental health and social services" encouraged parent participation

in SDP schools. Haynes and Comer (1996) explained the need for effective networking

in the development of learning communities:

> Services to children and families often are fragmented and unable to adequately
> address the psychosocial needs of children which almost always influence how
> much and how well children learn and perform in school…As SDP communities
> seek to develop the keenest, brightest and most inquisitive minds among all
> children regardless of social class, race/ethnicity, gender or culture, we also seek
> to create structures and establish linkages and networks with community groups

and services…so that we can raise healthy and smart children whose habits of heart, mind, and work are consistent with those espoused in the learning community and modeled by significant adults.

Barrera and Warner (2006) asserted that by networking "schools can reach out to link families to needed services and community organizations, which in turn can strengthen home environments and increase student learning" (p. 2). Hence, networking skills, that is, the ability to collaborate effectively with parents, social service agencies and business and civic leaders, may be a prerequisite for successful parent group formation and sustainability.

According to Barrera and Warner (2006) there were three preconditions to increased parent involvement in schools. First, educators must create a climate of trust and cooperation. Secondly, educators must open lines of two way communication with parents. They claim that "the best parent-involvement programs allow plenty of time for open ended, parent-dominated discussions that foster positive school climate and communication" (p. 3). Finally, educators must collaborate with parents. Parents must be integrated into the decision making apparatus of the school. Here again, the sharing or redistribution of power is essential. Educational equity requires collaboration.

These preconditions to increased parent involvement are difficult to attain in many urban schools serving low socio-economic, predominantly African American communities. In such communities, some parents may harbor a high level of distrust for institutions dominated by Whites. Lareau, and Horvat (1999) asserted that while "educators are relentless in their demands that parents display positive, supportive approaches to education…The historical legacy of racial discrimination…makes it far more difficult for black parents than white parents to comply with such demands" (p. 38).

The experience of racial discrimination may severely undermine the ability of some African American parents to trust educational institutions administrated by Whites. Additionally, Smalley, and Reyes-Blanes (2001) stated that "school personnel intimidate some parents. Prior tumultuous school experiences deter others. Many simply fail to recognize the importance of their involvement. Still others, who would like more involvement, find meeting times inconvenient or lack school-setting participation experience" (p. 520).

Another issue that may be considered in empowering parent participation is that families of different cultural backgrounds have different modes of interaction with schools. Diamond, Wang and Williams-Gomez (2004), drawing from interviews, observations, and surveys concluded that although both African American and Chinese American parents placed high value on the education of their children, each cultural group had very different modes of interaction with schools. Furthermore, parents utilized cultural and social capital differently to support the educational aspirations of their children. African Americans effectively utilized extended family and church based resources to maximize involvement in education. Extended family members were used to provide childcare and transportation which allowed parents to attend teacher conferences and other functions. Diamond, Wang and Williams-Gomez (2004) concluded that "African American parents believed strongly in home and school-based involvement and attempted to intervene inside their children's schools" while Chinese-American parents "were extremely active in home-based involvement" (p. 2). They termed African American parents "front stage activists" and Chinese American parents "back stage/behind the scene" supporters of their children's education. Although critical

of schools, Chinese parents were much less likely to intervene. On the other hand,

Chinese American parents effectively utilized community resources to provide alternative

educational resources for their children. These findings imply that the cultural

background as well as the socio-economic status of parents should be taken into

consideration when organizing parent groups; that is, parents may be organized

effectively around the cultural values and experiences that they hold in common.

Parents' cultural capital may form the basis for sustained involvement. Conversely,

attempting to organize parents of different cultural and economic backgrounds may prove

problematic because, as discussed earlier, the cultural capital of less affluent, minority

parents is often less valued than their more affluent peers.   Diamond, Wang and

Williams (2004) suggested that educators should:

- View parents' distinct involvement strategies as a reflection of their cultural styles rather than their levels of investment in education
- Recognize the nondominant/ethnic cultural capital of parents as valuable and seek to build on it to create stronger connections between schools and communities.
- Recognize school-based expectations of parents as one set of cultural beliefs (among several) about the appropriate role of parents in education.
- Capitalize on community-based forms of social capital that exist in racial minority communities. (p. 4)

Toward that end, African American parent groups may provide an environment (or field)

wherein the social and cultural capital of parents is easily activated. The African

American parent group may function as a safe place for parents to air their ideas and

concerns, thus providing a bridge between the community and school.

Applicable Theories

Numerous studies have established the correlation between socio-economic status

and the involvement of African American parents (Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Jeynes,

2005; Smalley & Reyes-Banes, 2001). Jeynes (2005) stated that middle class African

American parents were far more likely to participate in the education of their children than their working class peers. One theory that might explain the close correlation between African American parent involvement and socio-economic status is Coleman's (1988) social capital theory.

Coleman (1988) identified three forms of social capital: 1) obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness of structures; 2) information that inheres in social relations (information channels); and 3) norms and effective sanctions. Obligations, expectations and trustworthiness of structures referred to mutually beneficial, reciprocal relationships or networks wherein individuals could expect to give and receive support. Information that inheres in social relations referred to information that individuals are privy to based on social network affiliation. Norms and effective sanctions referred to the enabling or disabling effects of the norms within a social network.

Yan and Lin (2005) stated that "social capital consists of social networks and connections-contacts and group memberships which, through the accumulation of exchanges, obligations and shared identities, provide actual or potential support and access to valued resources" (p. 116). Friedlaender (1999) described how social capital might empower social action, "social capital refers to the features of social organization, like trust, common beliefs, and social networks, which can facilitate social action…the development of trust can lead to expanded social networks" (p. 4).

Monkman and Ronald (2005) asserted that "students with more valuable social and cultural capital fare better than their otherwise-comparable peers with less valuable social and cultural capital" (p. 37). Applying this theory to parents, it may be surmised

that parents of low socio-economic class may lack the social and cultural capital required

to be effectively involved in their children's education.

Horvat and Weininger (2003) defined social capital as "material and immaterial

resources that individuals and families are able to access through their social ties" (p.

323). They argued that "social networks accessible to working class and poor families

are less valuable than those of middle-class families in negotiating the particular

institutional environment formed by schools" (p. 323). Their findings demonstrated how

these networks differ:

> For middle-class families, webs of social ties tend to be woven through children's
> lives and especially through the organized activities they participate in, as well as
> through informal contacts with educators and other professionals. By contrast,
> the social networks of working-class and poor families tend to be rooted in and
> around kinship groups, ties to other parents and to professionals are considerably
> less common. (p. 327)

Stanton-Salazar (1997) explained that poor and middle class parents may be

excluded from highly valued social networks "the potential for the development of

supportive ties is always set in the context of interlocking class, race, and gender

hierarchies" (p. 9). As a result, poor and working class parents, particularly those of

ethnic minority groups, often find it difficult to break into the networks of their affluent

peers (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Hence, these parents are often

less able to sustain involvement in their children's education.

Diamond and Gomez (2004) asserted that:

> Educational institutions tend to value the cultural dispositions of the middle and
> upper classes and devalue those of less affluent groups. In this way, children (and
> parents) from middle-class and upper-class families are able to more easily
> convert their cultural resources into cultural capital within educational
> institutions. (p. 391)

Monkman and Ronald (2005) described how this process creates educational

inequities:

> The various forms of capital tend to reflect and reproduce stratification patterns in a class-based society such as the United States; as such they are implicated in the processes that enable or prevent acquisition of economic resources and to determine one's position in the socioeconomic structure of society. Social and cultural capital reflects social relationships, cultural practices, and knowledge that are used to gain social and economic benefit. (p. 7)

Lareau and Horvat (1999) clarified the concept of social capital by specifying that

1) "the value of capital depends heavily on the social setting (or field)" and 2) "there is an

important difference between the possession and activation of capital" (p. 38). Hence,

African American parent groups may help sustain parent involvement by providing a

social setting or field wherein parent's cultural and social capital may be activated.

African American parents, regardless of socio-economic status, often have

access to ethnic cultural capital. Like social capital, ethnic cultural capital provides

parents with important resources. For purposes of this study, ethnic cultural capital is

differentiated from other forms of social capital in that it inheres in community and

family based networks. Diamond, Wang, and Gomez (2004) stated that, "ethnic cultural

capital provides parents with access to familial and community based forms of social

capital" (p. 1). It follows then that African American parents may seek membership in

parent groups because these organizations often provide social capital in the form of

networks, shared information, mutually supportive activities, and a shared/social identity.

Furthermore, African American parent groups may provide a social setting wherein

parent's ethnic cultural capital is valued and easily converted into social capital. Finally,

it is likely that the "ethnic cultural" capital that African American parents bring to these

organizations provides a common ground for developing the social identity of African American parent groups.

Utilizing Yan and Lin's (2005) conceptualization of shared identities as social capital, it follows that the social identity of African American parent groups is an important form of social capital. Furthermore, this social identity, as social capital, may empower African American parents to sustain their roles as advocates for their children and reformers of schools.

Social identity is a form of social capital because:

Individuals who identify with a group take on more and more of the prototypical features of members of that group, they may also adopt the attitudes, preferences, and behaviors that they think typify the group…these attitudes are then likely to influence their behavior. (Forsyth, 2006, p. 93)

Recalling Coleman's (1988) assertion that "When a norm exists and is effective, it constitutes a powerful…form of social capital" (p. 104) this study surmised that African American parent groups develop a social identity through group interaction and that highly empowered members exert a normative effect on less empowered members, thereby increasing their social capital. In other words, as group members, African American parents may identify with the most effective members of their group and take on some of the norms, values, and behaviors of those members. Drawing from Jeynes (2005) conclusion that parent involvement is closely related to socio-economic status; it was supposed that middle class African American parents exerted a strong normative effect on their low socio-economic and working class peers.

Moore (2005) examined the normative effects of middle class African Americans in the redevelopment of a predominantly African American community. She concluded that:

> The residents most active in the neighborhood's redevelopment activities display a particular middle class identity ("multi-class") that links them to lower-class blacks and structures their vision of the neighborhood…The community development activities in this neighborhood are the product of the multi-class residents' attempt to articulate and affirm their racial identity and ideology. (p. 437)

> Their vision for the neighborhood's redevelopment is that of a mixed class black community that would promote the political, cultural and economic power of the black community as a whole. I argue that this vision of community and the development activities that accompany it are byproducts of their unique social identity. The articulation and marketing of their envisioned community enables them to validate and hopefully attract/convert others. (p. 440)

Applying Moore's (2005) findings in community development to parent involvement in education, this study posited that individuals who share the social identity most likely to be involved in community development are also most likely to be involved in advocating for their children's education. This study supposed that multi-class African Americans, i.e., middle class African Americans who understand their connection to less fortunate members of their race and embrace racial solidarity, would not only be active in their own children's education, but would also be active advocates for African American children in general. Moore asserted that "this identity fuels contemporary grassroots political action…helps to mobilize resources within and outside of the community and shapes the projected vision of the community" (p. 448). If this particular social identity were present in African American parent groups, one might expect to find middle class African Americans articulating and marketing their vision of parent involvement to help empower less fortunate African American parents.

While Moore (2005) demonstrated the power of social identity in shaping the norms, values, and actions of African Americans involved in community development, she also pointed out that class conflict could negatively effect or limit its outcome. This

study explored how social identity and class conflict were worked out through group interaction in the context of African American parent groups.

Because parent empowerment is a transformational process, this study explored how leadership styles helped to explain how African American parents become empowered as leaders and mentors. The leader, follower relationship can be understood as a type of social capital because it links parents with an institutional agent who is capable of supporting their sustained engagement with the school. Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) argued that "supportive ties with institutional agents represent a necessary condition for engagement and advancement in the educational system" (p. 116). Stanton-Salazar (1997) explained that "relationships with institutional agents, and the networks that weave these relationships into units, can be understood as social capital" (p. 8).

According to Northouse (2004):

Transformational leadership refers to the process whereby an individual engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower…This type of leader is attentive to the needs and motives of followers and tries to help followers reach their fullest potential (p. 170).

Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, and Sojourner Truth are examples of transformational leaders who have had a significant impact on the African American community. Bass (taken from Northouse, 2004) described how transformational leaders motivate followers.

Transformational leadership motivates followers to do more than the expected by doing the following: (a) raising followers' levels of consciousness about the importance and the value of specified and idealized goals, (b) getting followers to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the team or organization, and (c) moving followers to address higher-level needs (p. 173).

Samir, House, and Arthur (taken from Northouse, 2004, p. 173) postulated that "charismatic leadership transforms followers' self-concepts and tries to link the identity of the followers to the collective identity of the organization". In this instance, the transformational leader transmits the social identity of the group or organization to individual members of the organization. This social identity may then serve to empower followers to exceed their own expectations for the sake of a common goal. In the context of African American parent groups this empowerment may translate into sustained involvement in the educational process, advocacy for children and institutional change.

In his speech, Message to the Grass Roots, delivered in Detroit, November 10, 1963, Malcolm X delivered a message designed to reinforce and transmit the social identity of African Americans to individuals within that racial group and to use that social identity to empower social change. An excerpt from his speech is cited here:

> During the few minutes we have left, we want to have an off-the cuff chat between me and you, us. We want to talk right down to earth in a language that everybody here can easily understand….What you and I need to do is learn to forget our differences. When we come together we don't come together as Baptist or Methodist. You don't catch hell because you're a Baptist. And you don't catch hell because you're a Methodist. You don't catch hell because you're a Methodist or a Baptist. And you don't catch hell because you're a Democrat or a Republican. You don't catch hell because you're a Mason or an Elk. And you sure don't catch hell because you're an American, because if you were an American you wouldn't catch no *(sic)* hell. You catch hell because you're a black man. You catch hell, all of us, catch hell for the same reason….So we're all black people, so-called Negroes, second-class citizens, ex-slaves….We have a common enemy. We have a common oppressor. We have this in common: We have a common oppressor, a common exploiter and a common discriminator. But once we realize that we have this common enemy, then *(sic)* we unite on the basis of what we have in common. And what we have foremost in common is that enemy-the white man. (Breitman, 1965, p. 4-5)

In this brilliant speech, Malcolm X exemplified transformational leadership by urging his listeners to forget about their religious, political and social differences to unite around a

common goal. He emphasized the social identity of the group by stating "You catch hell because you're a black man. You catch hell, all of us, catch hell for the same reason." (Breitman, 1989, p. 5). His speech was designed to raise the consciousness of his followers about their plight in America and the need to form a united front to fight oppression. The ultimate goal of his speech was to incite a mode of social action.

If sustained involvement is related to increased motivation and morality and based on increased consciousness around the need for parent involvement, then transformational leadership may explain how African American parents are affected by the leadership styles in their groups. On the other hand, as previously noted, one of the parent groups in this study used economic incentives and other enticements to motivate parents to participate. This group emphasized transactional leadership. Transactional leadership relies on exchanges of benefits between leaders and followers wherein both parties are motivated by self interest. Transactional leaders may give pay raises, bonuses or promotions to motivate followers. In this case, attempting to motivate parents through economic incentives might be considered transactional leadership.

