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Resource and Remaking:
Organizational Mediation of Parent-School Relationships

By
Seenae Ruth Chong

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Doctor of Philosophy
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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:
Professor Rick Mintrop, Chair
Professor Janelle Scott
Professor Susan Stone

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Abstract

Resourcing and Remaking: Organizational Mediation of Parent-School Relationships

By

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Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Rick Mintrop, Chair

Engaging low-income parents of color in schools in ways that empower and respect rather than further marginalize remains a persistent challenge. Current studies on organizations which work with low-income parents of color in schools, which I term “parent engagement organizations” or PEOs, highlight how PEOs lend critical infrastructure and resources to activities such as disseminating information about educational practices or organizing parents for school reform. Less understood is how organizational survival, a condition specific and unique to the organization as a social actor, may influence parent engagement practices and, subsequently, how low-income parents of color are empowered to engage in schools. In this study, I move beyond technical descriptions of organizational resource brokerage in parent-school relationships to uncover how organizations, as distinct social formations, mediate parent agency in schools. Bringing insights from the sociology of organizations to bear on research that examines the possibilities of empowering low-income parents of color in schools, I used a multi-case study design to explore how the conditions of survival and sustainability shaped the ways two PEOs—one educative, the other political—fostered parent agency and positioned parents in the micro-politics of schooling.

The findings suggest that organizational mediation of parent-school relationships consists of far more activities than resource brokerage. The two focal organizations dedicated resources and care to creating spaces on school sites which were welcoming and responsive to parents. However, the types of parent agency advanced by the organizations were limited to those which could also accommodate organizational needs for survival and sustainability. In the educative PEO, the parent engagement program was funded through a sub-contract with the school district. While parent engagement staff offered information and activities which addressed parents' desire to be useful and helpful in school life, organizational identity, roles and routines, and context construed parent engagement as a compliance task that needed to be fulfilled to maintain its sub-contractor status with the district. Prioritizing good school relations was evident in the ways parent engagement staff suppressed parents' critiques and concerns and redirected parents toward volunteer activities in peripheral school operations. In the political PEO, parents gained the skills and knowledge to advocate for and advance their interests in a variety of arenas. However, organizing was limited to district-sanctioned spaces of engagement, as pressures from collaborations with other organizations as well as district politics challenged staff's ability to stay focused on parents' specific, expressed interests. Consequently, the power relations which upheld policy-making authority in the hands of district elites remained unchallenged. This study demonstrates the ways parent engagement organizations are socially productive actors which shape the everyday interactions among parents, teachers, and school and district leaders, thereby shaping the social life of schooling.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Parent engagement policies have long been a favored vehicle to animate the “public” in public education. Recent forms expand the sphere of parent activity in schools—from choosing schools to closing schools; from hiring decisions to determining budget priorities (Hess, 1999; Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015; Patillo, 2015; Rogers, Lubienski, J. Scott, & Welner, 2015; J. Scott, 2013). For parents of marginalized communities, schools have relatively few barriers to participation as compared to other institutions (Rogers, Saunders, Terriquez, & Velez, 2008). Questions remain, however, about whether these arenas of participation and engagement offer substantive opportunities or create additional obstacles for low-income, minority, or immigrant communities struggling to make schools more responsive to their interests. Parents, educators, and policymakers have long struggled with fulfilling the aspirations of parent engagement policies in the face of deeply embedded historical conflicts, structural inequities, and institutional recalcitrance that have worked to exclude low-income, minority, and immigrant parents as part of the rendering of the public in public education (Anyon, 1997; Bowles & Gintis, 2011; Fine, 1993; Noguera, 2001). How parents engage in school life now is consequential to how their voices and interests are incorporated into current and future visions of schooling.

New arenas of engagement have seen a concomitant increase in the numbers of organizations working to support parents and educators in making sense of and assuming unfamiliar roles and responsibilities (Mediratta, 2007; Marsh & Wohlstetter, 2013; Lopez, Kreider, & Coffman, 2005). However, organizations are not simply containers of activity. Individuals’ lives, and accordingly the quality of social life, are increasingly mediated through and within organizations (Small, 2009). Embedded within social, cultural, and political values, organizations reproduce and disrupt social structures across organizational relationships and activities (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004; McQuarrie & Marwell, 2009). Current studies on organizations which work with low-income parents of color in schools, which I term “parent engagement organizations” or PEOs, highlight the benefits of PEOs’ resource brokerage activities to the task of school-site parent engagement. These studies assume a taken-for-granted arrangement of parent-teacher relations to which resources can be added to improve functioning. Less considered are the ways organizations are socially productive actors actively working to influence the negotiated order or schools in the particular paths of parent engagement they lay out for parents (Ball, 1987). This study attends to the possibilities and constraints of organizational mediation of parent engagement by specifically considering how organizational context and their resulting practices position parents in ways that facilitate parent self-determination and agency in the micropolitics of schooling (Ball, 1987; Vincent, 2012).

The Case

This collective case study of two organizations, All Nelson United (ANU) and Powerful Youth Projects (PYP)¹, offers insights on a new politics of parent engagement which accounts for organizations as self-interested actors. The study takes place in Nelson Unified School District (NUSD), a diverse, mid-sized, urban school district. The district context teems with complex social and political dynamics resulting from diverse linguistic, cultural and ethnic, populations, income inequality, the organizational thickening of civil society, and increasing

¹ All names are pseudonyms except where indicated.

avenues of participation. The region in which the city of Nelson is located has a vibrant history of civil rights activism which attracts many who value civic participation; consequently, Nelson has a thriving non-profit sector. NUSD serves primarily students of color. At the time of data collection, in its district run schools, student enrollment was about 13% Asian, 26% African American, 45% Latino, 1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 2% reporting none, 3% of mixed race, 10% white². Approximately 74% of students received free and reduced-price lunches and 31% of students were English language learners. As Nelson is a hub of immigration, NUSD has newcomer programs across school levels and was working to address the growing numbers of unaccompanied minors at the time of the study. Moreover, NUSD is a district shaped by parent organizing. In the early 2000s, parents initiated a movement for small schools, breaking up large comprehensive schools, opening up processes of school design to the community, and fundamentally transforming NUSD's landscape. Today, 25% of NUSD's student population attend charter schools. Additionally, NUSD has various pathways for parent participation from the school to district level such as school-site volunteer programs, school governance committees, and district-wide committees for resource distribution and priorities. In this space, ANU and PYP offer parent engagement programs with decidedly distinct approaches. Powerful Youth Projects uses an educative approach, providing parents with a range of supports and resources to help parents increase their efficacy in navigating school systems and the challenges of parenting in and of itself. All Nelson United uses a political approach, organizing parents to implement changes they want to see in their school sites. These two non-profit organizations with different strategies and organizational networks and serving different schools and parents provide distinct examinations of how organizations arrange themselves around the task of parent engagement and the contingencies created for emerging practice. Together, the two focal organizations demonstrate that organizations are not only resourcing but remaking parent-school relationships.

A Note about Terminology

The focus of this dissertation uses the term “parent engagement” because it is a concept which acknowledges parents as having a distinct set of interests in school processes and examines parents as active agents in asserting their interests (Barton et al., 2004). Whether or not acknowledged by professionals, parents, as all actors, act in ways to achieve their interest. Thus “parent engagement” is primarily used to describe parent activities intended to influence educational processes. In addition, the term “parent(s)” is used to reference all adults who represent the family or community sphere of a child's life and assume responsibility over a child's education. The use of “parent” is not intended to ignore the diverse kinship arrangements which care for a child's wellbeing but solely for pragmatic concerns.

The Literature

Currently, the empirical literature on organizations doing parent engagement work conceptualizes the organization's central task to be that of engaging parents. These organizations differ from volunteer organizations such as parent-teacher associations because they are

² Data taken from state department of education website and district website for the primary school year of data collection (2016-2017).

intermediary organizations (IOs), independent actors with professional staff positioned between schools and parents (Honig, 2004). Though not a cohesive body of research, the lines of scholarship that examine parent engagement organizations enumerate their benefits: they provide infrastructure and resources to sustain the work of parent engagement (Lopez et al., 2005); their staff have expertise and skills dedicated to parent engagement (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011; Shirley, 1997); and they do not necessarily carry the “baggage” of schools and are seen as a safe space for marginalized parents (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012; Lopez et al., 2005; Warren, 2005). Few studies elaborate or complicate these generally positive accounts of resource brokerage by PEOs (see Apple & Pedroni, 2005 for an exception) despite the wealth of empirical evidence attesting to the difficulty of engaging low-income parents of color in ways that empower and respect rather than further marginalize (Fine, 1993; Nakagawa, 2000; Schutz, 2006; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). The critiques of these scholars suggest that as the number of organizations engaging parents in schools continues to grow (Lopez et al., 2005; Mediratta et al., 2002), the need for a robust conceptualization of the organization as a distinct and independent actor constructing how they work with parents, which, in turn, shape parent engagement in schools is increasingly apparent.

The research on intermediary organizations in education elaborates the more descriptive studies on parent engagement organizations with evidence of IOs that are actively shaping and being shaped by the environment. In providing technical and resource support for school reforms, IOs shape key policy messages as they interpret and translate policy for school and district actors (Coburn, 2005; Honig, 2004). Scholars who examine IOs from a macro-perspective have observed behavioral adaptations to environmental pressures. Foundations often influence IO research agendas and dissemination strategies (J. Scott & Jabbar, 2014); district accountability pressures make it difficult for IOs to maintain independence and respond to resource-provider demands (Cucchiara, Gold, & Simon, 2011; Russell, Knutson, & Crowley, 2012; Wechsler & Friedrich, 1997); and broader dominant educational discourses advancing ideas of marketization sharply focus IO work on data and the managerial components of teaching and learning, away from pedagogical needs or broader democratic values (Trujillo, 2014). This research suggests that parent engagement organizations are likely interpreting and translating messages from the environment while addressing a wide variety of environmental pressures, of which parent interest is only one of many. A study of parent engagement organizations is incomplete without a consideration of the ways organizationally-specific features—such as mission and maintenance needs and work routines—influence how parent engagement is conducted.

Conceptual Framework

I developed an interdisciplinary conceptual framework to illustrate how organizations independently shape parent engagement beyond interpersonal interactions or resource distribution. Case study methodology was used to identify and explore the aspects of organizational life consequential to how parent engagement practice was conducted (Yin, 2009). Rather than for the purposes of generalization, the two organizations were selected to offer a perspective on the spectrum of organizational behaviors which could shape parent engagement.

Conceptual tools from the sociology of organizations, the politics of education, and the literature of parent engagement guided this collective case study of parent engagement

organizations (Creswell, 2007). To develop an organizational perspective, I consider whether parent engagement impacts organizational ability to meet and address legitimacy and resource dependency pressures from the environment. Furthermore, I investigate how this relationship shapes how parent engagement is conducted and the consequences for parent empowerment.

Organizational behaviors are bounded to activities of mission and maintenance (Fromson, 2003). An organization survives by managing and maintaining material, social, and political resources (Walker & McCarthy, 2010). Addressing constituent needs is necessary but not sufficient to fully address resource dependency and legitimacy needs (Hillman, Withers, & Collins, 2009; Suchman, 1995). The ongoing, repeated interactions among staff and between staff and parents which constitute organizational routines will uncover insights into organizational priorities and decisions around mission and maintenance which shape the conditions in which parent engagement emerges (Feldman, 2000; Sherer & Spillane, 2011). To understand how organizational conditions affects the ways parents are empowered to act in schools, the micropolitics embedded in routines of parent engagement are also investigated.

Research Questions

The relationship between parents and educators is fundamental to school life. Low-income parents of color continue to negotiate and unsettle the ways and the arenas in which they can be present and assert influence and authority. This dissertation study was conducted to explore how organizations matter for the empowerment of low-income parents of color in parent-school relationships. To this end, I investigated the following research questions:

1. In the two focal organizations, what conditions are created for parent engagement practices?
 - a) What is the relationship between parent engagement work and the resource dependency and legitimacy needs of the organization?
 - b) How do organizational routines arrange work around parent engagement?
2. In the two focal organizations, how do parent engagement routines attend to parents' interests and needs in ways that empower parents?
 - a) What are the similarities and differences between the parent engagement routines of an educative organization as compared to a political organization?
 - b) How do routines empower parents in relation to the school or educators?
3. What, if at all, is the relationship between organizational contingencies and parent engagement within the organization?

Overview of Chapters

Chapter Two reviews the literature on parent-school relationships, parent engagement organizations, and on the sociology of organizations to identify and distill critical themes across the literature to inform the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework is further elaborated.

I review my methodological decisions and procedures in Chapter Three. I describe my research design, sampling procedures, and analytical processes, detailing changes or challenges which impacted the design and/or data collection and analyses. I conclude with a discussion of the limitations and strengths of the study as well as my positionality as a researcher.

Findings from the study are presented in Chapters Four and Five and a summative discussion of the findings is presented in Chapter Six. Chapter Four provides findings about the salient aspects of organizational resource dependencies and legitimacies which shaped staff's perception of the organization. Additionally, I describe the extent to which organizational routines considered and accommodated parent engagement. Chapter Five offers an in-depth examination of parent engagement routines across the two organizations. In Chapter Six, I discuss the findings from the two chapters together to consider how this study begins to clarify the influence of organizational mediation in parent-school relationships and their capacity to facilitate parent empowerment.

I conclude the dissertation in Chapter Seven by summarizing the findings, discussing empirical and practical implications, as well as identifying future areas for research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction to Literature Review

The complexity of parent-school relationships is evident in the large body of scholarship on the topic, attesting to the many ways these relationships are embodied which afford for a diversity of empirical and theoretical approaches. This literature review is focused on research which explores relationships between low-income parents of color and educators in urban school districts. I begin with an overview of the problem of parent-school relationships, generally. Then, I review the policy context of parent-school relationships as well as educators and parents' orientations and experiences in parent-school relationships. I then review the literature on parent engagement organizations to assess the current status of this body of research. I conclude with literature that speaks to the way the organizations are distinct and independent actors which work to accomplish the dual goals of mission and maintenance (Fromson, 2003). Together, these bodies of literature provide a picture of the complexities of parent engagement; what is known about the PEO that undertakes the project of parent engagement; and broadly, how organizations fulfill mission and maintenance tasks.

Parent-School Relationships in Low-Income Communities of Color

Authentic and full engagement of low-income parents of color in schools is not easily resolved within the field of education which marginalizes the knowledge, capabilities, and insights that low-income parents of color bring (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). While the lack of engagement of low-income parents of color is often presented to be the result of communication or information failures, this review demonstrates that relationships between parents and educators are challenged by deeply institutionalized roles which reproduce broader patterns of inequality and power distributions.

The Field of Parent-School Relationships

Parent engagement in schools is challenging to discern precisely because the concept covers a wide range of activities, beliefs, and norms. The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model (1997, 2005) and the Epstein framework of parent engagement are widely used in studies of parent engagement. The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model is typically used to explore how the following three psychological constructs are implicated in parents' motivations around engagement: 1) parents' construction of their role as parents; 2) parents' sense of efficacy in helping their children succeed in a variety of settings; and 3) opportunities, invitations, and demands by the child or the school to get involved. Empirical tests of the Hoover-Dempsey model demonstrate demographic differences in parents' orientation to school involvement that illuminate the particular dynamics of low-income parents of color involvement in schools. While Park and Holloway (2013) found demographic differences in school-based involvement at the secondary level, they also observed that Latino and African American parents were involved in their children's education at home in ways not detected by school administrators or teachers. Bhargava and Witherspoon (2015) elaborates the role of race and class in school-based involvement by examining the individual and neighborhood characteristics that shape parental

decisions to become involved. They found parents from disadvantaged communities were more likely to engage in home-based activities and academic socialization, and consequently less likely to be involved in school-based activities.

Epstein's (1995, 2010) framework of parent involvement has six categories to capture the range of possibilities for parental involvement: 1) parenting, 2) communicating, 3) supporting schools, 4) learning at home, 5) decision making, and 6) collaborating with community. These categories are used to identify activities that schools can implement to support stronger relationships between parents and schools (e.g., Robbins & Searby, 2013; Sanders, 2008; Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & De Pedro, 2011). In their review of parent involvement literature, Henderson and Mapp (2002) stated the vast majority of the 51 research studies they examined defined parental involvement within the categories identified by Epstein and her colleagues. While their review suggests that the bulk of literature finds that some form of parent involvement to be effective, they caution that parent involvement looks different at different stages of the child's educational trajectory and has variable impact depending on the child's grade in school. For example, parental involvement in the form of activities both at school and at home tended to have greater impact on children in preschool to kindergarten whereas similar activities had negative impact on young people in high school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

These models of parent engagement operate under the assumption of its benefits to children's education within a discourse and policy context which has created definitions and understandings legitimating specific types of parent involvement over others, as well as common sense notions of good parents. Well before any school-site interaction and initial first impressions of teachers or parents, conceptions of "appropriate" parent engagement and associated roles are reproduced and enacted through broader social discourse (Nakagawa, 2000). Explorations of the discourse embedded in parent engagement research and policy highlight the roles and responsibilities associated with parents in these discursive spaces. These roles are assumed in both research and policy, suggesting they likely have a taken-for-granted quality which guides the day-to-day interactions which constitute most parent-school relationships. Nakagawa (2000) analyzed a range of legislative and policy documents that reviewed family-school relationships and school reform. Two roles for parents were prevalent in the documents. Parents were posed as a problem when they failed to meet school expectations or parents were the protector, providing resources to counterbalance school resource deficits. Either way, parents have a narrow set of parameters of acceptable behavior oriented toward the school. Parents are in what Nakagawa called a "double bind" which hems in parent behavior to support school interests.

Narrow definitions of parent engagement are echoed in research discourses. In a literature review on research on parent engagement in literacy practices, Baquedano-López, Alexander, and Hernández (2013) identified three themes which shared the characteristic of being oriented toward school support: parents as first teachers, parents as learners, or parents as partners. These three themes in the research are variations of Nakagawa's "parents as protectors" trope. The one thematic outlier is the idea of "parents as choosers and consumers." Additionally, Baquedano-López and her colleagues found that the research literature they reviewed tended to highlight a consumer orientation when discussing parents' agency, while neglecting other possibilities and forms of agency. Together, these four themes constitute what Baquedano-Lopez and colleagues identify as a "neo-deficit ideology" in which programs which proclaim asset-based approaches

still frame the problems of school failure as primarily the consequence of parent failure rather than structural failure (p. 135).

While framing parents in particular roles, discourses also privilege certain behaviors as the norm, throwing into doubt and question other types of parent behaviors. Prins and Toso's 2008 analysis of the Parent Education Profile (PEP), an assessment for parent support of literacy, captures how discourses become normalized and standardized. The PEP arranges observed behavior on a scale, creating values for specific types of behavior. Prins and Toso found that middle-class, White parenting behaviors were advanced as the ideal and the norm within the PEP. Other behaviors which may result in similar outcomes or how valued behaviors may have alternative outcomes in different contexts are disregarded. The possibility of variation both in terms of parent behaviors and children's outcomes is obviated by the scale ranks of behaviors.

Scholars use the concept of cultural capital along with Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field to help make sense of how the discrepancies between the models, data, and discourses of parent engagement can, in conflicting and contradictory ways, exist together. Robinson and Harris (2014) distinguished between cultural capital and habitus as "cultural capital is knowledge about the rules of behavior (e.g., knowing the order in which forks should be used for each course), and habitus is the instinctive enactment of behaviors (e.g., knowing which fork to use without considering that an alternative is even possible (p. 64)." Cultural capital consists of the resources available to parents through their upbringing and habitus facilitates how cultural capital is deployed. As parents move through different spheres, their habitus is more or less in consonance with their field of interaction. The dissonance between fields and habitus creates power differentials and individuals are situated differently accordingly to the various types of capital at their disposal (Lareau, 2003; MacLeod, 2009).

The field of education tends to privilege and reward the cultural capital and habitus typical of white middle-class parents over others; those who act in ways similar to these norms are at a distinct advantage than those who do not (Lareau, 2003; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Noguera, 2006; Vincent, 2012;). Lareau (2003) demonstrates how the cultural capital of middle class parents, shaped by available resources and the communities in which they were embedded, differs from working class and poor parents. These differences in cultural capital were consequential to the parents' experiences and ongoing behavior in schools because schools were organized around norms, behaviors, and rules that mirrored that of middle class parents. School actors were more receptive to the ways middle-class parents deployed their cultural capital which, in turn, facilitated parents' ability to secure advantages for their children. On the other hand, working-class parents felt ill at ease in and ill-equipped for such navigations and were far less successful at getting their interests considered, much less, addressed.

Lee and Bowen (2006) confirm Lareau's findings through quantitative analyses and extend her research by suggesting that the racial disparities in academic achievement can be tied to the extent to which parents' social and cultural capital corresponds with the forms of capital privileged by schools. Overall, they found parents' presence at school was associated with higher achievement levels, regardless of racial background or socioeconomic class. They suggest that once parents are present on school sites, they are able to find ways to translate the cultural capital they have at their disposal to benefit their children. However, parents whose culture corresponded with those of educators—white parents and parents with high levels of education—tended to be the parents who were more present on school sites. Consequently, Lee and Bowen

argue that the racial achievement gap can partly be explained by the social advantage experienced by white parents and parents of higher socio-economic classes who are more present on school sites because their habitus is more consistent with the expectations of the school.

The discourses and models used in parent engagement research are powerful mechanisms which help to privilege white, middle-class culture in the field of education. While parents of all race and class backgrounds similarly value education, the field diminishes the value of the efforts and contributions of low-income parents of color to their children's educational experiences. The empirical studies reviewed in the following sections will demonstrate how these dynamics unfold. Parents' individual efforts demonstrate agency and ingenuity, developing their own definitions of engagement steeped in their racial and cultural histories. However, the efforts of low-income parents of color to extend their engagement beyond school support to have a voice in school practices and policies encounter resistance and remain marginalized within a larger field which has pre-determined roles for parents. In the next section, I review how parents, individually and in groups, engage in schools.

Parents' Experiences of School-Based Engagement

In their efforts at engaging in school sites, low-income parents of color face a myriad of challenges. The demands of attending to the needs of family survival often limits the availability of additional resources for parents to devote to school-site attendance or ongoing, continuous oversight of children's educational experiences after they attended to the needs of family survival (Camacho-Thompson, Gillen-O'Neel, Gonzales, & Fugilini, 2016; Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007). The historical and spatial locations of family life matter as well. Dorner (2012) demonstrates how immigration settlement patterns in a suburb of Chicago impact parents' access to information. Mexican immigrants in this suburb had tended to settle in a middle-income neighborhood which had a vibrant community of people who were bilingual in Spanish and English. As newly arrived immigrants interacted with the people in their neighborhood and through local institutions, they developed networks that facilitated the flow of information and advice regarding educational policies and how to navigate them. Dorner found that immigrants who settled outside of these networks had less access to information about a bilingual education policy which directly impacted their children's educational success. In the thinness of resources as well as a paucity of networks through which resources can flow, low-income parents may be limited in how they can engage on school sites.

While marginalized parents contend with significant and real material, social, and political challenges, they are not without resources which they can mobilize to navigate the school system and stay involved in their children's education. The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997, 2005) model of parent involvement identifies role concept, that is, a parent's own definition of how one should parent, as one of several core psychological constructs which influence propensity for both home- and school-based involvement. Several studies point to the ways low-income parents of color use their racial and cultural histories to assert parental authority and enact involvement as they see best fit. Greene's 2013 qualitative study demonstrates a complex interplay between African-American parents' lived experiences in economically depressed neighborhoods and the roles they create for themselves in regards to school-based involvement. Parents identified their responsibilities to their communities and families to stay involved and actively support their children in light of safety issues in the school neighborhood due to crime and traffic. Educational policies which had broken up the sense of

neighborhood and community around the school made parents feel, more than ever, there was a need to be positive and demonstrate their support of their children in an environment in which economic and social supports had been decimated. In contrast to studies which highlight the many obstacles confronted by low-income African Americans in parent involvement, Greene emphasizes how parents constructed active and engaged roles for themselves within a political economy which continues to marginalize their community.

While Greene locates African American role construction for parent engagement in a specific political economy, Cooper (2009) locates it in a socio-historical lineage of African American feminist theories of care. Because of histories in which the resistance to racism and injustice has been fundamental to survival, African American notions of care are deeply integrated with concepts of justice, intertwining individual and collective orientations diverging from mainstream theories of care which tend not to emphasize the role of justice (Cooper, 2009). Her interviews with mothers reveal the mothers' clarity about the ways their involvement differs from educators' preferences. At the same time, mothers insisted on asserting their own definitions of care based on their available resources which encompassed not just their children, but other African American children in their school community to counter educators' biased behaviors toward any African American child.

Immigrant parents also infuse their parent engagement with their own cultural norms, values, and histories. Doucet (2011) found that the Haitian immigrant parents she interviewed work to buffer the impact of "American" culture from their children's school which they believe weakens Haitian values and violates Haitian norms. They do so by creating separations between school and home. Resisting schools' efforts to influence the home did not mean they stay sequestered at home. Instead, their obligations to their children often bring them to school sites, to advocate for their children. In a case study of Mexican migrant parents' involvement in a new school, Jasis and Ordoñez-Jasis (2012) suggest that the concept of *tequio*, a historical tradition of communal work to improve the community, bolsters parents' commitments. The long volunteer hours and the juggling of multiple responsibilities required to organize and start a new school resonated with the collective commitment and persistence required through *tequio*.

Parents are often well aware of the discrepancies between their actions and those preferred by educators (Camacho-Thompson et al., 2016; Cooper, 2009). Despite recognizing the potential ramifications in these discrepancies, parents press on to support their children however they can. While mainstream definitions of parent engagement employ a white, middle-class standard, in their own interactions with school, low-income parents of color demonstrate and enact their own definitions of engagement.

While the previous studies highlight individual efforts of parent engagement, parents have long come together around different forms of school-based involvement, the most obvious example being Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) (Woyshner, 2009). However, studies of parent groups engaged in school-based involvement suggest that for low-income parents of color who surmount obstacles to school-based involvement, there are few assurances of more influence or equality once on school sites. In racially and economically diverse parent spaces, the networks and norms of middle-class parents push aside low-income parents and parents of color aside. Abram and Gibbs (2000) examine the intersections of inclusion and exclusion for parents active and not active on school sites. White parents created norms in PTA meetings such as an absence of translation or privileging consensus effectively precluded forms of participation

which did not resemble their own. Latina mothers' anger at being excluded from PTA decision-making around school support activities had no venue in PTA meetings. Posey-Maddox's (2012) qualitative case study traces the impact of demographic changes in a school which served a majority low-income, African-American student population and had test scores well above comparable schools with similar demographics. White and Asian middle-class parents perceived this school as enacting social justice principles and felt an affinity to the school with their own values. Yet these parents' efforts to build a parent community to support the school's ongoing success largely occurred outside of the existing African American community members and within their own middle-class networks. In an open-enrollment district, information about the strengths of the school spread among middle- and upper-class families already equipped with strategies and information about the enrollment process. The demographics of the school changed and veteran teachers and African American families mourned the loss of family and community that had been carefully cultivated. In similar ways, Dorner's (2011) case study of a contested bilingual policy finds claims of diversity belie marginalization. In school board and community meetings, the debate around the location of an English Language Learner program raged between a mixed group of White and African American, US-born parents who did not want it at their neighborhood school and US-born, some White and some Latino and mostly middle-class, who supported the policy (Dorner, 2011). The voices and interests of monolingual families and children, who would most directly be impacted by the policy are not directly heard but considered in proxy vis-à-vis the Latino and white bilingual parents. The most vulnerable and the most impacted community are noticeably absent from the conversations and meetings around the policy.

Conflicts between parents and educators sometimes are framed as the inevitable consequence of parents' more individualized interests around their own child and teachers' orientation toward groups and classes of students (Bauch & Goldring, 1998; Nesper, 2013). However, the African American and immigrant Latino parents in these studies employed a broader lens of engagement oriented toward supporting all children of their same racial and ethnic background. Rather, it may be that parents' collectively oriented engagement efforts diverge from institutional norms and structures for parent engagement. In the next section, I review how educational structures and teacher professionalism can constrain partnership efforts between parents and teachers and the spaces where these norms are challenged.

Educators and Parent Engagement

The research on teachers' orientations and behaviors to parent engagement suggests teachers generally support parents' learning about the school system and believe that parent engagement will result in improved academic outcomes for children (Amatea, Cholewa, & Mixon, 2012; Schechter & Sherri, 2009). When they participate in programs to foster relationships with parents, teachers easily learn to take a more collaborative approach to education as well as gain a greater appreciation for parent experience and knowledge (Auerbach & Collier, 2012; Hyland & Heuschkel, 2010; Schechter & Sherri, 2009).

Mawhinney (1998) urges caution when considering programs that provide teachers with new skills and knowledge in order to foster partnership and collaboration with parents. Mawhinney distinguishes between cognitive and political conceptions of professionalism and the ways these allow for different possibilities for teacher-parents relations. Cognitive notions of professionalism emphasize teacher expertise and knowledge as fundamental to teacher efficacy

which results in approaches to parent engagement which suggested expanding teachers' knowledge about diverse cultures, increasing teachers' tools of communication, and providing opportunities for teachers to interact with parents. Additionally, professional training and ongoing professional activities define for teachers the type of knowledge and experience necessary for expertise to demonstrate mastery. In this way, professionalism serves as "a means of controlling an occupation (p. 52)" through asserting the authority to define and formally recognize expertise. Addressing how teachers engage with parents must address teachers' socio-cultural knowledge and technical skills as well as the politics of professionalism which work to limit educative authority and influence to those trained as professionals. For educators, notions of parent engagement are wrapped up in ideologies of teacher professionalism.

Contexts of resource scarcity and external pressures can frustrate efforts which have the potential to rearrange power relations in parent-school relationships. Christianakis (2011) conducted a case study of teachers' perceptions of parents in a school under threat of sanction for inconsistent growth on state test scores. Her findings demonstrate the ways schools' material context shapes the extent and nature of teachers' openness. While teachers did position parents as assets to school operations, Christianakis explains how these descriptions situated parents as "help labor" within the school's context of minimal resources. Rather than exploring how parents could support classwork, teachers view parents as helping in tasks important to school functioning but unlikely to be completed in an under-resourced, high-stress school. Christianakis' interviews with parents reveal that volunteering occurred at great personal sacrifice. Mothers, as all the volunteers were mothers, contributed essentially what amounted to double shifts—coming in before or after a work shift to spend a few hours helping out in the classroom. Even as teachers express an awareness and concern for the socio-economic conditions of the school community, teachers construe existing parent volunteers as the norm and judged other parents negatively for being unable to be present at the school site.

Ishimaru (2013) finds similar structural constraints around the potential of parent-educator relationship. In a cross-case study of three schools, principals working side-by-side parents in substantive school processes developed conceptions of professionalism in which the authority over education was distributed across parents and educators. Deep relationships among parents, teachers, and school leaders flourish during the school design processes which expanded the social capital networks among participants. Principals are able to leverage available social capital and work with the parents to push the district to provide resources and other support for desired avenues of school reform. However, principals' alternative understandings of their roles as well as expanded roles for parents in principals' understandings of professionalism bump up against the more traditional conceptions of school leadership held by the district. Principals struggle to reconcile these two roles which were often in conflict. Individual educator efforts to expand professionalism may not have the organizational and institutional supports necessary to be sustainable, particularly when these efforts might put them into conflict with school and district authorities (Ishimaru, 2013).

Fine (1993) examines the range of authorities and power given to parents in school reform efforts in relation to the authorities retained by educators and professionals in a series of three parent involvement projects across the United States. One parent involvement project in Baltimore began with the intent to organize parents in school reform efforts. Yet the focus on

parents' specific problems in the school system and professionals' commitment to address parents' immediate and pressing needs tipped the program toward crisis intervention. She found that while resource provision was crucial to parents' survival, at the same time, serious critiques of school failures, and subsequently organizing to confront systemic issues, were abandoned. In Philadelphia, the restructuring of school governance councils to include parents expanded the range of voices primarily at the school sites. At the same time, power was not restructured vertically within district bureaucracy such that school governance councils struggled with top-down decisions regarding reductions in resources. While Fine recognized the local school councils (LSCs) of Chicago Public Schools in the 1990s as the most radical restructuring of parent and professional power at the time, her data suggest that there was a distinction between the "ideological power granted to parents and the material power still held by the central administration and the financial elites in this urban community (p. 702)." While parents on Chicago LSC exercised much more significant power than their Philadelphian counterparts and deliberative processes were thriving with a diversity of voices, the control of the district still lay in the solely in the hands of the district administration. The power asymmetries which favor the educational system and its actors are deeply institutionalized in school structures, discourses, practices, and norms such that even explicit attempts to counter them often managed to be integrated into ways to uphold the broader structures of power.

Racial politics can also shape how cognitive and political notions of teacher professionalism are linked. For example, within the talk of white, female, middle-class teachers, Yoon (2016) found teachers espoused principles of equity while still employing negative stereotypes to discuss the parents of their students. Using discourse analysis, Yoon uncovers a shared narrative around their professionalism facilitates discursive maneuvers which draw on discourses of equity as well as familiar, negative tropes of low-income parents of color. These teachers, while well-versed in equity, still reflect structural inequalities in their talk which privileges them in terms of class (professionalism) and race (whiteness). In contrast, some studies of the histories of African-American schooling and currently successful schools embedded in African-American communities suggest teachers in these communities demonstrate alternative arrangements in the relationship between cognitive and political teacher professionalism. While not dismissing the diversity of perspectives within the African American community around the content and aims of Black schooling (Anderson, 1995), these studies nevertheless demonstrate that the African American educators who have supported the educational success of African American children have a distinct orientation to professionalism. The segregated schools of the pre-Brown era were exemplified by teachers and principals who were highly visible and active in their students' lives as well as in the broader community in which their students lived (Siddle Walker, 2000). These social and cultural relationships are undergirded by a political understanding of education in which teachers' and principals' professional behavior is guided by notions of professionalism which explicitly linked education and advancement of African Americans during a time of Jim Crow and legalized racism (Siddle Walker, 2000). A professionalism which incorporates the active development and maintenance of ongoing relationships between educators and families and community members continues to distinguish successful schools which serve largely African American students (Khalifa, 2012; Morris, 1999).

Teachers' professionalism is undergirded by both cognitive and political arrangements which work to uphold preserve the authority and control over education in hands of the professionals (Mawhinney, 1998). While programs designed to address cognitive professionalism have demonstrated shifts toward a more partnership and collaborative orientation (e.g., Amatea et al., 2012; Auerbach & Collier, 2016), the environmental pressures of schooling often foster a perspective of parents as "resources", which restricts parents to an auxiliary role in schooling (Bauch & Goldring, 1998; Christianakis, 2011). One potential countermeasure toward these institutional tendencies could be to yoke the politics of professionalism to a broader politics which seeks to challenge the marginalization of communities of color.

Approaches which assume that teachers and parents will easily come to shared understandings of the best interests of the children elide how good intentions, information dissemination, and collaborative efforts are embedded and constrained by social structures and patterns of inequality. Institutional tendencies and professional ideologies work to define parent engagement in terms of school support, upholding the authority and expertise of educators over that of parents, despite parents' creativity and determination in determining their own means of engagement. Policies and programs which try to bridge the relationship between parents and schools require considerable investment of time, skills, and resources on the part of parents and schools. Some scholars have suggested intermediary organizations can bring additional resources to balance the relationship between parents and schools (Lopez et al., 2005; Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007). Organizations enter into this fray, in hopes of loosening this complicated entanglement of histories, ideologies, and politics. In the next section, I review the scholarship on parent engagement organizations.

Parent Engagement Organizations

Intermediary organizations (IOs) are a growing influence on educational practice and policy. Honig (2004) defines IOs as organizations positioned between two sets of actors that bring some value that is unavailable in either of the two original actors. While research on IOs in the field of education is burgeoning, there is limited scholarship on IOs functioning in an organizational field in the social space between parents and schools. I use the term "parent engagement organizations (PEOs)" to refer to IOs involved in parent engagement through providing critical infrastructure and resources to bolster the capacity of low-income parents of color to engage with schools (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011; Mediratta, 2007) and to a lesser extent, working with school actors to increase their skills and knowledge around parent engagement (Lopez et al., 2005; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014). Scholars have documented the ways in which the presence of PEOs and their investment of resources fosters relationships between educators and parents where there were previously none or shifts school environments from being disrespectful of parents to ones vibrant with parent activity (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011; Lopez et al., 2005; Martinez-Cosio, 2010; Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007; Shirley, 1997; Warren, 2005). The scholarship on PEOs offers generally positive, descriptive accounts of the impact of their resource brokerage. As such, the growing numbers of PEOs are considered to be a testament to how PEOs are successfully able to engage low-income parents of color in schools (Lopez et al., 2005; Mediratta, Fruchter, & Lewis, 2002).

Extant literature on PEOs focuses on organizations that take either a political or educative approach to parent engagement. PEOs using the political approach (hereafter referred to as political PEOs) work to organize parents to leverage their collective power to challenge professional and institutional power. PEO staff recruit and mobilize parents around issues of school reform, provide leadership training and development for parents to mobilize and organize other parents, and invest time and commitment to sustain campaigns (Martinez-Cosio, 2010; Mediratta, 2007; Shirley, 1997). The political PEO creates opportunities for parents to discuss and address issues of power with each other and to confront power asymmetries by engaging with educators and political elites in civically purposeful ways (Mediratta, 2007; Shirley, 1997). For example, Shatkin and Gershberg (2007) described how a political PEO provided training and advocacy support for parents serving on a school-based governance council. Beyond mandating parent presence on the governance council, there were no school or district resources to facilitate parents' involvement. The PEO's staff educated parents on issues being raised in committee meetings, helped parents coalesce around a common agenda, and trained them to articulate and advocate for their interest in the governance of the school.

These studies suggest that parents' relationships with organizers as well as with other parents are crucial to parents' ability and persistence in pushing for change. Glickman & Scally (2008) identify a three-phased iterative process, consistently asserted across research on education organizing, that begins with basic organizing to bond people together around shared values and issues. The initial step of developing relationships between community members begins to interrupt the isolation that they may experience living in neighborhoods where crime keeps doors locked and people indoors, diverse cultures and languages stilt casual conversation between neighbors, and punitive social structures targeted at low-income communities of color generate fear and suspicion. Relationships begin in spaces where community members can air out their grievances and share their fears and anxieties (Mediratta, 2007; Shirley, 1997). As what was once held individually and privately becomes shared and held in the group, parents make connections, not only with each other socially, but across the concerns and worries thought to be personal and idiosyncratic. Community members negotiate individual interests while constructing a shared understanding of the problems and solutions around which they will mobilize their energy. The solutions articulate notions of quality education grounded in the lived experience of community members. These bonds can build the political power to demand and hold public officials accountable to collectively-identified and community-developed solutions.

Hong's (2011) extensive study of the Logan Street Neighborhood Association (LSNA) provides rich detail about the relationships that animate parent organizing. Parents' relationships within the association provided material and social supports beyond school walls, deepening parents' commitment to each other. These commitments fueled ongoing advocacy efforts which require persistence. Parents were consistently active in campaign efforts because they desired to reciprocate the support they have received through their association with LSNA. Parent-organizer relationships featured prominently as well. Organizers encouraged parents to take on leadership roles and engage in political activities that had been outside parents' realm of possibility. Organizer technical support was crucial to parents' confidence in interacting with political elites. Parent organizing relies on the relationships among parents to foster a sense of community based on accountability to each other and their common goals. Furthermore, parents gain the information and skills for advocacy through support from their organizer. Together,

these relationships facilitate parents' ability to identify a shared set of interests and push toward realization of their goals.

There are several studies of PEOs using an educative approach (hereafter referred to as educative PEOs). While not necessarily a cohesive body of literature, the similarities across these studies suggest some patterns in the behavior of educative PEOs. Researchers characterize the asymmetry between parents and schools not in terms of power but in differentials of social and cultural capital. Educative PEOs address these asymmetries through education and training which builds the capacity of low-income parents of color to more effectively navigate a system organized around middle-class culture and values (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012; Sanders, 2001). Educative programs demystify the bureaucracies of schooling (Lopez et al., 2005; Sanders, 2008), increase parents' knowledge of and capacity to enact the roles they can play at home and school to support children's learning (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014), and build relationships among parents to bolster social capital (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012). Lawson and Alameda-Lawson (2012) explored how an organization builds parents' social capital. The organization's parent engagement program, named the Community Action Network, reduced barriers to participation by providing resources which addressed immediate needs of parents. The trust and confidence, *confianza* as described by Lawson and Alameda-Lawson, built in these spaces emanated outward as parents began to recruit other parents to the program by sharing the resources they received. Parents' initiative shifted CAN from being contained within a community-based organization to active in the local neighborhood as parents designed and implemented neighborhood-based activities to facilitate dissemination information and resources beyond organization walls into their communities.

Hong's focus on the Logan Street Neighborhood Association and Lawson and Alameda-Lawson's discussion of the Community Action Network is populated by organization staff and parents. Their studies are indicative of most studies of educative and political PEOs which discuss the activities of organizational staff and organization interchangeably. The organization itself does not serve an empirical purpose beyond acting as a container for organizer and parent activity.

A few studies have hinted at components and behaviors of organizations apart from staff and their interactions with parents. For example, Shirley (1997) emphasized organizers' considerable efforts to diversify their strategies to establish a diverse Latino base which straddled class-lines. Diversification was framed not only as a political tactic but also as a strategy for organizational survival. Additional sustainability measures, such as creating a salary structure, were also highlighted. These are organizational activities which enable but are distinct from parent engagement practices. Scholars have also recognized how organizational relationships and positioning matters for the outcomes of parent engagement. Martinez-Cosio's (2010) comparison of the efforts by an African American parent group and a Latino parent group to influence school reform policy led her to surmise that relative success of the African-American parents as compared to their Latino counterparts was, in part, the consequence of their membership as an affiliate of a national organization. This organizational relationship brokered additional resources crucial to the parents' advocacy efforts. Proponents of PEOs discuss the advantages of community-based organizations as a function of how their relationship (or lack thereof) to other organizations, namely the school (e.g., Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012; Lopez et al., 2005; Mediratta, 2007; Warren, 2005). Their relative independence from school systems and ability to

be in a space distinct from the school system is framed as a unique *organizational* quality which operates as an important resource for parent engagement. It is clearly evident that organizational resources are consequential to outcomes of parent engagement.

Scholarship on both political and educative PEOs emphasize how organizations create spaces for relationship building, information distribution, and skill development for parents. However, the scholarship tends to subsume organizational features, such as organizational independence, or behaviors, such as diversifying constituent bases, under resources lent to the task of parent engagement. Framing organizations primarily as configurations of resources is a reductive, instrumental perspective of organizations, neglecting the ways these features and behaviors are particular to the nature of formal organizations and serve purposes outside, and potentially conflict with, parent engagement. Furthermore, the significance given to the resource role of organizations advances the notion that the challenges of parent engagement are technical problems to which organizations as technical solutions can be applied. Both the parent-school relationship and organization are rendered neutral.

Research on intermediary organizations (IOs) in the field of education suggests that organizations act generatively using resource brokerage as a vehicle. In providing technical and resource support for school reforms, IOs shape key policy messages as they interpret and translate policy for school and district actors (Coburn, 2005; Honig, 2004). Scholars who examine IOs from a macro-perspective have observed behavioral adaptations in response to an organization's need for resources. Foundations often influence IO research agendas and dissemination strategies (J. Scott & Jabbar, 2014) and district accountability pressures make it difficult for IOs to balance between their desire to preserve their organizational mission and the pressure to respond to resource-provider demands (Cucchiara, Gold, & Simon, 2011; Russell, Knutson, & Crowley, 2012; Wechsler & Friedrich, 1997). Collectively, these studies point to organizations as actors who have a distinct set of interests, apart from those of client or constituent, which drive behavior. Thus, to understand the PEO as an actor in its own right, I turn to the sociology of organizations.

Organizational Theory

The sociology of organizations assumes organizations are of theoretical importance as unique social structures embedded in broader social structures and patterns of inequality (W.R. Scott & Davis, 2007). Organizations have distinctive socially productive roles which shape and are shaped by their environment (McQuarrie & Marwell, 2009). Moreover, organizations are distinguished by highly formalized internal dynamics in which social interactions and processes occur (W.R. Scott & Davis, 2007). In this section, I review theoretical and empirical scholarship which takes on an organizational lens to understand the field from the perspective of the organization.

Maintenance: Resource Dependency and Legitimacy

Legitimacy is constructed between an actor and an audience: "Legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions (Suchman, 1995: p. 4)." Meyer and Rowan (1977) argued that "organizations are driven to

incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of organizational work and institutionalized in society. Organizations that do so increase their legitimacy and their survival prospects, independent of the immediate efficacy of the acquired practices and procedures (p. 340).” Thus, legitimacy is related to dimensions of organizational survival. For example, legitimacy can be afforded for the purposes of continuity or credibility (Suchman, 1995). Organizations need only reflect institutionalized scripts and norms to generate legitimacy for continuity. Assuming those ideas, activities, and norms that are broadly accepted in the field of parent engagement will generally suffice in maintaining a parent engagement program as long as no outside resources are necessary. Credibility differs from continuity in that it requires an organization to engage in action that makes it more meaningful, that is, more “trustworthy”. Organizations must demonstrate trustworthiness to some audience in regards to investment or relationship. PEOs often work to expand parents’ existing perceptions of their role in schools to include various forms of active school-based involvement. Hasenfeld (2010) argues that work to change people is work “on” people and should be considered as moral work. Given the moral nature of the work, the process of social sanctioning from key stakeholders who endorse the “goodness” of the work is critical to organizational survival (Hasenfeld, 2010). Legitimacy for credibility suggests there is a social sanctioning process which allows parent engagement organizations to continue working with marginalized communities. When a PEO embarks on the task of parent engagement work, it mostly likely incorporates activities, ideas, and beliefs which are socially sanctioned or accepted to be appropriate for working with low-income parents of color to ensure it can garner legitimacy from parents, schools, coalition partners, or funders who in turn provide the organization with the social support necessary to continue its moral work (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). While both consistency and credibility are necessary for PEO survival, the need to establish both may result in conflict: “Actions that enhance persistence are not always identical to those that enhance meaning (Suchman, 1995: p. 6).”

There is no single, definitive way for organizations to respond to the multiple and often conflicting dynamics of the environment. The ways in which a PEO expresses legitimacy to a school differs from the ways it expresses legitimacy to a funder which differs still from behaviors that indicate legitimacy to the parents involved in its programming. In fact, Oliver (1991) identified a typology of five distinct organizational strategies which can be deployed to manage the pressures of legitimacy: acquiescence, compromise, avoidance, defiance, and manipulation. These responses manifest either through organizational practices or structures. For example, a dimension of acquiescence is compliance. Organizations will comply through structural elaboration which is the process of adding departments and committees as required by policy even if these departments do not enhance the technical core of the work (Oliver, 1991). Compliance also occurs in changing behaviors as demonstrated through the increasing use of consultants and the adoption of strategic plans by non-profits in response to funders’ demands to demonstrate professionalism which mimics the activities in the business sector which are thought to enhance efficiency and accountability (Hwang & Powell, 2009).

The challenges of establishing legitimacy among multiple stakeholders are further compounded by the relationship between legitimacy and material resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). The concept of resource dependency examines how inter-organizational flows of resources are leveraged for influence or control (Hillman, Withers, & Collins, 2009). Resource dependency is particularly complicated for PEOs because their status as non-profit organizations

limits their means to create capital yet they require capital to sustain the salaries of the professional staff and other organizational maintenance activities (Staggenborg, 1988; Weisbrod, 1998). PEOs enter into relationships with foundations, schools, districts, and other organizations to secure resources. However, the search to secure resources for organizational sustainability typically comes with some loss of organizational autonomy (Hillman, Withers, & Collins, 2009). The scarcity and criticality of the resource to the PEO creates an “asymmetric dependency” which increases the influence the resource-holding actor organization has over the behavior of the PEO (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). When goals of the PEO and the resource-holding organization align, asymmetric dependency may not interrupt business as usual; however, when the goals between the two organizations do not align, the PEO may transform its formally defined goals to attend to the relational goals which come about from asymmetric dependency.

In a competitive funding environment, sustained and robust sources of funding are difficult to secure. Scholars have identified strategies and tactics unique to non-profit organizations, such as PEOs, to manage their multiple resource dependencies such as compliance, revenue diversification, or political action (Froelich, 1999; Hillman et al., 2009). For instance, non-profits can pursue resource alignment as an alternative strategy to revenue diversification. While revenue diversification is typical of for-profit organizations because it allows for autonomy as its end goal, Moulton and Eckerd (2012) argue that the orientation of non-profits toward public values opens a resource management strategy that focuses on seeking resources from organizations and individuals that hold values that are similar to those espoused by the non-profit.

Only a handful of studies on parent engagement consider how legitimacy and resource dependency management impact PEOs. Nygreen (2016) described the efforts of a community-based, grassroots organizing group to start a new school grounded in Freirian principles of popular education. Parents and organizers worked together to develop a shared vision of school culture and goals and design a plan to submit to the district’s call for applications for pilot schools. However, the constraints of resource dependency ultimately forestalled efforts and the vision never was realized. Conflict among organizers and parents around whether to open the school as part of the district’s pilot school program and take on district responsibilities or as a charter school to ensure autonomies strained relationships, challenging their ability to move forward. The fragility of the organization was further exacerbated by a crisis in funding which was resolved by staff’s decision to accept a sub-contractor position with the school district to provide afterschool programming. The energy and resources necessary to fulfill this contract, which provided critical material resources for the organization’s survival, consumed and ultimately extinguished organizers and parents’ desire for a school which incorporated the radical and liberatory potential of a Freirian model of education.

In their nuanced study of the voucher movement in Milwaukee, Apple and Pedroni (2005) provide a compelling picture of the complexity of organizational self-interest in terms of mission and maintenance. They investigated the organizing efforts of the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) to introduce vouchers into the Milwaukee Unified School District. Even though vouchers are predominantly considered as an issue on conservative school reform platform, the BAEO argued that vouchers, along with the concept of educational markets as a whole, could “be reoccupied for Black cultural or nationalist politics and can be employed to stop what they consider to be the strikingly ineffective education of black children (p. 2084)”. While BAEO organizers employed a radical discourse of Black nationalism and politics in their

organizing efforts for vouchers, these organizing efforts were underwritten by the Bradley Foundation, which is well known for being racist and conservative. Apple and Pedroni suggest that the melding of radical black politics and the conservative school reform strategy of vouchers came together in the organizational mission partly as a way to address BAEO's maintenance needs of acquiring sustainable funding while maintaining legitimacy with its African-American constituents. These two studies make evident how decisions around organizational survival and practices attending to parents' interest are not easily resolved. Attending to issues of the organization uncover the ways existing parent engagement practices were outcomes of decisions which set aside parents' interests or generated uneasy compromises.

Routines

Inside the organization, work among staff as well as between staff and parents typically occurs through routines—intentional, repeated “patterns of interaction (Sherer & Spillane, 2011)” in which actors negotiate, navigate, advance, and struggle around organizational priorities, enactment of work, and motivation and outcomes of work. In other words, it is most often through routines that staff make sense of and accomplish the tasks of organizational survival.

Routines are animated by the “flows of connected ideas, actions, and outcomes (Feldman, 2000, p. 613)”. Within a set of constraints, routines can be manipulated to articulate multiple and various connections to reproduce existing patterns or create alternative or new ideas, actions, or outcomes. This is especially evident over time as demonstrated by Sherer and Spillane's 2013 study on school routines around language arts which spanned four years. One routine, the Five Week Assessment, was a source of innovation and stability as the school tried to improve its language arts assessment. When the change was initiated, new routines were established across different configurations of administrators, department chairs, teachers to ensure ongoing interaction around the teaching reading and writing. Tools were created specific to these routines which focused interactions around agreed-upon components of language arts assessment. Furthermore, relationships resulting from the formal routines also spurred additional informal interactions around the content outside the routines. In this way, routines shifted the pedagogy around reading and writing significantly. At the same time, during major transitions in school leadership with the retirement of the principal and the transfer of the literacy coach, the repetition of these routines by veteran staff as well as people new to their roles affirmed the parameters of language arts activities as it existed within in the routine. Routines introduced ideas and actions that signaled organizational priorities and supported the realization of these priorities by both facilitating opportunities for change as well as a space for stability.

Routines are guided by explicit and implicit rules (Fromson, 2003). Formalized rules make the structure and boundaries of routines explicit, enabling certain types of actions which uphold the intent of the routines and limiting alternatives or redirecting digressions (Adler & Borys, 1996; Sherer & Spillane, 2011). Informal rules such as norms often delineate the acceptable (and unacceptable) interactions. Control over the rules that govern meetings, such as agenda setting, time-keeping, processes of debate, is asserted by actors to legitimize or delegitimize particular concerns, issues, or people (Ashcraft, 2001; Coburn, 2006). In her rich case study of the various everyday routines of the business side of a symphony, Maitlis (2008) demonstrated the ways meetings were controlled correlated to more or less unified accounts of organizational work across actors. When symphony directors used their authority to circumscribe

content and participants to coordinate a series of stakeholder meetings around a high-priority issue, stakeholders had highly coherent and consistent account of leaders' message about next steps. In comparison, other routines were less guided and controlled, resulting in more fragmented or a lack of understandings around the necessary tasks. Both the content and processes of routines were consequential to how staff understood and responded to organizational priorities and the ways they accomplish their work.

The sociology of organizations provides concepts to specify the distinctive nature of organizations. Attending to the environmental pressures of resource dependency and legitimacy is crucial to organizational survival. Routines are central to how staff come to understand their work and structure how work is defined and accomplished.

Summary of Literature

Parent engagement is premised on the possibility and promise of relationships between parents and schools. The review of literature offers significant evidence that the possibilities and promises of this relationship differ for parents from marginalized backgrounds. While low-income parents of color draw from a variety of social and cultural resources to engage in education, the dominant narratives and professional ideologies embedded within the institution of education position parents in auxiliary roles in terms of activity, relationship, and authority. These conditions suggest that the empowerment of low-income parents of color in schools, that is, positioning parents as legitimate, active agents and producers of schooling, will require significant political, cultural, and social shifts (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Bauch & Goldring, 1998; Fine, 1993). The proposal of parent engagement organizations as a solution primarily recognizes PEOs in a technical role of resource brokerage. The organization fades into the background while its resources take center stage for the ways they facilitate political or social shifts in how parents engage with schools. Concepts from the sociology of organizations suggest that rarely is the organization simply a setting, but a social actor which has distinct environmental pressures and is uniquely internally structured to produce an independent set of social processes. This review of literature suggests that the PEO has three objectives: to address gaps in parent skills and knowledge, to create solidarity among parents to challenge existing narratives, and to continue to survive as an organization. While the first two have been explored in terms of resource brokerage, less understood is how the last objective, which is the only one specific and unique to the organization as a social actor, may interact with the other two. There is a need to consider the implications of organizational mediation in parent-school relationships.

Introduction to Conceptual Framework

The literature review demonstrates that parent-school relationships are deeply ingrained by broader social, political, and cultural dynamics and patterns of inequality (Auerbach, 2007; Graue & Oen, 2009). Formal organizations have been identified as potential workarounds for the challenges which trouble relationships between low-income parents of color and educators and schools, more broadly. A conceptual framework which can attend to both the politics of parent engagement and organizationally-specific contingencies is necessary to explore the characteristics and mechanisms of organizational influence on parent-school relationships. Drawing on the sociology of organizations, the politics of education, and the literature of parent

engagement, I develop a conceptual framework to examine the socio-political implications of organizations in parent-school relationships in terms of how they challenge or reproduce the power asymmetries experienced by low-income parents of color in their efforts to support their children's education.

Assumptions

I begin from the ontological premise that reality is socially constructed such that how we understand and engage in social interactions is a condition of our particular location in time and space (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Context, then, is integral to understanding the case in question: “[c]ontext is not just a constraining external realm but as constitutive of the object of study...a more integrated and ephemeral notion of socially produced figure and ground (Seddon, 1995, p. 6).” The figure-ground metaphor guides this study in its fundamental understanding of parent engagement practice as emerging from and shaped by an embedded organizational sphere. The feature of embeddedness is also an assumption about the ways social activity occurs in a “strategic action field”, a “...fundamental unit of collective action in society which is a constructed mesolevel social order in which actors are attuned to and interact with one another on the basis of shared understandings about the purposes of the field, relationships to others in the field (including who has power and why), and the rules governing legitimate action in the field (Fligstein & McAdam, 2015, p. 9).” Strategic actions fields suggest there are multiple ways actors, individuals and organizations, are related to each other as they engage in some collective activity. While this study does not explore the field of parent engagement per se, it does begin from the assumption that organizations exist in fields characterized by networks of relationships which create demands to which organizations respond.

Research on parent engagement acknowledges the ways social inequalities create breaches in how parents and educators interact. However, the proposed solution of an organization has received little examination which fleshes out the organization as a fully-developed actor within the context of the parent-school relationship. By situating parent engagement within the social interactions among organizational staff as well as between staff and parents, I will demonstrate the organizational contingencies which shape the construction of parent engagement practices.

Operationalizing Parent-School Relationships

Current Models

Parent engagement organizations (PEOs) are primarily examined for their resource brokerage role in parent-school relationships. In this model, the challenges of parent-school relationships are understood in terms of resource insufficiencies on both the part of schools and parents. PEOs are independent sources of resources, unencumbered by the many complications of parent-school relationships (Lopez et al., 2005). Figure 1 illustrates the dominant model of parent engagement organizations:

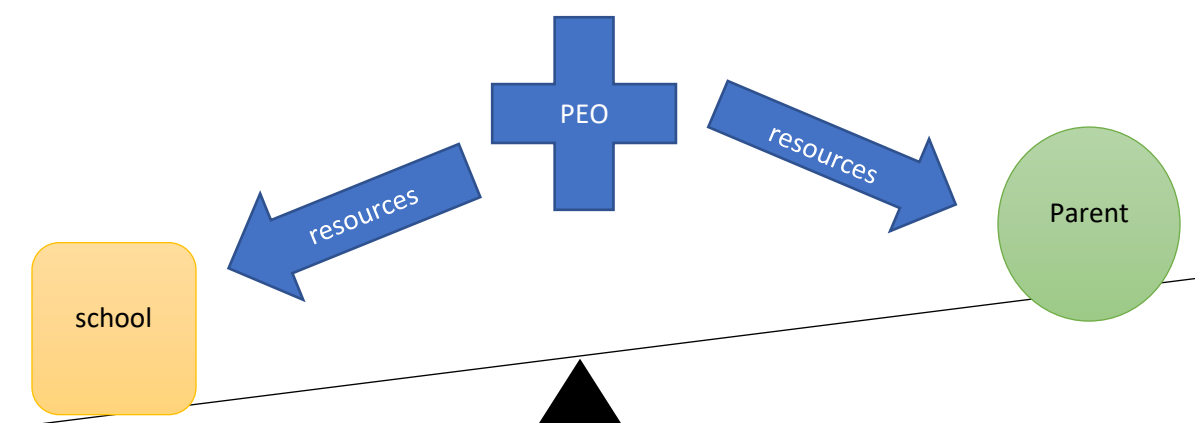


Figure 1. Dominant model of organizations in parent-school relationships.

In this model, interactions between parents and educators are mediated by the resources, or lack thereof, that each actor brings to the interaction. Lending organizational resources to either school or parents or both addresses the resource inequities which impede relationship-building. For example, organizations can dedicate staff and time to equipping parents with information that facilitates advocacy for their children which, in turn, may push teachers to provide higher quality education. For teachers, having organizations structure interactions between teachers and parents removes administrative burdens and protects time and space for teachers to learn about family culture and develop relationships with parents. These suggestions assume an additive model of parent-school relationships in which organizations address resource gaps in either parent or school operations to better balance the relationship.

These models examine the outcomes of resource brokerage but not how or why organizational resources were distributed in a particular manner. To begin to specify how organizations ameliorate or exacerbate the “negotiated order” between low-income parents of color and educators (Ball, 1987, p. 20), I depart from an additive model to a process model which considers the dynamics of organizational survival as settings in which parent engagement practice is embedded and the politics of parent engagement as the mechanisms by which parents are empowered or further marginalized (see Figure 2).

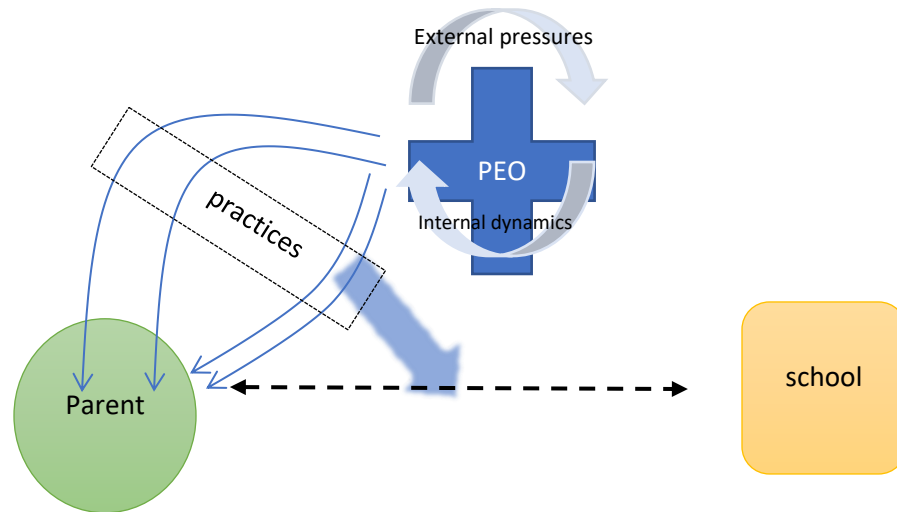


Figure 2. Conceptual framework

Conceptual Framework

The proposed conceptual framework attends to how organizations shape the politics of parent engagement, extending our knowledge of the organizational role as a pipeline of resources or a container for staff activity to one of potential mediation. It does so by employing conceptual tools which animate the organization as an “arena of interaction (Clemens & Minkoff, 2008, p. 156)”, shaped by its environment and constructing its scope of work in ways which attend to its constituents and its survival needs. I explore how staff make sense of the multiple and conflicting pressures and demands from the organizational environment and stakeholders using the concepts of resource dependency and legitimacy. To examine organizational practice, I apply the concept of routines to explore how parent engagement is incorporated into the work of organizational maintenance as well as the micropolitics of parent engagement work. Specifically, within the micropolitics of parent engagement work, I attend to the ways organizational staff facilitate different facets of parent empowerment.

Organizational context. I employ concepts from the sociology of organizations which operationalize the internal dynamics through which staff navigate, negotiate, and struggle over how their work looks and how to respond to external demands. Organizational identity is a useful container for a range of organizational behaviors. Organizational identity is crucial to organizational maintenance and survival as it provides bounds and definition for the scope of work (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002). Organizational cultures of interactions offer staff various opportunities to create, negotiate, and contest shared understandings of work in relation to organizational identity (Clemens & Minkoff, 2008; Lok, 2010). Routines are the intentional, repeated “patterns of interaction...[which] frame and focus interactions among staff helping to define work practice (Sherer & Spillane, 2011: p. 617)”. Routines are animated by actors’ interactions as well as the norms and rules which guide, focus, and control the dynamics of

interaction to accomplish organizational tasks (Anagnostopoulos & Rutledge, 2007; Ashcraft, 2001; Fromson, 2003; Coburn, 2006).

Organizational complexity necessitates multiple routines. To facilitate inquiry into the organization as a context, I prioritize routines of maintenance, such as meetings, to uncover staff's shared understandings of how their work responds to organizational pressures and reflects organizational priorities. To examine work, I focus on routines of parent engagement to explore how interactions between staff and parents define and frame the processes of parent engagement. I explore routines in terms of interactions and the formal and informal structures that frame the interactions.

Resources conferred through external perceptions of organizational identity are arranged, prioritized, and distributed through staff work. Organizational behaviors to strategically manage resource dependency relationships or to cultivate legitimacy can be understood as efforts to assert and define organizational identity amidst multiple environmental pressures (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002; Lok, 2010). Resource dependency emphasizes the interorganizational flow of material resources and how those flows are leveraged for power (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). The scarcity and criticality of the resource to the PEO creates "asymmetric dependency" in which the resource-holding actor organization can "influence or constrain" the behavior of the PEO (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003).

In addition to managing resource dependency relationships, organizations also negotiate relationships and contexts which shape the terms of legitimacy, "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions (Suchman, 1995: p. 4)." Organizational legitimacy is acting within the parameters of a socially-understood arena of acceptability. The many stakeholders and diverse interests that converge on PEOs bring together a tangle of not necessarily compatible demands, complicating how organizations demonstrate acceptability to diverse audiences (Froelich, 1999; Oliver, 1991). Yet legitimacy maintenance and management are crucial to organizational survival because legitimacy is fungible, often yielding additional material, moral, cultural, human, and socio-organizational resources which facilitate an organization's survival (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003; Walker & McCarthy, 2010).

Inside practice. Participation in schools is a potential vehicle for empowerment for low-income parents of color who often find themselves outside of mainstream political processes (Rogers, Saunders, Terriquez, & Velez, 2008). Rather than exploring participation in terms of its presence or absence, I understand participation as a socially constructed phenomenon which can be explored in terms of its relational qualities: "Participation is not thought of as a practice with essential characteristics but as a practice that derives its significance from how it is situated relative to other practices, actors, and meanings (McQuarrie, 2013, p. 147)." Specifically, I examine how organizations construct parent engagement to empower different forms of parent participation on school sites, positioning parents in particular ways within the micropolitics of schooling.