It may be argued that transactional leadership was necessary to move parents from a state of disengagement to one of sustained participation. In fact, many programs designed to increase parent participation relied heavily on transactional leadership (Comer, 2005; Cooper & Christie, 2005; Smalley & Reyes-Blanes, 2001). This study attempted to discover what forms of leadership, transformational or transactional, were most effective at sustaining African American parent involvement.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American parent groups help to sustain parent involvement. The literature review focused on the abundant empirical evidence that supports a strong positive correlation between parent involvement and academic achievement. The positive effects of African American parent involvement and its relation to the educational achievement gap were also examined. The impact of parent groups and strategies for sustaining African American parents groups were also explored. Finally, the theoretical underpinnings of the study were explored.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

As seen in the review of the literature, extensive research supports the correlation between parent involvement and educational achievement. Likewise, research has demonstrated the positive effects of African American parent involvement on the educational achievement of their children. Based on this data, a logical assumption is that if more African American parents were effectively involved in the education of their children, the education gap between African American children and their European American peers would shrink and may eventually be eliminated. The formation of African American parent groups is one strategy being used to increase African American parent involvement. However, to date very little research has been done to explore how these groups help sustain parent involvement. This study attempted to fill this gap in the research by exploring the perspectives of African American parents and other stake holders as they participated in or interacted with African American parent groups.

Research Design

This study employed participatory action research (PAR) methodology as described in Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and utilized by Cooper and Christie (2005) in their social justice evaluation of a university-sponsored District Parent Training Program. Coming from a social justice/emancipation orientation, Cooper and Christie focused on capturing the perspectives of low socio-economic status Latina parents, giving voice to the least powerful stakeholders in the educational process. This approach was consistent with the researcher's goal of examining the perspectives of African American parents

who were similarly situated as the least powerful stakeholders in the school-parent

relationship.

PAR advocates shared ownership of the research process and the collaborative

creation of knowledge. It is geared to help participants find solutions to locally based

social problems through the implementation of self-determined action. PAR is

committed to "social, economic, and political development responsive to the needs and

opinions of ordinary people" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 568). Selener (taken from

Jason, Keys, Suarez-Balcazar, Taylor, & Davis, 2004) defined PAR as "a process through

which members of an oppressed group or community identify a problem, collect and

analyze information, and act upon the problem in order to find solutions and to promote

social and political transformation" (p. 19). As such, PAR focuses on the empowerment

of research participants. In PAR, the researcher acts, not as a liberator, but to facilitate

dialogue between stakeholders who ultimately identify and solve their own problems. In

this study, the researcher engaged African American parents and other stakeholders in

dialogues pertaining to their involvement in the education of children. These dialogues

illuminated barriers to parent involvement as well as strategies for sustaining parent

involvement.

This study was guided by seven principals for implementing PAR in community

research (Jason, Keys, Suarez-Balcazar, Taylor, & Davis, 2004):

1. Consider participants as social actors, with a voice, ability to decide, reflect, and
   capacity to participate fully in the research process.
2. The ultimate goal of PAR is the transformation of the social reality of the
   participants by increasing the degree of control they have over relevant aspects of
   their community or organization.
3. The problem originates in the community/organization itself and is defined,
   analyzed, and solved by the participants.

4. Active participation leads to better understanding of the history and culture of the community/organization and a more authentic analysis of the social reality.
5. Engaging in a dialogical approach also leads to critical awareness.
6. Recognizing people's strengths also increases their awareness about their existing resources and mobilizes them to help themselves.
7. The research process also promotes personal change both for participants and researchers. (p. 22-24)

With these principals in mind, the researcher partnered with parents and other stakeholders to develop research procedures that maximized the input of all concerned.

The researcher sought to explore how African American parents might best organize themselves into effective and resilient groups. The effective organization of African American parent groups is socio-political development in response to their desire for educational equity. Given its concern with the needs and opinions of ordinary people, and for the empowerment of oppressed people to solve problems through self-determined action, PAR was well suited to support the empowerment of African American parents by helping them increase their understanding of how group dynamics and leadership styles impact their ability to organize.

The research design created multiple opportunities for collaboration in the production of knowledge. Parents and parent leaders were full partners in the research. This partnership was important because the ultimate goal of PAR is the formulation of self-determined, community based action plans to be implemented in the solving of localized problems. In this case, the action plans recommended ways of organizing parent groups that were most responsive to the needs of African American parents.

Research Setting

This study investigated two African American parent groups at different schools in the Urbania School District (a pseudonym), a large urban school district in northern California. The groups were associated with different schools in the Urbania School District in Northern California.

Alpha Group (a pseudonym) was founded and led by middle class African American parents who self-organized around the educational needs of their children. Alpha Group, comprised of African American parents of heterogeneous socio-economic backgrounds, was associated with Hilltop High School, an affluent school, in an upper middle class neighborhood. All except one parent in Alpha Group was African American. Alpha Group had been in existence for fourteen years. It was founded by a group of African American parents who believed that African American students were being systematically excluded from advanced placement (AP) classes at their high school.

At the time, entrance into AP classes was contingent upon a student's grade point average and a teacher recommendation for placement. Under this arrangement, African American students with grade point averages above 3.5 were excluded from AP classes when teachers, most of whom were white, refused to recommend them for AP placement. Hence, AP classes were accessible to white students with lower grade point averages than African American students who were excluded due to their inability to obtain a teacher recommendation. Alpha Group successfully advocated for the elimination of the teacher

recommendation requirement, a change that allowed more African American students to take AP classes.

After its initial success, Alpha Group expanded its advocacy to include successful efforts to increase the number of AP classes taught at the high school as well as to improve instruction in AP classes. The group currently acts as a support group for African American parents, disseminating information about college scholarships and financial aid, student services, school evaluation criteria, and college admissions requirements.

Beta Group was founded by community activists and educational policy makers, using private funding sources, with the purpose of increasing African American parent involvement in the structural aspects of the educational system as well as the daily activities of the classroom. Beta Group was comprised almost exclusively of low socio-economic and working class parents. It was associated with Urban Elementary School, which was situated in a low socio-economic, crime and drug infested neighborhood. Beta group parents were recruited into the program to participate in a ten week curriculum. The program was not designed to be ongoing. Rather, its goal was to prepare parents to assume educational leadership in their homes and at school. At the start of the curriculum, 15 of the 21 parents in Beta Group were African American while six parents were Latino. Unfortunately, midway through this study, all but two of the African American parents dropped out. Possible explanations for this dramatic decline in participation by African American parents will be suggested later.

Parents were recruited into Beta Group and given a $300 stipend for participating. Childcare and meals were provided to allow parents who would otherwise not be able to

attend meetings to participate. Beta Group employed classroom style instruction to give

parents information about their rights, school policies and procedures, school evaluation

criteria and other pertinent topics. The group met in a library on the school campus.

<div align="center">Research Participants</div>

All research participants were informed of the purpose of the study, its

probable benefits, and its limitations. For a sample Participant Consent form, see

(Appendix A). Due to limited time and resources, parent research participants who took

part in dialogues were selected on a first come first serve basis. Six Alpha Group parents

volunteered to participate in dialogues while three Beta Group parents participated. Each

group's respective leaders also participated in dialogues. The research participants will

be described in detail in the parent profiles section of the research findings.

<div align="center">Researcher's Profile</div>

The researcher was a public health professional with twenty-two years of

experience. He had a Masters Degree in Public Administration and a Bachelor of Arts

Degree in Microbiology. He gained his teaching experience when, as a college student,

he founded the Black Children's Learning Laboratory (BCLL). BCLL was designed to

introduce African American children to math, science and African History and Culture in

a fun, nurturing environment. The goal of the program was to motivate children to

pursue careers in science and technology tempered with a commitment to the betterment

of their community. Although many BCLL students came from low socio-economic or

working class families, all were intelligent and easily motivated to learn. All of the

children had parents who desired the best possible educational outcome for their children.

Several BCLL students went on to graduate from college and pursue careers in

engineering, environmental management and other fields. While some of these students

attributed their success to early exposure to math and science, the researcher believed that

much of the students' success could be attributed to strong parental support.

Although the researcher never belonged to a parent group, he received valuable

familial and community support from the African American community. These

experiences gave him reason to believe that organized parent groups may provide

valuable support to parents. However, it should be acknowledged that the researcher's

experiences were dissimilar to parents' experiences within African American parent

groups.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

The researcher observed and video taped three (3) Alpha Group meetings to gain

insight into the group's dynamics. Field notes from parent meetings and notes from

video critique sessions were compiled and analyzed for recurrent themes. The researcher

coded his field notes to identify recurrent themes. Parents were invited to critique the

themes developed from the field note analysis. Alpha Group met on a monthly basis, the

first Thursday of each month. Meetings were approximately 90 minutes in duration.

The researcher conducted dialogues with seven (7) Alpha Group parents. One of

the parents interviewed was the leader of the group. The dialogues were taped and

transcribed. The researcher coded the dialogue transcripts to identify recurrent themes.

After the themes were identified, the researcher contacted each parent participant and

provided them a copy of their dialogue transcript. At that time, the researcher discussed

the themes with each participant to verify that the themes were properly identified. The

researcher also collected all informational handouts, curriculum, flyers, leaflets and other

program descriptions. These documents were analyzed for recurrent themes and those themes were triangulated with field notes and dialogue analysis. After these initial findings were developed, the researcher met with the Alpha Group leader to develop an action plan to improve the organization.

A similar process was carried out with Beta Group. Beta Group met every Thursday. Therefore, the researcher was able to observe five (5) Beta Group meetings. The meetings were observed and field notes were compiled. Two of five (5) meetings were video taped. The researcher coded his field notes for recurrent themes and watched the video taped sessions to gain an understanding of the group's dynamics. Three Beta Group parents and two (2) Beta Group leaders participated in dialogues with the researcher. The researcher coded the dialogue transcripts to identify recurrent themes. The participants were then contacted to discuss the themes and to receive a copy of their dialogue transcript. The researcher also collected written documents pertaining to Beta Group. These documents included flyers, informational brochures, and curriculum. These documents were analyzed for recurrent themes and this data was triangulated with the themes developed through field observations and dialogues.

The dialogues were centered on the following research questions as well as parent's ideas and concerns:

1. How does group membership serve as social and cultural capital to help sustain African American parent involvement?

2. How do African American parent group dynamics create norms, values and modes of action and transmit them to individual parents?

3. What group structures and leadership styles determine the optimum social context for African American parent group sustainability?

For specific questions used to explore the research questions, refer to (Appendix B).

Data Analysis

Text developed from each dialogue with parents and other stake holders was transcribed. The transcripts were read by the researcher and participant to ensure that the content accurately conveyed what was intended. Follow-up dialogues were conducted to gain a more accurate rendering of its intended meaning. The researcher coded the resultant transcripts to develop a description of the social interactions that took place within the parent groups and elucidate recurring themes (Creswell, 2005). Creswell (2005) stated that this process "consists of answering the major research questions and forming an in-depth understanding of the central phenomena" (p. 241). Once the description and themes were developed, the researcher collaborated with participants to explore consensual strategies for organizing sustainable African American parent groups.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings from this study will be discussed as follows: Each of the two parent

groups will be used as a unit of analysis. Data from each group will be discussed

separately to illuminate the organizational strategies and dynamics of each group. The

discussion will begin with an overview of the history of each group followed by a

description of the group's demographics, setting, and dynamics. This Data was used to

address the first research question: How do African American parent group dynamics

create norms, values and modes of action and transmit them to individual members?

Parent profiles, history of involvement, and reasons for participating in their groups

illuminated the answer to the second research question: How does group membership

serve as social capital to help sustain African American parent involvement? Finally,

parent perspectives on their group's leadership spoke to the third research question: What

group structures and leadership styles determine the optimum social context for African

American parent group stability? Taken together, this data answered the over-arching

research question: How do African American parent groups help sustain parent

involvement? Pseudonyms were used for all parent names.

<center>A Struggle for Change: Alpha Group History</center>

As previously noted, Alpha Group was in its 14th year at the time of this study. It

was founded as an outgrowth of struggle for educational equity at Hilltop High School.

According to Buseje, one of its original founders, Alpha Group was founded by a group

of African American parents who banded together to fight what they perceived as racially

motivated exclusion of African American students from Advanced Placement (AP)

courses. To get into AP courses, students were required to have a high grade point average (GPA) and a teacher recommendation. African American students with stellar GPAs were excluded from AP classes due to their inability to get teacher recommendations. These same teachers, most of whom were European American, recommended European and Asian American students for AP courses who had lower GPAs than the African American students. AP courses were desired for two reasons. First, AP courses offered an enriched curriculum which was intellectually stimulating and more rigorous than regular high school curriculum. Secondly, successful completion of AP courses was used by prestigious universities to identify the most able and motivated students for admission. As a result, excluding African American students from AP courses limited their access to quality colleges and universities and by extension reduced their life chances.

Alpha Group was successful at forcing Hilltop High School to drop the requirement for teacher recommendations as a prerequisite for AP courses. However, the group continued to advocate for more AP classes being offered at Hilltop High and that AP course curriculum be improved. These changes benefited not only African American students, but also the entire learning community at Hilltop.

The history of Alpha Group influenced its group identity. Alpha Group members identified themselves as powerful change agents. Buseje explained that because Alpha Group was in its 14th year of advocating for educational equity "Alpha Group's reputation precedes us. People know that there is a black parent group."

Alpha Group Demographics

Alpha Group was founded by well educated, middle class African American

parents. Buseje, one of Alpha Groups original founders, explained:

> One of the ways that Alpha Group came to be a force to be reckoned with was
> that…we had different people doing different things. We had a person who called
> herself a scribe. She was a professional. Most of us had at least one college
> degree or post high school training, so we knew what academic writing was and
> we learned to lay out things in a way and CC. So that's what we did. We grew it
> to the point that there were a couple school board members that would say, "Are
> you on Alpha Groups CC list"? That was before email.

 At the time of this study, Alpha Group was heterogeneous as to socio-economic

class. Abayomi, a medical doctor's wife and stay at home mother, explained:

> I think in Alpha Group, it's diverse. Parents of all socio-economic backgrounds
> are in that. And in fact, there might be a little bit more blue collar; because we are
> almost the last of our counterparts of our African American friends who have
> their kids at Hilltop…They look at us like, "You have your kids up at that school?
> How could you do that?" But I figure if they have the classes they need, and we
> raised our kids well, you can raise you kids well and still not get the outcome, but
> we were very fortunate so far and they have learned from the things that go on in
> that environment.

Most of the parents and guardians who participated in dialogues in this study were

middle class per their economic status. However, the researcher found that Alpha Group

parents shared what Moore (2005) called multi-class identity. According to Moore:

Multi-class identity values the continuation of a connectedness to the lower-income
members of the black community. This connectedness suggests that the upwardly mobile
individuals have not "forgotten where you came from" and are using their resources to
promote advancement of the race. Multi-class identity stands in contrast to another
identity expressed by the black middle class, labeled middle class minded. Middle-class
minded individuals are more accepting of class differences between them and other
blacks and usually surround themselves in environments where most of their peers are
also middle class. (p. 443-444)

 This multi-class identity was exemplified by Buseje, who expressed a "burning desire to give back to the community". Although she and her husband lived a comfortable middle class lifestyle, they never stopped working for the benefit of other African Americans.

Although Alpha Group did not discriminate, after 14 years of existence, it still consists almost entirely of African American parents. The lone exception was a European American mother of mixed race children.