The review of literature discusses parent empowerment in two ways—means and goals. Information acquisition, skill development, and relationships among parents are crucial in the processes of empowering parent engagement (e.g., Auerbach, 2007; Fuentes, 2005; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012; Hong, 2011). Yet empowerment can only be achieved when these

means serve parents' ability to determine and enact their influence on school life and policy (Anderson, 1998; Fine, 1993; Tollefson, 2008; Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009). By attending to parents' skills, knowledge, and opportunities to be engaged in the school, PEOs are stepping into the fray of school micropolitics. Blase (1998) defines micropolitics as "the use of formal and informal power by individual and groups to achieve their goals in organizations...political actions result from perceived differences between individuals and groups, coupled with the motivation to use power to influence and protect (p. 265)." Tensions between parents and educators around their roles in educational quality and who can determine the processes and outcomes of education fit squarely within a micropolitical perspective (Ball, 1987; Cochran & Malen, 2008). PEOs lend resources and infrastructure to parents, and occasionally teachers, to effect different types of interactions around these tensions. Embedding parent-school relationships within the micropolitics of schooling facilitates the consideration of how conflict and consensus are employed by organizational staff in their work with parents (Ball, 1987; Cochran & Malen, 2008). I trace the ways conflict and consensus operate in parent engagement spaces as well as how conflict and consensus are deployed in constructions of parent participation. In this way, I build our understanding of the organizational actors who, with parents and educators, shape the politics of parent-school relationships.

Understanding how organizations construct parents' participation in relation to practices and actors will uncover the organizational role in shaping the parameters of activities and goals for parents' agency on school sites and how these constructions contribute to or diminish parents' empowerment.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the research methods used in this study. I offer a description of and rationales for the research design and procedures as well as approaches to design challenges. The research design was intended to apply qualitative research methods to provide a rich picture of the dynamics and processes of organizational behavior in parent engagement.

Research Questions

In this research study, I endeavored to understand the parent engagement organization as a meaningful object of inquiry in parent-school relationships. The overarching question of this study took the title of a policy study, “How Does a Policy Mean?”³ as a point of departure. In that study, Yanow uncovers the symbolism in the language, artifacts, and practices of employees in community centers to explore how they make sense of new policies around their work. Inspired, I wondered, “How does an organization mean to the inequalities in parent-school relationship?” That is, how might the distinct social nature of an organization be able to empower parents in parent-school relationship? Most scholarship assumes a resource-brokerage role for organizations. I wanted to open up the organization, much like Yanow opened up a policy, as a question, and explore how organizations arrange themselves around the task of parent engagement and how organizational contingencies shape the practice of parent engagement.

I asked the following research questions to explore how an organization means:

1. In the two focal organizations, what conditions are created for parent engagement practices?
 - a) What is the relationship between parent engagement work and the resource dependency and legitimacy needs of the organization?
 - b) How do organizational routines arrange work around parent engagement?
2. In the two focal organizations, how do parent engagement routines attend to parents’ interests and needs in ways that empower parents?
 - a) What are the similarities and differences between the parent engagement routines of an educative organization as compared to a political organization?
 - b) How do routines empower parents in relation to the school or educators?
3. What, if at all, is the relationship between organizational contingencies and parent engagement within the organization?

³ Yanow, D. (1996). *How does a policy mean?: Interpreting policy and organizational actions*. Georgetown University Press.

These research questions worked together to guide an investigation into how organizations mean for parent engagement. The first set of questions attended to organizationally-specific characteristics to understand the contours of the organization as an actor in the parent-school relationship. The data highlighted the conditions for practices within the organization. The second set of questions attended to how the organizations constructed and implemented practices of parent engagement. In exploring both the conditions created by the organization and then the practices which emerged from within the conditions, I hoped to identify the features specific to organizations which influence how and why organizations enact parent engagement and the extent to which their involvement can address the many obstacles for engagement faced by low-income parents of color.

Case Study Design

Social scientists embark on understanding and exploring social complexity through a process known as “casing”, slicing and bounding social life to create objects of study to bring into relief those features of interest (Ragin, 1992). Research endeavors seek to build, extend, interrogate existing casings. This research design cases parent engagement in a way that is relatively rare—that of the organizational role in parent-school relationships. I employ case study methodology for an exploratory study on how PEOs navigate survival demands and parents’ interests (Yin, 2009).

In case study methodology, boundaries help to bracket the unit of analysis, or the case, in question (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). In this study, I centered the organization as the unit of analysis. The organizations were bounded by geography in that they worked within the same district and by the same activity of parent engagement. Because case studies try to build understanding of a phenomena as it unfolds in everyday life, case study methodology is appropriate for this research study given the limited empirical insights which exist on how organizations are phenomena with unique characteristics influencing the relationship between parents and schools (Eisenhardt, 1989). For reasons which will be elaborated below, I moved from a comparative case study to a multi-case study. Multi-case studies bring together multiple cases to explore various dimensions of the case; in my study, I examined parent engagement through the two distinct cases of organizational approaches (Creswell, 2007). This approach was not for the purpose of obtaining generalizability but to shed light on the organizational variations across approaches to parent engagement (Creswell, 2007; Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Furthermore, I utilize case study methodology informed by interpretivist and constructivist presuppositions while stopping short of a total grounded theory approach (Crotty, 1998). This study relies on assumptions of staff’s meaning-making of their environments and their interactions as well as their efforts to guide parents’ meaning-making about school-site involvement. In this way, I do not believe that there is one single objective definition of parent engagement but that research participants are actively constructing and enacting their own particular definitions such that parent engagement is constructed to reflect the dynamics of its context (Crotty, 1998; Berger & Luckman, 1967). While interpretivist-constructivist assumptions informed methodological and analytical choices, concepts derived from theory and empirical research guided the analytical path.

Case Selection

The work of identifying a topic, reviewing relevant literature, developing research questions and hypotheses is challenging but the relative abstract nature of these tasks means they are fairly under the control of the researcher. Case selection and confirmation, however, is a task mired in reality. In this section, I outline the parameters and procedures for case selection and the obstacles in securing participation.

Case Selection Parameters

As noted previously, I had intended to carry out a comparative case study of two different types of parent engagement organizations. To ensure that a comparative analysis would be possible, I sought to hold the district as the constant variable. While I recognized the non-monolithic nature of districts, I also believed that organizations working in the same district would be operating within a relatively similar field in terms of the actors, policies and practices, and narratives that constituted parent engagement in a district setting. I identified Nelson Unified School District (NUSD) as a setting that had many of the environmental demands faced by PEOs. This district is a vibrant hub of non-profits and community-based organizations. As a result, competition for funding and resources among non-profits is fierce. NUSD also has a district policy environment perhaps more amenable to parent engagement than others. The district, and the city of Nelson itself, have long histories of influential parent organizing (Self, 2005; Tilton, 2010). This history is the backdrop to a myriad of school reforms that created avenues for parent engagement ranging from school choice to school site councils to a parent advisory council that oversees the distribution of education funds newly restored to the district from the state (“About the Local Control Funding Formula”, 2014). However, consistent and robust parent engagement remained a struggle in this district with almost 90% students of color, 71.4% of students on free or reduced-price lunch, and 49% of students speaking a language other than English at home ([NUSD] Fast Facts, 13-14).

In a pilot study conducted in Fall 2014, I interviewed executive directors or directors of parent programs of PEOs in NUSD and three neighboring school districts (n=8). As had been identified in the literature review, PEOs in the pilot study motivated their work with either the educative approach or a political approach. Due to the corroboration between the pilot study data and extant PEO literature, I felt confident in hypothesizing that the political and educative approach were the dominant organizational approaches in the region. Guided by pilot study data, I attempted to purposively sample (Creswell, 2007) an educative PEO and a political PEO which worked exclusively with parents of NUSD students to explore the potential variations in the relationship between how a PEO fulfills its self-interest and its work of parent engagement.

Case Selection Procedures

This section details the efforts to secure research participants and how failures in purposive sampling resulted in a sample of convenience. Using the data from the pilot study and my own working knowledge of the district, I created a list of PEOs operating in NUSD. I read the websites of each of the organizations to identify whether they used political or educative approaches. The criteria of non-profit status and professional staff would ensure that resources, and by extension, survival, would remain an on-going concern for staff that must continually be resolved.

I began outreach efforts during the pilot study. I typically ended interviews of executive directors of PEOs operating in NUSD with a request for participation in my dissertation study. I was declined by all three organizations. As the case study was bounded by district, the organizations which refused to participate were the only ones that fit my original selection parameters. Desiring to keep some bounds on the case, I widened my selection parameters to any non-profit organization working with parents in some capacity in NUSD. I also began to reach out to friends and colleagues for potential contacts to organizations. At that time, a colleague happened to be working with two organizations to foster parent engagement at Gardens High School in NUSD. This colleague graciously connected me with the executive directors of the two organizations, requesting their participation in my study on parent engagement. The two executive directors accepted, much to my delight and relief.

In accepting my request for research, PYP's executive director directed me to the director of community programs who supervised the parent engagement program. I met for a short introductory interview with the director of community programs in which I provided her with a document which summarized the study which I also explained verbally to her. We discussed how I might be able to support PYP's parent engagement efforts and at the end of the meeting, she signed the organizational letter of support, a requirement for the Institutional Review Board (IRB). We concluded the meeting with her emailing the school site program managers to connect me with them. For ANU, I met with the executive director for a similar introductory interview. She expressed interest and then suggested I attend a staff meeting to pitch my study to the entire staff. In this meeting, I provided the staff with the summary document of my research as well as a verbal explanation. The staff asked me several questions about my background, why I was interested in ANU specifically, and what I hoped to gain from the research. The organizers agreed to allow me to conduct my research. At the end of the meeting, the executive director signed the organizational letter of support for the IRB.

This sample of convenience muddied the comparative potential across the two organizations. Neither organization focused solely on parent engagement—rather, parent engagement was one of several activities which made up their scope of work. However, within the parent engagement program itself, the two organizations did contrast on the types of approaches employed along the educative-political dimensions. I trusted that this contrast would also make itself evident in the organizational operations as well and began data collection. This sample of convenience shifted my research design from a comparative case study in which I would explicitly compare and contrast the two different organizations to a multi-case study in which I explored the spectrum of organizational behaviors that might influence parent engagement practices.

Cases

Because I provide in-depth descriptions of the two organizations in the findings chapters, I offer just a brief overview here. Powerful Youth Projects (PYP) and All Nelson United (ANU) are the focal organizations in my study. PYP is a non-profit organization that has been in existence for 20 years. It manages the full-service community schools program, under which parent engagement is housed, at three high schools in NUSD. It also operates a charter school and a preschool. PYP identified increasing family and parent engagement as one of its goals for one of the school years within the data collection period. ANU is a non-profit community-based organization that organizes Nelson residents around issues in their neighborhood. Education is

one of the multiple issues of an organizing platform dedicated to improving the quality of life in Nelson for its most marginalized communities.

Data Sources and Procedures

Case study methodology builds understanding of a phenomenon by collecting and analyzing multiple sources of information to trace the various dynamics which shape how the case is situated within and constituted by the context (Creswell, 2007; Seddon, 1995). In my study, I used interviews, observations, and to a lesser extent, documents.

Interviews

Communities of common interpretation, ranging from small niche professions to entire societies, have a repository of shared meanings from which members of the group can draw upon to communicate with each other by reproducing existing meanings or creating new ones through reassembling and rearticulating of previously held meanings (Gee, 1992). Interactions between organizational staff are facilitated by shared understandings which can be either explicit or taken-for granted. Interviews are useful tools to uncover the information hidden in an individual’s mind (Patton, 2002). Interviews from staff of an organization can uncover idiosyncratic perspectives and understandings as well as the set of shared understandings across staff which constitute organizational behavior.

I used semi-structured interview protocols to ensure that respondents would have the freedom to respond as they wished within the boundaries of parent engagement and the organization (Weiss, 1995). I employed three different protocols to obtain various perspectives (see Table 1). Several individuals were interviewed twice.

TABLE 1

Interview Protocols and Associated Samples

| Purpose | Sample | Question Categories | Appendix |
|--|---|--|--|
| Overview of the organization | Administrative and program staff | Background, information about role, mission and vision of organization, tensions and challenges of work, resources crucial to work, organizational priorities and operations | A.1: General Organization Overview |
| Specifics of parent engagement program | Staff with ongoing contact with parents | Intended goals of parent engagement program, tensions and challenges of parent engagement, organizational resources crucial to work, relationship with school site | A.2: Parent engagement practices |
| Specific experience of parent engagement | Parent engagement program participants | Parents’ own goals of parent engagement, program experiences, program influence on parents | A.3: Parent perspective of parent engagement practices |

I used criterion sampling in which I used staff members' roles to create a sample of interviewees (Patton, 2002). To obtain a picture of organizational operations, I selected staff whose roles either included decision-making over or were directly involved in organizational sustainability efforts such as grant development staff and the executive staff. I also included parent engagement staff in this first round to understand the organization from their point of view. In PYP, this sample also included the school site managers of community programs as parent engagement was one of several types of community programs offered by PYP. In these interviews, staff shared their perspective of the organization from their role. Even though I did not ask for it, they often shared their insights about parent engagement practice because they knew my study was, in part, an examination of parent engagement.

In follow-up interviews with staff directly working with parents, I used a second protocol focused on parent engagement practice, the organizational role in parent engagement, and their routines and practices of parent engagement. Parents were selected primarily through a sample of convenience. After observing the parent engagement routines of each organization for several months, I was fairly familiar with the consistent participants. I requested interviews with parents I knew were active members of the program or with whom I had developed relationships. Some of the parents were monolingual Spanish-speakers. In that case, I employed a translator to assist me in setting up interview times and conducting the interview. Appendix B provides the demographics of the individuals interviewed as well as their role.

The time for interviews ranged between 37 minutes to 95 minutes. Participants signed a form providing their consent to participate at the time the request for the interview was made. I recorded all the interviews with permission from the interviewee. The interviews were transcribed to facilitate analysis. I conducted 33 interviews in PYP with 21 staff and six parents. I conducted 16 interviews in ANU with six staff and two parents. I was unable to conduct an interview with one ANU organizer due to scheduling constraints. In total, I conducted approximately 47 hours of interview.

Observations

For research designs which employ interpretive qualitative methods, observations are key sources of data. Observations allow the researcher to learn about the everyday, routine activities that make up organizational life and through which staff negotiated organizational priorities (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). Criterion sampling was also used to determine the types of routines to observe (Patton, 2002). Observations needed to provide insight into organizational operations as well as parent engagement practices. Thus, I sought to observe organizational maintenance routines such as staff meetings or board meetings as well as any staff meetings related to parents and the routines of the parent engagement programs.

To conduct observations, I primarily assumed the role of "observer as participant role" (Creswell, 2007; Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). I selected this position as a safeguard for my current stage of my development as a researcher. As an observer, I was able to take detailed field notes that acted as nearly verbatim transcriptions of the discussion as well as note arrangements of space, emotions, and facial expressions as they were happening rather than relying solely on memory. At the same time, I left the door open to participation because I wanted to develop relationships with research participants to facilitate conversations and interviews. In both types

of routines, I opted to participate in the social activities as a way to get to know staff and parents. However, I distanced myself from the primary content of the routines, instead taking field notes and observing dynamics. Yet distance was not strictly maintained as I often sat among staff members or parents during routines and they would often engage me in conversation. I preferred this engagement as typically the dynamics within routines were warm and friendly.

I took field notes on a small laptop computer. While some have argued that a computer may be distracting (Schenshul & LeCompte, 2013), in many of the observed meetings, other individuals in the meeting often had computers themselves. As much as possible, I would arrive early to an observation. By arriving early, I was able to take notes on the room environment, obtain meeting documents, observe how people came into the room and selected their seats, and listen to the general chatter between participants. During the meeting, I worked to transcribe the discussion as closely as possible, while also attending to individuals' expressive mechanisms such as hand gestures, body language and facial expressions, and how they interacted with others. After the observation, I would verbally record my thoughts and impressions of the meeting using a recording application on my cell-phone. As much as possible, I would review my field notes the day of the observation to fill in gaps and correct errors as well as add my verbal notes from after the meeting.

In both PYP and ANU, it was fairly easy to begin observations of parent engagement routines. I began by emailing a request to observe a parent engagement workshop or meeting to the staff member who coordinated the program. Every request was accepted. After the first observation, I would approach the program's facilitators and ask if I could continue to attend. In observations, I would collect information about upcoming events and workshops and attend those that met my criteria. I conducted observations of parent engagement routines in both organizations from Spring 2015 to Summer 2016.

Access to organizational routines was much more challenging in regards to PYP. At the first staff meeting of ANU, I made it clear that I was interested in attending future staff meetings. The staff agreed to my attendance when they agreed to the study. However, in PYP, my repeated email requests to the executive director and director of community programs to observe a staff meeting were ignored for several months. I learned of all-staff meetings through school-site staff and emailed the director of community programs to request attendance. She agreed to my attendance at these meetings. When I was finally able to secure an interview with the executive director, nearly a year after I had begun conducting observations in PYP parent engagement programs, I made an in-person request to attend the next staff meeting. She agreed and directed me to her executive assistant for the schedule of meetings. I observed ANU organizational routines from Spring 2015 to Summer 2016 whereas for PYP, I have observations of organizational routines very occasionally in the Fall of 2015 and consistently in the Spring of 2016.

Field notes were an unexpected tool which helped build relationships with staff and shifted my role to "participant as observer" (Schenshul & LeCompte, 2013). Staff in both organizations began to request my field notes to use as minutes for meetings. In ANU, organizers used my field notes to create summary documents of research meetings to share with parents. Because I was present and taking notes, ANU organizers also often asked me to verbally summarize key take-aways and agreements at the conclusion of meetings with important political

officials such as the district superintendent or school board president. I was also asked to present a summary of key findings from the research meetings during an ANU action.

I conducted 109 hours of observation of PYP routines. Of the 109 hours, 62 hours were dedicated to parent engagement routines and 47 were spent dedicated to organizational maintenance routines. In ANU, I observed 223 hours of routines. I observed 113 hours of parent engagement routines and 110 hours of organizational maintenance routines. In sum, I conducted 332 hours of observations.

Documents

Documents were primarily used as supplemental material for observations and interviews. As much as possible, I collected documents distributed in the meeting. Documents from parent engagement meetings were typically agendas, informational material, and occasionally worksheets which were used during the meeting. I did not collect any documents individualized to parents such as printouts of student test scores. Documents from staff meetings also included agendas and occasionally organizational material such as strategic plans, budgets, and reference material.

I dated and identified the purpose of each document. If a document was used and referenced during the meeting, I made a note in my field notes indicating whether I had a copy of the document. If the document potentially provided useful information about the organization or the parent engagement program and I did not receive a copy, I often requested that document from the appropriate person.

Notes on translation

As a bilingual speaker of English and Korean, I am well aware of the art of interpretation inherent in translation. While familiar with Spanish because of living and working in areas where there are many Spanish speakers, I have no formal training in the language. As such, I was hampered in my ability to understand, unmediated, parents' voices or meetings that were conducted only in Spanish. For interviews, I hired a bilingual translator. Because many parent engagement meetings were translated between Spanish and English, I was familiar with the ways that some translators were translated word-for-word whereas others provided synopses. My impression was that my translator was somewhere in the middle of this spectrum with a tendency toward summary and synopsis. However, given that interviews with parents served more as a means to triangulate staff interviews and observations rather than the core of analysis, I felt confident in the interviews that were conducted via this translator. I shared my protocol with the translator before the parent interviews so she could prepare. In the interviews, I would ask the question in English and the parent would respond in Spanish with both of us waiting for the translator.

Occasionally, I would observe meetings conducted entirely in Spanish. Because I understand minimal Spanish, I would do my best to write down my impressions of the meeting as it was happening. I would write down often repeated words or capture any posters or documents produced during the meeting and look them up in a dictionary later on that day to see if they affirmed my impressions. I chose not to leave the meetings despite not being able to fully participate because I believed consistency was important and I wanted to demonstrate my interest in all activities to parents and staff, whether or not I was able to fully access.

Data Analysis

In one sense, data analysis seemed to begin with the first day of data collection. Recording myself as I reflected on an observation or interview I had just conducted or hunches I followed while informally chatting with a staff during a meeting were efforts to make sense of my data. This intuitive data analysis often led me down intriguing paths only some of which were potentially useful for the focal questions of this study. A more explicit data analysis structure helped to sift through the mounds of data. I employed a hybrid coding method that began with deductive codes derived from the conceptual framework which I then elaborated through inductive coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I started data analysis with the interviews for a variety of reasons. Empirically, the study was intended to construct an organizational lens on parent engagement. Interviews offered a perspective of the organization from the people who constituted the organization. I approached the interviews with a “hermeneutics of faith” in which I took staff’s perception of the organization to be a fair and accurate reflection of the organization and its operations (Cornish, Gillespie, & Zittoun, 2013). Thus, I could map out a picture of the organization as understood by those who brought the organization to life. Additionally, there were fewer interview transcripts than field notes, which allowed me to approach this first foray into coding with a surmountable task.

I transcribed ten interviews. The remaining interviews were transcribed using a transcription service. I reviewed the transcription for errors and accuracy by listening to the audio file and editing the transcription as necessary. Transcript review facilitated the process of “highlighting” which involves reading through all interviews and noting responses related to the research questions (van Manen, 1984). Highlighting was useful as a first step in becoming familiar with the data. I then wrote descriptive memos for each organization to connect my impressions from the interviews into a sketch of the organization from the perspective of the staff (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I then systematically coded the data beginning with descriptive coding in which I “attributed a segment of text with codes derived from [my conceptual framework] (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 57).” I began by reviewing my conceptual framework and identifying the actors, practices, and beliefs I wanted to explore. I created an initial list of descriptive codes organized by components of the organization (identity and routines) as well as the primary actors involved in parent-school relationships (school and parent). For example, I “organizational identity” was a parent code and “mission/vision”, “relationships”, “reputation”, “activities” were child codes which referred to a feature of organizational identity as identified in the conceptual framework. I used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software to code interviews and fieldnotes. In addition to the initial list of deductive codes, I left open the possibility for new inductive codes to capture descriptions of the actor in unanticipated ways (Creswell, 2007). This approach allowed me some flexibility as well as focus—the deductive codes created a focus but I could also be compelled by the staff’s voices to consider an idea which I had not previously considered. Appendix C contains the list of codes used in the study.

Once all the interviews had been coded, I pulled the codes for each actor and read each of the subcodes to identify themes for each of the actors according to the conceptual framework. For example, within the “reputation” code for the organization, I began to see patterns across staff in the ways they described their perception of organizational reputation, the organizations and actors who affirmed this reputation, and the resources and opportunities afforded from this

reputation. As these nuances emerged, I elaborated, refined, and edited my initial memo describing the organization. I also saw patterns in the other codes associated with a code. For example, within PYP's reputation code, the code for "school" was often present as well indicating the staff member referenced or described the school or district in some capacity. To confirm these patterns, I used NVivo to create data matrices exploring different combinations of codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During this process, I continued to write analytic memos to support my understanding of emerging themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Fieldnote analysis was similar to interview analysis with a few exceptions. I coded fieldnotes using the codebook developed from the interviews. As with the interviews, I "highlighted" the fieldnotes and created a chart which identified the topic of routines and attendees as well as key events. From this chart, I developed a memo which sketched out the main features of organizational routines (van Manen, 1984). I took note of those observations I most often referenced during this memoing process to identify those fieldnotes that were the most "rich" with data relating to parent engagement or organizational maintenance and sustainability. I used this method to create a sample of fieldnotes to code (N=130). For PYP, I included fieldnotes from 30 out of 30 parent engagement routines and 6 out of 13 organizational routines. For ANU, I included fieldnotes from 54 out of 54 parent engagement routines and 40 out of 54 organizational routines. Data matrixes and analytic memos were used to identify patterns across routines that spoke to my research questions. While I had hoped to include the documents in a more substantive way, I primarily used them as supplements to the field notes. When there was a particularly rich conversation which used an artifact, I reviewed the artifact and pulled out relevant components which I added to the field notes.

I then embarked on a cross-case analysis where I compared the ways staff described and understood the organization, as identified through the interviews, and the ways organizational priorities were expressed and parent engagement was enacted in routines. I sought to identify areas where these two sources of data converged and diverged. I used analytic memos to guide this process.

The Possibilities and Constraints of Study Design

When beginning a research study, one hopes the researcher's efforts in developing a study design has carefully anticipated obstacles. Yet the realities of data collection and analysis waylay the best laid plans. This section identifies the limitations and strengths of the study.

Limitations

With the original study design, I had intended to compare an educative to political parent engagement organization. Securing organizations was a significant challenge as my initial case selections chose not to participate. As the field of organizations who are dedicated to solely parent engagement is fairly small, I was concerned about the possibility of not having any organizations to conduct the study. The resulting cases were the result of a sample of convenience informed by a purposive sampling effort.

The sample of convenience resulted in two limitations. My first entrée into the organization was vis-à-vis my colleague's recommendation. ANU was a smaller organization and its culture was more horizontally oriented. As stated above, I was introduced to all the staff.

From then on, I felt at ease with the staff and encountered almost no obstacles in asking questions, setting up interviews, and conducting observations. For PYP, I never had a face-to-face with the executive director until nearly a year after my data collection had started and it was difficult for me to access organizational meetings. As I began to conduct interviews with PYP staff, I began to realize that the organization was much more oriented around youth development rather than parent engagement than I had previously understood. A robust comparative case-study was out of the question so I revised my study design. The dissimilarities in organizations impacted my ability to make more robust comparisons across organizational structures.

The second limitation was that because I did not have direct access to the executive director when I began data collection, I was unable to be explicit in terms of my data needs. My colleague's email had pitched my study primarily in terms parent engagement and PYP staff pigeon-holed me into those programs such that it was difficult for me to access other parts of the organization. My discomfort and perception that there was confusion about my study and my inability to clarify with key organizational leadership interfered with my ability to set up interviews, request access to other organizational meetings, and ask probing questions. As a result, I missed out on valuable observation opportunities such as meetings which occurred between the parent coaches. I learned the importance of transparency as well as the importance of being explicit when leveraging contacts to secure sites.

This study is also limited in that it reproduces some of the inequalities that I myself wanted to challenge in that parent voices are minimal and minor in the study. I believe parent engagement to be a much more iterative process between staff and parents than presented in the findings. Parents are co-constructors in parent engagement, whether or not that participation is formally recognized. How parents interact with staff, how they make sense of the information distributed in parent engagement programs, and how they enact parent engagement constitutes the dynamics of practice as well. Due to linguistic and cultural limitations and my own concerns about navigating difference, as I review below in discussing my positionality as a researcher, I provide only a minimal amount of insight into parents' activities and perspectives. I endeavor to do differently in my next research study.

Strengths

Case studies are appropriate for understanding the "particular" rather than seeking the generalizability of variables in questions (Merriam, 1988). The nature of this study was intended to be exploratory and not for the purposes of generalizability. The case study approach allowed for flexibility in design when case selection did not go as planned. Furthermore, the move from a comparative case study to a multi-case study challenged my own biases in wanting to highlight one approach or organization as "better" which contributes to notions of best practices, efficacy, and generalizability. Rather I had to maintain a laser-like focus on what the organizations were doing for parents and what might the organizations together reveal about the phenomena of parent engagement organizations.

The Role of the Researcher

How one researches is indelibly written by the history and presence of the one who is researching. The cross-cuttings of class, gender, and race shape how I approached the research and how people approached me in the research.

I employ interpretivist methods grounded in a constructivist ontology (Crotty, 1998; Yanow, 1994). From my own stance as a child of immigrants, I understood early on that culture and history create different lenses of understanding of the same situation. As a constructivist, I give context a co-starring role with the actors of a situation, one that influences thought and behavior as much as the actors do. I also recognize that the context favors dominant actors, demanding a tendency toward a mainstream perspective that I as researcher must endeavor to uncover, especially give my personal desire to incorporate the ideals of social justice and equality into my work. In analyses, I tend towards the interpretivist approach in that I believe that people make meaning of their work and this is crucial to the ways organizational action occurs (Yanow, 1994). Yet this meaning and action occur within constraints of social structure which pattern social inequalities in specific ways. The iteration between agency and structure animates my empirical approach.

My position as a graduate student at an elite university both facilitated and frustrated my access to organizations. While the university affiliation offered some legitimacy, being a graduate student afforded little in terms of influence as was evident in my efforts to secure an organization to study. For some participants, I believe being a graduate student lowered my “threat” in that people saw me as a peer or with low social status. Program staff, particularly, were open about their critiques about the organization and the administration. Other participants were more careful in their interviews. Administrative staff tended to walk the “party line” and discuss the organization in a fairly positive light.

As a second-generation Asian American woman, I was trusted and distrusted. I often shared with parents and staff members that I had been a teacher in Nelson Unified. I often found that this gave me legitimacy with parents and staff in that I was familiar with the challenges facing the low-income communities and communities of color in Nelson. I do believe that being a person of color but not sharing the background with either of the dominant racial/ethnic groups of the study facilitated a useful insider/outsider perspective. On one hand, I was sensitive to the normalization of certain types of parental activities, particularly ones which upheld White, middle-class norms and standards, in parent engagement practices. At the same time, it was perhaps difficult for the Latina and African American mothers to feel comfortable with me—partly due to race and language, but also due to class as well as life position as I do not have children of my own. However, the mothers, as almost all the participants were mothers, were generally friendly to me, if a little distant. This was especially true in PYP in which I took on the role of observer much more than of participant. In ANU, because groups were smaller and I often directly contributed to workshops, I was on friendlier and more familiar terms with parents. Staff, on the other hand, positioned me differently. They spoke to me as a peer, often assuming that I agreed with them or assuming I had a shared understanding of the topic. I believe this was facilitated by the fact that I reflected a similar class status as them—as a former educator and now as a graduate student.

These positions informed my biases in analyses. My safeguard against my biases was my data. I worked to ensure all my arguments could be substantiated by data. While my analytic efforts were informed by my own ideological beliefs about the necessity of self-determination for marginalized peoples, I also tried to ensure that I did not misrepresent the tireless and passionate commitments displayed by the staff. In my research, I endeavored to show the complexities of the work, showing the constraints of agency alongside the care demonstrated. All

failures to do so are the fault of my own and serve as guideposts to improve future research efforts.

CHAPTER FOUR: ORGANIZATIONS AND CONTEXT

Introduction

The scholarship on parent engagement organizations (PEOs) tends to foreground practices, treating the organization as a resource for practice. In this chapter, I animate PEOs as “arenas of interaction (Clemens & Minkoff, 2004, p. 157)” to demonstrate how organizational activities and interests create a set of conditions consequential to ongoing and potential parent engagement practices.” I ask the following questions:

1. In the two focal organizations, what conditions are created for parent engagement practices?
 - a) What is the relationship between parent engagement work and the resource dependency and legitimacy needs of the organization?
 - b) How do organizational routines arrange work around parent engagement?

In comparing the two focal organizations, I find organizational elements, that is, those aspects necessary for the very existence of formal organizations, create conditions which influence how parent engagement is considered in the work of the staff. The ways parent engagement work sits at the organization’s center or periphery coordinates with the extent to which organizational resources are mobilized in support of parents. Existing scholarship on parent engagement organizations assumes the formal organization acts as a singular resource wholly dedicated to parent engagement (e.g., Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012; Lopez et al., 2005). This chapter diverges from this picture by demonstrating the range of organizational factors which can affect how parent engagement is accomplished by an organization.

I begin this chapter with a descriptive overview of each PEO. I describe the organization’s type of work, history, organizational structures and staff, connections to the school district as well as a brief outline of its budget. I also provide an overview of the parent engagement practices. I then explore organizational elements, such as identity, decision-making structures, and formal and informal routines, and how these elements shaped how parent engagement was positioned within the PEO. I conclude by discussing similarities and differences in the ways structural features across the two organizations impacted the available conditions for parent engagement practice.

Organizational Snapshots

Context

During data collection, Nelson Unified School District was in a period of transition. I began data collection in the spring of 2015; a new superintendent had been hired the previous fall. The two organizations in this study, Powerful Youth Projects (PYP) and All Nelson United (ANU), were trying to assess his stance and his priorities as the superintendent sought to make his mark on the district.

Several district policies and initiatives were salient to organizational work life during the data collection period. The superintendent’s landmark initiative was the Innovative Impact

Design Initiative⁴ (IID), an open call for proposals to redesign some of the most persistently low performing schools in the district. Any group could submit a proposal to redesign an identified school; a district committee would choose one proposal from among the submissions to fund and support. Once a proposal had been selected, a team made up of representative stakeholders, including parents and community members, would move from proposal to develop and implement a re-design plan. Both PYP and ANU were working in schools undergoing the IID process. At the same time, a city bond measure which provided funds for high schools to implement linked learning⁵ was being newly implemented. The bond was a ten-year parcel tax, the majority of which would go directly to the school sites. In addition, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and the accompanying Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) had been adopted by California during the 2013-2014 school year. These policies gave districts greater flexibility in how they spent their state funds and mandated community engagement to determine district goals and budgeting priorities. Finally, the community schools model was a district-wide effort which brought together partnerships to provide a range of school-based services and resources to support students and their families.

Powerful Youth Projects

Organizational features. Powerful Youth Projects (PYP) had multiple areas of work. It had a charter high school and preschool, and it managed the full-service community school programs at several NUSD high schools. These different strands of work fell under the umbrella of youth development, a field which advocates an assets-based approach to young people's development. The following overview will provide a sense of the overall organization. However, the findings focus on PYP's work as an administrator of the community schools model as it was in this capacity that PYP began its parent engagement work.

The organization was at a particularly dynamic point in its twenty-year history. For most of its organizational life, PYP had been based in Broadside, a small, predominantly middle-class town which bordered Nelson. It had administered afterschool programs guided by four principles: co-creation, meaningful action, real relationships, and continual learning. Working with small groups of students to develop and implement community-improvement projects had led to the preschool and charter high school. Even though its primary work was based in Broadside, over the years, PYP had developed various connections to the city of Nelson. Its charter high school served many Nelson students. A relationship between a PYP staff and one of the teachers at a school located in Nelson, the Marie Daly Academy, generated an invitation to administer its afterschool programming. After several years of PYP as the afterschool provider, it was offered the community schools contract by Marie Daly's principal. PYP went on to pursue and win the contracts to manage the community schools model at two other NUSD schools—Gardens High School and Newton High School. In four years, it had doubled its staff. PYP was also trying to stabilize after a recent move of its headquarters, high school, and preschool to temporary locations in Nelson while awaiting the completion of significant facilities renovation of an East Nelson site which would house the preschool, high school, and headquarters.

PYP as an organization was spread over multiple sites. The recent re-location into Nelson had moved administrative and operations staff to an office building in downtown Nelson. The

⁴ Pseudonym.

⁵ Linked learning was promoted as an approach that connected academics with career opportunities as a means to enhance students' engagement with schooling.

charter high school was located in East Nelson, which was also the future site for the PYP preschool and administrative offices. The school district contracted PYP to oversee the community schools model at Marie Daly Academy and Newton High School and provide out-of-school programming for Gardens High School. PYP staff who managed the community school programs and the charter high school staff spent the vast majority of their time at the school sites and came to the administrative office primarily for meetings.

PYP referred to the programs administered through the various community school contracts as “Community Programs”. There were multiple layers of staff which differed at each school site according to the type of contract between the school and PYP. At Marie Daly and Newton, a PYP staff member was designated as the community schools director supervising implementation of the community schools model, maintaining relationships with school officials, and managing community partnerships. The director participated on student service teams (SSTs) which convened school and social service staff to discuss student challenges and coordinate interventions. The director also supervised “managers”—PYP staff who coordinated the out-of-school programs and supervised the part-time staff, known as program staff, who implemented a range of programs. The community programs that were of particular interest to this study were the parent engagement programs managed by program staff, known as parent coaches or coordinators. Marie Daly Academy had two part-time parent coaches who, in partnership with the community school director, designed and facilitated the parent engagement program. Newton High School had a full-time parent coordinator who facilitated a South Nelson regional parent engagement program as well as managing Newton’s parent engagement program. While the directors, managers, and program staff implemented the school district’s community schools program, they were PYP, not district, employees. Table 2 lists the interviewed staff.

Table 2

Interviewed Staff from Powerful Youth Projects

| Name | Department | Role | Site |
|----------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Quincy | Administrative | Executive Director | Administrative office |
| Perla | Administrative | Chief Operating Officer | Administrative office |
| Betsy | Administrative | Director of Community Programs | Administrative office |
| Kyla | Administrative | Fund Development Director | Administrative office |
| Wayman | Operations | Volunteer and Marketing Development | Administrative office |
| Melinda | Community Programs | Director | Newton High School |
| Lemuel | Community Programs | Manager | Newton High School |
| Donna | Community Programs | Parent Coordinator | Newton High School |
| Tonya | Community Programs | Director | Marie Daly Academy |
| Tim | Community | Manager—High School | Marie Daly Academy |

| | Programs | | |
|----------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Davina | Community Programs | Manager—Middle School | Marie Daly Academy |
| Nylea | Community Programs | Parent Coach | Marie Daly Academy |
| Beatriz | Community Programs | Parent Coach | Marie Daly Academy |
| Sam | Community Programs | Manager | Gardens High School |
| Destiny | Community Programs | Family and Student Engagement | Gardens High School |
| Queenie | Community Programs | Parent Coach | Gardens High School |

According to a presentation at a board meeting, PYP received 84% of its funding from various government sources, 14% from foundations, and 2% from individual and corporate donations (Observation, May 21, 2016). Of the government funding, 48% were in the form of district contracts whereas 36% was state funding for the high school. The early childhood center, once completed, would be a significant revenue source for PYP.

An educative approach to parent engagement. Parent engagement was one of several responsibilities that Powerful Youth Projects (PYP) took on when contracted by the school district to serve as the school-site community schools administrator. PYP staff were solely responsible for parent engagement at Marie Daly Academy and Newton High School. The third high school, Gardens High School, had a dedicated parent and community engagement coordinator and parent coach. However, the PYP staff at Gardens worked closely with an ANU organizer and parent engagement program at Gardens was primarily associated ANU and consisted of ANU practices. For this reason, discussion of PYP’s practices will attend only to the parent engagement programs at Marie Daly Academy and Newton High School.

PYP did not standardize parent engagement practices across the school sites; each site had a unique program. At Marie Daly Academy, the attendees of the program were mostly Latina mothers, many of whom were monolingual. A few African American parents attended occasionally. The program was primarily managed by two parent coaches, Nylea and Beatriz, and Tonya, the Community Programs Director at Marie Daly Academy.

Bundled under the title “Parent Academy”, parent engagement practices at Marie Daly consisted of weekly parent breakfasts, monthly evening workshops, social activities, and volunteer activities. The parent breakfasts were the most consistently attended and were considered the core of PYP’s parent engagement programming at Marie Daly. Based on my observations, there was typically an average of 15 parents attending weekly with variation. It generally followed the same format every month:

- First Wednesday: Principal meeting
- Second Wednesday: Committee work
- Third Wednesday: General topic of interest

- Fourth Wednesday: Extended day programming/Community school partners

The agenda and topics of workshops were determined in weekly meetings between Nylea, Beatriz, and Tonya. Most workshops were facilitated by Nylea and Beatriz; however, principal workshops and other workshops which brought in outside presenters were typically facilitated by Tonya. During the first Wednesday, the principal would present information about school policies, various aspects of teaching and learning, and other school events and issues. The second Wednesday was reserved for parents to work in committees to plan and implement various activities. The third Wednesday remained open; topics ranged from information about nutrition to presentations and trainings by district parent engagement staff⁶. The final Wednesday of the month was reserved for workshops by Marie Daly's extended-day programming staff and information about services and resources available through the full-service community school model.

Informational workshops for parents that covered topics as diverse as cyber safety, literacy, and the city's police department were held one Thursday evening a month. The parent coaches and community school director also connected parents to workshops implemented by other organizations or the district. For instance, the parent coaches encouraged parents to attend a series of nutrition workshops conducted by the county public health department. District parent engagement staff recruited from Parent Academy for the district's parent leadership program. To accommodate parents' schedules, PYP offered morning and evening study groups for the General Education Development test to receive a high school diploma. Near the end of the data collection period, one of the parent coaches started a monthly social gathering for the mothers to enjoy each other's company and engage in an arts and crafts activity.

The final component of Parent Academy consisted of school volunteer opportunities. The mothers who regularly attended the parent breakfasts also served as volunteers. Parents would help distribute breakfasts to students, provide extra office support, and made food for the afterschool program. In one of the committees, parents also discussed organizing a safety patrol for before and after school hours as well as passing periods and lunch.

Newton High School's parent engagement program was designed to support parent engagement in the traditional public schools⁷ in the South Nelson region. This design reflected the various funding streams PYP received to leverage the community schools model at Newton as a means for developing a robust ecosystem of schools and revitalizing the South Nelson community (Interview with Melinda, July 9, 2015). The Parents Leaders of Nelson (PLON) program was headquartered at Newton High School. Parents who were regular volunteers at Newton High School as well as parent volunteers in the various elementary and middle schools in the South Nelson region were invited to join PLON. The program brought parent volunteers

⁶ Nelson Unified School District had two departments dedicated to working with parents. The community engagement department worked with parents around district-wide policies such as LCAP whereas the parent engagement department provided site-specific parent engagement. It was all rather confusing as district staff often moved between the two departments.

⁷ Nelson Unified School District has both charter schools and traditional public schools. "Traditional public schools" is used to distinguish schools that are public and under district auspices as compared to charter schools which maintain some independence from the school district.

together for workshops and social activities. Almost all PLON participants were African American mothers and grandmothers. During the observation period, I observed one African American grandfather who occasionally attended PLON activities.

Donna was the parent coordinator for PLON, planning all of PLON's activities, and also served as the parent coach for Newton. Donna felt that she had the license to fulfill her vision of parent engagement as Melinda, Newton's Director of Community Programs rarely dissuaded her from anything she wanted to try and offered encouragement and, when Melinda could, resources (Interview with Donna, July 14, 2015). PLON's primary activity was a workshop series entitled "Second Cup of Coffee". The workshops were designed to foster leadership skills and offered information on various topics. During the observation period, an average of seven parents attended the Second Cup of Coffee consistently, with an additional five parents who were less consistent but still attended several times. Donna also organized social events for the parents such as outings to the local carnival or to the movies.

PLON parents received a stipend for completing a set number of volunteer hours which was partly fulfilled by attending PLON activities. In addition to maintaining their regular volunteer hours at their school site, parents were also expected to organize and implement a project which would address a school need. The Community Impact Project (CIP), as it was known, was intended to demonstrate the skills and information parents had gained through participation in PLON. Parents designed a project and then presented it to a panel for feedback before implementation. The CIP took its inspiration from PYP's youth development program's culminating project in which students presented their reflections of personal, social, and academic growth to a panel of community members.

Donna also worked with district parent engagement staff who provided support to PLON parents at the school sites. Occasionally, the district parent engagement staff attended the Second Cup of Coffee and Donna attended meetings between the parents and district staff at school sites. At the end of the observation year, the district parent engagement office and Donna produced a two-week program for parents on topics ranging from trauma, socio-emotional learning, attendance, and wellness. This program was for parents, many of whom had participated in PLON, hired by the district as "parent liaisons" to support district parent engagement staff at school sites in the upcoming school year. Both district staff and PYP staff acted as facilitators of the various topics during the two weeks.

All Nelson United

Organizational features. All Nelson United (ANU) focused on grassroots organizing in marginalized communities within the city of Nelson. In the 1960s, two Jesuit fathers began the organization with community members to organize their neighbors and transform the living conditions of their neighborhoods. In the mid-1980s, it shifted its organizing base from neighborhoods to churches. It expanded into schools in the 1990s. ANU had been working to move people of various faith backgrounds to advocate for concrete changes in their lives for over forty years.

At the time of data collection, ANU had a small administrative staff and four full-time organizers (see Table 3). The administrative staff also often stepped in as organizers as well.

Table 3

Staff of All Nelson United

| Staff | Department | Role | Issue Cut |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Bonnie | Administrative | Executive Director | General support for all issues |
| Leon | Administrative | Chief Operating Officer | General support for all issues |
| Cheryl | Administrative | Operations Manager | South Nelson region |
| Franco | Staff | Organizer | Education, Immigration, East Nelson region |
| Joni | Staff | Organizer | Education at school, district, state levels |
| Celeste | Staff | Organizer | Education, Criminal Justice, South Nelson region |
| Ernestine | Staff | Organizer | Criminal Justice, Housing, Economic Justice |

ANU’s strategic plan highlighted organizing in three issue areas, referred to as “issue cuts” by ANU staff: criminal justice, education, and immigration. The issue cuts were identified by ANU’s constituents who were known as “leaders”; anyone who was working on an issue with an organizer was considered to be a leader. Typically, leaders were recruited from an institution such as a church, synagogue, mosque, or school and met regularly as that institution’s local organizing council (LOC). Organizers were assigned to support specific LOCs. As evident in Table 3, organizers worked on several issues at once, reflecting the varied interests of their leaders. Some issues, such as criminal justice reform, were supported by LOCs based in an institution as well as individual leaders who were not part of a school or house of worship but had connected with ANU around the issue. Organizers and leaders were engaged in an assortment of activities such as “campaigns” or “actions” which were dedicated to specific policy changes within an issue or building relationships with community members to disseminate information and provide support. For example, within the issue of criminal justice reform, Celeste and her leaders worked on campaigns such as a state-wide campaign to pass legislation to remove disclosure of previous criminal history on employment and housing applications, coordinating resource fairs for individuals who were previously incarcerated, and organizing for police accountability in the fatal shooting of an African American man who had mental health issues and had attacked someone with a knife.

In educational issues, ANU was best known for its role in fomenting the small schools movement in Nelson Unified. This movement started in an East Nelson church LOC as congregants began to share their concerns about the neighborhood elementary school their children attended. With the support of the ANU organizer, the leaders began to advocate for changes in the school, beginning with their concern over the state of the school’s bathrooms. As they continued to research for ways to help the school improve, their investigation took them beyond school walls to a district perspective. Educational inequity operated in plain sight in the district—a quick review of publicly available data revealed schools serving mostly white, middle-class students ranked high according to the state accountability system whereas the majority of schools serving mostly students of color, immigrant students, and low-income

students were considered low-performing. Leaders' search for policy solutions identified schools with small numbers of enrollment and small classrooms as having a powerful impact on the quality of education. Parents and organizers were successful in their efforts to push the district to adopt small schools as a district-wide strategy to improve educational quality. Since this movement, education organizing had been an integral part of ANU's slate of issues.

ANU considered itself to be a federation of houses of worship, schools, and individuals who came together on issues impacting their local communities and the city of Nelson. The payment of annual dues to ANU was one condition of membership in the federation. ANU established partnerships with schools primarily through informal means. As a rule, ANU refused to accept any contracts from the district to do parent engagement. Rather if a school paid the membership due, ANU would commit an organizer to the school to foster a culture of parent engagement. However, an observation of a staff meeting in which fees were discussed suggests that these were difficult to collect (Observation, June 15, 2015). For the most part, the continued existence of school-based LOCs was the result of ongoing relationships between organizers and school staff or parent leader.

As fees were a modest and unreliable source of income, ANU's budget was almost entirely foundation-based. One of the executive director's primary responsibilities was ensuring that ANU maintained its funding levels. The need to secure funding sometimes put ANU in surprising relationships. However, Bonnie, the executive director, argued that her policy of maintaining honesty and constant communication with foundation program officers helped avert potential conflicts of interest (Interview with Bonnie, July 19, 2016). For example, ANU received money from a foundation well known for its advocacy of charter schools. When accepting the money from this foundation, Bonnie verified that the terms of the grant did not require the advocacy or promotion of charter schools but was intended to support efforts to amplify parent voices in school and district policies.

A political approach to parent engagement. At the time of the study, ANU staff was actively organizing parents at four elementary schools (Dolores Huerta Elementary, North Star Learning Academy, Gulf Elementary, Imani Community School) and one high school (Gardens High School) in Nelson Unified. Organizers were typically invited to a school site by parents or by a district or school administrator. At the school site, organizers would reach out to parents to set up a time to conduct a one-on-one (1:1). In 1:1s, organizers listened to parents describe their struggles and concerns and explored the changes they desired. Organizers also employed this strategy with school staff who were open to it. The 1:1 was as a container for all the different processes of relationship maintenance between organizers and leaders including check-ins about life, targeted or further education on a specified topic, and support and preparation for upcoming actions or meetings. Once there were a few parents who had expressed interest and commitment to school change, organizers would set up a local organizing committee (LOC). The LOC was a group of parents explicitly affiliated with ANU and committed to improving the school.

As the LOC, parents would embark on a "research cycle". Parent leaders began by discussing and identifying issues they wanted to address in the school in 1:1s and within groups. Leaders would engage in listening campaigns in which they reached out to other parents in the school community to learn about the concerns, struggles, and hopes held by various members of the parent community. Often in discussing school issues, parents would realize they needed more information to understand a problem they had identified in the school. They would then conduct

research meetings in which parent leaders met with community and professional experts as well as school or district officials to gather information and data about an issue. Research meetings also acted as workshop spaces for organizers to present information about school and district policies and other issues related to academic performance, social and emotional issues, and various parents' concerns. Through the process of research meetings and assessing the information and data presented to them, parents would determine one or several specific outcomes they wanted to see in their school and the means to achieve these outcomes.

Some changes could be easily implemented by parents and the organizer. For example, Joni helped parents at Dolores Huerta Elementary organize a thank-you breakfast for teachers (Interview with Joni, June 16, 2016). Other times, parents' identified solutions were announced through a culminating "action", a public event intended to broadcast parents' concerns. During the observation period, I observed two types of actions. Actions sometimes focused on specific changes to policy. These actions were large events with an audience as parent leaders and school or district administrators engaged with each other in a highly structured manner around the demands. In the weeks leading up to the action, parent leaders and organizers recruited parents and community members to attend as audience and demonstrate support as community members. They invited key district or school leaders who had been identified as the "target" given the authority they had to make changes and worked to ensure their commitment to attend. They continued to conduct research meetings to deepen their understanding around a topic. The list of demands would be shared with the administrators ahead of time so they would not be caught off-guard. Parents practiced actively facilitating the meeting, with the organizers providing public speaking tips and encouraging parents to step into their power. During actions, parents asked questions to and had specific asks of administrators to which administrators would publicly respond. Other actions were public demonstrations of broad parent support for a policy change. For example, Joni organized a parade to demonstrate community interest and support for a new, multilingual school. The parade included parents, children, and teachers waving vibrant posters and playing musical instruments loudly as it moved along a well-traveled street. Joni reached out to a range of district officials as well as reporters to raise awareness of the parade as well as invite them to participate or observe.

Organizational Dynamics and Parent Engagement

Practices emerge from the interactions within organizations. These interactions are situated within various organizational features and arrangements. In this section, I consider the aspects of the organization related to maintenance and sustainability to explore the organizational features consequential to the types of practices used to recruit and retain parents in organizational programs. I review operational routines such as staff, administrative, and board meetings; organizational culture such as norms, beliefs, and identity; and sustainability efforts such as funding and marketing strategies, budgets, and strategic plans. I found that funding strategies ensured parent engagement was present in the organization. However, organizational identity, roles and routines, and context distinguished whether or not parent engagement was integrated into the organization.

Powerful Youth Projects: Mandating Awareness, Not Accommodation

Previous to the community school contracts, Powerful Youth Projects had primarily been doing youth development work through projects with young people in afterschool programs (Interview with Kyla, July 20, 2016). Acting as the lead agency for the community schools model expanded PYP's scope of work to include student intervention services, parent engagement, and partnership coordination. In this way, parent engagement was a necessary component of PYP's work and its ongoing presence was assured. However, I find there were few *organizational* elements which could facilitate the incorporation of parent engagement into the work of PYP staff. In contrast, existing organizational elements more easily accommodated the tasks which constituted student intervention services and partnership coordination.

Contracting parent engagement. A significant increase in budget accompanied the new tasks designated to PYP through the community schools contract. Community Programs as a PYP department accounted for nearly 50% of PYP's operating budget. The community schools contract was the impetus for PYP's parent engagement programs. In other words, parent engagement was not germane to ongoing work but imported into the organization as a contractual obligation.

Participation data was the primary requirement to satisfy the terms of the community schools contracts (Interview with Quincy, February 2, 2016). Staff did not take the attendance requirements of district contracts lightly. The afterschool programs and parent engagement programs often struggled to meet the participation requirements:

But when you look at the hard numbers, like most grant folks will not be too happy with what my attendance looks like...there's an expectation in me being able to serve 120 students, something ridiculous like that but I only have 4 staff members. So...if teachers are struggling to hold a class of 20 students during the school day, how can you expect that 4 of my teachers can hold 20 to 25 students in a program that they have to choose into? (Interview with Sam, June 29, 2015)

...I tell my parent coordinator all the time, I don't care if one person shows up, we are acting like 100 showed up because we want them here. And if they are able to leave and tell their friends who have children, you know I went to this workshop last night and it was only me but it was really good. They made it happen, we did it anyway. That's going to bring out more people. They're going to say you know what, next time I'll go with you and you start to see the room fill. We've seen that, over the year. We started off with 3 or 4 showing up. Then it was 10 at the next one, then it was 14, then it was 22. We've seen that but it's because we've been persistent. We've also seen it where it was 2 and it was 1 and it was 2. We've seen that too... (Interview with Melinda, July 9, 2015)

The need to meet the participation requirements of the community schools contract was a salient concern for PYP staff given that successful fulfillment of contract terms was primarily determined by participation numbers. In fact, Beatriz, the parent coach at Marie Daly, suggested that the only requirement for her parent engagement program was the attendance of twenty parents (Interview with Beatriz, June 6, 2016). The ambition for parent engagement was operationalized as quantity and presence on school sites.

There was limited funding for parent engagement programs to support outreach and recruitment. Perla, PYP's chief operating officer, was quick to note that the funding specified to parent engagement within these contracts were fairly limited (Interview with Perla, February 2, 2016). She, as well as Tonya, the community programs manager at Marie Daly High School,

suggested that PYP's augmenting of funds from the community schools contract to staff the parent coach positions was an indication of PYP's commitment to parent engagement.

The contractual obligation for parent engagement added a substantial component to PYP's work. However, there was little guidance from the contract itself on the specifics of parent engagement beyond the requirement of parent presence on school sites. PYP administration had enough insight into the work of parent engagement to commit additional resources to satisfactorily staff the position. However, in the next section I demonstrate how supplementary funding and dedicated staff for parent engagement did little to fold the work of parent engagement into the core of organizational life.

Organizational past, present, and future discount parent engagement. In the following sections, I suggest that Perla and Tonya's belief in PYP's commitment to parent engagement stood on shaky ground. I demonstrate how the inclusion of parent engagement as a requirement of the community schools contract raised organizational awareness of parent engagement. However, while becoming the lead agency for the community schools model enhanced the organization's reputation in youth programming and expanded the organization's understanding of its work to include new components such as school partnership, organizational structures and routines relegated parent engagement to the periphery. There were few organizational opportunities for staff to connect or incorporate ideas and practices of parent engagement into the youth development work.

Organizational identity affirmed. In addition to contributing to financial stability, obtaining and fulfilling the community schools contracts enhanced PYP's reputation in specific ways. PYP staff understood their ability to meet the contract requirements as contributing to its reputation in terms of its existing identity as a youth development agency. Parent engagement had no relevance to this identity which had been ingrained into the organization over twenty years.

Staff believed PYP was in good standing with the district. Staff most often referenced district's actions toward PYP as indicators of the quality of their work, suggesting that the district's assessment of PYP was paramount. These descriptions, however, focused exclusively on aspects of the youth programming. For example, staff at each of the sites as well as administrators shared that the district had taken several aspects of their afterschool programs and incorporated them into the district's youth leadership programs or included PYP's signature youth development practices as part of district-wide training modules for all afterschool providers. The district had been audited for its administration of out-of-school programs and subsequently implemented a request-for-proposal process for existing providers to compensate for a previous absence of this process. Staff shared that they were one of only two organizations which had received exemplary marks for their proposal. Betsy, the community programs manager, believed PYP was well-respected as evidenced by the contracts it received: "I think that we're well-respected enough. We get DPN contracts. We got asked to take employments (Interview with Betsy, February 23, 2016)". Davina described how PYP designed and implemented their own summer school program for their students but other organizations had to follow a district curriculum. She suggested that PYP was given this freedom because they were trusted to deliver high quality programming whereas other organizations were not. The exemptions from the mandates of the district contract were understood as endorsements of staff skill in working with young people and trust in the quality of programming delivered. Staff

pinpointed how staff’s exemplary youth development practices accrued district recognition for PYP even though the contracts included an array of responsibilities such as parent engagement.

Parent engagement siloed into roles and absent in routines. The contracts for community schools expanded PYP’s arena of work from being solely focused on youth development to include three new tasks: school and community partnerships, parent engagement, and coordination of student intervention services. However, staff roles, in terms of making sense and distribution of responsibilities, and organizational routines inhibited uptake of parent engagement while facilitating the two others. While staff readily recognized school partnership as core to their work, the day-to-day work of PYP staff was structured in ways which circumvented opportunities to fold parent engagement into either school partnership or youth development. Staff roles created silos which made parent engagement the sole responsibility of a few staff members. Meetings which exposed staff to parent engagement did not provide opportunities to accommodate it into the work of youth development. Parent engagement was relegated to the periphery of the everyday of organizational work.

The allocation of responsibilities via staff positions separated parent engagement from the youth development component of PYP’s work. While commitment to young people served as a foundational value and described the primary content of their work, PYP administration and staff also often referenced the concept of partnerships to characterize the organization or their work and made little mention of parent engagement, with the exception of those staff who had direct contact with parents. Table 4 displays samples of staff descriptions about their daily tasks, the resources important to their work, or the value PYP brought to school sites. Nearly all interviewed staff, whether administration or program, referenced organizational partnership to describe the dynamics of their work.

Table 4

Staff Descriptions of Work

| Name | Role | Works Directly with Parents? | Sample Quote |
|---------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Quincy | Executive Director | No | I think that we...I think we have, I think the organization, I think myself really holds collaboration and service in a, in a deep way. And so, in terms of thinking about the partnership that we have, particularly with our schools, or even coming into this new site in East Nelson for our own high school. There is a real intention to figure out what is it that we can offer and how do we address gaps. I think that there’s an appreciation of that. |
| Betsy | Director of Community Programs | No | I think in the community school, that's like I think you have to think, "What is it we do and what is it we can help you [the school] broker as partners?" ...Are there other partners that we can help broker and bring on to campus that we trust, that we vet, that we know? That we can then ... I think that's been a really big growth for us. |
| Kyla | Fund Development Director | No | I would say we’re a strong partner in providing youth leadership. Yeah. That’s what I would say. |
| Melinda | Director of Community Programs, | Yes | My role is director of community programs which means essentially every partnership that comes here to this campus has to first go and vetted through myself and the administration. So that meant I would |

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|---------------|--|-----|--|
| | Newton High School | | <p>be able to see any program that wanted to come and provide supports to our young people. Some things they absolutely need and I was able to assess their needs very early on. Some things they absolutely don't need. It was very easy for me to say, okay, I felt I could have a freedom in being able to decide how we best serve our students...I also coordinate the COST, mental health and SEL team. I love that piece of it because that's my mental health piece. I also got to work in a youth and family center. I was not only working with young people but also working with their families and educating their families, whatever their family looks like. Mom and grandma, foster parent, whatever that looks like, I would have access to not just the young person, but families as well.</p> <p>I do a lot of work, I work very closely with the administration in the school. We have a cabinet approach, I'm one of the cabinet members. There's a lot of work I'm doing inside of the school to make sure that our partners are doing what they're supposed to be doing, parents are getting what they need, students are getting what they need, admin is getting what they need. So there's a lot of facilitation around making sure that people are where they're supposed to be and doing what they're supposed to do.</p> |
| Lemuel | Manager of Community Programs, Newton High School | No | <p>I took those kids to Mississippi. There was never any big thing about ... We drove through eight states in two weeks. I partnered with two other agencies to do it...This past March, me and Donna, and then Micah⁸, the guy you just saw, took 18 juniors to LA for a college tour in partnership with the school</p> <p>So we've [Donna and district staff] formed a relationship to whereby we're going to work together. Just this, just last week, [district staff] and myself, along with two parents, we met with the new principal at [local middle school] here again, they have another principal. And we were able to sit down with the principal and the parents were able to express the things they thought they needed, the things they would like to see done.</p> |
| Donna | Parent Coordinator, Newton High School | Yes | <p>Sierra⁹ and myself and the young ladies who are a part of her team. I'm the one that pitched the idea other, and I said, "How can we partner in doing this work?" Then there will be areas that I will be responsible for finding people to facilitate and then there are areas where Sierra will do. So we'll do the A through G requirements, we'll do attendance, we'll do truancy, and so we're going to have different people to come in that will actually facilitate those groups for us for parents...</p> |
| Tonya | Director of Community Programs, Marie Daly Academy | Yes | <p>Relationships to people in other organizations and the district. The biggest resource I have is my network, my professional learning community. Seun-Jae¹⁰ from the district has been a huge resource for myself and our families around the family work. If not for him, we wouldn't be doing nearly as well...I've a really good relationship with the administrators who are also on our admin team and they're great resources... And then, you know obviously, the parents, you know, that are active, and the kids. Everybody who I serve, is you know, outside of probably, if you want to get technical about, the</p> |

⁸ Pseudonym for PYP staff

⁹ Pseudonym for district parent engagement staff.

¹⁰ Pseudonym for district parent engagement staff.

| | | | |
|----------------|---|-----|--|
| | | | grants and those resources are maybe, you know, number one, a very close one, are the people you serve because they're the folks who are teaching me the way. They're the ones teaching me how to do my job and what's working and what's not. If I'm not getting feedback from youth and families about how we're doing our work, we're dead in the water... |
| Tim | Manager of Community Programs-High School, Marie Daly Academy | No | I'm very integrated in the school... I think it's a lot easier in a lot of different levels, so I love being able to be so integrated, and plus I, myself, I'm so involved in my kids life that make me like, "Hey I've got to go talk to this teacher about this and make sure that you're doing this stuff". I think I've also been able to create those spaces specifically with my student's teachers, which really helps a lot. |
| | | | ... I think that's the story of PYP. There are gaps in the school, so we're going to go ahead and fill them because it's about serving the kids holistically. It doesn't matter that we're not supposed to be running a middle school program. We're running it. We're good partners, and that's what we have to do. |
| Davina | Manager of Community Programs-Middle School, Marie Daly Academy | No | We're not just doing after school. If we were a different program partner and we only came in and ran after school, well of course, we wouldn't be invited to these meetings. When I sit here and have these meetings with other site coordinators in the district, they are like, "My teacher doesn't invite me to be on the admin team. They don't invite me to sit in a COST team." I'm like, "Well, what are you doing?" "Well, I sit, and I only run after school." Well, they don't see your value then. If you're only running after school, and you're not doing anything else, then of course they aren't going to invite you to the table. |
| | | | What has been great about working at Middle and then also with PYP is that we really invite families. They are also a partner in the development of the student. |
| Sam | Manager of Community Programs, Gardens High School | No | So I think my biggest asset being on this campus is having a strong relationship with the school administration and with our community schools manager. They're my first line into the school... They're my direct line, so I need their support in order to be able to do any work on this campus. Without support, you kinda just fall. |
| Destiny | Family and Student Engagement Coordinator, Gardens High School | Yes | The biggest [constraint] is lack of coordination... Among school site, the vision of parent engagement at the site. |
| Queenie | Parent Coach, Gardens High School | Yes | For me, here, it was kind of hard because I didn't have that relationship with the principal. And have that communication, like sit down with the principals or the community programs and say you know what let's reach out to parents at the same time. Introduce the school at meetings, or how can we engage these parents. |

Staff's descriptions of their work tended to be oriented toward relationships or interactions with school or district staff. Description of partnerships that referenced parents were limited, with the exception of Davina, to those staff who were directly responsible for the parent engagement program.

The contrast between Gardens parent engagement staff and the manager offers additional evidence of how parent engagement was siloed into roles. Destiny and Queenie, the parent engagement staff at Gardens, attributed the challenges in their programming to the lack of relationship or partnership with school actors. They believed that stronger relationships with the school staff would bolster PYP's efforts to engage parents. Sam, on the other hand, asserted that the primary asset to his work was his relationship with the school administration. However, Sam's relationship with school administrators was not leveraged in support of the parent engagement work, despite the fact that Gardens had two staff dedicated to parent engagement. This suggests that for Sam, parent engagement did not register as a part of his scope of work toward which he should direct resources. The inclusion of partnership into descriptions of program staff's work suggests that while some aspects of the community school contract mandates were incorporated into the scope of PYP's work, other contract requirements, namely parent engagement, largely remained the responsibility of a few staff.

The disconnect between parent engagement and the organization's scope of the work was further cemented through organizational routines which introduced ideas of parent engagement but were absent of opportunities for staff to consider how youth development practices and parent engagement practices could work together. During the whole-staff orientation held in early August before the start of the school year, parent engagement was identified as a professional development theme for the year. However, parent engagement staff described ongoing meetings discussing parent engagement as being attended only by the parent coaches:

...all the parent coordinators from [PYP], we come together actually. We try to coordinate and kind of share best practices or things where they need more support... Normally, we have our once a month meeting and they talk about things and oftentimes what I see is that in the other sites don't have as much as a report as our parent academy has. We're given an opportunity to talk about what's working here and be able to share out there. It's also a sharing of other experiences due from the other sites as well. (Interview with Nylea, April 8, 2016)

In the eight observed ongoing director and manager meetings, parent engagement was never mentioned. The only meetings in which parent engagement was a topic of discussion for staff other than parent coaches were those of the two mandated whole-staff meetings at the beginning and midpoints of the school year.