Alpha Group Setting and Group Dynamics

Alpha Group held its meetings in the library of Hilltop High School. The library was clean and had plenty of seating. Buseje and Mwalimu, the wife and husband team leaders of Alpha Group, always provided food for parents and their children. The food was always quite plentiful. There were usually chicken wings, turkey sandwiches, a vegetable platter, and pastry. Beverages were also provided. About midway through each meeting, parents would take a break to eat and carry on conversations.

Although Buseje led Alpha Group meetings, the group was very collegial in that parents often answered each others questions and offered support. Chiku, a very enthusiastic Alpha Group parent, described the group dynamic, "It's a family. When you're at an Alpha Group meeting and somebody asks something particular about their child or a teacher, you will hear in the audience that somebody else will be able to respond and give some insight." Friedleander (1999) described the benefits of collegial parent interaction, "Participation skills should be modeled for parents by peers who engage them in horizontal relations that allow them to learn without fear of being silenced, alienated, or embarrassed" (p. 1). Its collegial atmosphere made Alpha Group an ideal context for highly competent parents to exert their influence on less competent

members. The researcher observed that as parents developed competence, they assumed

the role of adviser and supporter of other parents. As a result, Alpha Group developed a

group identity as highly effective advocates. According to Yan and Lin (2005) this

shared/group identity was a form of social capital.

The following case illuminates Alpha Group's dynamic. Dalila, a big sister

turned guardian to her younger brother due to the death of her mother, expressed her

frustration in trying to motivate her younger brother to get serious about education. Her

frustration was met with immediate support from the other parents. A set of

grandparents, who were raising their grandchildren, referred her to the Family Resource

Center. Dalila was so happy to receive help and support she hugged both grandparents.

The meeting was momentarily paused while hugs were delivered. Then everyone

refocused on other information that was being disseminated. Dalila explained her

reaction:

> I think what shocked me the most was seeing the grandparents up there raising
> their grandchildren. And so when I looked at that, I'm like wow, you never stop
> being a parent (even though I never really started)…You're a grandparent, and
> you're raising your grandchildren. And so seeing them helps me to keep going to
> Alpha Group. Because there's so much I guess they can do, and are willing to
> help me do.

Another feature of Alpha Group meetings was that there were always one or two

representatives from the Hilltop administration on hand to answer parent's questions or

concerns. In fact, shortly after Dalila received her referral from the grandparents, who

were her peers in Alpha Group, she was approached by Ms. Oyo (Pseudonym), a Vice

Principal assigned to Alpha Group. Ms. Oyo assured Dalila that she would get to know

her brother and that she could make sure he stayed on track.

These interactions illuminated the potential for the conversion of ethnic cultural capital into social capital within the context of an African American parent group. The contacts that Dalila made, first with the grandparents' referral to the Family Resource Center, and then with Ms. Oyo, the Vice Principal who promised to get to know her brother, constituted social capital. Stanton-Salazar and Dornbush (1995) proposed that:

> Inclusion into mainstream institutions is aided when cultural and linguistic capital are (*sic*) converted into instrumental relations with institutional agents who actively transmit valued resources, special privileges, and personal assurances of future institutional sponsorship. (p. 3)

They further asserted that:

> Success within the educational system, for working-class and minority youths is dependent on the formation of genuinely supportive relationships with institutional agents….individuals who have the capacity and commitment to transmit directly or to negotiate the transmission of institutional resources and opportunities. (p. 1)

Based on these suppositions, Dalila's new contacts constituted social capital which could benefit her brother.

Buseje, who was the face of Alpha Group, talked about how she worked to build relationships with institutional agents:

> It's building relationships; and you have to be committed to doing it. There is no prescription. And it can't come from people who are not committed to doing it. I make it my business to get to know counselors and the administrators. I think it's every parent's right that you get to know the people that are going to be involved with your children's education…I talked to every counselor and administrator…And generally when I say go to talk to a person, I've already talked to that person...So in general I have permission from my person and I've gotten it ahead of time.

Buseje's commitment to building relationships with institutional agents was one of the key factors that made Alpha Group effective at empowering African American parent involvement.

Alpha Group Parents

Abayomi.

Abayomi in Yoruba means pleasant meeting. The pseudonym fit this parent

because she was very pleasant and outgoing. Abayomi was a medical doctor's wife and

stay at home mother of three children. Abayomi valued the fact that her children

interacted with children of different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds while

attending Hilltop High School. When asked how her children benefited from attending a

multicultural, socio-economically diverse public school, she replied:

> Oh definitely, my daughter who is a sophomore in college, she thanks me all the
> time, "Mom thank you for letting me go to Hilltop High School"…And my son,
> we talk about the education they may have gotten if they had gone to prep school.
> And he says, "But Mom, we got an education that is not in books. We got a real
> life education about different kinds of people." They relate to everybody. Their
> friends are on Bancroft, 98th, Brookfield and they can hang with that crowd like
> they can hang with their soccer buddies from Oakville (pseudonym for a wealthy
> suburban town). And they got their Asian friends; we go to the hole-in-the-wall
> places in Chinatown to get the mango I don't know what….They have friends
> from El Salvador, and it's so enriching. With all this negativity going on, they
> really learned about you know, the cultures."

Abayomi described her history of involvement in her children's education:

> From preschool on …just being very aware of what's going on and what they
> need from the teacher by asking questions…And we moved to the neighborhood
> so that we could do public school…Being involved in the various activities of the
> PTA. We had a language league…I was involved in that. I went on every field
> trip, was room mom multiple times, sometimes for two children at a time, I
> worked in the library.

Abayomi's involvement enabled early detection and intervention of her son's

learning disability. As a result, she was able to hire a learning specialist to help him

overcome dyslexia. Her advocacy, however, was not limited to her own children.

Abayomi explained how she was able to effect change and advocate for several African

American students in a predominately White elementary school:

> Always there keeping an eye out because oftentimes I found that some of the
> volunteers or even some of the teachers were a little more hostile to the African
> American boys. And once they would see me looking at them, then they would
> ease up a little bit and try to approach whatever the situation was with a little
> more kindness and understanding.

This level of advocacy was indicative of multi-class identity (Moore, 2005). Abayomi

was not only concerned about her own son, but was also concerned with the education of

African American students in general. This mindset was a recurrent theme amongst

Alpha Group parents.

When asked why she valued an African American parent group. Abayomi

mentioned that she didn't feel as welcome when interacting with European American

parents:

> Well I think when that you go into the auditorium when you drop your kids off for
> kindergarten, for the most part you didn't feel as welcome as white people. Say a
> white person walks into the room, they're like "Oh, you're new to our school; it's
> so good to have you here. You should get involved with this, or sign up for that."
> And then you walk in and they just kind of look at you. Um, well this is what we
> have available. I don't think that there's anything really there. There wasn't
> really that connection there."

The feeling of being unwelcome by European American parents and school

administrators was a recurrent theme. This theme contradicted Diamond and Gomez

(2005) finding that "Black middle class parents were, for the most part, pleased with the

education that their children were receiving and perceived schools to be encouraging their

involvement" (p. 410). In fact, data from this study suggest that middle class African

American parents often felt unwelcome in schools and situated themselves as advocates

for systemic school reform. Indeed, Alpha Group was formed for that specific purpose.

According to Abayomi, a lot of the European American parents' discomfort stemmed from their desire to believe that institutional racism did not exist:

> I think the disconnection…with some of the white parents, is that as they perceive that we may walk around with a chip on our shoulders…If I would mention something about the racism that my kids went through they were like in shock "Oh no, that couldn't be. I'd never have that happen to my children." Well that separated me from them in terms of our friendships; it was just about business.

For most Alpha Group parents, racism was not a thing of the past; rather, it was something they sought to protect their children from on an ongoing basis. Abayomi described what she perceived as a racist incident:

> In his AP English class, my son had to write a paper about The Color Purple…and the teacher didn't give him his grade back. He went to see her, and she said "This is a really good paper, there's a lot of passion. I don't think you wrote it. You just haven't written with this much passion about other subjects. And so I'm wondering where this was coming from." And he said, "Well this is something I could relate to…This was dealing with my history, things…that people of color had to go through. And so this was something that I could think about, and feel something about, and that's why I wrote like that".

Abayomi perceived this incident as racist because she perceived that there were low expectations for African American males at Hilltop High School. She explained, "I felt that…the African American boys we had in some of the classrooms, they weren't expected to do much". Buseje concurred, "Still to this day, some teachers will say, 'that's good enough.' Would you tell an Asian parent that a C or a B is okay? The expectation still in so many ways is less." This sentiment was echoed by other Alpha Group parents. Based on these perceptions, the researcher would propose modifying the Lareau and Horvat (1999) contention that while "educators are relentless in their demands that parents display positive, supportive approaches to education. The historical legacy of racial discrimination…makes it far more difficult for black parents to comply with such

demands" (p. 38). Data from this study suggested that the perceptions of African American parents regarding persistent institutionalized racism should be taken into account to accurately assess the difficulty African American parent's face in supporting schools.

Given her perception that Hilltop High School was a racist institution, Abayomi valued Alpha Group as a place where African American parents could go to address their unique issues. She described how Alpha Group helped to stem the exposure of African American students to teachers who were perceived to be racist. She asserted "We have to be aware of the teachers who are going to be negative to our children. And so this gives us…a forum to discuss; who are these teachers who are blatantly being racist and hostile to our children?

This study data indicated that Alpha Group parents came together based on what they had in common; what they had most in common was a need to overcome perceived persistent institutionalized racism that threatened to undermine their children's education and by extension limit their life chances. Forsyth (2006) asserted that, "experience of being in a minority apparently increases the salience of the social identity based on that membership" (p. 93). He further asserted that:

> Individuals who identify with a group take on more and more of the prototypical features of the members of that group, they may also adopt the attitudes, preferences, and the behaviors that they think typify the group. These attitudes are then likely to influence their behavior, particularly when their membership in the group is salient to them. (p. 93)

According to Yan and Lin (2005) the shared/social identity derived from Alpha Group membership was a form of social capital. Their shared identity as effective advocates

and change agents enabled Alpha Group parents to organize to meet their collective and

individual goals.

Ajani.

Ajani is a heroic Yoruba name which means, one who fights for possessions.

This pseudonym fit this parent because he was relentless in his efforts to provide a

quality education for his daughter. At the time of this study, Ajani was months away

from retirement as a teamster. He told his story:

> I'm 56 years old man…I take care of myself though. I don't do no drugs. I got a 36 inch waist, big old chest, big arms. I take care of myself. I definitely don't do no- I haven't done any drugs since the 70's. I was in the air force. In the air force I was communications repair, which was radio assembly machines, letter machines, things like that. And when I got out I went to college for TV and stereo repair. I passed with honors.

Ajani's involvement in Alpha Group was an example of the conversion of

ethnic/cultural capital into fully activated social capital. When he joined Alpha Group,

his ethnic/cultural capital was valued by key members of the group and easily converted

into social capital. He explained:

> Buseje and I have one thing in common. We were both raised in the south, in Louisiana. So a lot of our values and the way we feel about life, it's all, we're all about the same. I respect her for that. She held onto her values that her parents taught her and her community taught her when she was growing up…Hopefully she respects me for the same thing.

When asked how effective an educational advocate he was Ajani responded:

> Very effective. To the point to where I push to make sure that she has the things that she is supposed to have as far as the right classes, the right teachers, and that her homework is done; also, with this peer pressure thing that's going on, I make sure that she has the right information to deal with peer pressure.

However, like many other Alpha Group parents, Ajani ran into barriers to educational

equity. He explained how membership in Alpha Group helped him overcome:

I mean the roughest struggle was dealing with the Urbania Public School system…Urbania Public school system wanted to put our daughter in just any school that they saw fit. However, because it was a new school, I went down and I sat in the classrooms…I watched what was going on. They had their after school, evening events and I attended that. And from what I seen, I was totally disgusted with the lack of respect that the students showed the teachers and the lack of respect that teachers required from the students…I watched kids wearing stereo headphones while class is going on, and drinking sodas, rummaging through potato chip bags, eating potato chips…We got on the ball to work on getting our daughter out of that school. It took us a year and a half to get her out of that school…That's when we talked to Mwalimu and Buseje and they told us they would help us to get our daughter into Hilltop.

Buseje activated social capital, her relationships with institutional agents, to gain access to funds of knowledge not easily accessible to Ajani. This information was critical to his efforts to gain access to Hilltop High School. Ajani explained:

When we first went to Hilltop to see about her getting in there, the teachers, the principles, or whoever it was, the school administration, told us that there wasn't any room. Buseje stepped up and said "Oh yes." She said, "I'll tell you who you go talk to." And she told us the name of the person to talk to, and I forget where they was, downtown Urbania, the building down there. We talked to that person; and they checked the numbers and she said they did have space… And at that point it was a lot of pushing.

Ajani perceived that his difficulty getting his daughter into Hilltop High School was in some part due to institutionalized racism. He asserted, "From what I understood, at that particular time, they didn't want to admit any more African American students. They wanted either Asians or Whites." He also perceived that the institutionalized racism was covert:

This thing that I'm telling you is not something they said out in the open. But this is a feeling that you get. Because now, during the process of our trying to get her into Hilltop they were admitting white students. Understand what I'm saying? So the feeling was that they didn't want any African American students up there. They had what you call, a quote-un-quote "quota".

Ajani's struggle illuminated several recurrent themes. 1) Working class and low socio-economic African American parents wanted their children to succeed in school and

were as likely as their middle class peers to be involved in their children's education. 2)

Although these parents were extremely involved, their advocacy was sometimes less

efficacious than their middle class peers because they lacked adequate social capital,

often in the form of contacts with institutional agents who controlled access to funds of

knowledge and were willing to advocate on their behalf. 3) Alpha Group functioned to

bridge the gap between the school and community by forging links between African

American parents and institutional agents. 4) Multi-class African Americans, that is,

those of middle class socio-economic status who nonetheless identified with their less

affluent peers, were often instrumental in forging said links (Moore, 2005).

 Chiku.

 Chiku in Kiswahili means chatterer. This parent was very talkative and had a lot

to say. The European mother of mixed race children, Chiku was the only non-African

American parent in Alpha Group. She explained why she was a member of Alpha

Group:

> Alpha Group, in my opinion, is more interested in the general welfare of all of the
> kids. Alpha Group obviously is focusing on the kids whose parents are involved
> but it could be any of the parents that came in and said, "We need some
> assistance." And they would be met…by people who are genuinely concerned
> about the kids. Whereas with many of the other groups that I've been involved
> with over my how ever many years in Urbania Public Schools, you get people in
> positions where really their only concern is their kids or just elite groups.

> Despite not being African American, Chiku felt at home in Alpha Group. She

explained:

> Anything that I've ever brought to the table at Alpha Group, any concerns, they're
> always addressed. So that's part of what Alpha Group has done. But I'll still tell
> you that Alpha Group has a whole bunch of positive things that they're trying to
> do…They bring us grades; they hook us up so that we can talk to counselors. It's
> always very inspiring, enlightening, empowering, positive, good things, good
> family. We're all a family; we're all equally embraced.

From her description of Alpha group it appeared that Chiku perceived that Alpha Group

was a safe place to bring her concerns.