There was an effort to highlight parent engagement in the whole-staff meetings. During a two-day August orientation, one of few activities for which all PYP staff were gathered together was the "fishbowl" discussion. The fishbowl discussion required staff to listen parents and caregivers respond to a series of questions. It was followed by a question and answer session in which staff asked caregivers questions and then an overall debrief of the fishbowl. The following questions structured the fishbowl discussion (Observation, August 10, 2015):

- What are your dreams and hopes for children as young people and as adults?
- What are the difficult things about being parent of adolescent?
- At schools and orgs, we see parents as resources. In reversing that, what should schools and orgs to support your child?
- What are the ways communication works and doesn't work?

- Can you think of a time when the school welcomed you in a way that really worked? How did they show parents were welcome?
- Think of opposite, when did you or your student didn't feel welcome?
- What are the times you expect a school to communicate and best way to do that?
- What advice would you have for teachers, youth workers, for people working with adolescents.

The parents' discussion mainly revolved around their challenging experiences with school staff. In the question and answer session, staff asked for input on recruiting parents to be present for school activities and how student discipline could be negotiated between staff and parents. Parents responded that as parents who were active school volunteers, they too struggled with how to keep parents engaged throughout the school year. They also suggested that communication with parents was key in issues of school discipline.

The staff debrief focused primarily on staff's reactions to parents' stories of egregious school behaviors toward their children as well as questions of how to engage:

Facilitator: Okay, I'm going to ask for two wows and two wonders from you [PYP staff] all.

"Wow" comments: As child grows older you think you can let them go, but that's when parent should be closer to the child; [parent's] experience of having his first grader expelled!

Facilitator: Students have had traumatic experiences with schools.

"Wonder" comments: If anyone in decision-making process regarding expulsion, took the time to think about changing policy. They certainly had taken time to label the child!; What's going on with the district and their initiative to work with African American boys?; How do we engage African American kids and parents? We have a Black history month program and nobody shows up. How do we get that engagement with parents?; We as an organization, we're set in our norms of why different communities are not showing up. But if I didn't graduate from high school, I already feel uncomfortable with school. How to make parents feel comfortable?

Facilitator: Right, how as an organization, how do we build each other's capacity?

It is apparent from the "wonder" comments that parents' educational challenges left an impression on PYP staff. However, the questions posted to parents as well as the debrief comments also reveal a preoccupation with parents "showing up". There was no opportunity for staff to substantively engage with parents and think through how PYP as an organization could play a role in ameliorating parents' challenges in school interactions. While the facilitator raised the question of an organizational strategy for parent engagement, it was left unanswered as the session closed after the facilitator had posed this question. The rest of the orientation did not return to these questions nor were there any follow-up meetings set up to further explore these questions.

The mid-year staff retreat was the second meeting which dedicated time for staff to discuss parent engagement. Rather than being an all-staff session, the topic of parent engagement was offered as one of several elective workshops among which staff could choose. The workshop was on the practice of one-to-ones (1:1s)—an intimate conversation between two people in which one person listens intentionally to support the emergence of the other person's interests and concerns—as a way to engage parents. The workshop included an icebreaker and role plays that modeled the 1:1s. During the discussion of the models, the staff observed the 1:1s to be a means to attend carefully to the parents' needs:

Betsy: You were able to get his innate motivation for why he is the way he is. You were able to relate to that...

Melinda: You made him feel safe. Safety is important when people open up. You told something about yourself, your tone was calm and you listened a lot more than you talked. He got to give more and more. When he was thinking, you didn't say oh... You let him have his moments.

[PYP staff A]: You were patient. It allowed them to process what you were asking and allowed you to process what they were saying. Have an intelligent conversation and a safe space to share.

Melinda: Did you write notes?

Facilitator: No. Afterwards.

Melinda: I never do.

Facilitator: No, I'm listening with my heart.

Destiny: As the relationships grow, notetaking process becomes part of the process.

[PYP Staff B]: I thought you did a wonderful professional use of self. You professional shared parts of yourself, that allowed someone listening to get to know you. Provides a safe environment. I attended a workshop where a woman just started to talk about herself.

Staff clearly appreciated the ways 1:1s offered a supportive, safe space for parents to express themselves. However, in a manner similar to that of the August orientation, there was no discussion of how staff could add 1:1s with parents to complement their ongoing youth development work or to enhance their partnership work with schools.

Dedicating time during all staff meetings served to increase awareness of parent engagement to all staff. Yet the introduction to ideas of parent engagement was not supported by additional dedicated time or resources for staff to engage with the idea of parent engagement in relation to their ongoing youth development work. Only parent coaches had meetings dedicated to discussing parent engagement practices. As such, parent engagement remained siloed via roles.

Parent engagement was absent from sustainability efforts. Increasing recognition of PYP was an organizational priority. In so doing, the hope was that PYP would become more widely known as a worthy and wise investment for individual and corporate donations (Interview with Kyla, July 20, 2016). There were considerable efforts to articulate a straightforward yet catchy description of the organization to facilitate the cultivations of donor relationships. In this streamlining of organizational identity to cultivate donor relationships, PYP returned to its primary identity as a youth development organization. Other components of its work, such as school partnership and parent engagement, were ignored when marketing the organization to ensure sustainability in the years to come.

PYP's first goal of its three-year strategic plan focused on refining its identity to facilitate awareness of the organization and the quality of its work:

Strategic plan goal 1: Develop and communication a clear, unified organizational identity, grounded in organizational best practices and professional development, which promotes awareness of Powerful Youth Projects as a premier youth development organization (Observation, August 10, 2018)

To accomplish this goal, the development team conducted trainings for staff and board members on the skills and language needed to be effective “brand ambassadors”. These workshops exclusively focused on youth development.

In the staff brand ambassador training, the development team lead an activity to help to build a sense of cohesiveness across the ways different staff talked about the organization. The activity focused on a branding and communication sheet; one section of the sheet suggested language for talking about the organization and a second section for writing about the organization. The following was included in the section “When talking about our work” under the subheading “Mission Manifesto”:

At Powerful Youth Projects, we believe young people are powerful. In our schools and community programs, we see young people striving for more voice, more connection, more ownership, and more meaningful ways to make a difference—for their own future and their communities. Because we believe in the power and promise of young people, we inspire them, support them, and create opportunities for young people to make a real difference. Every day, we’re growing the leaders who will transform our schools, our neighborhoods, and our world. And you can too. Because if we want our young people to have more, all we have to do is help them get ready for it—they’ll do the rest.

The Mission Manifesto highlighted young people as the primary feature of organizational identity that staff should emphasize when describing PYP. Young people’s communities were identified as needing change and young people’s families received no mention. PYP staff were not expected to consider parent engagement as a component of the organization that needed to be communicated to individuals unfamiliar with the organization.

Parent engagement was also overlooked in the brand ambassador training for board members. The annual board retreat agenda had dedicated time to discuss board members’ responsibilities as brand ambassadors. The facilitator framed the activity as a way to explore organizational values most meaningful to board members and how to represent these values to potential donors within their networks (Observation, May 21, 2016). Board members discussed the following questions in small groups:

- Think of an audience/individual that you can represent Powerful Youth Projects to—they have a limited awareness of PYP or they have an outdated understanding of the brand. What will you say when asked: “Why are you involved?”
- When you think of the real impact youth are making in our programs, what does this inspire in your approach—how you reach out, involve potential supporters?
- What’s one way you see yourself and other board members acting on or living the brand in your meetings and in how you work with each other?
- Does this discussion help you define what your unique contribution could be for PYP this year? As a role, project, involvement in a committee or work group? (Observation, May 21, 2016)

The small group I observed consisted of Betsy, the director of Community Programs, one veteran board member with over five years of service, and two new board members who had been confirmed earlier that morning. Over the course of thirty minutes, they discussed their reasons for being involved in PYP. The following is a sample of their discussion:

Betsy: Whatever is core for you is what you should say, because that is how you sell it. For me it’s that youth is powerful. If that’s what connects for you, that’s what you should say. [Facilitator], is there a right or wrong?

Veteran board member: What resonates for me is closing the disparities. I don't care about helping soccer moms' kids. I care about closing disparity and offering other kids opportunities they don't have.

Retreat facilitator: You're one of the bigger groups. I'd like to hear how you connect to it. You don't need to refine. Each one is authentic. That is what we're going for here.

New board member 1: It's about empowerment, what drew me closer to this organization was the idea of empowering youth to communicate and build relationships outside of their comfort zone. Across generations, educational levels, other classes, enabling them to communicate and be a leader in their own community and other communities.

New board member 2: Mine is very similar to that...The disparity component is so important. People forget how lucky we are. My parents always reminded us where you come from, never forget. I operate with integrity in my personal and professional worlds and now matching that in the community. Kyla said that 100% of students impacted by violence in PYP. In this area that has so much, it should never be taken for granted and bringing that awareness to others. (Observation, May 21, 2016)

Participants discussed their personal commitments to increasing opportunities for low-income young people of color and whether the youth-led projects were making an impact which could be considered "real". For any of the board members, veteran or new, parent engagement did not register as a component of the organization to which they were committed or as an integral part of the organization's identity. Perhaps more telling was the neglect of parent engagement by Betsy who, as the supervisor of staff administering the community schools model, was familiar with the range of programming at school sites, including parent engagement.

The brand ambassador trainings were organizational efforts dedicated to increasing awareness of and cultivating connections to PYP. These efforts emphasized the constituent features of PYP necessary for an outsider, specifically, a potential funder, to develop a sound understanding of organizational identity. Moreover, as strategies to secure funding, these activities highlighted those organizational features on which they want to grow their reputation. The parent engagement program was omitted from the current definition of the organization as well as its imagined futures.

ANU: The Art of Representation

All Nelson United (ANU) applied its organizing model, developed over forty years of community organizing, to its work with parents and schools. Routines and structures within ANU were oriented toward ANU constituents, who were known as leaders. Parent engagement readily folded in to organizational norms, routines, and structures. However, the pressures from collaborations with other organizations as well as district politics challenged staff's ability to stay oriented around orientation around leader interest.

Leaders' interests as organizational barometer. ANU constituents were known within ANU as "leaders". The commitment to leaders' interests was embodied in essential ANU routines and structures which ensured that organizational activity was informed by leader interest. The organizational value of staying close to leaders' interest was affirmed in the ways ANU was recognized by other actors as an organization attuned to its constituents.

Leaders typically lived in Nelson and were connected to a community-based institution such as a house of worship or a school. A local organizing council (LOC) was comprised of leaders who were congregants at the house of workshop or parents at a school. An ANU

organizer usually supported several LOCs. ANU’s vision was one of self-determination—the executive director described ANU’s work as creating space for leaders to be “authors of their lives (Interview with Bonnie, October 7, 2015)”.

The one-on-one (1:1) was the first and most fundamental step of ANU’s organizing model intended to facilitate this authorship process. Franco, an ANU organizer, described the goal and the purpose of 1:1 during a training:

First step in our model is simple. We focus on listening to people. Wherever they are. The basic is that they are intentional. I have the intention to sit with Keisha and listen to her for 30 minutes. I hope to be able to build relationships with her. I hope to identify Keisha’s self-interest. I hope after that is to create build power. We have principles in our organization that power is the result of relationships and self-interest moves people. If Keisha decides to do something is because Keisha has her self-interest not because I invite her. Parents come and they don’t come back. In this model helps us to avoid us saying come and support us. (Observation, January 28, 2016)

One-to-ones were designed to determine leaders’ interests as expressed in the struggles of their daily lives. Cheryl describes her experience of how a 1:1 led to her becoming an ANU leader:

The church I was attending in [South Nelson], we had an organizer...[she] just asked the church administrator to point out a few people she thought might be movers and shakers in the community and in the church actually and so she pointed me and my husband out. She called us and asked us to do a one to one. She came to our house. We live right in the middle of the block between Newton High School and a liquor store. We had lots of concerns because we had teenage children. They did not attend Newton because of all the things we saw happening like kids walking back and forth from that school to the liquor store...During the middle of the day, smelling weed. We know they were buying alcohol and all that kind of stuff and then it is supposed to be a closed campus, so we didn't want to send our kids there...That's how we got involved in [ANU]. She asked us is there something in your community you would like to see change and of course, that. Not only that, but in front of our church...there were prostitutes. There was a bus bench right there in front of the church and the prostitutes were there all the time. We did not have a fence around our church, so they would use the church steps to do their business. We'd come to church on Sunday and there was used prophylactics on the church steps. It was terrible. They solicited the priest....Those were the lots of things we needed to fight for (Interview with Cheryl, April 27, 2016).

The 1:1 gave space for Cheryl and her husband to share the concerns that shaped their everyday experiences, from simply living in their home to where their children went to school to where they worshipped on Sundays. For Cheryl and her husband, the conventions of living were unsafe and challenging. In a similar vein, Franco’s report on the focus of her LOCs in a staff meeting detailed how leaders’ interests stemmed from the experience of living in their neighborhoods:

We’ve had two research meetings at [a local church]. The third research meeting on November 5 is with [city public transportation agency], city attorney, mayor representative, and officers in that area. The bus stop on [an intersection of two main streets in East Nelson] have criminal activity. The purpose of that stop, people don’t wait for the bus there. They want this stop to be dismantled or relocated. There are five liquor stores that’s next to [a nearby intersection], close to the church. Five liquor stores, and one homicide of a student of [local elementary school]. Another shooting as well that is really close (Observation, October 19, 2015).

The everyday of leaders’ lives constituted leaders’ interests.

Through 1:1s, organizers said they developed a deep sense of obligation to their leaders and the issues, beyond professional commitment:

It's because it's really tricky. The reason why we don't want to give up the issues is because people are about issues, and we are about people. It is really tricky, because for me it's hard to give up immigration for example, because all of my leaders are immigrant. Many of them aren't documented. How am I going to give up that to focus on Gardens High School?... I have these other five or six LOCs on my bed ...Again, when [the staff] come together, and I say it very loud, I'm not going to give up on immigration, because if I give up on immigration it's like giving up on the community that I'm working with...(Interview with Franco, June 15, 2016).

In this quote, Franco describes how he felt that issues were intimately connected to the lives of leaders. The roots of issues were grounded in leaders' lives, making it difficult for organizers to pull back from an issue. Franco also implied that there was some pressure on him to forego organizing on immigration while he organized around educational issues at Gardens High School. However, for Franco, giving up on immigration as an organizing issue felt like giving up on people. Similarly, Ernestine understood her work as connecting to people in her immediate community:

First of all, the prescription of Nelson and the idea that the work you're doing is for this city allows me and my personal stuff because that's where I live, and that's where my community is. I always thought it was fascinating and all I have is to compare it to the union where I was doing social justice work. It's like you talk about increase in taxes...Some of it is very ghost-like, you know what I mean?..They're a different kind of connection. The people I'm dealing with live in Nelson for the most part. The people I'm dealing with have ties and I can speak from a different place than just this "professional or expert" over here. I really can speak from the heart when we talk. It feels so much better saying, "I'm Reverend Ernestine from this church from this corner." As opposed to I'm Reverend Ernestine from ANU only. It lets you live in both worlds. (Interview with Ernestine, June 7, 2016)

In contrast to her previous work as a union organizer, Ernestine believed that ANU allowed for an intimacy in organizing as she was able to connect to people based on their shared lived experiences. Organizers understood the issues not only in terms of advocacy but on a personal level, in the ways the issues shaped the daily struggles and challenges of leaders' lives. Through the process of 1:1s, leaders identified their concerns, desires, and hopes which informed the direction and demands of ongoing campaigns or acted as the stimulus for new campaigns around changes that leaders wanted to enact. Asserting 1:1s as the first step of organizing was one organizational practice that established leaders and their lived experiences as the organization's compass.

Leaders' ideas and opinions also guided organizational decision-making informally in practice and structurally through the board as well. In almost every observed meeting, organizers shared leader' opinions during discussions of political strategy Staff asked each other "What do the leaders want?" or "What do leaders say about [the issue]?" or questioned the extent to which leaders demonstrated ownership of an activity. In 42 observed meetings, only four lacked any references to leaders' ideas or activities. Staff returned to the question of leaders' interests as the touchstone for decision-making around next steps. Leaders' interests informed the mundane and significant decisions about organizing such as how to best approach a political official or agendas for meetings among community members.

Leaders were also stewards of the organization. ANU's board consisted of leaders from the LOCs. While some board members held leadership positions at their churches or schools, other board members were simply active congregants or involved parents in the church or school LOC. The board's responsibilities focused on political strategy, financial sustainability, and organizational direction. At the time of data collection, one co-director of the board was an immigrant woman who was undocumented and monolingual in Spanish and the other was an African American male pastor. Bonnie described the ways in which many of her decisions as executive director were in close consultation with the board:

We bring a lot of decisions back to the board. I bring a lot of decisions back to the board. I bring a lot of decisions to the co-chairs. There's things that people don't even see. Is ANU part of X campaign? Can we sign on to da, da, da, da, da, da. That all gets processed through the board. I don't make any of those decisions. People will reach out to ANU. "Can you sign on this letter? Could we say that ANU is connected to ...?" or "Does ANU endorse ...?" and I'll say, "Give me a couple days," and depending on the heft of what it will require from us as an organization, I definitely at a minimum take it to the board co-chairs, and if needed, I'll take it to the entire board (Interview with Bonnie, July 19, 2016).

Being a board endowed with significant stewardship and decision-making powers and constituted by *leaders* ensured that organizational power structures prioritized leaders' interests. Board practices further served to emphasize leaders' interests in campaigns. I observed three board meetings in which consequential questions about fundraising and political campaigns were posed to the board (Observations, October 12, 2015; March 14, 2016; May 9, 2016). In all three meetings, decisions about these issues were tabled for a future meeting. Even though board members were considered to be representatives of leaders, decisions were delayed to provide board members the opportunity to go back to their LOCs, discuss the issue with the other leaders, and then return to the board to vote in a way that had more fully accounted for their communities' interests and concerns.

That organizational routines and structures as well as the personal commitments of ANU organizers truly centered leaders' interests were confirmed by staff's perception that leaders felt a sense of ownership of the organization:

I feel like the organization has changed a lot. They have evolved to being really the people's organization and the way I have felt about it since I started was, this is my organization. This does not belong to the staff...that's the way I feel and I know a lot of people who feel that way. They don't feel like they have to ... Like what they need to do in their community is a decision that the staff person has to make (Interview with Cheryl, April 27, 2016).

Today, one of the leader was telling me that her husband never likes to go to any kind of celebrations because he doesn't feel like he's part of any place where he goes. She says, "When I push him to go to one celebration with ANU, I basically forced him. He fell in love because he felt like everybody is welcoming, everybody, they don't see like I'm Bonnie, as the CEO who is far away...I think that says a lot for the organization. Bonnie, people feel really like she's just, I can relate to her. I can speak with her. I trust her. She's not the white lady in power making decisions. She's somebody who's taking in account what we say (Interview with Franco, June 1, 2016).

Leaders also recognized how the board was constituted by "real people", that is, people just like them, and how this practice diverged from the norm:

...one of the leaders told me that she was looking at the, pure leaders that go to the website. She was looking at the board members and different organization. She realized that ANU is the organization that has people like, not with the big profile as an educator, as a wealthy person, as an

educated person, but people from the community, real people (Interview with Franco, June 1, 2016).

Incorporating leaders' interests and voices was not intended to elicit feedback to be considered and taken up or dismissed by staff members but to foster a sense of ownership over ANU and to create a space for leaders to act as the authors of their lives.

Within the organization, the dedication and commitment to leaders' interests and voices was evidenced by routines, structures, and organizers' understanding of their work. ANU's reputation as an organization was also rooted in the relationship between ANU and its leaders. ANU was recognized by other organizations and institutions as being well-connected to Nelson's marginalized communities. Organizations provided funding for ANU to explore leaders' thoughts regarding topics that were going to be on the upcoming year's political agenda. For example, ANU received funding to survey leaders on, which at that time were, potential policy initiatives such as the taxing of sugary beverages and the legalization of marijuana (Interview with Leon, March 9, 2016). According to Leon, the organizations that provided funding believed ANU was connected to low-income communities and communities of color and would be able to gain insight on their thoughts which would allow them to assess the political viability of these policies. In a staff meeting, I observed a staff member from the county public transportation agency request help from ANU organizers in engaging community members regarding considerable infrastructure changes within East Nelson (Observation, February 29, 2016). ANU accepted funding to survey community sentiments regarding the political campaigns after checking with the board. In addition to building trust among leaders, the grassroots identity was crucial to ANU's reputation and attracted funding.

Divergences between organizational and leader interests. In addition to its constituents, there are multiple audiences for an organization's behaviors. In particular, ANU needed to maintain its political standing in the field. While recognition of ANU political strategy and strength likely served leader interest, managing the organization's political position moderated the norms and routines which emphasized direct expression of leaders' interests and concerns.

ANU's reputation of mobilization and winning campaigns was consequential to organizational survival. Campaign wins demonstrated to leaders the feasibility of change in their daily lives. A parent leader describes how hearing another parent leader share her history of organizing beginning with advocating for cleaner, safer bathrooms at her child's school made real the hope for change:

All the knowledge, knowing things that have happened, how they changed, just a simple bathroom issue but then the other, how she was so powerful in telling us how change could happen, that it could happen. If you put your mind to it, if people get together. (Interview with Parent Leader A, May 26, 2016)

Another parent leader describes how even the smallest of wins cultivates hope: "...some of us [leaders] are still here and we see little change. Sometimes that's better than nothing. It gives us hope that other things should come along or start forming in place (Interview with Parent Leader B, June 14, 2016)." Campaign wins affirmed to leaders that ANU's organizing model did not exist in theory but had practical applications. Because concrete changes had come about through organizing, leaders could trust in the model, invest their time in campaigns, and commit to the

organization. Leaders' interest in changes and the organization's interest in recruiting and retaining constituents converge in campaign wins.

Campaign wins also underscored ANU's reputation with other organizations. Campaigns typically targeted political elites, such as district attorneys, agency executives, or school district officials, who had the authority and power to respond to leaders. Franco describes how his reputation within the school district was associated with the costs of the commitments that Franco and leaders were able to secure through organizing.

...they were like, "Oh my God, he can organize." I remember [district official] say, "Did you know that they label you as the guy? That your value was, I don't know how many million dollars, right? Maria¹¹ and myself were almost in the same price with the politicians. I said, "Why?" He said, "Because you know what? If you organize around building a new school, that has a price." [School 1] was so expensive, [School 2] was so expensive, [School 3] was so expensive. Marie Daly Academy was, and then [inaudible 01:34:51] was expensive. When we put all the money together, it was so many million dollars. That was only you and Maria (Interview with Franco, June 1, 2016).

Campaign wins were contingent on ANU's ability to mobilize in a way that pressured political elites to concede to leaders' demands for policy changes, even at significant financial cost.

Staff were well aware of the importance of wins to the organization. During a staff meeting, members discussed a former director who had intimated that salary increases would be tied to wins (Observation, October 30, 2015). Bonnie, as executive director, had made a concerted effort to move away from "wins" as the defining feature of ANU and refocus organizing around relationships. However, the sense that successful campaigns where demands were met were critical to ANU's reputation was still pervasive among staff, particularly given the growing numbers of advocacy organizations setting up shop in Nelson (Interview with Bonnie, July 19, 2016; Interview with Joni, June 6, 2016). Efforts to work with these organizations opened up ANU to behaviors which compromised ANU's ability to be identified with specific political activities:

[Other organizations we're working with] claim the work...They'll even claim it publicly. Where I'm sitting in the room and it's ... What am I going to do? Get up in the middle of some meeting and state that you're full of it...You had two leaders, we had 125 (Interview with Joni, June 6, 2016).

That happens all the time. It still happens. I think that is something that we're not going to be able to stop because people like, there isn't right now concern about some of the stuff that has happened and which one of those organizations? Joni is doing the work and somebody else is claiming that already or putting that on paper. When I was in Gardens, I remember putting some ideas around sharing that idea. Somebody from another organization the next time we met, have everything in paper...right in my face (Interview with Franco, June 1, 2016)!

Explicit association with campaigns or political activities accrued recognition for ANU's reputation as an influential and savvy political actor. Other organizations taking credit for an idea that ANU had advanced or for an outcome that ANU had organized around diminished the visibility of ANU activity from Nelson's political sphere. Wins displayed and proclaimed ANU's political power.

¹¹ Pseudonym for a former ANU organizer.

The pressure to produce wins sometimes constrained ANU's ability to center and amplify leaders' interests and voices in its organizing work. Navigating the demands of the field by being in coalitions with other organizations or asserting political relevance often pulled organizers away from leaders' interests which tended to be immediate, local, and concrete. In other words, while these activities were done with leaders' interests in mind and would likely serve leaders' interests, they were not exact articulations of leaders' interests. Inter-organizational relationships asked organizers to use a frame of reference which would benefit ANU's positioning in influential policy arenas far from leaders' daily lives.

Organizers' reports of activities within inter-organizational spaces suggest that for staff, this arena amplified a set of interests specific to ANU as an organization. Organizers engaged in activities that assured ANU a seat at the table in policy arenas or among advocacy organizations as well as communicated ANU's influence. While these activities were arguably *in* the leaders' interests, they were not necessarily *of* the leaders' interests. For example, in a staff meeting, Celeste provided an update on an event connecting formerly incarcerated individuals with a variety of resources and legal aid which was coordinated in conjunction with several other organizations. She described an ongoing dilemma in her organizing around criminal justice:

The challenge right now is this. Our group, we're new on the scene on criminal justice reform. It's literally me. Because of that, there is this way in which ANU, we do a lot of stuff by ourselves. It's not going to work in this space, just us. It's not an environment conducive for that. We have a group of leaders and staff, and our models are so different and there's real tension. (Observation, October 19, 2015).

According to Celeste, ANU organizers had historically worked independent of other advocacy organizations. However, as the new kid on the block in criminal justice reform and her sense of the norms of organizing in this issue cut, Celeste felt it was more appropriate to work in collaboration with more established organizations. Celeste recognized that her decision to organize in coalition put the ANU organizing model and their leaders in conflict with the organizing models and constituents of other organizations. So, while Celeste's leaders wanted to be active in criminal justice reform, the coalition was the avenue by which ANU as an organization gained *entrée* in to the arena of criminal justice reform even as it created conflict for leaders as well as ANU's organizing practices. Celeste's decision to stay involved in this coalition was not questioned by other staff members.

ANU was also involved in policy arenas or discussions that were not primary among leader concerns:

Ernestine: ... Sometimes I think ANU gets lost in this housing issue but I don't think we've been organizing enough and having enough leaders rooted in the issue yet for us to have a better reputation as to making a difference in that organizing yet. We're part of a coalition and there are other housing groups that have been doing housing work almost exclusively. They're a little bit more advanced in the knowledge of the housing issues... Their leaders are more committed to the housing issue....

Interviewer: What's at stake if ANU doesn't have that reputation? What's at stake for ANU?

Ernestine: Influencing outcomes in policies around housing. This is going to happen in the next 12 months that could impact us for the next 15 years (Interview with Ernestine, June 7, 2016).

In describing her work in housing policy, Ernestine distinguished between leaders' current interests and her participation in a coalition of organizations. Ernestine rationalized her presence

in this space by citing her anticipation of policy decisions that could impact leaders rather than any declared interests of leaders. Her presence acted as a foothold in the policy arena for leaders in the event they began to express interest. At the same time, her presence in the coalition allowed ANU to secure a position as a policy influencer in issues around housing.

Campaign strategies were also deployed in ways that considered ANU's positioning. The Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) was a companion document to California's new educational funding system, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). The LCAP identified a district's goals and the LCFF demonstrated how funding was apportioned to support the LCAP. Districts were mandated to create the LCAP in consultation with different parent and community advisory committees. Joni had been organizing with parents around recommendations for the distribution of LCFF funds. Their organizing had garnered commitments from LCAP representatives to submit to the school board a recommendation plan which distributed most of the funds directly to the school sites. The school board had unanimously approved the recommendation. However, apparently there was still an additional \$1.6 million in the school budget which had not been accounted for. ANU organizers discussed next steps during a staff meeting:

Joni: ...In terms of ANU leaders, the mostly deeply engaged have been [Parent Leader 1] and [Parent Leader 2]. They both think we should claim this victory, and not ask for the extra \$1.6 million. It's not strategic.

Bonnie: I wouldn't do that. Makes more sense claim the larger victory. Maybe say something to the effect that we have a long ways to go and we're not going anywhere. This year, proud of what we've done together, with the funding at school site, but we as parents are committed to this process. (Observation, June 24, 2015).

Parents' interests and staff's strategizing diverged in this exchange. The parents leaders were focused exclusively on the campaign and therefore perceived the meeting of their demands as satisfactory. However, Bonnie, as well as Ernestine later on in this conversation, offered an alternative strategy which included making additional demands and asserting a dogged persistence of the district. Bonnie and Ernestine's strategy used leaders' existing interests as a platform to "claim the larger victory." The larger victory demonstrated to the district that parent leaders *affiliated with ANU* would not be satisfied with existing concessions but would continue to press and advocate for parents' interests. At the same time the larger victory accrued recognition of parent leaders, it also, more forcibly, signaled ANU's organizing prowess.

Organizers' focus on leaders' interests became murkier when organizational interests had to be accounted for in terms of decision-making and strategizing in organizing. There was pressure to stay abreast of the politics and claim wins. Participation in these spaces benefited leaders in that ANU maintained access to venues to assert leader interests. ANU toggled between leaders' interests which reflected their lived experiences on their neighborhood blocks and arenas in which political elites and organizational actors jostled and maneuvered to negotiate policy and assert political power. Navigating between these spaces resulted in sometimes leader interest being maneuvered in such a way as to also support organizational survival. In these policy arenas, ANU represented leaders' interests, a task which also dovetailed with ANU's political positioning efforts.

Discussion

This chapter demonstrates how the organization not only channels resources, but, very much, exists as an “arena of interactions” which generate possibilities and constraints for the practices of parent engagement. The inner life of organizations informed by organizational identity and arranged by organizational routines allow for parents, or simply the idea of parent engagement, to become more or less integral to organizational work. The context in which organizations are embedded and the ways they navigate this context to ensure organizational survival and sustainability set the parameters by which the inner life operates.

In existing scholarship, parent engagement organizations are only differentiated by the types of parent engagement practices. My data on Powerful Youth Projects (PYP) and All Nelson United (ANU) illustrates how parent engagement can be variously situated within organizational elements. The case of PYP depicts one outcome of mandating and “outsourcing” parent engagement. PYP took on parent engagement as a requirement of district contracts to act as the school-site administrator for the full-service community schools model, in effect, assuming a large part of the school’s responsibilities around parent engagement. ANU, on the other hand, focused on schools as one site of community organizing. Community organizing strategies developed outside the school system to initiate various changes in constituents’ neighborhoods and lives were used by organizers to address constituents’ concerns about schools.

PYP offers an example of how parent engagement can become a compliance task for an organization. Parent engagement was a fairly new addition to PYP’s scope of work. There were few opportunities for parent engagement to gain traction in PYP. For twenty years, PYP had engaged in youth development practices which emphasized opportunities for young people to take leadership roles and develop self-confidence. Moreover, PYP primarily worked with high school youth, who were at an age where many activities and decisions can be done independently from their parents. It was unclear how parent engagement fit into the picture of youth development, particularly for high school students. In the organizational roles and routines where work was discussed, negotiated, and enacted, there were few opportunities for staff to interact around parent engagement. Parent engagement work was siloed into the roles of parent engagement. Discussions of parent engagement across the staff were limited to informational sessions which raised awareness of the challenges of parent engagement as well as potential practices. The occasional exposure to parent engagement ideas was indicative of the minimal time or resources given to staff to thoughtfully integrate parent engagement into their ongoing youth development work. The shared sense among staff of PYP’s identity as a youth development agency combined with an absence of efforts to expand this identity precluded connections to the parent engagement component of the community schools contract.

The contract itself had few incentives around parent engagement requiring only parent presence in terms of participation numbers. The absence of direction was coupled with a small amount of dedicated funding for parent engagement. In terms of expected outcomes and available resources, the policy itself seemed to suggest that a peripheral treatment of parent engagement was satisfactory. Moreover, because PYP primarily considered itself as a youth development organization, its peer organizations likely provided few examples of how to incorporate parent engagement practices. Because parent engagement is not incorporated into the core of organizational work, it can be more readily understood as a compliance requirement, one

of multiple tasks PYP needed to fulfill in its role as community school managers. In this way, parent engagement remained at the periphery of PYP's work.

On the other hand, ANU's identity was rooted in parents' interests and desires. The foundational belief of All Nelson United (ANU) was that all people, particularly those marginalized, should be and were fully capable of authoring their own lives. This belief was materialized in ANU foundational practices and organizational structures and was reinforced by its environment both materially and normatively. ANU's signature practice, the 1:1, was dedicated to eliciting leader interests which animated organizational activity and direction. As a grassroots organization, ANU structured organizational hierarchy to emphasize leader authority in decision-making processes. The board, made up of ANU leaders representing local organizing councils in schools and houses of worship across Nelson, had significant influence in strategy and tactics. Leaders' experiences, voices, and interests were the heart of ANU.

However, even when an organization is arranged around the voices and interests of parents, distinctive organizational features complicate organizational commitments to parents. ANU clearly understood its activity taking place in a political field constituted by growing numbers of advocacy organizations working to mobilize constituents as well as political elites and the institutions and private organizations they represented. Its dedication to leaders in conjunction with a history of obtaining policy wins provided ANU with significant political currency. The extent to which ANU could influence policy and generate wins was in large part due to ANU's ongoing presence in these policy arenas. While not directly conflicting with leaders' interests, navigating policy arenas required ANU organizers to employ a field-level perspective of organizations and policy-level activity which did not necessarily have a direct correspondence to leaders' interests as intimated by organizers. Organizational positioning for access and asserting influence benefited leaders but also required actions not explicitly identified by leaders. Representation of leaders cannot be characterized as being only informed by parents' interests because it also included organizers' professional assessment of political strategy.

Organizational identity, roles and routines, and context set the table for parent engagement practices. Organizational factors of PYP suggest that there were few conditions put on parent engagement in terms of contractual expectations. Parent coaches, relatively unsupervised, were generally free to conduct parent engagement as they best saw fit. Yet this freedom was the consequence of the most basic of organizational commitment of resources and time to the complex task of parent engagement. ANU's organizational factors suggest that there was concerted effort to attend to parents' interests and desires in educational change and transformation. However, political strategizing required more from organizer skills and expertise than from the knowledge borne of leaders' daily lived experiences. How do these conditions matter for parent engagement? What types of parent engagement practices emerge, when under-resourced yet unrestrained? How do parent engagement practices that seek to politicize parents negotiate between parents' immediate local interests and the policy arena? The next chapter seeks to address these questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE POSSIBILITIES AND CONSTRAINTS OF PARENT AGENCY

Introduction

This chapter considers similarities and variations in the way parent engagement is conducted as demonstrated by the two organizations of my study, Powerful Youth Projects (PYP) and All Nelson United (ANU). Specifically, I consider the types of practices employed in the day to day routines and the dynamics between staff and parents within these interactions. In reviewing patterns and themes across the two organizations' practices, I find that similar types of practices are employed across the two organizations. However, the practices allowed for and generated different degrees of parent agency. Shared forms of parent engagement did not result in a common ideal of how parents could be engaged in school sites. I conclude with a discussion of the findings and their implications for the roles and responsibilities organizations make possible in parent-school relationships.

Parent Engagement Common Denominators

Both PYP and ANU's executive directors believed that the two organizations greatly differed from each other (Interview with Quincy, February 2, 2016; Interview with Bonnie, May 7, 2015). Despite Quincy and Bonnie's perceptions of difference, similarities existed between the two organizations. Table 5 provides an overview of practices observed in meetings. It displays the type of activity, an exemplar of the activity, and the number of times that activity took place. Of the five categories of practices employed by the two organizations, four were present in both organizations.

Table 5

Overview of ANU and PYP parent engagement practices

| Category | PYP Activity | Exemplar (n=number of meetings w/activity) | PYP and ANU Activity | Exemplar (n=number of meetings w/activity) | ANU Activity | Exemplar (n=number of meetings w/activity) |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--|---|-----------------------------|--|
| Learning About Schools | Workshop: Individual Student Data | Student reading levels (1) | Workshop: School policies and procedures | PYP: 8 th and 12 th grade defenses (5) ANU: School budget (15) | Workshop: School level data | Balanced score card (5) |
| | | | Classroom observations | PYP: 3 ANU: 1 | | |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Increasing Access | | | Planning volunteer activities in school | PYP: Breakfast distribution (5) ANU: Cultural day in response to bullying (2) | |
| | | | Meeting with school or district administrators | PYP: Meeting with principal (6) ANU: Meeting with Director of Special Education (12) | |
| Parent Resources | Workshop: Community resources | Tour of Community Health Center (2) | Planning volunteer activities in school | PYP: Breakfast distribution (5) ANU: Cultural day in response to bullying (2) | |
| | | | Parenting skills | PYP: Family conflict resolution discussion (4) ANU: Reading strategies for home (2) | |
| | | | Socio-emotional support | PYP: Parent social activities (3) ANU: 1:1s (0) | |
| Parent Capacity | | | Communication Skills | PYP: Communication Styles (4) ANU: Public speaking (8) | |
| | | | Understanding Self as Leader/Leadership Development | PYP: Leadership qualities (4) ANU: Developing agendas (13) | |
| Governance and advocacy | | | | Participating in school and district governance structures | Presenting at school board meetings (6) |

Note: Meetings contained multiple types of activity, so numbers of activity will not equal to the numbers of meetings. N=82 total observed meetings; PYP n=29 observed meetings, ANU n=53 observed meetings.

Each category of practice included several activities employed by both organizations. Unsurprisingly, ANU is distinguished by its work in governance structures which tends to fall under the umbrella of “political” given the decision-making responsibilities of parents in these spaces. In the following section, I provide a brief description of types of activities of an exemplar activity as an illustration of each category.

Learning about Schools

The two organizations educated parents on school policies, practices, and issues. This category of activity sought to provide parents with helpful information for making sense of their child’s academic experiences and navigating the school system. Both ANU and PYP explained how to read data; however, ANU focused on school-level data whereas PYP focused on individual-level data. During a parent breakfast workshop at Marie Daly, mothers received printouts of their child’s score on a district-administered reading assessment (Observation, October 6, 2015). The principal described the purpose of the assessment, explained how to read the scores, and identified the grade-level goals. ANU’s education organizers, Joni and Franco, conducted several workshops using the school’s “report card”, a publicly-available document which compared school performance to district and state average performance on several key academic and socio-emotional indicators. In one workshop, Joni used the school report card to help parents understand grade level performance in reading for Dolores Huerta Elementary students (Observation, December 11, 2015).

Both organizations also conducted classroom observations with parents. Classroom observations were an opportunity for parents to observe their children’s teaching and learning experience first-hand. ANU’s classroom observations were part of a research cycle to identify the needs of Gardens High School. The classroom observations took place during a research meeting and were conducted by Franco, three parents, Destiny, PYP’s family and student engagement coordinator who worked closely with Franco, and myself (Observation, October 29, 2015). The observations were fairly informal as we popped into a classroom, stayed for about ten minutes, and then went into another classroom. We visited four classrooms over the period of an hour and then discussed our observations. In contrast, Tonya carefully structured the classroom observations that took place at Marie Daly. Two workshops were dedicated to preparing parents for the observations (Observations, September 16, 2016; October 21, 2015). Observations were conducted during one workshop using an observation protocol Tonya had distributed before we went into the classrooms (Observation, March 16, 2016). The mothers in attendance split up into groups, one of which I joined, and observed one classroom for about thirty minutes. Upon return, the mothers discussed their observations.

Finally, PYP and ANU disseminated general information about schooling. Parent engagement at Marie Daly and Newton primarily focused on existing school policies and practices. Melinda describes a few of the workshops that took place at Newton High School:

Biggest thing we do are workshops which help parents understand a number of different things. Beginning with things like, school stuff, you know. LCAP, and common core, and things like that. Helping them really understand the culture of what it is expected in the way of budget, and SSC¹²,

¹² School Site Council (SSC) is the school governance committee which makes decisions about school goals and budgets. SSCs require representatives from administration, faculty, parent and community, and students if they are of high school age.

and PTA¹³ and things like that. We also do workshops for IEPs¹⁴ because a lot of parents are families with that. We do college going workshops, financial aid workshops. (Interview with Melinda, July 7, 2015)

ANU organizers also conducted workshops in which parents learned about school policies and process such as school budgets (Observation, April 21, 2015). Moreover, they organized research meetings where parents learned about school design and the conditions for reform (Observations, November 17, 2015; December 14, 2015).

Increasing Access

The two organizations facilitated access to the schools by increasing opportunities to be on school sites as well as setting up interactions between administrators and parents. PYP supported parents' activities on school sites in several ways. PYP staff at Marie Daly had identified ways to involve committed parents, regardless of language ability:

[Active parent volunteer] doesn't speak really any English. She's monolingual. But, we found a way to get her here to work with the Spanish classes, to help with lunch duty, and some of the parent patrol, safety patrols we tried to start. Helping the deliver breakfast from the cafeteria to the rooms because we don't have access to the cafeteria in the morning during the breakfast (Interview with Tonya, June 26, 2015).

Additionally, during the parent breakfasts, PYP staff allotted time for parents to organize activities such as a multicultural food fair for the school community. In a similar vein, parents at Newton High School were expected to identify school problem and implement a community impact project (CIP) as a solution:

And in this program, all of our parents, they have to do a project. So what they do is they go in the school and the object is to find the need within the school where you can bring change, right? ...So this last year, school year, the parents here at Newton, their project was kits of love. That's what they entitled them. They're hygiene kits, so what they did was they did a study within the school. And they polled the children to find out how they would feel about receiving hygiene kits. And the kids were like we would love them. Because there are some kids who don't have the toothpaste and deodorant. The things they need to take care of themselves, right? So our parents here, they did kits of love (Interview with Donna, July 14, 2015).

ANU organizers also assisted parents in engaging in activities at school sites. At Dolores Huerta, one of the first actions that parent leaders coordinated was a parent-teacher breakfast in which parents cooked teachers a breakfast as a show of gratitude for their work (Interview with Joni, June 16, 2016). At Gardens, parents had spent six months patrolling the school before and after school and during break times in an effort to reduce gang-related violence in and around the school (Interview with Franco, June 1, 2016).

Parents who attended either organization's parent engagement program also had the opportunity to engage with school and district administrators. Marie Daly parents could count on a monthly meeting with the principal. Franco and Joni often invited district officials to research meetings. I observed research meetings where a small group of parents were able to talk to a special education director (Observation, May 17, 2015), the school board president (Observation, June 15, 2015), and the superintendent (Observation, February 20, 2016). These spaces gave

¹³ Parent Teacher Association

¹⁴ Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a special education legal document that specifies a student's academic goal for the year.

parents direct access to school officials who might otherwise be difficult for a parent to pin down. By providing this access as a regular part of the program, PYP and ANU normalized this type of access for parents.

Parent Resources

ANU and PYP staff addressed the perceived gaps in parents' available resources. The two organizations disseminated information on specific skills which would help parents support their children emotionally and academically. In addition, the parent engagement programs offered socio-emotional support to parents through a variety of activities. PYP programs also connected parents to local resources.

PYP had several workshops on a range of parent skills. For example, at Marie Daly, Beatriz facilitated a workshop on family conflict resolution (Observation, March 9, 2016). Parents watched a video about challenging family dynamics, children's developmental needs, and appropriate communication styles. Following the video, mothers had a lively discussion about their own experiences of miscommunication with their children and the ways they tried to improve relationships with their teenagers. ANU's program also included parent-skill activities such as the time Joni brought in Dolores Huerta's literacy coach to share home-based reading strategies that parents could use to foster their child's literacy (Observation, December 11, 2015).

Parenting in Nelson was a formidable challenge. ANU and PYP staff created warm, welcoming spaces that offered social and emotional support. Marie Daly's parent breakfasts were a respite for mothers from the challenges of eking out a living for their families:

What they're really looking for, a lot of the time, is social connections with other people from their background because the reality for these women is that they have a lot of responsibility in the house. They're kind of, a lot of them are operating under very traditional gender norms in terms of dad is working, they are staying home, maintaining the house raising the kids cooking the food and the very intense life of a homemaker. Shopping around for the absolute best deal, because money, because the dollar doesn't go as far as it does as in other places living here in Nelson. I think it's real hard work and a lot of the time it can feel isolating so the parent group, so they come for, they come for the social aspect and they benefit tremendously from all the other stuff and they continue to come for the value of the sessions outside of the social connection (Interview with Tonya, June 26, 2015).

The workshops offered a space for friendship as well as a recognition of shared experience. Denise, a PLON participant, her experience in the workshops at Newton:

Then [parents] are watching their kid go the wrong way and not understanding what can I do to change this path, or parents who have lost their kid to violence. With those pieces coming out, they begin to understand more about the background and the need for these parents to come and be involved in these type of groups so that ... I've that learned that after those sessions you come out feeling relieved like okay, I got that off and now I can start afresh (Interview with Denise, May 26, 2016).

In PYP workshops, mothers greeted each other with hugs or kisses on the cheeks. Often music would be playing in the background. All workshops I attended always had snacks or food available. Mothers often brought their younger children to the meetings and other mothers would play with them or hold them. The parent coaches also designed additional workshops and coordinated events that attended to parents' social interests such as art classes or trips to the movies.

While PYP staff addressed parents' social emotional needs through group activities, ANU organizers used 1:1s¹⁵ to support parents. Franco described a 1:1 in which Bethany, a parent leader at Gardens, considered leaving the school:

In the last ones-to-ones have been really powerful because she's told me, she even called me and said, "I need to talk with you." I said, "What is it about?" When I went with my son to Carmine¹⁶ because they were doing something out there. All of a sudden, her son starts asking her, "I think you need to move me to another high school. What will it take me to go to Carmine High where you went?" Bethany was in shock like, "Why? I know that you like Gardens." He said, "I like Fremont but my friends who are in eleventh grade, I don't think I'm going to get what I need next year. I know this year I was lucky to have good teachers, but I have my friends and they were not lucky. I want a better future for me." She said now he's wondering whether he's going to stay there or not. I asked her, "How did that make you feel?" "I'm nervous." I said, "You need to feel proud of your son because if he's saying that that means that he's reflecting a lot around what you're working for. You are working for a better future. I would hate for you to leave Gardens but you need to listen to your son." At the end of the day, I told her, "Make the decision that is best for your child, not what I think, because as a parent I have to think as a parent, what is the best for my child? I will hate for you to leave Gardens because you are one great organizer and leader here. At the same time, what is the best thing for your child?" (Interview with Franco, June 1, 2016).

With Franco, Bethany felt free to express concerns and anxiety around her son's desire to leave Gardens where Bethany had done a significant amount of organizing. Bethany believed that her 1:1s with Franco provided an opportunity to reflect on her emotions: "There's some things that we think alike. He's a parent so he really thinks like me. He thinks about the kids. Everything he's thinking, I think it but sometimes I just don't say it (Interview with Bethany, May 26, 2016)." In 1:1s, organizers offered a judgement-free space for parents to consider actions that would benefit their families.

PYP also connected parents to a variety of social services, available at the school and in the broader community. Melinda described the range of resources Newton High School staff offered parents:

Job development workshops for parents as well because many of them don't work or don't have the skills. We provide various supports, we do a number of events. We give away turkeys for Thanksgiving, toys for Christmas, we have what we call our Princess Project where we give prom dresses to young ladies and tuxedos to young men. We do a lot of things to support families. We also have case management services. So, if a parent needs to come in because they can't pay their rent, we have someone to support that. We have mental health services so they can do family counseling. What else, I mean...we have a parent resource center where they can use computers and they can do classes (Interview with Melinda, July 9, 2015).

PYP staff at Marie Daly connected parents to resources through workshops. One of the monthly Parent Breakfast workshops was dedicated to a presentation by a partner providing services through the community school model. I observed tours of the community health center, information about college workshops, as well as outreach by other community groups with information about resources such as subsidized housing or computer giveaways.

Parent Capabilities

This category included activities intended to foster parents' sense of efficacy. These activities focused on either communication skills or leadership development. Thus, these

¹⁵ One-to-ones were not observed because of their private nature.

¹⁶ Carmine is a pseudonym for a city neighboring Nelson.

activities recognized and worked to develop parents' capabilities. For example, at Newton, Melinda facilitated a workshop typical of PLON's communication skills workshops. Melinda guided parents through a survey designed to identify communication styles. Then she facilitated a discussion about how this style impacted the ways they understood other people as well as the ways they were perceived by others (Observation, March 6, 2016). ANU's workshops on communication focused on public speaking, usually in preparation for an action. Before an action, Franco met several times with parents so they could prepare their script and practice it aloud. Franco gave tips for speaking in front of an audience and encouraged parents to speak from the heart (Observation, June 2, 2015).

Admittedly, leadership development is a more nebulous description of activity. For PYP, leadership development consisted of activities which gave parents the opportunity to explore the idea of themselves as leaders either through self-reflection or project implementation. In a PLON workshop, parents brainstormed a list of leadership qualities and discussed the qualities they exemplified (Observation, December 8, 2015). Donna also considered the CIP as a leadership activity as it gave parents the opportunity to plan and implement a project. Similarly, Marie Daly's multicultural food fair was seen a leadership activity as parents were the main coordinators and Nylea and Beatriz provided minimal guidance (Interview with Nylea, May 25, 2016).

For ANU, all public actions were considered leadership development opportunities because parents took center stage. Other leadership development activities took place in the preparation for actions. While a significant amount of leadership development occurred in 1:1s between organizer and parent leader, some activities were observed in meetings. For example, organizers and parents developed agendas for research meetings together, brainstorming ideas of activities for the meetings and sharing their opinions on the appropriate activity for the goals of the meeting (Observation, October 15, 2015). Following a principle of doing rather than reflecting, ANU organizers supported parents taking active roles in all research meetings as a way to support their self-confidence and foster their identities as leaders.

Governance and Advocacy

Parents could participate in a variety of school- and district-level governance structures in Nelson Unified. Only ANU organizers had a consistent practice of supporting parents in governance structures. They encouraged parents to join these structures and provided ongoing support by helping parents make sense of the content discussed in these committees. For example, Nelson Unified had only one LCAP coordinator who was stretched thin providing support to the multiple LCAP committees, disseminating information about the LCAP, and organizing community engagement meetings. She had little bandwidth to recruit or support the parents who served as LCAP committee representatives. Joni made sure that the parent leaders in the Dolores Huerta LOC were involved in this district-wide structure which influenced the distribution of state funding. She organized parents to nominate and rally around a parent leader to represent the region in which Dolores Huerta was located. This parent leader became the first Arab woman to be elected as a representative to any parent advisory board in the district (Interview with Joni, February 18, 2015). Joni also attended LCAP meetings and discussed the events of the meeting with the parent leaders, helped them to make sense of the budget, supported them as they disseminated the LCAP information to the parents at their school, and helped them to strategize how to best advocate for their school (Observations, June 15, 2015;

June 24, 2015; November 19, 2015). Franco engaged in similar activities with Garden's parent leaders who were on the school site council (Observation, October 26, 2015). He also supported parent leaders who participated on Garden's principal selection committee as well (Observations, February 18, 2016; March 3, 2016). In interviews, both Melinda and Tonya mentioned governance structures, such as school site councils or the LCAP community board as potential avenues for parents or topics for workshops (Interview with Melinda, July 9, 2015; Interview with Tonya, June 26, 2015). However, there were never references to any school- or district-level governance structures during any of the observations that took place during the parent engagement programming at either Newton or Marie Daly.

The similarities in the type of parent engagement practices between these two ostensibly different organizations suggest that parents' current context and desired futures matter in parent engagement practices. Addressing a lack of resources, reducing social isolation, increasing knowledge about schools attend to the challenges that low-income parents confront as home well as the factors that impede their presence at school. At the same time the organizations responded to parents' need, they opened up schools to parents. The organizations were able to create space for parents on school sites vis-à-vis volunteering and interactions with school and district administrators.

When considering the categories common in both parent engagement program, it is evident that organizational resources were primarily directed at parents. These resources addressed potential information and skill gaps which may have been preventing parents from accessing school sites. Reducing barriers to school was also accompanied by the ways PYP and ANU encouraged parents to try different, unfamiliar activities to develop leadership skills.

Inasmuch as the two organizations generally employed similar types of activities, how these activities were inhabited distinguished the two organizations. The next section reviews the differences in the ways PYP and ANU executed the activities and what they intended parents to accomplish as a result of the activities.

The Means and Ends of Parent Engagement

ANU and PYP employed a spectrum of practices to educate parents about schools as well as to facilitate their activities in schools. Even as the two organizations engaged practices similar in form, how these practices were enacted to mediate relationships between parents and school actors were distinct to each organization. The organizations focused on parent learning to shape parents' activities, behaviors, and relationship to school sites. PYP's activities had predetermined means and predefined ends whereas in ANU, the means and ends of parent engagement were more open to negotiation between parent and organizer.

Parent Education

Both ANU and PYP worked to change how parents engaged with educational actors through a focus on parent learning. The extent to which parent education was determined by staff or parent distinguished the two organizations.

PYP. The structures and content of PYP's parent engagement program were entirely administered by staff. Staff determined the agendas and facilitated meetings. Workshop agendas

followed the same pattern: 1) Opening and review of rules; 2) Icebreaker; 3) Workshop/topic; 4) Closing. While parents were invited to plan and organize specific volunteer or school culture activities, this invitation did not extend to the parent engagement program itself. In interviews, staff did not reference how parents were included in the design and implementation of workshops other than staff informally surveying parents on their interests. Additionally, there were no observations of PYP meetings in which parents had roles other than as participants.

Workshops were almost always delivered in a presentation format by a professional such as PYP staff, community organization staff, or school or district administrator. Occasionally, the presenter would open up with an activity or questions but more typically the presenter would deliver a presentation about a topic in which information was delivered in one way—from the presenter to parents. This type of format included opportunities for parents to discuss the topic at hand but circumscribed parents' ideas and opinions to that specific workshop. The series of workshops on classroom observations illustrate this point. In an interview conducted before the workshop series began, Tonya described a former experience with classroom observations conducted with parents:

Parents viewed the observations, they viewed what they're seeing negatively, because our families, you know, grew up in an education system in Central America or Mexico in which it was very didactic and the teacher with all of the power and the structure of the classroom and the relationship between the teacher and student is so different than here. Like they will come in here and see kids working in groups and not totally being 100% focused 100% of the time, or teachers being overly tolerant of behavior problems and being like there was no control of the class and things like that (Interview with Tonya, June 26, 2015).

In one of the preparatory workshops, parents compared their educational experiences to that of their children. The following comments are indicative of the whole group discussion:

- It was very different from Guatemala. The freedom the kids have here, but I really like it because it lets them develop themselves. In Guatemala, it is about being successful in school but here it's about a vision for the future.
- Our parents were not involved but here there's more opportunity to be involved here.
- Teachers weren't approachable. They controlled the climate by intimidation. Kids here are a lot more independent and can talk with the teachers. Here there are many programs to help young people to continue their education. (Observation, September 16, 2015)

Parents' observations of differences between their home country and the U.S. as well as their desires for their children reveal understandings which contradict Tonya's belief that parents were unfamiliar with the norms and practices of the US education system. However, parents' apparent knowledge about schooling was not incorporated in the subsequent workshops on classroom observations. In this way, parents' opinions and ideas were solicited for the topic on hand but were not brought to bear on the content of future workshops.

At the same time staff neglected to build on parents' expressed knowledge within workshops, there were no formal structures to support translating parents' articulation of interests into workshop content. Parents' descriptions of the ways staff gathered their input suggest little connection between input and workshop content. Moira, a consistent participant in the Parent Academy, describes an informal process at Marie Daly:

[Nylea and Beatriz] always, both of them, always are asking what kind of workshops we want...in conversations, hey girls, what do you think, this week we should talk like about what. Or they say, we're going to have this workshop, do you guys want to be part of it? They are interesting, how

many people are coming? Everybody have everything they need. They always start asking stuff. (Interview with Moira, April 20, 2016).

Moira depicts Nylea and Beatriz as being genuinely interested in parent feedback as they were constantly asking the mothers about their opinions. At the same time, the lack of an institutionalized process suggests that parent input was not considered integral to workshop planning. Instead, input is gathered by chance from whomever Nylea and Beatriz happen to talk to that day. Moreover, because staff had the discretion as to whether or not to gather parent input, staff also had the discretion to incorporate or ignore parent input.

The PLON program at Newton had a more structured way to compile parent input:

It's about helping to identify what they want. We do a survey at the beginning of the year what would you like to learn this year, what would you like workshops on, what would you like to see come to the school that would be helpful for you, and that has helped to drive and inform the workshops that we do offer to parents (Interview with Melinda, July 9, 2015).

Melinda's description of the process suggests that staff used the survey responses to "inform the workshops" offered to parents. The more formal process of a survey likely resulted in a more systematic collection of parent interests. Yet even as parent input on potential content was collected, decisions on workshop content remained in Donna's hands.

In sum, staff controlled the structures and content of PYP workshops. Workshop structures controlled the dissemination of information from presenter to parent and were predetermined by staff. Workshop content considered but were not established in parents' interests. Parent learning in PYP was a result of staff's assessment of parent need.

ANU. The structures and content of ANU's parent engagement were subject to a certain extent of negotiation between organizers and parent leaders. The research cycle and its components were well-established, having guided ANU through its forty-year history. With the guidance of organizers, parents participated in the design and implementation of research cycle activities, that is, what they would learn about, in both structure and content. Organizers and parents worked together to determine agendas for workshops and research meetings. The following excerpt is from field notes of a planning meeting held by Joni and Dolores Huerta parent leaders to determine the agenda for an upcoming regional parent meeting which was being hosted at Dolores Huerta Elementary:

Joni: ...So we thought of two things that fit really well for regional meeting, helpful for every leader at this time of year. One is doing a 1:1 because in part there is an actual assignment. In the room, people can practice doing 1:1s with people they don't know, especially from other schools...

Parent 1: What topic will we use for 1:1?

Joni: That's for conversation and you decide. We can have a guide. The other thing we thought of is practicing an opportunity for public speaking. Because LCAP met, and there is a relationship between LCAP and SSC, so people can practice how to give an update on LCAP and what's the significance for the school site and for young people...

Parent 2: I think 1:1 is really important because we need to building relationships because there will be no community. I also really think LCAP is really important because last year we were just getting started and we weren't able to integrate. For me, it's really important to get ideas from school community. Because me by myself, I won't know all the needs of the community. If we're

not having conversation with families in school community, we won't be able to share the ideas with the school district so that part is important too.

Parent 3: I think it is really important to do 1:1s too because there are new people and they have different perspective. Without sitting down and hearing from them, we won't know them. They may have new good ideas that we haven't thought about before. I think the LCAP part is really critical to have a clear understanding to give that kind of update and engage school community in LCAP, why it's important, what's the significance, what does it mean. To get people's input, the parents, caregivers, educators, staff to make a difference for students. The other thing I'd like to add is that the trainings are really key. If parents don't have these kinds of training, principal ignore them and don't listen to the parents. With these training, they're able to work more closely with the principal and take their ideas into account and work more accountability.

Joni: [Parent 1], what do you think about focusing on these two things for the trainings? 1:1 and important things about the LCAP?

Parent 1: It's a good idea. A 1:1 is a good idea as far as people getting to know each other, speaking on a topic we give you, if we get to know each other then we'll have a better feeling about how our groups can mesh, if we know each other better, we can spread the news. 1:1 makes you feel comfortable and 1:1 conversation builds up the confidence to talk in front of a group... (Observation, October 15, 2015).

During the planning meeting, Joni facilitated, asking questions and moving the conversation so that parents considered all aspects of the upcoming meeting in developing the agenda. In addition, parents either shared facilitation responsibilities with the organizer or led the meeting themselves in almost all observed ANU meetings. For example, in a Gardens High School research meeting with an education consultant, Bethany, a parent leader, acted as the primary facilitator and the other parent leaders asked questions about the resources and structures teachers needed to be successful (Observation, December 14, 2015). Bethany opened the meeting, reviewed norms, and moved the meeting along when the discussion lingered too long on a topic. Franco, the organizer assigned to the Gardens LOC, was present and asked a few follow-up questions, but was mostly occupied by translation duties during the meeting.

Parents also contributed to the content of the research cycle. One-to-ones were oriented around parents as it was a space for organizers to sit with parents and explore and share their concerns and hopes for their children. Research meetings focused on gathering information and data to identify solutions about the problems with which parents were most concerned. In actions, parents articulated the solutions identified through research meetings and pressured school and district leaders to address their concerns. The research cycle cycled around parents.

However, parents' active participation in deciding the content of research meetings and the substance of actions was unevenly evident across campaigns. Franco's organizing around the IIDI offers evidence of mobilization efforts largely driven by Franco himself. The IIDI's focus on school transformation circumscribed the content of parents' interests as well as how parents could participate in the process. Moreover, the IIDI had a pre-determined timeline. Franco wanted to ensure that parents were included as full participants in Gardens' re-design process as designated by the IIDI. School redesign is a technically complex process which considers all aspects of schooling as negotiable—from processes of teaching and learning to professional development of novice and veteran teachers to support of high needs populations to school operations and facilities. While parents occupied roles in meeting agendas by serving as facilitators or posing questions, the *content* of research meetings around the IIDI drew largely from Franco's own knowledge and expertise of school design and transformation and his

assessment of information necessary to prepare parents for conversations around school redesign. Only two of the seven observed research meetings leading up to the June 2, 2015 action and one out of the ten observed research meetings leading up to the February 2, 2016 action included discussions in which parents were making sense of the information and identifying questions they wanted answered or changes they wanted included as part of the demands. The result was a research cycle around the IIDI that was primarily shaped by Franco’s expertise in school design and transformation even as Franco strived to incorporate parent interest.

The form and content of ANU’s educative activities were often created with parents and by parents. Parents, who were not leaders, attending ANU’s workshops or actions saw other parents facilitating meetings and leading activities. Yet the co-construction process became constrained under the pressure of policy. In these spaces, the organizer took lead, using his expertise and relationships to determine and organize the research meetings. Parents still facilitated meetings and played an active role in questioning but the meeting itself took on a cast which resembled PYP’s one-way format.

Parent Roles

The different forms and dynamics of education positioned parents as specific types of agents in relation to schools and school staff. Both organizations’ efforts to be responsive to parents’ interests had limiting factors. The focus and care afforded to parents by PYP remained fairly limited to the boundaries of their program and overwhelmingly advanced a supportive orientation toward the school. In addition, the technical demands of policy and district political dynamics frustrated ANU organizers’ ability to conduct research cycle driven by parents’ interests and increased organizer intervention.

PYP. PYP staff strived to be responsive to parent desires and needs. The four mothers from Marie Daly and the two mothers from Newton all cited their children’s success as their motivation for school-based involvement:

Table 6

PYP Parents’ Motivations for Volunteering in School

| Name | School | Quote | Interview Date |
|--------------|--------------------|--|----------------|
| Moira | Marie Daly Academy | My biggest passion and my biggest interest is being an advocate for my son and his friends, like the kids in my son's classroom, helping out these kids specifically that are in special education because sometimes I feel like they're sort of isolated from the rest. I'm always wanting to provide ideas about different workshops or programs... | 4/20/16 |
| Neta | Marie Daly Academy | Actually, I really sees the difference between my parent involvement with as opposed to my first child, I wasn't as involved, and I really struggled for him to be able to just develop himself versus my second child now doing really well since sixth grade and being able to see that even his GPA average has been 4.0 ... | 4/20/16 |
| Flora | Marie Daly Academy | I have about 8 years of being involved with my kids’ education since my son was in [local elementary school] and I just really love helping parents and other kids to be able to thrive and just be able to be involved and for kids to be able to be at a higher academic level. I see how it helps them not only academically but also emotionally for sure. I love to motivate parents, | 4/27/16 |

| | | | |
|----------------|--------------------|---|---------|
| | | my own kids obviously but other kids as well and I really don't like when I can see and observe that other kids are staying behind they are kind of being left out. | |
| Nalda | Marie Daly Academy | My children definitely motivate me. Whenever the kids are noticing and they see that their parents are participating, I've been able to notice a difference. Now that I've been participating her kids are doing well academically actually. I firmly believe that when you participate, the kids just do good in school overall. My kids are me biggest motivation. | 5/4/16 |
| Gracie | Newton High School | That one thing that I truly honestly hope to accomplish is that the kids feel loved... For me, the real joy is that the kids to have the same kind of love because it's like my kids gets a lot of love. She might not think she does but she gets a lot of love. There's a lot of kids that don't get half of what she gets. | 5/10/16 |
| Dorthea | Newton High School | I hope to accomplish seeing students become successful academically, building self-confidence and a lot of young ladies and young men in conversation just letting them know they do make a difference. Letting them know that there's a lot of opportunities and a lot of paths but they have to start now. Success, that's my main goal. That they are able to leave out here and feel successful | 5/26/16 |

PYP addressed parents' desire to be involved by creating programs in which parents felt welcomed and efficacious. In the following quote, Nylea describes how staff's efforts to respond to parents resulted in parents' commitment to Parent Academy:

I had told the parents last week and said, "Next week there's not going to be any topic. There's just going to be a coffee time for the parents if you want to come." I really didn't think that anyone's really was going to come, but there was twenty parents. They brought food, tamales, and this other food. Sometimes they were saying, actually, that some of the parents were actually telling us, "This is not just a place where we come here and yeah we get the information or the knowledge, but it's also it feels really good to be here." They feel really respected as well. It feels like a family (Interview with Nylea, May 25, 2016)

Parents felt respected by PYP's staff acknowledgement and attention to their needs. The respect that parents received was not cursory but intimate and familial. Another example demonstrates the care with which PYP staff worked with parents:

I noticed a parent that she was more separate, or isolated, from the whole group, and I knew it was because she couldn't read or write, but she would always say, "No. Those meetings are not really for me. I don't really belong to those groups," and so I started befriending her and started talking to her, "Hey, but your voice is really important, as well. Your voice matters. You should definitely come and be part of it," and I'm really impressed by that mom. I don't like to share her name because of confidentiality, but that she's a mom of four kids and her husband was deported, however, she still shows up, and she's a very strong, committed, hard working mom... This parent, in the beginning, she couldn't sign in because, obviously, she couldn't write, but that they actually came up with the idea of saying, "Well, let's just give a couple homework, so that she can practice," including another mom, apparently, also. They started practicing and so now, to this day, they actually, whenever they come in now, they sign in, they're able to sign in together (Interview with Beatriz, April 8, 2016).