Due to their mixed heritage, Chiku's children were subjected to institutionalized

racism. She described an incident when her son decided to grow his hair out and as a

result looked more ethnic:

> My son, although he was a straight A student and in classes for college credit,
> when he decided to let his hair grow out and he was noting how differently he was
> treated when he looked ethnic. And he said, "This is really a learning
> experience." He said he was having problems in one of his classes and that the
> teacher told him that he would be failing. And I contacted the teacher for a sit
> down talk. "Why is my son going to fail? He's never had any problems with his
> education before." The teacher told me, and I have documentation, I said wait a
> minute, "Does my son participate?" "Yes he does." "Does he raise his hand?"
> "Yes he does." The teacher agrees. "Will you call on him?" "No I won't." "But
> isn't classroom participation part of it?" Teacher agrees, "Yes it is." "Well if it's
> part of it and you're saying he's not participating, how are you failing him when
> he's attempting to participate?" The teacher sits back in his chair and says, "Well
> just look at him." "What do you mean look at him?" "Look at the way he looks.
> Look at his hair. Look at his body. Just look at him. If I call on him he will be
> the vortex of attention and take away from the class."

As with her African American peers, Alpha Group provided a context in which

Chiku's social capital could be activated. She identified with them as a parent and

advocate for children who were subject to unfair treatment. The other parents could

relate to her concerns in a way that other European parents could not. This shared

identity informed their motif operandi as it pertained to Hilltop High School and enabled

their sustained involvement. This finding confirmed Forsyth's (2006) supposition that:

> Individuals who identify with a group take on more and more of the prototypical
> features of the members of that group, they may also adopt the attitudes,
> preferences, and the behaviors that they think typify the group. These attitudes
> are then likely to influence their behavior, particularly when their membership in
> the group is salient to them. (p. 93)

Kamau.

Kamau means quiet warrior. This pseudonym fits this grandparent because he was very low key. He liked to work behind the scenes. He explained, "That's how I am. I'll get it done; but I ain't going to be out front doing a whole bunch of stuff. Get me behind the door or however we want to make this work, I can do that."

Kamau was a spry elder with a deep commanding baritone. Having retired from a career as Director of Budget at a major university medical center, his principle occupation was bass fishing. According to Kamau, in addition to their comfortable middle class home, he and his wife owned a lake cabin where the fishing was always good. Having years of experience managing complex bureaucracies, Kamau was well adept at getting what he needed from school staff. Nevertheless, Kamau perceived a unique benefit from membership in Alpha Group:

> I will speak more freely at an African American parent group than I would speak at a regular PTA meeting. The few that I have attended (PTA meetings) it's so much posturing and trying to run it according to Robert's rule that it's a waste of my good time to attend. You get bogged down in committee report and a lot of other things that go on…Whereas in an African American group, I find that I can speak what's on my mind, not in a negative tone but in a proactive way that would be helpful or increase thought for the whole group.

Kamau valued the ethnic cultural capital of African American parents. His comments indicated that he believed that ethnic cultural capital was a basis upon which African American parents could come together and that ethnic cultural capital could be converted into social capital. His explained:

> In the bigger picture I think it's really essential that as Black folks we have some of that breakout, get-together time, where from our cultural perspectives, we can break bread together, we can talk. Because culturally we all have some common rights. And sharing that, on a cultural basis can really bridge back on the social side of things…because just because socially you are "X" culturally you may be "Y" and as a people we've been struggling with that the whole time. And some

of us…we can do pretty good, others of us have not bridged that gap. So I think that one needs to just keep that in mind at all times that wherever we are, we can at least break bread and talk across the fence and get something going. Everybody is not going to connect but if one person connects or if three people connect, then that's a win.

Kamau's perspective, expressed in various ways by Alpha Group parents, confirmed the researcher's supposition that African American parent groups served as a context wherein the ethnic cultural capital of African American parents was converted into social capital. It followed that, once acquired and activated, this social capital helped to sustain parent involvement.

Dalila.

As previously noted, Dalila was parenting her younger brother as the result of the death of her mother. As one of the youngest and most inexperienced members of Alpha Group, Dalila was challenged by her role as mentor and guardian. Although she wasn't middle class, like some of her Alpha Group peers, she was extremely motivated to ensure a quality education for her brother. She described her motivation:

I had to force myself because I'm the kind of person…I just don't like to cause friction. But when I realized that I can be a lazy sister, guardian, and not care, and let him do whatever it is he wants to do…or I could stand up for him and show him I care. I love him. So I just made an effort. God gave me the strength I need to take care of my brother and make sure he makes it through life.

Despite being a full time student and working full time, Dalila managed to be involved with her brother's education. She described her involvement, "I went with him on registering for school. I made sure I found out who his counselor was. I went and I met all his teachers. I was a Parent Patrol volunteer."

Dalila learned about Alpha Group when she went to Hilltop High School to register her brother. She said, "Anything for Black folks was my thing. And I wanted to

see what they offered to help me in raising a young Black man." Alpha Group helped

Dalila connect with needed services. She explained:

> The school has a lot to offer…a lot of things I didn't know even when I was going
> to school…stuff that's going on that's available for students. I just didn't know
> how to ask; who to go to…Alpha Group seemed to have things to offer more—a
> lot of information about education. I met two grandparents there who are raising
> their grandchildren and now I'm involved in the Family Support Services. And so
> I met a lady who's our social worker who's helping me and Rafiki (pseudonym),
> her husband is Rafiki's mentor.

As previously discussed, Dalila's case illuminated a recurrent theme, that of competent

and effective members of Alpha Group helping to increase the social capital (in the form

of connections to institutional agents) of less effective members to enable their sustained

involvement in the education of their children.

Another important finding related to Dalila was that she shared the multi-class

mentality of her more affluent peers (Moore, 2005). That is, she identified with African

American people and wanted to contribute to the betterment of her community. She

described her ambition to organize a school for African American youth:

> I'm going to school because I want to start my own business. My dream is to
> open up an academy. I will be teaching children…basically teaching them how to
> survive. And it will be primarily African Americans. I'm not trying to do the
> world; I just want to get my own people…I pray I live long enough to open my
> school and get it started and see it through so it can pass on because we need it.

At forty years of age, Dalila still dreamed of making a contribution to improve the life

chances of African Americans. The desire, of African American parents to make a

positive contribution, not only to their children's education, but to the education of

African American children in general, was a recurrent theme.

Ayo.

Ayo was a mother of three children and a new grandmother. She had a B.A. degree in Biology and was back in school to become a registered nurse. She taught high school biology for seven years. Like Dalila, Ayo was a member of the forty plus club. Yet, despite her age, she had a keen desire to advance her education. Her strong belief in education probably fueled her desire to ensure educational equity for her children. She described how a mentor inspired her involvement:

> I've been involved in my kid's education since they were in preschool. I was doing a parent co-op when my kids were in preschool. Gertrude Brown, she educated us. She would say, "You need to be with your kids. And then I just learned to study the issues on my own and get involved with SSC and PTA.

She described how her involvement continued through high school:

> Most times, what I notice is that parents leave at the high school level, they're not really involved. But with them…even though they hated Hilltop High School, I was involved. Sometimes I would sit in the class. I would go into the class and watch…You really, really have to be an advocate for your kids, whether they're in special Ed or what ever; you have to be an advocate.

After years of involvement that included stints as PTA President and on SSC, Ayo evolved into a mentor. She described her evolution:

> I got more involved with school site council up at Hilltop these past couple years...I started getting more and more involved with the politics…and I kind of stuck with it and educating other parents. Telling other parents, "You need to go to school site council because that's how you follow the money." And a lot of parents don't know how they're spending the money.

Even though Ayo had a long history of involvement prior to joining Alpha Group she still valued group membership. She talked about how Alpha Group helped, "They taught us how to get scholarships, the A-G requirements. I didn't know anything about A-G requirements. I learned that from Alpha Group. Alpha Group taught us…who the right people are, and to talk to those people."

One such person was Ms. Aisha (pseudonym), a counselor that Ayo met at an

Alpha Group meeting. As a result of this meeting and the relationship that ensued, Ayo

was able to help her daughter graduate on time. She explained:

> Ms. Aisha was there, she was helpful because she was my daughter's counselor.
> And what happened was, we found out my daughter was 5 credits short from
> graduating…We didn't know and nobody told us that she had to take an
> additional class to make up 5 credits…but it turns out she needed another class to
> graduate. And so we went to Ms. Aisha, because she was at Alpha Group all the
> time, and Ms. Aisha found a way that she could do an independent study class
> through the Adult School. She knocked it out within 3 weeks…doing the
> independent studies and got the credits. But if I didn't know about that, she
> wouldn't have been able to walk across the stage.

Ayo's story illustrated the recurrent theme of the activation of social capital in the form

of a connection to an institutional agent who controlled a fund of knowledge (Stanton-

Salazar, 1997; Stanton-Salazar & Dornsbusch, 1995). This activation of social capital

was facilitated by her membership in Alpha Group.

Buseje and Mwalimu.

Buseje and Mwalimu were the wife and husband team that led Alpha Group.

They were two of its original founders and were involved with the group for fourteen

years.

Buseje means "ask me" in Yao. This pseudonym fit well because Buseje was a

constant source of accurate information. She described her mission:

Giving information and sharing information and meeting parents' needs to make sure
they have what they need to help their kid succeed. That's why all of our meetings focus
on giving them information…I'm not going to waste your time. This is information
that's valuable for you to translate to your child. Hopefully you'll meet other parents so
that outside of Alpha Group you may have some similar interests or similar concerns that
now you can network in that way.

Buseje was the face of the organization. She spent a lot of her time and energy

networking with educators to make sure that Alpha Group was always provided with

accurate and up-to-date information. Her relationships enabled her to have institutional

agents at every Alpha Group Meeting. All three group meetings observed by the

researcher had institutional agents as key note speakers.

Mwalimu is the Kiswahili term for teacher. Mwalimu was an Electrical Engineer

turned Orthopedic Surgeon. Success in both careers afforded him and Buseje a

comfortable upper middle class life style. The pseudonym, Mwalimu, was selected for

this parent and co-leader of Alpha Group because, despite his challenging schedule, he

managed to take time out to tutor students in math and physics. Buseje explained:

> He loves to tutor and with our close proximity to Hilltop, my husband has a habit
> of telling parents, once they come up to him and say, "my child has a problem
> with math", he says, "send them to the house." So for a while, especially since
> our son has been away three years, we had students come so that Mwalimu could
> tutor. He loves to tutor. He loves math. He even did a lecture in my oldest son's
> physics class at Hilltop. He planned it for a month and a half---all the
> experiments, had a great time. The kids asked him to come back and be their
> teacher. Maybe it's good.

The researcher surmised that Mwalimu's actions were not based solely on his love for

tutoring but that Mwalimu had a deep concern for the educational development of

African American students and was dedicated to serving the African American

community. Bomani's daughter was one of the many children who benefited from

Mwalimu's tutoring. He shared his perception of Mwalimu:

> When I had a chance to do things I was out there partying (laughs). You know,
> but this brother stayed in school, he stayed in school kept his nose to the grind
> wheel, and handled his business; I take my hat off to him…because, you know, a
> lot of us we get a little bit money and we don't want to be with our own people.
> Even with all his credentials he doesn't look down at me as though I'm less than
> he is. He treats me just like I'm his equal.

Buseje and Mwalimu typified the multi-class mentality (Moore, 2005). Despite their

middle class status, they identified with African Americans of all socio-economic classes

and sought to improve educational outcomes for their children. Buseje stated that, "We

both have this sort of burning desire to impart what we have and share with others." As

previously stated, this multi-class identification was recurrent in the Alpha Group

parents. All of the parents who participated in dialogues expressed a desire to help

African American children other than their own. This shared value was a uniting force in

Alpha Group that enabled group cohesion and sustainability.

<div align="center">Alpha Group Leadership</div>

Initially, when asked what kind of leader she was, Buseje, claimed that she didn't

consider herself a leader. At that point the researcher described transformational,

transactional and servant leadership styles. Buseje clarified her position:

> I think you can lead people by first accepting being second. You can't lead people
> if you're always in front because you don't see them. So…what I want to do is
> give parents what we know to help parents have the tools to help their students.
> So to me from your description it would be more servant leadership. I'm giving
> them the tools they need and hopefully it would transfer to their students and to
> other parents.

According to Greenleaf (1998) Buseje and Mwalimu were servant leaders because they

could answer the following questions affirmatively:

> Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier,
> wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And
> what is the effect on the least privileged of our society; will they benefit, or, at
> least, not be further deprived? (p. 19)

Buseje's notion of "being second" evoked the teachings of Jesus Christ, a prototypical

servant leader, who said "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the

servant of all" (Blanchard, 1998, p. 27). Through their work as servant leaders, Buseje

and Mwalimu set a standard for Alpha Group members.

Other members of Alpha Group followed suite. Kamau discussed how he reached out as a servant leader. He talked about how he distributed information about A-G classes, the requirements to graduate ready to attend college, to two ex-convicts who had bright siblings starting high school. He also routinely contacted his grandson's friends' parents to make sure they stayed on track to graduate and attend college. Abayomi talked about how she looked out for the African American boys at Hilltop High School because she thought they were being singled out for abuse. Ayo discussed mentoring a parent from her church and encouraging other parents to get involved with their children's education. She also discussed looking out for the children of parents who were not able to be at school. Chiku stated that:

Alpha Group has offered me the ability to share their support with other parents and with other children. So when somebody comes to me with an issue, whether it's a parent or a child, I tell them, "Contact Alpha Group. They've got information." And it's amazing because sometimes people have a change of heart; so there's some power behind their understanding that Alpha Group isn't just going to let things go.

Even Dalila, the youngest and most inexperienced member of Alpha Group, was hoping to one day open a school to teach African American children how to survive. These findings indicated that members of Alpha Group had indeed passed the test for servant leadership.

Buseje and Mwalimu's servant-leadership was ultimately transforming to their followers. Burns (1995) described transforming leadership:

Such leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality….Their purposes, which may have started out as separate but related…become fused. Power bases are linked not as counterweights but as mutual support for common purpose.

While parents may have come to Alpha Group to solve their individual problems, after exposure to the group, they were motivated to advocate for children other than their own. This was evident in the fact that many parents attended Alpha Group meetings who had no immediate concerns about their children's welfare, but were interested in what was going on with African American students in general.

<div align="center">Alpha Group Action Plan</div>

The data indicated that Alpha Group effectively served the needs of the parents who actively participated in the group. Likewise, there were approximately 400 parents on the Alpha Group e-mail list who received all Alpha Group news and updates. Additionally, the Alpha Group website contained most of the information and deadlines that were made available to those parents who regularly attended meetings in downloadable format. The question that still remained was: How could Alpha Group reach out to African American parents who for various reasons were not involved with their children's education?

Alpha Group parents proposed several ways to engage African American parents. Ayo suggested developing mentor relationships with young parents. Kamau and Dalila emphasized face to face, personalized contact. The researcher observed that parents were already effectively utilizing these strategies to the extent possible and it was agreed that they should continue their practice.

Ajani stated that he spread news about Alpha Group by word of mouth, but was also interested in the possibility of setting up chapters of Alpha Group at additional sites. Buseje expressed interest in setting up additional Alpha Group sites. In fact, she had attempted to set up a parent group at another high school. However, she emphasized that

parents' needs were site specific. As a result, she stressed the need for at least two or three African American parents, who knew the internal politics of each school site, to spearhead each group. From her perspective, localized leadership was required to sustain a parent group. She expressed interest in identifying and working with those parents.