Beatriz recognized the mother's ambivalence around participating in school—her desire to support her children was tempered by her embarrassment by a lack of specific skills. Beatriz took the time to invest into this relationship and reduce obstacles to this mother's participation.

Though PYP staff may have facilitated opportunities for parents' presence at the school site through PYP program-related events and activities, there was not a corresponding increase of parent presence in school life and community. The volunteer activities arranged by PYP were outside the classroom such as passing out student breakfasts, patrolling school halls, helping out with tasks in the front office, and selling lunch at school. Nylea describes her desire to increase teachers' awareness of parent activities:

With that said, also it's just so that the work that the parents are doing in the Parent Academy that the school in general knew more of that. That's something that I struggle with...I have an internal struggle about wanting to be able to provide, send out an email, for example, at the end of the year and say, "This is what we've done throughout the year." Have teachers, and say what the parents have done together...It would be really great to also perhaps have a bulletin board outside of the Parent Academy as well to announce and say, "Oh, these things are happening. This is what the parents are working on. This is what we're all working on together," because there is one bulletin board downstairs that Beatriz put down there but it doesn't capture everything and it's not really out there. It would be nice for the parents and the rest of the school to know, but also for the teachers to know what they're doing. (Interview with Nylea, May 25, 2016)

Parents were involved in ways which attended to resource gaps in the school. As such parent volunteer activities contributed to school operations but were generally unnoticed by the broader school community.

There were few opportunities for interactions between school staff and parents. In existing interactions, staff interviews and observations provide evidence of the ways PYP staff would shape how parents approached staff by emphasizing support or collaboration and minimizing conflict. At Marie Daly, parents had requested a workshop where they could share their concerns with the principal. The parent engagement team were responsive to parents' request. At the same time, staff structured the session to minimize and avoid confrontation between parents and school staff:

There were some concerns about that because [parents] wanted to be all just negative or like a complaining session essentially. We were thinking about, "Oh, how are we going to do it? How are we going to present?" Finally, we thought like well, having the parent say something that's positive and then also something that's like maybe not working out as well as much but now leave a comment just leaving like towards the end, so that it's just like everyone has the opportunity (Interview with Nylea, May 25, 2016).

Parents' request for a more interactive session with the principal suggests that parents felt comfortable in making their requests known to the parent coaches, providing evidence of the parent coaches' responsiveness to parents. At the same time, parents had felt limited in other workshops with the principal, particularly in expressing matters that worried the mothers. PYP staff accommodated parents' request by structuring the activity to ensure parents expressed their support of the school before any criticism.

The orientation around support was also evident in the informal discussions between parents and PYP staff. During the debrief of the classroom observations at Marie Daly, Neta shared about how she and other parents had observed a first-year teacher's classroom a few years ago. The teacher had been struggling and parents and children felt his classroom management was overly harsh. Parents gathered signatures for a petition to meet with the principal and the teacher to share their concerns. The mother declared the meeting helped the teacher understand his mistakes and now he was one of the best teachers at the school. Tonya responded to the mother's comment, describing it in terms of collaboration:

That story is perfect. Teachers collaborate. Learn about the classroom to help the school. There are very strong teachers. That's why we have community school. One group of people learn from another. As parents, we have a perspective and be part of instructional improvement. Celebrate the great stuff and offer support to teachers who need it. [The teacher] learned from parents and improved from parent support. (Observation, March 16, 2016)

While Neta had shared the story as an example of parents addressing a problem they saw in a teacher, Tonya downplayed those aspects of the story. Rather Tonya suggested that parents could contribute to instructional improvement by recognizing teachers' accomplishments and providing support as needed. The focus on consensus and support was not limited to the one interaction between Neta and Tonya; Tonya had opened the debrief by asking parents to share one positive aspect of the classroom they noticed. Using the same tactic as employed in the principal feedback session, Tonya structured the debrief to highlight how the school was functioning well rather than any flaws or failures.

Efforts to minimize conflict between parents and school staff were evident at Newton as well. An important aspect of the PLON program was the Community Impact Projects (CIP) presentation to a panel of peers and community members. One group of mothers presented their CIP which targeted increasing school uniform compliance at the local middle school (Observation, April 6, 2016). During a question and answer session about the project, it became evident that there was conflict between the mothers who wanted to strictly enforce the policy and the principal who did not consider school uniforms a priority. When panelists, of which I was one, went to another room to discuss our feedback, a PYP staff member shared that the conflict between the mothers and middle school principal had been ongoing. The other PYP staff, including Donna and Melinda, agreed that the conflict needed to be reduced. They discussed ways to direct mothers toward another project that would cause less conflict and would address the pressing academic needs of the school and support the principal. The mothers on this team were at the school almost daily and had clearly articulated their interest in school uniforms as a way to boost student pride in their school which they hoped would increase students' desire for success. To accommodate parents' interest while at the same time reduce the conflict between the mothers and the principal, PYP staff decided to suggest that the mothers shift from a school-wide focus on school uniforms to a more atomistic approach in which mothers would encourage and provide rewards for individual students who were consistently dressing in uniforms. In this effort, PYP staff redirected parents away from a whole-school approach and engaging with school policy to defined interactions with students which emphasized support and encouragement.

The parent engagement program at Newton was, in part, created to strengthen the K-12 enrollment pipeline in South Nelson schools. Yet, workshops rarely addressed South Nelson regional issues in a systematic way that might suggest a coherent, regional focus. At best, PYP provided minimal support for parent engagement in policies impacting South Nelson and these policies were discussed during the workshops in an informal manner. For example, at the beginning of a workshop, the parent coordinator announced that an upcoming workshop had been cancelled (Observation, December 8, 2015). She ascribed the cancellation to a regional community meeting which was being held to discuss the IIDI which was impacting several schools in South Nelson. The coordinator encouraged parents to attend the meeting and offered to give parents those hours to fulfill their PLON requirement of hours, lending organizational support for parents to become involved in the initiative. This set off a lively discussion which a range of topics including the ongoing mistreatment of the African American community by the

district. Several times throughout the discussion, some mothers urged parents to come together to identify their own interests in the redesign process so the group could present together as a unified front. They even brainstormed about how to recruit specifically African American parents. This discussion was brought to a close by the parent coordinator to shift to the planned workshop which was a discussion of leadership qualities. Notably, the PYP staff facilitator did not link the discussion on leadership qualities back to parents' previous discussion of coming together in response to the IIDI nor to parents' ongoing work at their respective schools. Parents too did not make this connection. The recognition of how the African American community was marginalized in the school district was not as much redirected as neglected as a substantive focus of conversation and action in a workshop on parent leadership skills.

PYP helped parents to feel efficacious in their children's schools by acknowledging parents' interests and facilitating parents' presence at the school. However, parent activity on school sites and parents' voices and interests remained on the periphery of the main arenas of school activity and confined within the parent group itself. In this way, PYP's parent engagement programs acted as islands of support in which parents were nurtured within the program but they remained largely disconnected from the daily life of the school.

ANU. ANU organizers sought to create a level playing field for parents to engage with school and district actors to bring about school change. Yet, ANU parents did not necessarily begin from a premise of school change. In ways similar to PYP parents, they identified their primary motivation for involvement as a desire to help their children:

Table 7

ANU Parents' Motivations for Volunteering in School

| Name | School | Quote | Interview Date |
|-----------------|---------------------|---|----------------|
| Bethany | Gardens High School | I wanted my son to not be, because after a while I realized that my son has always been ... I feel like [special education students] are as involved in the school activities as the rest of the students. Yeah. I feel like they, even though they say they try to, I feel like they weren't. I feel like my son missed out on some things because of him and his anger issues back in middle school, he was taken out of the only extracurricular activity which was theater or something. He was doing the set up and stuff and it seemed like he liked it but then he started having issues with other kids. Basically, his anger towards having issues with kids because it wasn't always him defending the other kids. He did have anger issues. I feel like he missed out on some stuff because of that. I wanted to make sure he didn't miss out anymore. | 5/26/16 |
| Wanda | Gardens High School | I want to just really be there for these kids more. Really giving adults the tools to any schools and centers, other places where kids go that's not their home. Anywhere you go that's not your home base, I think adults should be trained in a way to whereas they not just looking at the kids, because clearly if they're opening up these establishments for them the last thing we want to do is look down on them when they get there. Maybe the way they're dressed, or the way they look, or the way they act, or whatever it may be to be acting a certain way. We need to start listening to these kids and be there for them more. | 6/14/16 |
| Serafina | Gardens High | My younger daughter was coming out of 8th grade, she was actually really with high notes, with high grades really. She was doing really great. I'm | 5/16/16 |

| | |
|--------|--|
| School | concerned that if the school is not doing really well, then they're not going to be able to help her, serve her so that she can go to a college because my older daughter, she's already in college and she's doing great. I'm really concerned about that because clearly, it seemed that with my younger daughter, she's also getting good grades right now and will definitely be going to college and I want to support my daughter and go to college. That's one of my biggest purposes and that's how I decided to get involved. |
|--------|--|

Parents' natural inclination was to act in ways that would be supportive of their children. School change was not necessarily in the purview of parents. Thus, the boundaries of how parents made sense of their children's as well as their own experience in schools needed to expand to include the possibility of the task of school change. Joni describes this process: "We create often times the frame for people to reflect on their own experience...(Interview with Joni, June 24, 2016)." Organizers provided a narrative for action, bundling parents' diverse interests and perspectives around a specific goal or activity.

Narratives of organizing parents resulted in a range of opportunities for parents to apply germinal political orientations and practice political behavior. Some activities which parents elected to accomplish resembled PYP parent activities in that they contributed to school culture and community without impacting school policy or the core of teaching and learning. The difference was that ANU parents were initiating activities to address problems they had identified in the community whereas PYP parents were demonstrating their support for the community. For example, the parent leaders LOC at Dolores Huerta had conducted a listening campaign to talk to other parents and identify their concerns. The two priorities identified through the listening campaign were reading and bullying (Observation, December 11, 2015). To address bullying which was primarily targeting Muslim girls, parents decided to put on a multicultural fair in hopes it would promote appreciation of the diversity of student cultures (Observation, March 11, 2016). The research cycle of talking with other parents, uncovering shared concerns about their children's school experiences, and identifying a solution was an experience of parents taking on the task of enacting school change.

A unique set of conditions shaped organizing around top-down policies. The technical aspects or content focus of a policy sometimes had little correspondence to parents' specific interests around their children or generalized concerns about schooling. Organizers had to relate parents' expressed interest with the policy. The following excerpt from field notes illustrates this process. Franco had invited 9th grade parents to come together and discuss their concerns about Gardens. Franco had intended for the meeting to serve as way to recruit potential new parent leaders to engage in the IID:

Franco begins by explaining why data analysis is important. He explains his son had a lot of difficulty in reading and Franco struggled to get him support. He then drew a picture of the city of Nelson on the whiteboard, with the middle-class and wealthy neighborhoods in blue marker surrounded by the working-class and poor neighborhoods of Nelson in green marker...He discusses the school ratings of 1-10 and how the schools in the wealthy neighborhoods are 8-10 whereas the schools in the surrounding areas are at 1 or 2. Some parents nod in agreement. Franco says how data helps them understand this and data is important for parents to understand how their children are doing. Two parents affirm Franco's comment and agree that this is very important. Franco goes on to say that the problem of us as parents is not an issue because of English but

because we are blindfolded...Franco directs us to look at the SRI¹⁷ report and to look at grade 9. He asks what is in the red. A student reads it and Franco asks what's the significance of the 83%. Another student says that's the number of students reading below grade level. One mother says so many are below and another mom says she's sad about all the children who can't read. One father says that elementary and middle didn't do good jobs. Another mom wonders about her son's reading scores. A mother in a red shirt says it's really bad.

Franco asks whether people think this data exists at [High School 1] and [High School 2], schools in the wealthy parts of the Nelson. He then asks how many people chose this school, Gardens. One mom says she did. But most did not. One mom shares how it was the decision of her child and she blames him. Franco says that's a part of the reason, but part of it is a systemic issue. Another mom says how one of her children was in a military school and the uniforms and the regulations were important. The mom talks about how discipline begins at home. She says that a kid who's a fuck up will be a fuck up anywhere...Franco tries to interrupt her a couple of times and asserts that the most important thing for parents to do is to educate themselves. Franco then asks do children have the conditions to succeed? He asks the student who came with her mom if the other 9th graders are here to waste their time? The student says no and then starts to say something about the teachers not being able to control their classrooms...Franco asks the student about how many new teachers she has and another mom comments that the teachers are so very young. Franco responds that high school teaching is a very specific skill and they need support (Observation, October 29, 2015).

Franco responded to parents' comments by asserting a perspective that did not necessarily directly correspond to parents' ideas and concerns. Instead Franco posed questions or responded by situating parents' expressed concern in a potential policy or structural issue which impacted parents' concerns. The top-down, technical policy of IIDI imposed a frame onto Franco's organizing such that in order for parents to make the initial step to participate, they had to make sense of their interests through the parameters defined by IIDI. While not necessarily in conflict with parents' interest, Franco interpreted and mapped parents' various expressed interests onto the IIDI frame of school redesign. In these cases, policy, not parents' interests, was the spark for mobilization.

In addition to defining the parameters of parents' interests, policies imposed externally determined timelines that did not account for parents' learning curve. Franco believed he took on the lion's share of organizing at Gardens because of the pressure of the IIDI deadlines:

I'm trying to create that culture because I haven't been really able to train them around the ones who aren't in that really deep way. It's more superficial, a short conversation with themselves, not very deep conversations. That's really interesting because this is the first place, Gardens has been for me as an organizer, I will say a total different environment that has placed me in a position where I'm doing the work not using all the big organizing model and the way how having happened all the time in my work career...The difference is that the parents right now...they are in relationship but it's more around we're going to have another meeting. We're going to meet. That is not because they think together like two people sit together and think together. I guess now that we have these people in place, I'm going to focus more around that. That's my hope, that's really my hope...it's like the one-to-ones are the blood of the organizing model. If there is no ones-to-ones it's like it's me who is sustaining that (Interview with Franco, June 1, 2016).

In the Gardens LOC, responding to the IIDI deadlines had created relationships through a culture of meetings to accomplish tasks rather than relationships grounded in the intimacy and trust of 1:1s. Meetings were more focused around instrumental tasks of school redesign at the cost of parents "sit[ting] together and think[ing] together". As a consequence, Franco was sustaining organizing by doing the 1:1s to mobilize parents and helping parents make sense of the research

¹⁷ The SRI indicates the grade level at which students are reading.

meetings all the while encouraging parents toward an action. The following excerpt is from a research meeting where parents reviewed summaries of previous research meetings which had occurred in response to the IID:

Franco: What did you hear and what do you think? How do you feel about the second investigation, research meeting? Do these points represent what you heard at the meeting? Of all these points, which one is the most valuable to you? All the points are critical or can we ignore one?

Parent 1: I think they are all in unity. They represent what we're interested in parents, aim at solutions we're looking for.

Franco: [Parent 2], what do you think?

Parent 2: I feel that all the points are important. A student cannot have success or achieve without a teacher that is supportive and teachers that are capable to guide them. Many times, they have a teacher but if teacher doesn't have good class discipline, then students can't focus on what's being taught. Half wants to continue to learn, half is being disruptive.

Parent 1: The student did talk about that. Many times in a classroom, she focuses mostly on students who need a lot of help, notice the students who can work independently but can't give them the support. That happens with my daughter as well, the teacher says it's not time for questions. My daughter says I leave class and I have doubts about what was taught.

Franco: [Parent 3], you were not at research meeting, what do you think? Do you think these are realistic, things that we can ask for?

Parent 3: Obviously we want teachers who are better trained.

Parent 4: The first point. Parents want high expectations. We want our students to go to college, we need a vision that they go to college. We've lost half the battle! That teachers that are hired should have 3 years experience, so we have a triangle of support—teacher, student, parent. Student should have the drive to go to school and teachers should be well qualified, someone who wants to teach! There should be a process where parents of students should be included in the hiring process.

Franco: What is the role of administrators? On a team of administrators, how important is it to have a team that is well-commissioned and prepared?

Parent 1: That is a good point. Maybe that's where we should start. That's where rules and protocols for teachers and students. Administration should have a strong base and foundation. Know what the goals are, and rules that are in place that need to be utilized. Teachers need to respect that and students need to respect that. We as parents, we need to support the parents, do homework, and do meetings. My husband never comes, but he asks me if I've been to meeting. Expects me to be involved because he asks me questions...

Franco: I would like very much to think about that, you have participated in one or the other meeting. We need to go to next steps, we can't keep on focusing on what we already know. One-to-ones, (Parent 1) and (Parent 2), are the conversations for you to share your dreams for your children. The other part, in the organizing model, is the research meetings. Why is this happening what you're not happy about or impacting the students? For example, the fishbowl, we analyzed the data we gathered from the fishbowl. We had a research meeting with [education reform expert] and we were able to ask questions and get responses. Listening to people from the community, that gives us information. Next thing is to organize an action, to request the changes, to make our demands, to put our asks publicly. We don't want to waste time. We want to continue to focusing on the concerns. In the organizing model, you prepare an action to make asks, demands. You will decide, this data sheet is composed from students, 1-1s, [education reform expert]. These could be the asks. Are these the correct asks or do we need to add more asks? Based on your own kids,

based on the fishbowl, 1-1s, or [education reform expert]? Or maybe there's something that shouldn't be on this list. (Observation, November 30, 2015)

In this research meeting, parents had the time to reflect on the information from the previous research meetings. While one parent eagerly proposed something she wanted, the discussion among the other parents suggests that they were still processing the information and trying to find connections to their own experiences. Franco's urgency was clear as he moved parents through different aspects of school reform to identify a list of demands. Despite an absence of a clear parent directive, Franco prompted parents toward making asks and organizing an action absent a parent-generated and shared, identified problem or solution.

Even though top-down policies limited parent interests to the policy content, organizers strived to support parents in organizing experiences that fostered their political skills and perspectives. Parents often used scripts in research meetings and actions with political elites and professionals. The questions and facilitation were typically scripted with some sections written by organizers with parent input and other sections written by the parents. For example, for the June 2, 2015 public action, I observed Franco work with a parent to write out the questions which posed parents' list of demands for Gardens' redesign to district administrators. They worked to incorporate what they had learned from the research meetings and the concerns that parents had expressed in the research meetings. In addition, I observed parents prepare their own scripts for other parts of the action, such as their testimony as well as the credential validating their presence and commitment. In another meeting, I observed parents of the Dolores Huerta LOC lead each section of the meeting. The facilitator of the meeting was a grandfather who read from a script he had written as he transitioned the group from one section of the meeting to another. Other parent leaders spoke extemporaneously (Observation, October 23, 2015).

Scripts were considered with suspicion by officials and educators who felt that these tools cast doubt on the authenticity of parent voice. However, organizers and parents suggested that scripts were crucial to parents' self-confidence in meetings and actions:

These are parents who are new. I see politicians reading papers. What is wrong with the parent doing that? Some people they feel like they're very scripted this. They got this. We use the parents, that's something that the parents want to express. We just want to help with the technical area around, you know? (Interview with Franco, June 15, 2016)

I like [the scripts] because I'm very bad at expressing myself... You should have been at the superintendent meeting, because that day, also, we didn't get a script. I didn't do it, I didn't prepare. I was trying to prepare what was the point of being there and then, it's just like I froze. I was the person leading it and I froze. I got stuck. I was just quiet. I'm like, "I'm sorry, I'm just a mom, trying to just help out my son's school. I'm sorry how I'm not being able to express myself." After a while, it kind of flowed a little bit. At first I froze, because I had little notes but I was reading to read what I wrote but it was all over the place. I froze. (Interview with Bethany, May 26, 2016)

Franco felt that scripts helped parents unused to interacting with administrators express themselves as well as supported them as they discussed the technical aspects of school reform. Moreover, Franco undercuts the validity of the criticism by associating politicians' use of scripts to parents' use of scripts and highlighting how people with elite status use the same tools as parents but without the associated objections. Bethany's quote provides additional evidence of the two types of scripts used in meetings as well as the importance of scripts. Bethany refers to a lack of two types of scripts—one that had been prepared for her by the organizer or one that she had prepared. Her anxiety about the absence of a script was palpable in her descriptions of her

reaction: she repeats that she “froze” multiple times and shares her apology of being “just a mom”. Even though Bethany was able to eventually find her footing and continue to facilitate the meeting, it is evident that the experience was particularly salient because of the absence of a script. While parent scripts were viewed skeptically by outsiders, the practice in ANU continued because parents appreciated and relied on them.

Scripts were available for parents during research meetings but parents were not required to use them or even follow them strictly. Parents often went off script to follow their interests or assert their position. Parents determined what information was relevant to their concerns. The following excerpt is from a research meeting with the school counselor and the district’s community schools director at Gardens. Bethany interjected a question after the school counselor described the challenges faced by novice teachers:

Bethany: I have quick question regarding the students. Is there a NUSD rule of how many students a teacher can have?

Community schools director: By contract, we can’t be above 160 for the periods we teach. If a teacher decides to take three more kids, they need to sign a waiver, which says they know they are above the contract count. But teachers can file a grievance.

Bethany: Are teachers able to do that right now?

School counselor: At the beginning of the year, we had twenty.

Bethany: How many of that done?

School counselor: I don’t know. I only found out from the principal who say teachers have too many students.

Franco: Basically, what they’re doing is illegal.

School counselor: And they’re two teachers who are in the first year in the same department who are over 200 students. They see the master schedule, ethically—they are taking on the students because there is no other room in the schedule for them to go into. They need the class to graduate, it’s a core area. The issue is it puts a teacher in the position to decide to advocate self and follow the contract or support students.

Parent leader 1: It hurts the class to have too large of class, you have to think of that.

Bethany: Everyone is suffering.

Parent leader 2: Would you attend the action with [the superintendent] and his cabinet in January or February? And would you be willing to share your experience at Gardens at that meeting?

School counselor: I honestly feel torn. I’m a first-year employee and at any time could be fired. I don’t feel comfortable with the leadership at our school. If they saw me at something like that, the trust is not there. I want to, but it’s just difficult. I became an urban educator to do this. To be engaged in a community that had action and movement and had a purpose. I’ve been a first-year employee in the past. This is the first time I feel a little afraid, I’m new to this district and with our leadership, I don’t know who would advocate for me who would be on my side to prevent something happening to me.

Community schools director: I’m with her. We’ll be somewhere else. I think, I would love to share my experience. More important to hear the experience of research meeting, and students, and parents. Always a bias because I’m an employee. I don’t know if my experience is seen as heavy as yours.

Parent leader 1: I think it's valuable that you come and tell us. I have a daughter who teaches in [neighboring city]. I can remember her saying, when she was a first-year teacher. They gave her all the toughest kids but she had a partner that helped her.

Bethany: We're here to protect good people like you and keep the good people who care about Gardens.

Franco: Just to echo what Bethany says, we don't want to put anyone on the spot. Just give an opportunity. We are here to protect the good people who are doing good for Gardens. The last thing we will accept is people cutting heads, we are not here to protect adults in that regard. Just to affirm you guys (Observation, December 21, 2015).

The initial question that Bethany asked was not part of the script for the meeting. However, she was comfortable in exploring a concern that had surfaced for her during the meeting. Furthermore, she offered protection to school administrators when they expressed qualms about attending an action with the superintendent. In this meeting, Bethany, who was "just a mom", uncovered a major school flaw and asserted the strength of parents as protection.

The actions in particular were closely monitored to ensure parents' voices were the focus. Actions were entirely facilitated by parents. The actions revolved around a set of demands that parents and organizers had identified through research meetings. During meetings preparing for the actions, organizers encouraged parents to press officials into specifying their commitments and to manage officials who were not respecting the given structure of the action. As with the research meetings, district officials were provided the demands ahead of time so they could prepare a response. District officials were only given a few minutes to respond to parents. There was no question and answer session and district officials were asked to make public commitments to the demands or provide an explanation of why the demand could not be met. In this way, the structures by which actions were organized were designed to foreground parents' voices and perspectives and constrain elites' attempts to appropriate the action for their own use.

The sense of research cycles being spaces which privileged parents' interests was best illustrated by the ways they defended their right to decide their course of action. In the days leading up to the action on June 2, 2015, a district administrator requested a meeting with the Gardens LOC. In the meeting, it became clear that the district administrator was concerned about the action. The following exchange took place among the parents, organizer, and district administrator:

District administrator: It's valuable to hear what are the plans and what's the commitment already. These are asks or statements. I understand this is a communication of what's important to this team and that's great. Is the hope that people hear about these things or just say yes?

Franco: Both. To succeed and get commitments.

District administrator: Maybe I could go back and try to put together a presentation that answers some of these things. I don't know if that's what your intended goal is. What's your goal? Are you hoping to hear already what's already been committed?

Franco: We want to hear from the district publicly and see it in action.

District administrator: These questions are going to take 25 minutes. Do you want time from district talking through each point? Within this there is so much detail, points that [another district administrator] and I have been asking about. Some of this might be premature to try to lay out every bit of support when we don't have all the information.

Franco: Gardens is going to be transformed. Support is a need regardless of the approval of the proposal. We move on the action. Now or before the action, you can lay out what's necessary to know. We don't want promises on something that is not going to be delivered.

Wanda: I was just thinking about staying in your lane. One person stays in their lane and then the other person can do what they need to do. You don't need to do everyone else's job. If that's being done, whoever is begin done whoever has to meet these things that we're asking, that's their job. If it takes 20-30 min to let us know. Just give us that time. What's 15 minutes when we understand that some of things we've already committed to. It'll help more of us believing that this is going to be done properly. It's a shaky situation for people in power. You can say yes, you are going to do it. We really want this for our kids. More than just yes. Not going to satisfy us. We want to feel that this is going to happen. Things that took place, these stepping stone, the other things will be following in that direction as well.

District administrator: How do we get to that?

Wanda: You the boss. You have to figure that.

District administrator: Yes is not enough. In order for people to feel heard. What is the hope?

Wanda: The hope is that us walking out feeling like we've accomplished what we've been working hard for. The needs are met. I don't know how you going about doing that. I'm just a mom. I don't know how you really do things. We're learning this from Franco and others. You know way more than me. We're banking on you! We need you to stay in your lane and do what you got to do.

Franco: [Parent Leader 1]?

[Parent Leader 1]: The main thing with these questions is to be able to simplify the answers, to talk in layman's terms. A lot of parents don't know the terminology, school lingo. That is a big problem in when talking or expressing school type things. The biggest part is more than a simple yes or no. You can talk about things you're currently working on. It doesn't have to be "we're at this 100% point". This is the process we're working on and even if it's not perfect but it's for them to understand things are in the pipeline. It's hard to understand district work, there's a lot going on. As far parents are concerned, they only see what's there at that moment. Explaining helps because general public don't have a perception of what's going on. (Observation, May 29, 2015).

In this meeting, the district administrator continually asked for clarification regarding the intent and goals of the action, casted doubt on the need for a public action, and suggested privately negotiated alternatives. While the conversation began between Franco and the district administrator, parents jumped in to defend the action as well as to reject the district administrator's attempts to quell parents' desired course of action.

Occasionally, organizational interests in reference to district politics conflicted with organizational values of parent determination. ANU had a clear set of organizational values that guided organizers and was intended to guide leaders as well. Joni describes the humbling process of organizing in a school where she had to put aside her own politics regarding charter and public schools:

My role was like to help create the space with families to weigh in on this decision [for a school to go charter]...for me, there was this super urgency because I was trying to intervene so that they wouldn't go charter. That was really on a personal level in terms of my own politics, personal politics....The transformational process for me was all my stuff about public education and comments and stuff was running into my actual relationships so now, I'm building this deep relationship with these families and knowing their story of the person who was getting involved, he never graduated elementary school and at the same time and he and his wife have this daughter who is their precious baby who is going to have an opportunity that neither of them ever have and

they don't want to risk that. It was incredibly humbling for me...I realized that who was I to judge when what we're talking about. There's nothing that compares with how a parent or caregiver feels about their baby. (Interview with Joni, June 16, 2016).

Joni's relationships with parents brought her into the intimacy of their hopes for their children, leading her to revising her original organizing goal for the school. At the same time, other organizational values took precedence over parent interest. In another interview, Joni described the actions of staff from another organization who had been mobilizing one group of parents around ideas that created racial fissures in the school community. She describes what might occur if a parent leader acted in a way contrary to ANU values:

I feel like one of the core things for me in my organizing was always and I feel like ANU was very clear about this is the values like first and foremost, when you're identifying somebody as a leader, there is a core set of values that guide like what you're doing in a conversation you're engaging in. If somebody is walking around and calling themselves an ANU leader and saying, "This is what was happening," and has actually acknowledged it that they want this to be a Latino school and no African-Americans, then I would have a sit down with that person and I would actually say, "You cannot be doing that in ANU." That's actually not okay...(Interview with Joni, June 24, 2016).

Organization values of relationship and racial justice superseded parents' desire for a school that catered to their needs. Contravening a parent's exclusionary instincts is admittedly a constructive assertion of organizational values. However, it stands that when necessary, ANU organizers would mediate the expression of parent interest. An illustrative example of organizer intervention occurred during the district's roll out of a hotly-debated enrollment system which would create one application for district and charter schools. Proponents of the system believed that it would help parents by simplifying a complicated enrollment process; critics argued it gave a leg up to charter schools¹⁸. At a meeting, organizers discuss an ANU leader's participation in an activity around common enrollment:

Franco: Nora¹⁹ asked Omnia²⁰ to do a presentation at [School L] around common enrollment...[Two district staff] are doing the training for parents...

Bonnie: That's the idea Omnia mentioned to me.

Joni: A huge problem.

Bonnie: It is a leader taking leadership. She is peripherally involved in common enrollment. Equal Education²¹ is doing community input sessions about common enrollment. Omnia went to one and thought that parents at [School L] should know...

Franco: It's that. I just feel like another thing coming. I understand the point of leader taking leadership.

Bonnie: Nora should have checked in with us.

Joni: We could get into a longer conversation...[The common enrollment] is perceived accurately as a push to charters. It's happening without any dialogue!

Bonnie: Who's helping Omnia learn about the repercussion?

¹⁸ [http://www.\[Nelson\]magazine.com/School-Enrollment-Shakeup/](http://www.[Nelson]magazine.com/School-Enrollment-Shakeup/)

¹⁹ Pseudonym for Equal Education organizer.

²⁰ Pseudonym for ANU leader.

²¹ Pseudonym for parent engagement organization

Franco: I met with her, I explained for an hour and a half around education and the struggle around organizing and how the disorganizing around Seun-Jae²² disorganized my work at Gardens. She understands that, and the other part around strategy for us around charters. Charter was strategy to push school district to give resources to the schools and not leaning into only charters.

Bonnie: Did you find agreement in the common enrollment?

Franco: Not about common enrollment but the language she's using to use with parents. I'm helping Omnia understand, you are the chair of ANU when you present yourself at meetings. You use the language around charters but have you checked with everyone else? (Observation, October 19, 2015)

The event was sponsored by Equal Education, an organization which had a reputation of representing charter school interests and had recently begun parent organizing. Additionally, the politically charged environment around the common enrollment and the leader's well-known affiliation with ANU threatened ANU's own reputation as an organization aligned with leader interests and not any specific school reform, particularly charter schools. ANU wanted to position itself as an outsider to create distance between itself and a policy and organization that were seen to be squarely in the pro-charter school camp. As Bonnie notes, this was a powerful instance of a leader initiating a conversation with other parents. However, Omnia's initiative to help parents occurred in a setting that created potential fall-out for ANU's carefully negotiated position. Franco had to find a way to continue to foster Omnia's agency while at the same time shape her understanding so that her future decisions would be more aligned to ANU's position. Franco returned to the organizational practice of 1:1 to remind Omnia that she not only spoke for herself, but for a community of leaders as well as for the organization. Franco also brought Omnia into the complexity of district politics as well as ANU's position. Franco framed ANU's relationship to the district by describing the activities of a district staff person, Seun-Jae, who ANU organizers viewed as explicitly interrupting their work. This example positioned the district in opposition to ANU's work. Describing the charter strategy as a means for resources rather than the goal of organizing itself communicated to Omnia that ANU did not indiscriminately support of charters as a reform. Franco walked a delicate line between fostering parent agency and fostering an organizational orientation.