<center>Summary of Alpha Group Findings</center>

The data illustrated that Alpha Group parents thrived in a collegial environment that allowed the free flow of ideas and information. Within this group context, African American parents were able to come together based on ethnic cultural capital that consists, in large part, of their shared experience of institutional racism and their desire to protect their children. Ethnic cultural capital enabled Alpha Group parents to bridge socio-economic differences and to create social capital in the form of linkages to institutional agents who were capable of affectively advocating on their behalf. Although most Alpha Group parents were middle class, most had a multi-class mind set (Moore, 2005). That is, they identified with African Americans of all socio-economic backgrounds and sought to improve educational achievement and by extension the life chances of all African American children.

Alpha Group was led by servant leaders whose leadership style passed Greenleafs (1996) test affirmatively:

> Do the served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect of the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived? (Greenleaf, 1996, p. 19)

Furthermore, their servant leadership was also transformational in that all of the Alpha Group members adopted the service norm. Given the enthusiastic participation of Alpha Group members, this servant/transformational leadership style was optimal.

Starting From Scratch: Beta Group History

Beta Group was founded by community activists working to improve conditions in a low socio-economic section of Urbania. It was funded by a $3 million grant from private foundations. The original scope of the grant focused on several issues impacting the community including housing and environmental justice. The community activist used education as a means of engaging the community. However, education was but one of a number of concerns that the group sought to address.

Three community based organizations collaborated with Urbania School District to create the curriculum and pedagogy for parent empowerment classes. The program was designed to be held in 2 ten week cycles. Parents who successfully completed the first ten week cycle were invited to participate in a second cycle. For the weekly topics covered in each cycle of Beta Group (see Appendix D).

The community activist set about recruiting parent participants by offering meals, childcare and $500 stipends. Their goal was to conduct cross-cultural parent education classes designed to empower parent participation in schools. This recruitment strategy had mixed results. By the third year of the program, word spread in the community that $500 stipends were being given out. As a result, ½ of program recruits were not parents. This issue forced the community organizers to rethink their approach. The stipends were reduced to $300 to be distributed in two installments, one midway through the program and another upon graduation. Still, the fact that parents were paid to attend Beta Group continued to be an issue.

Both Beta Group staff and program participants voiced concern that stipends might have been the primary motivation of many parents to participate. When asked why

most of the African American parents left Beta Group, Folami, an African American

parent who was responsible for recruiting Beta Group parents responded, "Because a lot

of them were just here for the stipend. Most of the time you get African American

parents out when you say stipend or food." Mtupeni, Director of Beta Group, asserted

that "about two thirds of the group simply came there for a stipend." Rehema, the

primary facilitator of Beta Group, explained the loss of African American parents by

asserting "I think we recruited some women who were not in it for learning. They heard

that they would get a check and they came to get a check." This finding indicated that

giving stipends as an enabling strategy, while effective as a recruitment incentive, was

not effective at helping to sustain African American parent involvement.

At the time of this study Beta Group was in its fifth year of existence. However,

the group was meeting for the first time at Urban Elementary School. The community

organizers had been trying for a year and a half to get permission to organize parents at

Urban Elementary but were unable to gain support for their efforts until an influential

parent successfully advocated for space. According to that parent, efforts to organize

Beta Group at Urban Elementary were stalled due to personality conflicts between the

Urban Elementary principal and Beta Group's Director. The principal agreed to allow

Beta Group to meet at the school when he was assured that he would have limited

involvement with the daily functioning of Beta Group. Beyond the allocation of space to

meet, there was no commitment on the part of the school principal to participate in or

support Beta Group.

Unlike Alpha Group, Beta Group members had no history together prior to the

onset of their ten week course. Furthermore, Beta Group had no history at Urban

Elementary School prior to the onset of the course. As a result, the formation of a group identity was a considerably more challenging undertaking than what was observed in Alpha Group. In fact, the first four weeks of Beta Group's 10 week cycle were dedicated solely to building community. This process was problematic because African American parents, Latino parents, and Beta Group staff all had different ideals about how to build a successful community. Importantly, all parties were not invited into the community building process as equal partners. Mtupeni insisted that parents assume the role of learners. However, she was not sensitive to the validating funds of knowledge that parents brought to the group by way of their personal life experiences. The fifth meeting of Beta Group was what Mtupeni, Beta Group's Director called a "get the hell out" meeting. At that point she was upset or disappointed that the African American parents "didn't identify as much as learners and they kind of had the attitude that they already knew." At that meeting, Mtupeni reiterated agreements that were made at the outset of the course and made it clear that parents should not return to class if they could not comply with the agreed upon rules. Eight of ten African American parents did not return to class.

<div align="center">Beta Group Demographics</div>

Initially there were 10 African American parents and six Latino parents in Beta Group. Most of the participants were female. There was one African American male and one Latino male. All of the parents in Beta Group had low socio-economic status. At least two of the parents were ex-convicts. Several Beta Group parents had lost children to street violence.

Beta Group Setting and Group Dynamics

Beta Group held its meetings in the cafeteria of Urban Elementary School.
Meetings commenced with a meal at 5:30 PM. Parents ate and fed their children.   At
6:00 PM, the children went to child care while their parents met. The researcher
observed that the Latino and African American parents usually sat on opposite sides of
the room creating a large space between the groups. This spatial arrangement did not
encourage cross cultural dialogue because parents would have to raise their voices to be
heard clearly from across the room. The fact that most of the parents, African American
and Latino, were monolingual was another impediment to cross cultural communication.
The inability to communicate across linguistic barriers made it difficult to develop a
group identity.

Beta Group had a Spanish translator who utilized special translation equipment to
facilitate communication between Latino and African American parents. However, the
translation equipment malfunctioned after the first session and as a result the verbal
translation process stemmed the flow of conversation. The researcher supposed that this
was problematic for African American parents due to their culturally based call and
response communication style. Many of the African American parents appeared
distracted during the translation process.

The researcher noticed that certain groups of parents arrived and departed
together indicating that social networks were already in place within the group even in
the absence of a holistic group identity. These connections were made clear when groups
of African American parents arrived late or departed together before group discussion

was concluded. Tardiness and absenteeism was a constant problem amongst the African American parents. The Latino parents were usually present and on time.

A four page pamphlet describing the Beta Group curriculum stated:

Beta Group was based on the principles of popular education. The popular education model uses participants' history and experience to create opportunities for dialogue around issues affecting their families and community. Rather than having parents become passive learners, it takes a participatory approach to learning. This approach focuses on using the participants' existing skills and life experiences as a starting point for their learning.

The popular education model was the central theme in Beta Group pedagogy. By way of example, the researcher participated in a class exercise that was designed to allow participants to get to know one another. In this exercise, parents presented their life maps to the group. The life maps displayed five life challenges and five high points for each program participant. The researcher and one of the facilitators presented their life maps to open up the session. This was done to let the parents know that if they were being asked to open themselves up to scrutiny by the group they could expect the facilitator and researcher to do the same.

This exercise was very revealing. The first African American parent to speak described losing two sons to street violence. A second African American parent had also lost two sons. An African American grandmother, who was raising two grandchildren despite being restricted to a wheel chair, talked about being homeless on multiple occasions. Her high point was securing a home for her family. These stories illuminated the level of violence and depravity that Beta Group parents were exposed to. Based on

these stories and observations, the researcher surmised that some Beta Group parents

might be desensitized to violence. The fact that three African American parents got up to

leave class in the middle of the presentations seemed to support that supposition. Not

surprisingly, the parents that got up to leave before the presentations were done did not

complete the program. In fact, these parents didn't return to class after the first stipend

check was dispersed.

<div align="center">Beta Group Parents and Group Leaders</div>

Mtupeni (Beta Group Director)

Mtupeni in Kiswahili means not too welcome. This pseudonym fit the Director of

Beta Group because she was not well liked by Beta Group parents. She was Beta

Group's fundraiser and fiscal agent. In her position, Mtupeni controlled the disbursement

of funds, including payment of employees and stipends to parents. The researcher

surmised that Mtupeni had the power to hire and fire staff and to determine whether

parents met program requirements to receive a stipend.

Mtupeni was extremely active in the politics of education in West Urbania. In

addition to being Director of Beta Group, she was also Executive Director of the West

Urbania Educational Task Force. Her husband was an attorney and past School Board

President. At the time of this study, Mtupeni was running for the School Board.

Mtupeni and her husband chose to live in West Urbania, a low socio-economic,

crime and drug infested neighborhood, despite their middle class backgrounds. They

exemplified the multi-class attitude (Moore, 2005). They identified with African

Americans of all socio-economic levels and sought to develop that community as a

whole. When asked about her middle class background Mtupeni challenged the idea that

a middle class background would preclude her from being an effective leader within a

low-income community:

> I'm wondering if you're saying that because I'm middle class and I'm a teacher and I'm bringing this information that somehow that's a barrier for learning. And I haven't found that to be a barrier for other people, poor, addicted, oppressed African American folks. I've found some people being incredibly open to wanting to learn. So to me the prerequisite around the effectiveness of this project and this process is where people are sitting.

Mtupeni's goal was to create educational opportunities for the children of low

socio-economic parents so that they could become middle class. She asserted:

> In many parent groups and organizations that are dealing with low-income families, that's kind of the point. The point is we're trying to bring you up. And recognize that you may not be middle income, you may not be this, but your child actually has an opportunity to do it. So we're going to show you the chart of: If they get a GED, this is how much money they're going to make. If they get a high school diploma, this is how much money they're going to make. So we can break it down to straight economics. So you want to talk about middle class?

Mtupeni's approach to African American parents, while well intentioned, was a

major stumbling block to building a unified parent group because many parents perceived

her to be condescending. In fact, condescension was consistently cited as the reason

African American parents left Beta Group before completing the program. When asked

why African American parents left Beta Group, Isoke, one of only two African parents

who completed Beta Group's ten week cycle explained, "they felt that they were being

looked at in a condescending way. Like you (Mtupeni) think you're better than me and I

don't have to take that".

Folami means respect and honor me in Yoruba. This pseudonym was appropriate

for this parent because no matter what she did to benefit Beta Group, she never managed

to gain the respect of its leaders. Her advocacy resulted in Beta Group being allowed to

organize parents at Urban Elementary School. She also helped recruit most of the

group's parents. In light of this organizational success, the researcher suggested that Beta

Group might be able to build upon her leadership and networking ability. Mtupeni

responded:

> I think you have to qualify the health of those networks. The networks are sometimes unhealthy, toxic and destructive. And the unhealthy thing for me inside African American community is that sometimes these networks are self-destructive and that they don't allow for input inside the network in order to improve the network. Because again you might have some cool core skills and whatever but right now it's perverted and your network is killing you.

Mtupeni clearly believed that her middle class network was superior to Folami's

network that existed amongst low-socio-economic African American parents. She stated:

> If I think about it, I got a network. I got my crew. I got my click. I got my folks…We hang out. We do this thing together. We educate. We raise our children in a particular kind of way. We share information. And then we encounter another network or another click. And what I had found is that people immediately get on the defense about their network or how they move in the world.

From Mtupeni's perspective, low socio-economic African American parents' way

of being in the world was counter productive. She blamed them for Beta Group's failure

to connect:

> They were very challenging of authority, they were really challenging of the process and the structure…I think probably about two thirds of the group...simply came there for a stipend...And they didn't even want to add any more information, or be a part of any type of group identity…There was a subset of people that I actually was a little bit more sad about them leaving and not participating because I thought they were people who could be interested in learning and intrigued by the information…And my sense was that if cultivated they would have a real opportunity to really show some leadership. But I think ultimately…they didn't identify as much as learners. They kind of had the attitude that they already knew.

Based on Mtupeni's statements, the researcher surmised that she believed her authority to

be beyond reproach. As a result, she tended to carry on one way didactic communication

with African American parents who were not receptive to her approach. The researcher

suggested that Mtupeni challenge her assumptions about authority. However, she wasn't

very receptive to the suggestion. As a result, the researcher supposed that her inability to

recognize other sources and forms of authority would continue to impede sustained

African American parent involvement. Her comments run contrary to conclusions drawn

from Diamond, Wang and Williams (2004) that educators should:

> 1) Recognize the nondominant/ethnic cultural capital of parents as valuable and seek to build on it to create stronger connections between schools and communities.
> 2) Capitalize on community-based forms of social capital that exist in racial minority communities. (p. 4)

When asked how Beta Group might help to sustain African American parent

involvement, Mtupeni responded:

> So if leadership organizations, entities that deal with this community wanted to be the be-all, if they wanted to provide services, education, information and case management then you could get greater African American participation. If there was perhaps more coordination of services, if we were inside of a school system that actually cared about the family and the parent and not just the educational trajectory of the child, if they were looking at the whole child and said, "Oh this family needs these things in order for this child to be successful", then you'd have greater partnership.

Despite her clear understanding of the needs of African American parents,

Mtupeni didn't feel that the provision of services fit within the scope of Beta Group. She

asserted:

> I'm not a service-oriented organization; I'm more of a leadership development organization. What might have been helpful might have been more staff inside of Beta Group that wanted to take case management and do services…Again, that's not our role. We're not case managers; we don't have that capacity. I think it would make our program much more successful. I think we would lose less people if we had the capacity.

These findings confirmed previous research that emphasized the need to

coordinate critical services to families as a means of sustaining parent involvement

(Barrera & Warner, 2006; Haynes & Comer, 1996; Smalley & Reyes-Banes, 2001). The need to provide services to strengthen families could be understood in terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs:

> According to Maslow, people are motivated to satisfy five basic sorts of needs. These include the need to survive physiologically, the need for security, the need for affiliation with people, the need for self-esteem, and the need for self-actualization…According to Maslow, any person's behavior can be understood primarily as directed effort to satisfy one particular level of need in the hierarchy. Which level happens to be motivating one's behavior at any time depends on whether lower needs have been satisfied. According to Maslow, lower level needs must be satisfied before the next higher level would become salient in motivating behavior. (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1995, p. 328)

Applying Maslow's theory to African American parent groups would lead one to conclude that before a parent could be motivated to be involved in schools, physiological issues, such as substance abuse, would need to be addressed. Educators intending to motivate drug addicted parents would do well to address their addiction before expecting their full participation. Likewise, parents who were victims of domestic violence could not be expected to focus on school related issues before their safety needs were addressed. The researcher surmised that, given the level of needs of some of the African American parents in Beta Group, Mtupeni's conception of Beta Group as "not a service organization" limited Beta Group's ability to sustain African American parent involvement.

Rehema (Beta Group Facilitator).

Rhema means compassion in Kiswahili. Rehema was the primary Beta Group facilitator. She led most of the discussions. Her style was very inclusive. She tried to get all of the parents involved. For example, when conducting a class on life stories, she was one of the first to volunteer to tell her story to the group. She also asked the

researcher to participate. This gesture was meant to put parents at ease and to convey

their equal status in the group. Rehema reduced the tension in the room by allowing

parents to observe her telling her story. The parents responded by participating more

openly.

Rehema had an extensive background in community organizing, curriculum

design, and pedagogy development. She described her involvement in Beta Group:

> My background is in curriculum development…so Mtupeni had a good outline of a curriculum for a parent engagement class and I came in and really kind of took that to another level. I really codified a lot of her ideas and brought in research and articles and made a syllabus for the 10 week class… Now we have this sort of manual that we use to teach these classes and it's sort of standardized and repeatable…I can hire people quite quickly and give them the booklet and say "teach this" rather than trying to figure out what to teach each time. And I also trained. So I was both creating the curriculum and improving it, and teaching the classes.

> She also talked about what she wanted to achieve:

> My goal and the goal of Beta Group is great academic success amongst our young people. And we believe that greater parent involvement is going to lead to that. So we want parents to be hyper-involved in their child's education. We are very, very disappointed in academic success amongst African American students. Quite frankly, we are 50 percentile points below our white counterparts in the Urbania Unified School District…I don't want to see that…We want African Americans to be leaders and teachers. We want them to be self-sufficient. And so I believe strongly that education is the way to do that and so we're trying to make education something that people participate in...There's all kind of ways that parents can make education better for their children and the complete goal or end result is for greater success and happiness amongst our folks.

Rehema delineated some of the reasons she thought parents were not involved in

their children's education. Her comments were consistent with previous research that

asserted that some African Americans avoided schools because of previous negative

experiences (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Smalley & Reyes-Banes, 2001). Likewise, she

confirmed Barrera and Warner (2006) assertion that the establishment of trust was a

prerequisite to parent involvement:

> I see a lot of parents who didn't finish high school and who certainly didn't finish college. And I think it's really difficult to instill a trust, a value in education, and a belief and a trust in schooling when Grandma hasn't had that experience, Mom hasn't had that experience. In fact, it's been the opposite, school was where I got in trouble, and school was where I struggled so much that I decided I wasn't going to stay. Those are the stories that our children today are hearing about school, that it's not culturally relevant.

Rehema discussed some of the challenges she encountered teaching African

American parents. She indicated that while some of the parents she worked with were

"very together, organized, motivated, and dedicated to their children"; having parents

come to class under the influence of drugs and alcohol had been an issue in terms of their

ability to pay attention and be appropriate. Likewise, she described how the attitudes of

some parents presented a challenge:

> I think you witnessed at the beginning of this class…some parents who are just not okay with being asked to be quiet while the teacher is giving information, so that's a challenge. It's hard to teach a class when your students don't want to stop talking, or they want to be on their cell phone…or they want to be in conflict all the time, you know, "Don't talk to me like that!" "Don't look at me like that!" "Don't give me that!" It's like "okay".

These findings confirmed previous research that indicated a need for educators to

network with community based service providers to help meet the needs of families

(Barrera & Warner, 2006; Haynes & Comer, 1996; Smalley & Reyes-Banes, 2001).

Substance abuse counseling, anger management, health and human services and job

opportunities were sorely needed by Beta Group parents.

When asked why she thought most of the African American parents left Beta

Group Rehema responded:

I think we recruited some women who are not in it for learning. They heard that they would get a check and they came to get a check. And when we just sort of said, "look you have to be ready to learn here." And we said "you can kind of take the first part of your stipend and decide if you want to come back or not." They decided, "Oh they really mean I have to pay attention for an hour and a half and be on time and not leave late." And I think it just didn't work out logistically. I think they didn't realize that we were going to hold them accountable to learning. And I wonder, I really wonder if the whole integration of Spanish speaking population and Latino population, I wonder if that had anything to do with it.

Isoke.

Isoke means a satisfying gift from god in Benin. Isoke was very compassionate as a result of her deep spiritual convictions. She was the mother of six children employed at Urban Elementary School as a community liaison. She was on the School Site Council and was President of the parent group (not a formal PTA). According to Isoke, she learned her parenting skills from her mother. Her mother also modeled educational involvement. She described her early and continuous involvement in her children's education:

From the beginning, from before pre-school, I would motivate them, teaching them their ABC's, their numbers, letters and the colors, to prepare them for preschool, so that when they get there they're not left behind, they're familiar with what the work is and have some kind of foundation. So I started there, like with my oldest for example, when she was in kindergarten we would ride to school in the morning and talk about college, talk about: Where do you want to go from here? What do you want to be when you grow up? We had those conversations everyday and she had good questions for me and I had good questions for her. We would just communicate. So I think good communication and open communication is key to knowing what your child is going through, where they're headed and how to direct them.

Isoke was another example of a low socio-economic parent who was very involved with the education of her children. She was an extremely successful advocate for her children and for children in general because she was well connected to and well liked by institutional agents. The researcher surmised that Isoke was able to connect with

institutional agents because her personality and demeanor were congruent with theirs.

This may have been due to early grooming by her mother. Isoke stated:

> She taught me everything I know. My mom was so involved: She was president of the PTA, she was chairperson of the SSC and she was eventually President of the School Board. She did a few things.

When asked about the challenges she encountered in organizing parents at Urban

Elementary School, Isoke responded:

> The challenge is getting people to come out and sit down and be able to talk about what it is we want to do together, without them feeling like they're being talked down to or without them feeling like we're trying to tell them something that they may feel like they already know. You have to be careful how you approach people because they think, you know, you think you're better than them and that's not the case. We're trying to come together so that we can do something better for our children; and that's the only point, to do better for our children because they are our future.

Isoke's comments were interesting on a number of levels. First, she seemed to

grasps the importance of respecting and not talking down to low socio-economic African

American parents. Secondly, she acknowledged that parents have access to legitimate

funds of knowledge derived from their personal life experiences that should be taken into

account by anyone interested in developing meaningful dialogue with them. Importantly,

both of these concepts remained outside the grasps of Mtupeni. Isoke was able to

organize low socio-economic parents at Urban Elementary School by stressing what they

had most in common: a commitment to the educational development of their children.

These findings indicated that low socio-economic class does not bear a negative

relationship to African American parents' commitment to their children's educational

achievement.

Zindzi.

Zindzi was a low socio-economic African American Grandmother who was confined to a wheelchair due to disability. During a class session on life stories, Zindzi told a story of being homeless on multiple occasions. Despite her physical challenges and lack of economic resources, Zindzi managed to be involved in her grandchildren's education. She described her involvement:

> I try to participate as much as I can because where I live I don't have a ramp. So the kids have to put a board down and take my chair down…I don't come over here as much as I should, but I was trying to get over here twice a week. And sometimes I'll come through here when I'm going home…But both teachers know that I have an open phone. They're on speed dial with me. And I go up there for Christmas and Thanksgiving; I do something with the kids. Except I didn't get to the third grade class because Thanksgiving came so quick. But Christmas I did an art project with them and when I did that it enabled me to see what was going on in the classroom. And what I gathered, there's not that much parent participation or parents period.

Zindzi talked about her difficulties interacting with Mtupeni, the Beta group Director:

> She frustrates the crap out of me. She upset me so bad that one day I told her don't say anything to me anymore. And you know she tries to be nice but you know she has a very smart mouth and she doesn't know how to talk to someone. She talks down to you. And I think she needs to get that in check. Because I try to be very tolerant, you know, but I'm not going to take too much of her talking down.

Zindzi's perception of Mtupeni's communication style was a recurrent theme amongst the African American parents of Beta Group and impeded their sustained involvement. She talked about a rift that developed between her and Mtupeni, which began when Zindzi introduced a controversial point during a meeting. According to Zindi, she asked the Latino parents if they were intending to stay involved after the ten week class was over. It was Zindzi's perception that the two communities, African

American and Latino, were failing to work together and thus develop strong group identity. She indicated that she felt both communities had a lot to learn from each other, but was not clear on whether either community was willing to make a long term commitment to organizing. Zindzi discussed her motivation:

> My thing was like, are we going to have this ongoing? I wanted it to be ongoing not just the little weeks we're here and that's it. Because when I came up I lived in a very diverse neighborhood. And I know, especially the ones that speak Spanish, they are very close knit. They don't really venture out their little community. And I love the way they are very close and family-oriented. But my question was "are you just going to be here for bilingual classes, or are you going to be here for the entire thing?" Because I wanted us all to intermix. And so I was told that…I was being prejudice.

Zindzi claimed that when she attempted to apologize to the group she was cut

down:

> So when I came and apologized, I was getting ready to apologize to the whole class and I was cut down. And I was told, "what about the Blacks?" I said, "I know how the Blacks are. But I want to know are we going to continue this as a whole. Like as a group, are we going to communicate together?" And I didn't get a chance to explain or nothing like that…I wasn't trying to be prejudiced, I was just trying to be honest and realistic.

She perceived that Beta Group was biased in favor of Latino parents. She offered

the following example to demonstrate the perceived biases within the group:

> Yeah and I got upset because I sat back and I watched how I made a statement in the second meeting about a lot of kids being noisy and disruptive. I couldn't hear. So I asked I said, "Can you parents tell your kids to be quiet?" And Mtupeni said, "Well they're not bothering me." I said "they're bothering me. I can't hear what you're saying." I said, "I have two grandchildren that are very destructive, they're out of control. And I get on them and tell them to be quiet." And she shot me down. So then I saw her later on when another parent was talking to her daughter about another little girl, she was concerned about where was she? Had she left? Did she get a ride? She was concerned about her well being. And Mtupeni got on her. And I looked at her. I said, "Now with the little Spanish kids, you said it was okay for them to make noise and disrupt the class. But now this little Black parent is trying to find out where this little girl is to make sure that she's safe, and you're going to tell her that she's disturbing the class."

Although she claimed that she joined Beta Group before she knew about the $300

stipend, Zindzi perceived that Beta Group staff thought that she was there for the money.

She also suggested that her input was not valued by Beta Group. A visceral example of

this devaluing came when Beta Group moved its meetings upstairs and made no

accommodations to allow wheel chair access. In light of the fact that there were meeting

rooms available on the ground floor, the researcher surmised that Beta Group staff didn't

value Zindzi's participation. As a result of the rift that developed between Zindzi and

Mtupeni, Beta Group did not function as a setting wherein Zindzi's ethnic/cultural capital

could be converted into social capital.

Folami.

Folami talked about her past:

I used to sell drugs, I've been to prison. I've done all that. So I'm trying to raise
my children another way. Their daddy, he's 52 years old, he's still walking up and
down the street on crack. I don't have time for that shit. I used to be out there but
I choose not to be out there anymore. My kids come first. There is too much
going on around here, I have to pay attention to my babies.

With such troubled history, one might not expect Folami to be an active and

effective parent. However, the researcher found that Folami was both active and

effective. She successfully advocated for Beta Group to be given space to operate at

Urban Elementary School. She recruited both African American and Latino parents to

join Beta Group. She had a well-connected network of low socio-economic and working

class parents in West Urbania who respected her leadership and as a result was able to

reach across language and cultural barriers to recruit Latino parents.

Folami's community based network was rich with ethnic cultural capital. It

enabled her to influence other low socio-economic parents. In fact, when some of the

African American parents became upset with Mtupeni's condescending communication style, Folami took action to diffuse the situation. She explained:

> She talks to everyone like they're a child, lower than her, and everybody is not going to take that. And some of the African American parents that we had here, I knew they weren't going to take it so I suggested that they go on and quit the program before it went any further.

This finding illuminated the fact that some low socio-economic African American parents have significant amounts of ethnic cultural capital based on their community based networks and funds of knowledge. This ethnic cultural capital may be converted to social capital within the context of an African American parent group. However, to benefit from this ethnic cultural capital, group leaders must be willing to enlist African American parents as co-creators of community.

Prior to her work for Beta Group, Folami was a parent volunteer at Urban Elementary School where she engaged in regular advocacy on behalf of her children as well as other children in the community. She stated:

> After I got in here for a little while, I was cool. When they get in trouble or something they come to me, I talk to them and try to get them before they go see the Principal, so that they won't get sent home. We try to work it out. If not, I have to take them, but other than that I don't have a problem out of the kids, I love all of them like they're all mine.

Prior to her tenure at Urban Elementary, Folami was a parent volunteer at Get Smart Elementary (a pseudonym). At Get Smart Elementary, she took charge of an after school program and developed a reading program for first graders. At the time of this study, Folami wasn't getting along with people at Urban Elementary School, so she was volunteering at another school.

Folami's parenting style kept her four children busy. All of her children were involved in after-school activities. Her son was involved in a mentoring program. Her

eldest daughter was in a special accelerated learning program while her youngest

daughter was in the LEAP program and also had one on one tutoring. On the weekends

they all attended the Big Brother and Big Sister Program. Her parenting strategy utilized

an array of community resources and further demonstrated her advanced knowledge of

her community. Folami's ability to marshal community resources to negotiate her

community was a clear indication of her significant fund of ethnic cultural capital:

> So I kind of got them involved because I don't want to send them to the Boys'
> Club because there's too many activities going on, on that corner, on 24th and
> Meade, all the drug dealers and stuff there. And then when I first moved down
> here they were going down to the park with my niece and them. But every time
> you turn around somebody wanted to fight and I just couldn't deal with it. So
> everybody is in a program, they don't get home until 6, 6:30. So everybody is
> tired, ready to take a bath and eat by the time they get home. We have computers,
> we have games and everything at home; so they don't need to be out here on these
> streets.

Although Folami's parenting strategies demonstrated both commitment and

ability, she wasn't always able to overcome race and class stereotypes. Her case

illuminated a number of recurrent themes:

3) African American Parents of low socio-economic background were just as committed to their children's education as their more affluent peers.
4) These parents often utilized an array of community based ethnic/cultural capital to ensure the educational achievement of their children.
5) Despite evidence of their commitment to education, low socio-economic African American parents were sometimes stereotyped or type cast by middle class African Americans.
6) Low socio-economic African Americans often had useful networks and funds of knowledge which, in the right context, could be converted into social capital.

Beta Group Leadership

Beta Group was designed to empower parents to become leaders in education. An

informational brochure explained Beta Group's fundamental premise, "It is…our central

ideal and core belief that effective schools for all children will be achieved when parent

and community members become full partners in school reform." The brochure also

stated:

> Without first laying bare the myth that credentialed experts are the only qualified leaders and decision makers; without first restoring parents' belief that they are intellectuals in their own right, and the most important source of moral instruction within their own communities; without first penetrating the deep sense of powerlessness that most people feel when confronted with enormous structures and complicated tasks; without first addressing these things, information and skills are meaningless.

Researcher observations and dialogues with Beta Group leaders and parents

revealed a significant divergence in Beta Group's published mission statement and its

Director's motif operandi. As previously discussed, Beta Group Director, Mtupeni,

believed that her middle class networks and funds of knowledge were far superior to

networks and funds of knowledge that existed amongst the parents in the group. Indeed,

she believed that the networks of working class and low socio-economic African

Americans were toxic and destructive and repeatedly referred to working class African

American parents as under-socialized.

As a result of her perceptions, Mtupeni as unable to form successful partnerships

with parents to create knowledge. Rather, information was distributed in a one

directional and didactic mode that perhaps unwittingly supported a deficit approach to

organizing African American parents. When asked why African American parents left

Beta Group, Mtupeni speculated that the personal values of parents rather than the over-

arching organizational values were at fault.

The transactional leadership style was not well received by low socio-economic

and working class African American parents. Mtupeni was described as uppity and

condescending, and many parents cited her leadership style as the primary reason they

left Beta Group. Importantly, the researcher observed that, as the fiscal agent and

Director of Beta Group, Mtupeni wielded the power to hire and fire staff and decide

which parents qualified to receive stipends. From this position of power, Mtupeni

utilized a transactional leadership style. Unwilling or unable to motivate African

American parents to position themselves as receptors of her vision, she relied on stipends,

meals and childcare to entice parents to participate. Burns (1995) described the

limitations of transactional leadership:

> Such leadership occurs when one person takes the initiative in making contact
> with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued things. The exchange could
> be economic or political or psychological in nature…But beyond this the
> relationship does not go. The bargainers have no enduring purpose that holds
> them together; hence they may go their separate ways. (p. 101)

Given the limitations of transactional leadership it was not surprising that African

American parents didn't stay in Beta Group after they received their stipends.

It is important to acknowledge that leadership styles utilized in Beta Group, as in

all organizations, were not homogenous. In this case, Rehema, the primary facilitator of

Beta Group classes, demonstrated a servant leadership style. She developed and

implemented a pedagogy that allowed two way communications and consistently

participated as a learning partner with parents. Her teaching style put parents at ease and

encouraged them to reflect on their leadership abilities.

Beta Group Action Plan

Due to difficulty in scheduling, the Beta Group action plan was carried out via e-

mail. Mtupeni, the Beta Group Director, Rehema, the primary class facilitator, and the

researcher took part in the action plan development. A number of recommendations were developed and accepted for consideration.

The Beta Group action plan centered on the question: How could Beta Group have greater success at sustaining African American parent involvement? Both Mtupeni, Beta Group's Director, and Rehema, Beta Group's primary class facilitator, agreed that if Beta Group was able to provide additional services or service referrals to parents, the group might retain more African American parents. However, both Mtupeni and Rehema expressed concern that expanding the scope of the program might dilute its message and, by extension, its effectiveness at developing parent leaders. The researcher provided Beta Group with research data that supported the notion that providing services to families helps support educational achievement (Barrera & Warner, 2006; Comer, 2005; Haynes & Comer, 1996); then asked Mtupeni and Rehema to examine strategies for partnering with community based service organizations.

The researcher also provided Beta Group with data that demonstrated that connections to institutional agents who could advocate on behalf of their children would help parents support educational achievement (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Smalley & Reyes-Blanes, 2001; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). The researcher suggested that Counselors, Principals, and other important institutional agents be asked to attend Beta Group meetings for the purpose of connecting with parents. It was further suggested that Mtupeni focus her energies on networking with institutional agents because her middle class values would probably serve her well in that arena.

The researcher provided data that supported the notion that parents are best influenced by horizontal relationships with other parents and are the best mentored by

their peers (Friedleander, 1999). The researcher then suggested that Beta Group parents be given challenging group projects and responsibilities that would allow parents to model leadership for each other.

Summary of Beta Group Findings

Although the African American parents of Beta Group were of low socio-economic status, they were committed to the education of their children. The three parents that participated in this study had long histories of parent involvement prior to their exposure to Beta Group. These parents utilized an array of family and community based resources to ensure the health, safety and educational development of their children. However, a sense of disconnect arose when parents perceived that their ethnic cultural capital was not validated by the group's director and was not used to build social capital.

African American parents needed an array of services to strengthen their families. However, Beta Group was not conceived of as a service organization. The possibility of networking with service providers to help deliver services to families was discussed.

The Director of Beta Group perceived her middle class values and ways of being as superior to those of low socio-economic African American parents. As a result, she failed to engage low socio-economic and working class African American parents as co-creators of community. While a $300 stipend enticed some parents to join Beta Group, economic incentive was not enough to sustain their involvement. That is, transactional leadership failed to sustain African American parent involvement and it became necessary to focus greater attention on the formation of group identity.

African American parents were unwilling to identify as receptors of one-directional, didactic instruction. Since this prescribed identity devalued their family and community based networks and funds of knowledge, they felt that they were being looked down on. As a result, they left Beta Group.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, APPLICATIONS,

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study utilized social capital theory to explore how African American parent groups help to sustain parent involvement. Based on social capital theory, African American parent groups were thought to provide settings in which community based ethnic cultural capital could be converted into powerful social capital that would enable African Americans to become leaders in the educational environment. This social capital, in the form of information, networks, and shared norms and identities, was presumed to enable sustained African American parent involvement in schools.

Additionally, transformational and transactional leadership theories were compared in order to determine what leadership styles were most effective in sustaining African American parent involvement. Based on the supposition that going from a position of non-involvement to a position of sustained parent involvement was a transformational process, that is, a process that required increased motivation and commitment to education, this study supposed that transformational leadership would be required to sustain African American parent involvement.

The study investigated two African American parent groups using each of the two groups as a unit of analysis. The research sought to answer the following three questions to explain how African American parent groups help sustain parent involvement:

1. How do African American parent group dynamics create norms, values and modes of action and transmit them to individual parents?

2. How does group membership serve as social and cultural capital to help sustain African American parent involvement?

3. What group structures and leadership styles determine the optimum social context for African American parent group sustainability?

Group histories, demographics and observations of group dynamics were used to answer the first research question. Parent research participants were enlisted as co-researchers to answer the second and third questions. Their stories revealed the extent to which each parent group's structure and leadership style enabled the activation of their social capital and by extension supported their sustained involvement in the education of their children.

Discussion

The Alpha and Beta parent groups differed in the extent to which they provided African American parents a context for the activation of social capital. Alpha Group was a safe place for parents to share their concerns and have their concerns validated by group leaders and other parents. A high level of trust was developed as a result of the Alpha Group leaders' self-sacrificial leadership style. According to De Cremer, Van Knippenberg, Van Dijke and Bos (2006):

> Self-sacrifice has been championed as an important aspect of charismatic leadership and can be defined as a person's willingness to suffer the loss of types of things to maintain personal beliefs and values...Self-sacrifice indicates that the leader respects and trusts the collective….Thus, self-sacrificial leaders are expected to influence follower self-esteem through the psychological process of communicating the message that they respect and trust the collective and its members. (p. 234-235)

Self-sacrificial leadership is a form of transformational leadership in that it raises the self-esteem of followers. Alpha Group leaders consistently exhibited self-sacrifice to their followers. They freely gave time, energy and resources to help meet the goals of the

group. They were always available by phone or e-mail to respond to parents' concerns and would often meet parents at school to help them iron out problems with teachers and administrators. In her research dialogue Buseje described numerous instances when school administrators offered to take care of her children but asked that she not advocate for others. For example, when she was advocating for African American students to be admitted into AP courses she was told not to worry because her son would be taken care of as long as she didn't advocate for other African American students. Despite this offer, Buseje continued to be a strong advocate for African American students. Alpha Group parents stated that they respected and appreciated her values and attitude and were proud to be associated with her.

Self-esteem is a form of social capital because it empowers action. According to De Cremer, Van Knippenberg, Van Dijke, and Bos (2006) "Self-esteem is a predictor of motivation, performance, and job satisfaction…and is argued to be of major importance in how employees at different levels in the organization reason, decide, and regulate action" (p. 233). In the context of African American parent groups, the better parents felt about themselves the more effective they were at supporting the education of their children. Likewise, increased self-esteem increased their ability to sustain their involvement. All of the Alpha Group parents were proud to be a member of the group.

As previously stated, shared identities are an important form of social capital. Social identity theory posits that group identities may be incorporated into individual group member's self-definition. Hence, the more an individual identifies with a group, the more sensitive he or she may become to both positive and negative evaluations of that group. According to De Cremer, Van Knippenberg, Van Dijke, and Bos (2006),

"followers who identify more with the collective are more sensitive to the respect for and value of the collective communicated by leader self-sacrifice" (p. 235). It followed that the extent to which Alpha group member's self-esteem was increased by their leader's self-sacrifice was positively related to how closely they identified with the group. Importantly, all of the Alpha group parents encountered in this research had a strong sense of group identity. Their group identity was evident in that they always referred to the group as "we". In fact, one parent asserted that Alpha group was "family". Given their strong group identity, it was not surprising that Alpha Group members had increased self-esteem as a result of the trust and respect of their group leaders.

Trust is a form of social capital because it facilitates cooperation and sharing. Alpha Group parent's trust was evident in their willingness to discuss their problems and frustrations amongst the group. Similarly, a high level of trust enabled parents to offer information and other forms of assistance to their peers. Alpha Group parents car pooled, provided childcare for each other and in some cases checked up on each other's children as a result of their trusting relationships. In fact, all manner of networking was facilitated by trust.

These insights explain how shared identities operate within group context by allowing individuals to be similarly sensitized to external stimuli. Shared sensitivity may enable groups to develop patterns of belief or shared meaning and to cooperate in concerted efforts to create change. Gareth Morgan (1996) asserted that, "Organizations are mini societies that have their own distinct patterns of culture and subculture…Such patterns of belief or shared meaning…can exert a decisive influence on the overall ability of the organization to deal with challenges" (p. 129).

Alpha Group had a progressive culture in which struggle for educational equity was an accepted norm. Its organizational culture developed as a historical consequence of the groups successful advocacy on behalf of African American students. Edgar Schein described organizational culture as the by product of shared learning:

> The culture of a group can be defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to problems. (Shafritz, Ott & Jang, 2005, p. 364-365)

Alpha group's culture was transmitted from group leaders to new parents through story telling and modeled behavior. As a result, all Alpha Group parents were conversant in the history of the group. They were aware of the organization's standing in the educational community, what strategies worked well in the past, and what modes of operation were considered appropriate and effective in supporting their children's education and promoting school reform. Hence, Alpha Group membership was a form of social capital because, through the enactment of organizational culture, individual group members were empowered to sustain their involvement in the education of their children.

It is important to note that not all organizational cultures are enabling. Some organizations have dysfunctional cultures that prevent organizational learning and adaptation. As a result, these organizations fail to meet environmental challenges and eventually cease to be. Transformational leaders help create organizational cultures that are highly functional by providing followers a clear vision that is attractive, realistic and believable (Northouse, 2004). Alpha Group leaders promoted a vision of equal access to educational resources and increased educational achievement. This vision was attractive to African American parents who wanted their children to succeed. The consistently

provided statistics and anecdotal information to make this vision both realistic and believable.

Transformational leaders "consistently demonstrate the organization's vision through their actions and behaviors" (Valentino, 2004, p. 3). Alpha Group leadership was consistently self-sacrificing of time, energy and resources to support the goals of the organization. Just as importantly, Alpha Group leaders were down to earth black folk who, although they had accomplished much in terms of education and economic status, were able to relate to other African Americans on an ethnic cultural basis. Hence, the ethnic cultural capital that parents brought to Alpha group was a valued medium of exchange easily converted into social capital. In fact, this ethnic cultural capital was the bedrock upon which Alpha Group's organizational culture was built. Common norms and beliefs held by African American parents based on similar life experiences and being similarly situated in the world formed a pre-understanding that enabled communication despite class differences within the group.

In stark contrast to Alpha Group, Beta Group relied on transactional leadership to encourage parent involvement. On one hand, this strategy made sense because, based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, one would not expect parents to be effectively involved in education when basic lower level needs were not met. Hence, there were cases when providing meals, childcare and a $300 stipend enabled parents to participate. On the other hand, this was not true of alcohol or drug addicted parents because their addictions diverted their attention from the needs of their children. Likewise, for parents suffering serious economic hardship, the economic incentives provided by the program were not enough to sustain their involvement.

The take home lesson here is that if you are going to engage in transactional leadership, you need to be fairly certain that your medium of exchange is meaningful to followers. Leaders need to make an accurate assessment of follower's needs to determine where they fall on the hierarchy of needs. It makes no sense to give a drug addicted parent a $300 stipend. Three hundred dollars is not enough money to have a long term affect on a drug addicted parent's economic well being, but it is quite a temptation to buy drugs. Anyone who is really serious about increasing a drug addicted parent's involvement in education must first address that addiction. Similarly, stipends can not be expected to fulfill the economic needs that are usually filled by a living wage. For parents experiencing acute financial hardship, job training and food subsidies may take president over involvement in schools. While providing drug and alcohol treatment, job training and referrals, and emergency food subsidies are tall orders for any single community based organization, it may be possible through a collaborative effort with other community based service organizations. At any rate, it is unproductive and disingenuous to blame drug addicted parents for their lack of attention to classroom based instruction. Such parents should not be expected to effectively participate in a parent involvement group until their addictions are addressed. This discussion was not meant to imply that the majority of African American parents in Beta Group had addiction problems, in fact, none of the parents who participated in research dialogues had current addiction issues. However, since drug and alcohol addiction was cited by Beta Group leaders as a reason why some parents could not fully participate in the group, it bears emphasizing that due to its physiological nature addiction should have been addressed before attempting to address higher level needs.

Parents know what they need. They have challenges and goals. Furthermore, most parents utilize an array of skills to meet their needs and challenges and to pursue their goals. Failure to accurately assess parent's needs and skill levels may result in a program that is incongruent with their lived reality. For example, Beta Group leaders were dismissive of African American parents who had an attitude that they already knew what the group was trying to teach. At the same time, African American parents asserted that they learned little or nothing from Beta Group that they didn't already know. The researcher observed that many of the topics addressed in Beta Group classes were very elementary. For example the fourth class discussion revolved around the question: If you get involved in your child's education, will they do better? It also talked about what to put in a child's back pack. The fifth class addressed the question: Can your child learn at home? Neither of these discussion topics required much reflection. It was quite plausible that some African American parents knew the answers to these questions prior to their exposure to the Beta Group curriculum. Many parents believed that the curriculum was dummied down due to low expectations while Beta Group leaders adhered to the condescending notion that low socio-economic African American parents didn't have a basic understanding of what their children needed to succeed. Given the poverty, unemployment, and drug and alcohol addiction of some Beta Group parents, it was likely that some parents, despite knowing what they needed to do, were unable to perform those tasks. They didn't need to be told what to do as much as they needed help doing it.

Beta Group leaders approached low socio-economic African American parents similarly to how developers from industrialized nations approach native third world

populations. While western developers often view native populations as needing to be civilized, Beta Group leaders repeatedly asserted that African American parents needed to be socialized. They believed that their middle class values and ways of being in the world were beyond reproach. Hence, they failed to engage in meaningful dialogue with parents about their challenges and aspirations. This failure to engage in dialogue prevented bi-directional learning and conveyed the notion that parents had nothing of value to bring to the table.

Bi-directional learning requires that teachers be willing to learn from students. Hence, it is often student directed. Bateson (1994) asserted that "because we live in a world of change and diversity, we are privileged to enter, if only peripherally, into a diversity of visions, and beyond that to include them in the range of responsible caring" (p.12). She also described the negative ramifications of the failure to engage in authentic dialogue, "the rise of fundamentalism within any tradition is always a symptom of the unwillingness to try to sustain joint performances across disparate codes-or, to put it differently, to live in ambiguity, a life that requires constant learning" (p. 13). Beta Group leaders adopted a fundamentalist attitude around middle class values and ways of being. They believed their values and ways of being were superior to those of low socio-economic African American parents and were evangelical in their efforts to convert the parents to their values and ways of being.

What was needed in Beta Group was what is commonly referred to in the African American community as "real talk". Gadamer (1977) described the essentiality of real talk, "genuine speaking, which has something to say and hence does not give prearranged signals, but rather seeks words through which one reaches the other person is the

universal human task" (p. 17). Hence real talk affirms our humanity and the humanity of those we wish to work and live amongst. It cuts through hierarchical social and economic constructs to get at what makes sense on a human level. Real talk arrives at mutual understanding through collaborative sense making. Hence, knowledge created through real talk is extracted from the socio-cultural realities of collaborators and is applicable in their context. Ricoeur (1998) explained that, "Understanding is subsumed by the interpreter to the conditions of pre-understanding, which in turn is constituted on the basis of traditional meanings incorporated into the seizure of any new phenomena" (p. 81).

The most efficient way to find out what is going on in a community is to ask somebody. Would be organizers of African Americans must be willing to enter into dialogue and to confront their prejudices. Only when prejudices that are unfounded and unjustified are confronted, can individual, and by extension institutional learning take place. Ricoeur (1998) stated that "only insofar as I place myself in the other's point of view do I confront myself with my present horizon, with my prejudices. It is only in the tension between the other and the self…that prejudice becomes operative…" (p. 76). Gadamer (1977) asserted that:

> Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth…Prejudices…constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply the conditions whereby we experience something-whereby what we encounter says something to us. (p. 9)

While it is true that prejudices are not always unjustified and erroneous, prejudices that go unexamined may become stereotypes which prevent authentic human interaction.

Gadamer (1989) explained:

> One's horizon is constituted by his or her prejudices, but that does not mean that an horizon is a static or closed thing. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving (p. 271).

Movement, in this metaphoric sense, refers to confronting one's prejudices by placing oneself in the other's point of view. Herda (1999) described how this can be accomplished through participatory research:

> In participatory research we move from observing, interviewing, and catergorizing our data to living in relationship with participants, placing our biases along side theirs in an attempt to hear each other and to work out a new contexts in which to live. (p. 53).

Living in relation with those with whom we seek to gain mutual understanding requires that the researcher accept participants as equals in the creation of knowledge despite possible differences in social, economic or political power.

The mode of being in relationship with participants prescribed in participatory research should be consistently implemented by would be organizers of African American parents. That is, the learning/teaching process should always be bi-directional with the organizer fully expecting to learn something. Beta Group leaders failed to position themselves in relation to their group participants and as a result failed to learn from them.

Conclusions

African American parents valued reciprocal relationships. They arrived at parent groups with values, norms and goals for their children. They thrived in a collegial setting that allowed their input as co-creators of knowledge. This setting maximized their connectedness with other parents and institutional agents who could serve as effective

advocates for their children. These connections, and the information that flowed through them, were one mechanism by which group norms and values were transmitted.

Another way that African American parent groups transmitted norms, values and modes of action was by modeling leadership. Coleman (1988) stated that "Norms in a community that support and provide effective rewards for high achievement in school greatly facilitate the school's task" (p. 104). Parents were able to have a greater impact on schools when they adopted the norms of dynamic group leaders. These norms enabled parents to improve schooling for their children and effect systemic change in schools.

African American Group membership served as social capital by providing connections to institutional agents who controlled funds of knowledge and resources that were needed to ensure student success. As parents expanded and strengthened their networks, their own social capital increased. Similarly, as parents participated in community building, they developed trusting relationships with other parents and group leaders. One parent said that her parent group was "like family."

Another way that membership in African American parent groups served as social capital was in the development of a group identity. Group identity grew out of the group's history and was modeled by its leaders and followers. Remembering Forsyth's (2006) statement that:

> Individuals who identify with a group take on more and more of the prototypical features of members of that group, they may adopt the attitudes, preferences, and behaviors that they think typify the group. These attitudes are then likely to influence their behavior, particularly when their membership in the group is salient to them. (p. 93)

Group identity informed group action. Furthermore, when members of the group became recognized internally and externally as powerful advocates for children and school reform, the total group identity became enabling for all parents.

This study found that the most effective leadership style for leading African American parents groups was servant leadership. Leaders of effective African American parent groups were transformational leaders who fully engaged parents in a way that raised parents' commitment, not only to their own children's achievement, but also to the educational achievement of all children. The research revealed that African American parents tended to emulate their leaders when they believed that those leaders were sincere. In those cases where a strong sense of trust between parents and group leaders was present, parents consistently went out of their way to act as leaders and be helpful to each other.

The best group structure for African American parent groups was a collegial structure that allowed parents to share their ideas, expertise and enthusiasm with other parents. This study found that African American parents were not receptive to one-directional learning. Rather, parents felt most empowered when participating in the creation of knowledge.

The researcher found that African American parent groups could serve as a setting for the activation of parent's social capital if a number of preconditions were met. First, parent group leaders should understand that low socio-economic African American parents were just as likely as their more affluent peers to be committed to the education of their children. Secondly, leaders should be willing to engage African American parents as equal partners in the development of community. Third, they should recognize

and legitimize the cultural/ethnic capital that parents bring to the group and use it as a basis on which to build social capital. Fourth, group leaders should make an effort to build connections and alliances between African American parents and institutional agents. Fifth, group leaders should take into account that some parents have unmet needs that prevent them from fully participating in their child's education and thus effective group leadership requires networking with community based organizations and service agencies to meet those needs.

The researcher found that some of the low socio-economic African American parents were experts at utilizing their ethnic/cultural capital to harness community based resources in support of their children's education. These parents could have mentored less adept parents to help them meet their basic needs.

Implications

The research found that African American parent groups provided a setting for the activation of parent's social capital and therefore helped to sustain their involvement in education. This conclusion has several implications to educators. According to Trotman (2001) "the participation of urban African American parents is essential in reversing the current disappointing school performance of low-income urban African American children" (p. 282). Comer (2005) concurred that "student academic performance, behavior, and preparation for life can be greatly improved if the adult stakeholders work together in a respectful, collaborative way" (p. 39). Comer (2005) also stated that "if parents could be involved in ways that threatened neither the parents nor the teachers, parent involvement could transform even the most dysfunctional schools" (p. 39). The implementation of the Success of All program, which featured parent involvement as a

key component, proved successful at reducing the educational achievement gap between African American students and their European American peers (Slavin & Madden, 2001). These findings imply that if African American parent participation can be sustained through their participation in African American parent groups, the achievement gap might be significantly reduced. Therefore the entire school community stands to benefit from African American parent involvement.

Given that African American parent groups can be used to increase and sustain parent involvement in schools, educators would do well to develop strategies for supporting these organizations. This study provided knowledge applicable to the development of said strategies.

Applications

This study found that the social identity created in African American parent groups was a powerful form of social capital. The data showed that parent empowerment was increased when less empowered African American parents were exposed to their more empowered peers within the context of an African American parent group. It follows that educators would do well to support the formation and maintenance of these groups in urban areas with large African American populations.

To create these groups, educators may need to partner with African American parents who are fully capable and willing to organize around educational achievement. In these cases, it may be important to identify leaders whose leadership styles are compatible with African American parents. This study showed that servant/transformational leadership, a mode of leadership that fully engaged leaders with parents to raise their motivation and commitment to education, was the best form of

leadership for African American parents. On the other hand, transactional leadership did

not prove effective as a stand-alone strategy for sustaining African American parent

involvement. Though parents recognized offerings of meals, stipends and childcare as

valuable resources, the effetiveness of the group leadership to empower parents to bring

about the best possible educational outcomes for their students was the key element to

long term African American participation and empowerment.

This study also showed that African American parent involvement is supported by

external agents who are willing to take an active role in helping to organize and maintain

African American parent groups and provide services that strengthen African American

families.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Parent Group Organizers.

Parent group organizers should enlist African American parents as full partners in

community development. This recommendation was based on data that showed that

African American parents had valuable funds of knowledge and community networks

that could be utilized in building community. This recommendation is consistent with

Diamond, Wang and William's (2004) recommendation that educators should:

1) Recognize the nondominant/ethnic cultural capital of parents as valuable
    and seek to build on it to create stronger connections between schools and
    communities.
2) Capitalize on community-based forms of social capital that exist in racial
    minority communities. (p. 4)

African American parent groups should be organized around the ethnic cultural

capital that parents bring to the group. Organizers should recognize that, based on unique

cultures, histories, and life experiences, ethnic groups differ in their approach to

education. It should be acknowledged that the history and life experiences of African Americans in this country makes it difficult for them to accept a one directional leadership style because this style fails to take into account the funds of knowledge gained through generations of struggle to overcome oppression in America.

Stipends, as a means of encouraging African American parent participation should be used judiciously. Data suggest the giving stipends, while an effective recruitment tool, was not an adequate means of sustaining parent involvement. Furthermore, giving stipends had the negative effect of stigmatizing parents. The data showed that Group organizers and parents (even those who received stipends) repeatedly accused parents of only being interested in the stipend. This suspicion undermined parent's efforts to participate as valued members of African American parent groups.

Parent group organizers must commit to building networks with community based service organizations to meet the basic needs of parents. Study data indicated that low socio-economic African American parents had basic needs that, when left unmet, prevented their full participation in their children's education. This recommendation is consistent with Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Parent group organizers should adopt and stay in the mode of inquiry characterized by action research for as long as they actively organize African American parents. In this mode of inquiry, the organizer as researcher approaches parents as co-creators of knowledge and fully expects to learn from them. Importantly, the organizer must always be open to learning about him or her self.

Finally, parent group organizers should pay attention to issues related to fatigue. Organizing African American parent groups is difficult work that may lead to stress.

Parent group organizers should pay close attention to their level of stress to prevent

burnout. It was apparent in this study that some group organizers may have been burned

out and as a result were unable to put forward the effort required to meet the needs of

parents.

Recommendations for Parents.

The research suggests that parents should get organized. Of the two parent groups

investigated in this study, the group organized by parents was the most resilient. Parents

should not wait for community organizers to initiate the process of community building.

This initiative may never come. Furthermore, parents have the most direct knowledge of

their needs and goals and therefore, organizations developed by parents are likely to be

most effective at empowering parents.

Recommendations for Educators.

Educators should get involved in efforts to build and sustain African American

parent groups. These groups create a bridge between the community and school, and

may provide a source of creative, enthusiastic, and committed parents to support

education. This recommendation is consistent with Comer's (2005) assertion that "parent

participation in schools can be helpful to students, school staff, and the parents

themselves" (p. 41). In this study, the parent group that was supported by educators was

more resilient than the non-supported group. As a result, that school enjoyed a higher

level of parent participation.

Recommendations for Future Research.

Although this study found that African American parent groups provide a setting

for the activation of social capital and thereby help to sustain parent involvement, it

didn't explain why some African American parents refuse or fail to get involved. More study should be done to explore the barriers to parent participation in African American parent groups.

Final Thoughts

Given the importance of parent involvement in education and the possibility that increased parent involvement may help to eliminate the educational achievement gap between African American students and their European American peers, it is incumbent upon leaders of African American parent groups to be equipped with the theoretical tools needed to guide their actions. Social Capital theory can be used to explain how African American parent groups empower parents. Specifically, social capital theory states that trust, in the form of shared obligations and expectations is a prerequisite for the effective leadership of African American parents. In this study, parent group leaders gained parent's trust through self-sacrificial leadership. Those who approached African American parents with an attitude of care and respect, i.e., as servant leaders, were able engage parents. On the other hand, group leaders that approached parents from a deficit perspective were unable to gain followers. This data suggest that would be organizers of African American parent groups should reflect on the prejudices inform their leadership styles. The goal of increasing African American parent involvement to eliminate the educational achievement gap is too important to approach without first examining prejudices that, if left unexamined, may serve to further alienate parents.

This study found that African American parent groups can provide a context for the activation of social capital provided that group leaders are respectful and are willing to partner with parents in the creation of knowledge. Group organizers should always

approach their mission expecting to learn as much as they teach. Through bi-directional

learning, group organizers are not only likely to learn about African American parents'

challenges, skills, and aspirations, but are also likely to learn about themselves. The key

to their learning experience will be their willingness to examine the prejudices they bring

to their work. Challenging their prejudices will help to broaden their horizons and enrich

their lives. In the words of John Dewey (cited in Greene, 1995);

> The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation
> through choice of action; and we are aware that action (unlike behavior) is
> conceived of the reflective taking of initiatives, the making of new beginnings, the
> moving toward what cannot be precisely predicted but what is often thought of as
> possibility. (p. 177).

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Consent to be a Research Subject

Purpose and Background

Mr. Ajamu T. Stewart, a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, is doing a study on how African American parent groups help sustain parent involvement. Given the well documented strong positive correlation between sustained parent involvement and educational achievement in the general population and in African American students, the organization and support of African American parent groups, as a strategy for sustaining parent involvement, may help to increase educational achievement in African American students. This study will explore how these parents groups support sustained parent involvement.

I am being asked to participate because I am a parent participant, leader or organizer of an African American parent group.

Procedures

If I agree to be a participant in this study, the following will happen:

1. I will participate in a 60 to 90 minute dialogue with the researcher, during which we will discuss my participation in my parent group and how those experiences have or have not contributed to my sustained involvement in my child's education.

2. I will review and clarify the findings of the dialogue.

3. Along with the researcher, I will review the researcher's field observations to help explore the possible meanings of observable group dynamics.

Risks and/or Discomforts

1. It is possible that some of the questions on parent involvement may make me feel uncomfortable, but I am free to decline to answer any questions I do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

2. Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Study records will be kept as confidential as is possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Study information will be coded and kept in locked files at all times. Only study personnel will have access to the

files.

3. Because the time required for my participation may be up to 4 hours, I may become tired or bored.

Benefits

A possible direct benefit to me from participating in this study is the development of a fuller understanding of my role as an effective advocate in support of my child's education. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the organizational leadership styles and structures that appeal to African American parents and help to sustain their involvement in their children's education.

Costs/Financial Considerations

There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study.

Payment/Reimbursement

Other than my time, I will incur no cost as a result of my participation in this study. I am volunteering my time and do not expect to be reimbursed.

Questions

I have talked to Mr. Stewart about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about the study, I may call him at (510) 306-7043 or Dr. Patricia Mitchell (707) 208-7726.

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk with Mr. Stewart. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

Consent

I have been given a copy of the "Research Subject's Bill of Rights" and I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point.

My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

_____

Subject's Signature   Date of Signature

_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date of Signature

Appendix B: Sample Dialogue Questions

The following questions were used with parents and group facilitators. Questions 1 thru 4 related to research question #1:

1. What challenges have you encountered in your efforts to support your child's educational achievement?

2. Why did you join your parent group?

3. How has membership in the African American parent group affected your level of involvement in your child's education?

4. How has membership in the African American parent group affected your ability to be an effective advocate for your child?

Questions 5 thru 8 related to research question #2:

5. Who has helped you and how?

6. How many of the parents in the group do you know personally?

7. Have you become friends with any of the parents you've met in the group?

8. Have any of the parents become a part of your personal network?

Questions 9 thru 13 related to research question #3:

9. Who leads your organization and how?

10. What personal attributes or skills do you appreciate in the leader of your group?

11. What personal attributes or skills do you contribute to your parent group?

12. What personal attributes or skills have you developed as a result of participation in your parent group?

Question 13 allowed participants to add their insights to the study:

13. What other insights would you like to share?