ANU fostered parent agency within meeting spaces by creating conditions where parents had the confidence and support to assert their interests, even in critiques of the school system. With organizer support, parents felt emboldened to address issues they observed at their children's schools. However, actions around policy were a more challenging arena to foster parent agency in that the demands of mobilization and the need to respond to district timelines increased organizer role. Organizers also had a hand in shaping parents' interests to situate them in policy through organizer framing. Parent agency, then, reflected a wide variety of parents' interests contingent on organizers' values and assessment of policy and politics.

Discussion

In this chapter, I explored the practices employed by two organizations as they worked to increase parent participation in schools. My findings suggest that organizations facilitate parent

²² Pseudonym for a district staff in the Department of Community Engagement.

presence on school sites, addressing a fundamental challenge to parent-school relationships. The literature on parent engagement describes substantial obstacles to the parents of color and low-income parents' presence on school sites. Teacher professionalism, social status conflicts, and the complexity of the technology of schooling and educational policy erect walls around the school whereas language barriers, gaps in knowledge, diverse socio-historical experiences of schooling, mis-matches between school and parent goals, and the thinness of resources shaping family life lend themselves to parents staying away rather than pressing through the difficult path to school (Doucet, 2011; Lareau, 2003; Noguera, 2001; Ogawa, 1998; Patillo, 2015; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). At the same time, I find that the means and ends by which parent engagement occurred resulted in diverging experiences of how parents could influence and shape their children's experiences of schooling.

Even as ANU and PYP claimed distinct approaches to parent engagement, of the five identified categories of practice, four were shared across the two organizations. Organizational staff had a deep understanding of the lived experiences of Nelson parents and cared for parents by responding to their desires, abilities, and needs. In both ANU and PYP, staff provide parents with an array of information about school policies, practices, and procedures; attend to parents' material and social needs; and foster parents' assets. Both organizations increased parents' presence on school sites by attending to gaps in knowledge and bolstering parents' available resources. These *types* of activities seem to be effective for the purposes of parent presence on school sites; that is, being responsive to parents' various concerns and needs and ameliorating resource gaps creates environments which encourage parent presence and engagement with school sites.

While both organizations contributed to increasing parent presence on school sites, they differently employed practices that shaped how parents inhabited "engagement". Organizational mediation of parent-school relationships created access to particular *roles* parents could occupy in schools. PYP trained parents to support schools which served to uphold existing dynamics of school micro-politics whereas ANU strived to articulate a new micro-politics by mentoring parents in the politics of school change.

A training imparts skills or knowledge to improve a particular aspect of an individual's performance. In parent engagement, trainings redress gaps in parents' capabilities to engage with all the various components of their children's education. At the same time, trainings presume an end goal and rely on the trainer's expertise to determine the gaps preventing participants from achieving the end goal. PYP staff controlled the format, content, and dynamics of PYP's parent engagement program. Workshop formats disseminated information from presenter to parent. While staff surveyed parents to identify potential workshop content and often incorporated their feedback, staff also maintained decision-making authority around content. The predetermined structure of PYP's parent engagement practices as well as PYP staff control over this structure suggests a training model.

The findings demonstrate that PYP's training model is oriented toward school support. The content that staff chose to present through workshops focused primarily on learning about the school system or improving parents' condition in some way. The information, resources, and tools shared through PYP's program were helpful for parents navigating an increasingly technical and complex school system. At the same time, parents' activities were limited to actions which supported current school functioning. Staff redirect or put aside parents'

frustrations, dissatisfactions, or preferences when they diverged from current school operations. The training format not only served to disseminate information and teach skills but also to reinforced and enforced parents' consensus to school goals. PYP facilitated parents' access to schools specifically in the form of auxiliary roles.

A large part of ANU's organizational work resembled that of PYP's in its emphasis on the dissemination of resources and resources. The educative means of ANU's parent engagement program diverged from PYP in two ways: 1) parents led and facilitated meetings, and 2) to a certain extent, parents determined the content they were interested in learning about as well as that which was shared with their parent peers. Parent authorship in the content and format of the research cycle's content and format suggests ANU organizers used a mentorship model to engage parents. Organizers offered their skills and expertise as resources in a tried-and-tested format to guide parents as they identified their concerns, researched explanations, and advocated for solutions. In supporting parents' participation in meetings and actions which emerged from parents' own interests and concerns, ANU not only disseminated information on educational policies and practices but provided parents with opportunities to practice deploying this information to assert their presence and voices into decision-making arenas. In this way, ANU organizers supported parents' desire to augment existing school operations as well as the ability to take matters into their own hands if they believed the school was failing in its educational or social responsibilities to their child. ANU worked to ensure that access was parent-determined and positioned parents equally to educators in the parent-school relationship.

However, policy and politics diminished organizers' ability to ensure the research cycle was animated authentically by parents' interests. Responses to district-implemented policy narrowed conversations between parents and organizers to the realm of policy. While parents had specific questions and concerns in relation to policy, the bounds of parents' interests were set by the policy itself rather than emerging from within the parents and organizer in the LOC. In the IIDI, timelines as well as the technical demands of school reform set additional parameters irrespective of parents' own timelines, needs, or interests. Franco hastened parents' activity toward actions and set up research meetings which considered parents' interests but relied, for the most part, on his own assessment of the information that parents needed. Organizing for IIDI resulted in parents having a cursory experience of a research cycle more oriented toward policy response and less centered around parent experience and interest. How ANU was located in terms of district politics also attenuated the focus on parent interest. Parent interests were sometimes tempered by efforts to maintain a favorable political reputation. Thus in ANU, sometimes organizers maneuvered access to accommodate both parent and organizational interest.

Additionally, the organizational focus on parents did not address the relational dynamics between parents and educators. The outcomes for this omission on how parents could engage with educators varied but had the similar effect of leaving the dynamics of parent marginalization intact. Parent activities at PYP school sites barely registered on school actors' radar which suggests that parent presence was limited to the periphery of school life. By training parents toward school support in activities that remained at school margins, PYP reified hierarchical relationships between parents and school actors even as organizational staff created spaces in which parents felt welcomed and cared for and gained the information and tools to access, in one way, the school. ANU organizers expanded parents' notions of their authority in school policies and practices by facilitating new types of interactions between parents and

educators. While these interactions allowed for new social arrangements, they bolstered parents' position but did not fundamentally facilitate political rearrangements. At Dolores Huerta Elementary, Joni and the LOC were proactively working to enact parents' vision of school culture. The LOC activities only had occasional interactions between school actors and parents which emphasized community and support. In these nascent efforts to establish a parent community at the school site, activities to challenge power asymmetries between educators and parents were unlikely to garner Joni's support or organizational resources. Furthermore, much of ANU's parent organizing occurred within the community engagement spaces which were a part of top-down implemented policies such as the IIDI. Interactions between parents and educators ultimately were confined to policy topics decided by school and district administrators. Even as ANU organizers worked to provide parents the skills and knowledge to act with more authority and influence school policy, ultimately, discretionary powers were retained by educators. The politics of policy making largely favored school professionals who delineated which policy topics and content were open to parent voice and feedback.

In sum, organizational activities of parent engagement increase parents' presence on school sites and facilitate access to new roles. Specifically, organizations dedicate resources and care to creating spaces on school sites which are welcoming and responsive to parents. In these spaces, organizations employ practices to teach parents new skills and information in order to shift parents' understanding of their role in schools. These roles differently position parents in the micropolitics of schooling—PYP ensures school support while ANU ensures parents are able to advance their interests. Both organizations dedicate their resources to those marginalized by the system as compared to the institution itself. However, neglecting how schools and educators maintain their authority and influence may nullify gains afforded through expanded parent agency on school sites.

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMATIVE DISCUSSION of FINDINGS

Introduction

The two previous chapters examined organizational structures and context of Powerful Youth Projects (PYP) and All Nelson United (ANU) as well as the parent engagement practices they employed. After a brief overview of the findings from the two chapters, I consider how the findings together offer an account of the organization in parent-school relationships. My findings provide evidence of how PYP and ANU's parent engagement practices were shaped, in part, by organizational responses to their environment. In this way, I demonstrate that as organizations provide resources, they mediate parents' experiences of schools.

Summary of Findings

Organizations are complex, shaped both by the interactions within and the context and relationships without. The parameters for parent engagement practices were shaped by the formal and normative aspects of the organization. Contract requirements introduced parent engagement into PYP but organizational identity and routines did not adjust to incorporate parent engagement. PYP staff perceived district recognition of its work to be related to the youth development and school partnership components of their work. PYP's efforts to brand and secure additional funding included no mention of parent engagement. PYP's interorganizational relationships, existing and potential, offered no affirmations of parent engagement which subsequently siloed parent engagement to the responsibility of a few staff and at the fringes of the organization.

In contrast, ANU's decision-making structures and norms in routines emphasized constituents', referred to as "leaders" in ANU, interest and input. ANU's foray into schools was an outgrowth of this model. Local organizing councils (LOCs), groups of leaders supported by an organizer, were located in houses of worship. The members of one LOC began to share their concerns about the state of the neighborhood school which their children attended and ANU organizers supported parents' efforts to improve school conditions. ANU's ongoing work in schools brought parents into the ANU base of leaders. However, the need to maintain a politically relevant reputation within the field attenuated the influence of ANU norms and structures oriented around leader voices and interests.

In terms of parent engagement practices, the two organizations enacted similar *types* of activities but leveraged parent learning differently to facilitate how parents were present and involved on school sites. PYP employed a training model for parents in which the means and ends of parent engagement were determined and managed by staff. This resulted in a parent engagement program in which parents learned how to be supportive resources for schools. ANU used a mentorship model in which parents, to a certain extent, participated in determining the means and ends of their engagement. While parents learned how to identify school problems and enact solutions, organizational interests occasionally curtailed parent political activity.

Organizational mediation between individuals and institutions is increasingly a feature of modern life (Small, 2009). This study explores organizational mediation in terms of the organizationally-supported and facilitated opportunities for parents to be empowered within the

institution of school. Previous research on parent engagement organizations, educative or political, have submitted that organizations are uniquely positioned to reinvigorate parent-school relationships, particularly for low-income parents of color. The findings suggest that organizational mediation of parent-school relationships consists of far more activities than only resource brokerage. Rather, when organizations work to empower parents, parent agency must accommodate the organizationally specific conditions of survival and sustainability. In the next section, I discuss the relationship between organizational arrangements around parent engagement and the practices of parent engagement to uncover organizations' distinctive influence on parent-school relationships and specifically, on the possibilities of organizational empowerment of low-income parents and parents of color.

The Organizational Politics of Parent Engagement

My study provides evidence of the ways the two focal organizations were able to empower parents to act as individuals and within specific school and policy sites. PYP facilitates individual parent agency by addressing gaps to potential barriers to parents' presence and engagement with school sites. ANU fosters parent agency to influence sites of policy and school culture. Both organizations invigorate parent engagement in the various school and district spaces they operate. However, the status quo which marginalizes low-income parents of color in matters of school largely remains intact even as parents' needs are cared for and their concerns are advanced. As organizations dedicate resources to increase parent presence on school sites, the drive for organizational survival appropriates parent engagement to serve organizational needs. Thus, organizations are not simply conduits of resources for parent-school relationships but remake parent-school relationships to respond to organizational maintenance needs which, in turn, circumscribes parent empowerment.

PYP focuses on empowering parents as individuals by being concerned with individual parents' perceptions of open school sites, self-efficacy in making educational decisions, and sense of parenting self-worth (Miraftab, 2004). Staff create welcoming spaces and maintain programs so parents are free to come and go as they please. PYP workshops disseminate useful information about school processes and practices. As a result, staff believes parents who attend their programs are able to make informed decisions regarding their children's educational pathway. PYP staff, individually and through workshops, care for parents' social interests and needs. Parents want to demonstrate their support of their children in schools so staff create volunteer opportunities for parents to contribute to school operations. Workshops and staff's attention respond to mothers' feelings of social isolation or struggles with the challenges and demands of parenthood. The "group" aspect of workshops support program operations and facilitate social relations but are not intentionally cultivated as a means of engagement on school sites.

The emphasis on individual parent engagement impacts parent-school relationships by encouraging individual parent presence on school sites. If parents feel more able—because of familiarity or because of information—to approach and interact with educators, there is more opportunity to establish and foster parent-school relationships. At the same time, PYP encourages a type of parent engagement oriented toward consensus with current school policies and outcomes vis-à-vis parents' desire for and to be social support. PYP staff create pockets of care, spaces in which parents' needs are attended, on school sites. These spaces often reflect

parents' interests and voices in that staff are generally responsive to parents' requests and feedback regarding workshops. However, parents' feedback is considered primarily as a form of data to finetune PYP's ability to create workshops attractive to parents. Rarely do parents' voices move beyond the confines of PYP's programming. Volunteering, vis-à-vis PYP's program, accommodates parents' desire to demonstrate their support of their children and the school. However, volunteering invites parents into school- and PYP-determined spaces of parent engagement such as literacy or school resource support. Moreover, there are few interactions between parents and educators. Access to the physical school site did not translate to inclusion into the school community. In this way, PYP upholds the status quo of parent engagement, by ensuring parents occupy an auxiliary role in school operations and at the periphery of school culture and community.

The isolation of the parent engagement program also serves PYP's organizational role of community manager and fulfills its reputation as a good school partner. The avoidance and redirection of conflict apparent in parent discussions of current school issues suggests PYP used a managerial approach with parent engagement (Ball, 1987; Cochran & Malen, 2005). Staff's responsiveness is not necessarily purely instrumental as it is evident that staff cares for and endeavors to be responsive to parents. Yet staff highlight opportunities to invest and support the school even when parents express frustration or dissatisfaction with current school operations. These behaviors suggest that staff's alignment to school legitimacy and not parent voice. PYP's parent engagement programs allows for the *expression* of parent interest but offers little means of influence in school life.

I argue that PYP programmatically manages its direct and explicit resource dependency relationship with the district by caring for parents' social and material needs while circumventing parents' political needs. NUSD needs support in implementing its community schools policy, a complex initiative which invited onto school sites a variety of organizations which ranged in familiarity and experience with school systems. In taking on the full-service community school contracts, PYP gains material and human resources through substantial expansion of financial resources and direct access to students who can participate in its youth development programs, the bread and butter of the organization. Yet the interchange of resource and resulting mutual dependence was attenuated by the power imbalance. The district's discretionary powers in granting contracts and evaluating successful fulfillment of contract terms tilts the power relationship to favor the district. Additionally, almost half of PYP's budget relied on the community school contracts, offering limited recourses of exit.

Organizationally, PYP manages the contractual obligations of parent engagement through *structural elaboration*, a process by which organizations manage external pressures by creating formal structures, such as departments, policies, or routines, to demonstrate compliance (Coburn, Touré, & Yamashita, 2009; Edelman, 1992). Edelman (1992) argues that while structural change in organizations can increase the possibility of substantive change, structural elaboration is distinguished by organizational behaviors that add on new structures do not change the nature of the work. Structural elaboration is a useful way to understand the organizational dynamics around parent engagement in PYP because parent engagement is a newer, unfamiliar component of their work. Given that more and more non-profit and community-based organizations are providing a range of school-site services, the possibility of an organization being asked to take on parent engagement in addition to its existing scope of work is likely (Lopez et al., 2005). NUSD's community schools contract was non-prescriptive in terms of parent engagement

programming, requiring only participation data. There was little incentive for PYP to rearrange its work.

Furthermore, PYP staff understood the organization's reputation in terms of youth development and good school partner, components of work which make no references to parents. There is no foreseeable benefit to a significant investment in developing parent engagement as integral to their work because parent engagement does little to enhance organizational reputation and identity as understood by staff. Rather than incorporating parent engagement to the scope of work of all community program staff, PYP's organizational response to the contract was to direct resources and hire dedicated staff to coordinate and manage their parent engagement program. Staff's description of their roles, unless they worked directly with parents, did not reference parents. In staff's view, the day-to-day demands of their work did not touch parents. Organizational routines such as meetings and orientations, intended to guide staff in terms of the scope and expectations of their work, referenced parent engagement in ways which may have increased staff awareness but offered few opportunities for staff to incorporate it into their work (Sherer & Spillane, 2011). The two meetings in which administrative staff communicated organizational priorities included parent voice but limited staff engagement with parents as was evident in the case of the parent fishbowl. Staff were clearly struck by the challenges faced by parents but there was no organizational follow up to situate staff's nascent knowledge of parents' experiences shared through the fishbowl within their work. While parent engagement staff engage with each other around their work, there are no routines to facilitate interactions with other community programs staff to think through connections across the streams of work. The isolation of parent engagement staff prevents connecting to existing relationships with school site administrators and teachers held by the rest of the community program staff. These cursory, intermittent accounts of and interactions with parents' experiences within organizational routines demonstrate minimal organizational sense-making efforts around the task of parent engagement (Maitlis, 2005). PYP's approach of structural elaboration toward parent engagement suggests it was primarily understood as an afterthought for PYP. Organizational structures preclude opportunities to create a shared narrative, much less a culture, around parent engagement. There is no central organizational vision or coordinated organizational structures associated with parent engagement nor are there opportunities or incentives to design and implement a parent engagement program integrated into school life in influential and substantive ways.

Thus, PYP's parent engagement staff are left to their own devices. PYP staff make their work meaningful by caring for and developing relationships with parents such that parents approach staff to help them resolve issues they have with the school. At the same time, the care provided for parents obscures the organizational position of supporting the school. As an organization, PYP understands its primary dependency to be on the school and its reputation as being a good school partner. Supporting and empowering parents to challenge existing operations or confront school failures likely threatens PYP's resource dependency and reputation. In this way, PYP manages parents by orienting them to school support which serves to bolster its role as a good school partner as well as a community school manager.

While individual empowerment solely focuses on how actors understand their own capabilities and their options for action, interpersonal empowerment considers how individual actors draw on personal and interpersonal resources to influence decision-making (Miraftab, 2004). ANU encourages parents draw on their resources, as parents and as a local organizing council (LOC), to influence school policy and practice (Miraftab, 2004). Organizing practices

such as 1:1s and LOCs ensure that the social and political capital of parents can be leveraged for organizing campaigns. Additionally, organizers strengthen parents' own available resources by educating them on key school policies and practices and emphasizing how parents' care and commitment legitimates parents' claims of influence and authority.

Organizational routines and decision-making structures are arranged to offer parents opportunities to enact interpersonal empowerment and influence organizers' work. Major decisions regarding ANU's sustainability as well as the arc of its organizing campaigns have to be approved by its board which is constituted by leaders. The norms guiding the routines and structures bolster leaders' influence in the organization. In both staff and board meetings, organizers and leaders return to their LOCs to inform strategies and critical decisions. Checking-in with leaders is integral to the process of organizing as well as used by organizers on each other to circumscribe organizer behavior that may be diverging from parent interest. The inclusion of parents in the organizational routines and decision-making structures also suggests that, to a certain extent, organizers and parents work together to identify the problems and topics to research and solutions for mobilization. Within the LOC space, parent voices and interests build consensus and guide action around the changes they want to see in their children's schools. In this way, engagement is a subjective process for parents which is defined and enacted by parents (Tollefson, 2008). The norms and routines of work ensure that organizing campaigns are rooted in the everyday experiences of leaders.

ANU encounters possibilities and tensions when LOCs turn toward influencing policy. MirafTAB (2004) distinguishes among spaces of citizen participation identifying "invited spaces" as those arenas legitimized by institutions and governments and "invented spaces" as outside the formally sanctioned arenas by which citizens can challenge the status quo. Organizers and parents work to occupy invited participation arenas in Nelson by building on the consensus constructed together in LOCs as well as using strategies of confrontation. The IID process mandated community engagement in the process of school redesign. Franco worked with parents to ensure a robust community engagement process which allowed for parent authorship. Parents invited school and district administrators to research meetings and actions, determined the topics of discussion and rules of engagement and held facilitation authority, and challenged district and school officials' control over district and school-sanctioned arenas of parent participation. ANU nurtures parents' skills and knowledge to influence these spaces, establishing their legitimacy in invited spaces. By working within available spaces of participation to assert arrangements of power which privilege the voices of parents, ANU makes explicit and accessible a wide range of tools which help marginalized communities survive and cope as well as those that help them to resist (MirafTAB, 2004).

Parents who are committed ANU leaders not only provided manpower for organizing but also demonstrate ANU's trustworthiness. For grassroots organizations like ANU, socio-political legitimacy "rests on the extent to which the organization accurately represents the interests of low-income communities (Walker & McCarthy, 2010, p. 321)." The ways ANU routines centered leaders facilitate recruitment and retention of leaders. At the same time, this reputation among organizations brings in resources and relationships which improve ANU's political agility. Yet political winds are mercurial and what accrues legitimacy one day can change in the next. The process of representation involves leader voice and decision-making but also is subject to decisions which drew from organizer expertise and knowledge of a political field. Organizers actively manage ANU's political legitimacy by employing a lens of anticipation and strategy to

ensure the possibility of political activity in the event it became necessary. For example, a considerable amount of Ernestine's time and energy was directed toward housing policy committees and coalitions because of an expectation that housing policies would impact leaders' lives rather than any expressed leader interest. Organizers also cultivate ANU's socio-political legitimacy by developing leaders' organizational frame of reference. Organizers discussed and intervened on a leader's initiative because she was participating in highly visible events associated with policies supporting charters, a reputation ANU wanted to avoid. While not a reprimand, Franco had a long discussion with the leader to help her understand the politics of the district, the ways other actors interfered with ANU organizing, and ANU's working theory of charters which recognized it as one tool of many in the goal toward parent interest but eschewed charters as an end, or even preferred, goal of school transformation.

The current dynamics of political opportunity require ANU to sustain its ability to compete in multiple political venues and be in loosely coupled organizational relationships by maintaining and nurturing its socio-political legitimacy and currency (Henig, 2010). Complex and shifting political dynamics require organizer expertise and knowledge to ensure ANU activity continues to garner socio-political legitimacy. Leaders have agency and share power in the organization in that they actively participate and determine the direction of the organization. Yet leaders do not have the authority to override organizer decision and such instances were not observed. Rather, in addition to supporting leaders in campaigns, organizers also take the initiative to act in ways which diverge from leaders' expressed interests. Organizers often bend and maneuver leader interest in ways that are organizationally advantageous in terms of the political context and reflect organizers' political calculations of how ANU should be positioned in that context.

Organizational maintenance of socio-political legitimacy requires an organizational lens which may complement but does not have to coincide with parents' interests. ANU organizers anticipate parents' interests to maintain presence and relationships in arenas to benefit and facilitate future organizing. While creating new possibilities for organizations, the new political opportunity grid also constrains their ability to directly amplify or represent their constituents' interests. The argument could be made that leaders are learning valuable lessons in the strategy and art of politics. However, this lesson is limited to only the most involved and active leaders. The consensus of community which underwrites ANU's political legitimacy facilitates these actions with little deliberation with the breadth of this community. On one hand, this allows ANU agility in the political field to anticipate and lay the groundwork necessary on which parents can build invented spaces. On the other hand, this weakens the mechanisms available to parents for the direct expression of their voice and interests, unmediated and unadulterated by external judgements of appropriateness or strategy. The need to maintain politically apace, both in terms of timeliness and organizational relationships, benefits the organization itself while at the same time moderating ANU's orientation around leaders.

ANU sought to interrupt the power arrangements which facilitated the ongoing exclusion of Nelson's marginalized communities from the policies shaping their lives. Both invited and invented are necessary for substantive challenges to dominant social structures and political inequalities (Miraftab, 2004). ANU's exclusively focuses on invited which allows for organizing which has immediate and local outcomes. Issue saliency facilitates parent recruitment and retention and most readily translates to organizing around current policies and issues concrete, yet idiosyncratic, to the school. Additionally, for campaigns to have political relevancy and

currency in the district context, parents must organize around salient issues to which schools and district administrators will respond. Franco, Wilma, Bethany, along with other parents, organized tirelessly to ensure that parents' concerns about Gardens were heard and parents had the knowledge and skills to participate as influential members of the design team. However, that the IIDI process was one out of many top-down policies that had impaired Garden's ability to provide a high-quality education was not confronted or questioned. The parameters of invited spaces limited ANU's ability, and by extension, parents' ability, to disrupt the broader logic of invited spaces which depended on district legitimacy. Even as ANU organizers and parent leaders strive to fill out invited spaces, the power inequalities that facilitated the creation of policies remain "taken for granted as the institutional background of the forums (Dahl & Soss, 2014, p. 500)." The resources to support authentically invented spaces are limited for ANU, reducing its ability to challenge and resist. At the same time, by working within invited spaces, ANU may have been unwittingly facilitating the legitimacy of the district to continue implementing top-down policies which created churn at school sites by advocating that parents having a say in how that churn occurred (Dahl & Soss, 2014; Fine, 1993).

The ways staff understood and arranged work to meet organizational legitimacies and resource dependencies limit the types of parent engagement activities creating organizational conditions for parent agency. Organizational routines create more or less opportunities for their staff to consider parents in their work. An organization's capacity to incorporate parent engagement in meaningful ways is constrained by the routines themselves. These formal structures do not emerge *tabula rasa* from within the organization but are related with staff's perceptions of and experiences with the organization's identity, reputation, and survival needs.

Therefore, organizations mediate how parents interact with educators. In elaborating its structures to accommodate rather than incorporate parent engagement to its work, PYP facilitates a *functional* parent engagement which advanced organizationally-defined modes of parent involvement. Because the organization's resource dependencies and legitimacies are aligned to the school district, the end goal of a functional parent engagement ultimately supports school functioning and parent agency acts as one vehicle for school support. Functional access has utility—resource gaps in school operations and parents' knowledge of school systems as well as social and material needs are addressed. However, the focus on needs narrows parent engagement to transactions between school and parent focused on addressing deficits. Opportunities to bring together parents and educators' personal and professional knowledge and strengths are foregone.

Additionally, organizational facilitation of functional engagement belies how PYP benefits from this type of engagement. Addressing parent needs and accommodating parents' desires to support the school enables PYP to recruit and retain parents to fulfill its own contract requirements. Functional engagement also maintains PYP's "good school partner" reputation because staff are able to direct parents to be supportive school resources, fostering parent consensus to current school operations. The impacts and outcomes of resource inequalities on educational quality becomes depoliticized in the efforts to ameliorate the experience of resource inequality (Fine, 1993).

ANU focuses on engagement as a process, what I term "experiential engagement". Organizers support parents not only to be present on school sites but to make decisions about all aspects of school operations. This type of engagement is authored by parents as they consider the

different components of schooling and the changes they want to accomplish in schools. Yet organizational needs impel parents and organizers toward tinkering rather than challenging and disrupting. Organizing on concrete, school issues and for material, cognizable change is grounded in parents' experiences and offers a useful hook in terms of recruitment and retention. However, this approach positions parents as reactionary. Agentic parents can respond with power and knowledge but only in policy-defined arenas of engagement. Parents did not have the opportunity to create and advance new spheres of engagement. The thinness of organizational resources as well as organizational efforts to sustain political relevancy contribute to a lopsided theory of change which empowers parents but only intermittently, idiosyncratically disrupts the power dynamics of the parent-school relationship or challenges educators' control over the definitions of education. A common vision which encompasses parents and educators and which can sustain school transformation is unlikely in this model (Fine, 1993).

Discussions of parent engagement through the lens of democratic participation suggest robust parent engagement in schools can strengthen the viability of engaged publics and thriving civil society. I have demonstrated that organizations complicate this viability as they are embedded in an organizational field to which they are obligated even as they facilitate parent engagement. In addition to their parent constituents, PEOs rely on districts, schools, and a variety of other organizations for their survival and sustainability. Previous studies have demonstrated how PEOs provide capacity building and infrastructures for engaged parents. I extend our understanding by uncovering the ways PEOs also work to satisfy the expectations and requirements of the institutions and organizations in their field and the resulting consequences for parent engagement.

PYP supports the empowerment of individual parents while ANU focuses on how parents can be empowered within interpersonal dynamics. These forms of parent agency are crucial to parents' ability to contend with and navigate ongoing experiences of economic, social, and political marginalization. At the same time, my findings demonstrate that those features which help an organization to exist and provide resources to parent engagement are often the very same aspects which bend parent empowerment toward coping mechanisms rather than challenging and confronting the status quo. Organizations, by their very nature, are constrained by the conservative tendencies of their institutional environments (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Thus, while organizational resources increase parents' access to schools, they also shape parent engagement to respond to the organization's survival contingencies. PYP's organizational marginalization of parents hinders the ability of parent coaches to go beyond accommodating parents. Parent coaches endeavor to care thoughtfully and compassionately for parents but PYP's organizational needs direct staff's care in ways that steer parents toward consensus with the school. ANU dedicates its resources to foster multiple pathways of participation. Yet organizational needs of political legitimacy and relevancy limit where and how these pathways can be established. The focus on developing pathways of participation within existing arenas of participation backgrounds the power relations shaping these arenas.

My findings build on the body of scholarship which problematize practice-based, technical solutions to the complex politics which underlie the engagement of low-income parents of color. I provide evidence for the political nature of resources by exploring the constraints placed on parent engagement as a consequence of organizational mediation. The survival of an organization depends on its savviness with existing and potential resources. For the two focal organizations, parent engagement is not only a component of work but also functions as a

resource for organizational survival. Parent engagement can accrue additional resources, as long as it is deployed in ways which fulfill the legitimacy and resource dependency expectations of the organizational environment. This study complicates existing conceptualizations of the enabling aspects of organizational mediation of parent-school relationships by attending to its constraining dimensions. Resources, through organizations or other mechanisms, are necessary but not sufficient for the empowerment of low-income parents of color. Parent empowerment vis-à-vis organizations can help parents socially and politically as well as begin to instigate questioning about ongoing marginalization. However, the possibilities of empowering parents in ways that challenge and fundamentally transform the social structures and institutionalized practices which exclude low-income parents and parents of color, as well as their children and communities, from full participation in determining quality and equitable education practice and policy will demand far more than organizational resources.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Summary of Study

In this study, I moved beyond existing technical descriptions of organizational resource brokerage in parent-school relationships to uncover how organizations, as distinct social formations, mediated parent agency in schools. By bringing to bear insights from the sociology of organizations on research that examines the possibilities of empowering low-income parents of color in schools, I used a multi-case study design to explore how two organizations navigated the conditions of legitimacy and resource dependency to exist, survive, and thrive, and to explore whether and how they built internal organizational practices to sustain parent engagement. I attended to the diversity of ways organizations foster parent agency and position parents in the micro-politics of schools. By highlighting organizational features that are consequential to how parent engagement practices are employed, I build our theoretical understanding of organizations as more than conduits of resources; rather, organizations are socially productive actors which shape the everyday interactions among parents, teachers, and school and district leaders, thereby shaping the social life of schooling.

The following research questions guided my study:

1. In the two focal organizations, what conditions are created for parent engagement practices?
 - a) What is the relationship between parent engagement work and the resource dependency and legitimacy needs of the organization?
 - b) How do organizational routines arrange work around parent engagement?
2. In the two focal organizations, how do parent engagement routines attend to parents' interests and needs in ways that empower parents?
 - a) What are the similarities and differences between the parent engagement routines of an educative organization as compared to a political organization?
 - b) How do routines empower parents in relation to the school or educators?
3. What, if at all, is the relationship between organizational contingencies and parent engagement within the organization?

I demonstrated how organizational routines were designed around parent engagement, which reflected the role parent engagement plays in satisfying the organization's resource dependency and legitimacy needs. Unsurprisingly, parent engagement routines were focused on parents with both PYP and ANU staff striving to care and address parents' concerns and interests. However, organizational maintenance routines revealed stark differences. Even though parent engagement was explicitly stated as an organizational goal for the school year, PYP's maintenance routines, such as staff meetings and orientations, rarely focused on the topic of parent engagement. The few occasions in which parent engagement was a topic, routine dynamics exposed staff to parents' experiences and challenges but did not ask staff to consider addressing parents' challenges through their work. Moreover, parent engagement was siloed within staff roles. Parent engagement staff only met amongst themselves to discuss parent engagement work. The

majority of program staff did not regard parent engagement as essential to their work or the identity of the organization. In contrast, ANU's maintenance routines were structured to revolve around the voices and interests of parent leaders. ANU's board, which held fiduciary, strategic, and sustainability responsibilities, consisted primarily of leaders. Through the board, leaders had decision-making authority over the content of ANU work and the future of ANU as an organization. In maintenance routines, such as staff meetings, organizers often returned to the question of whether leaders had been adequately consulted and discussed how leaders' interests informed strategy and next steps.

Parent engagement routines were complicated by the organizations' own need to survive in a competitive and resource scarce environment. Consequently, the types of parent agency advanced by the two focal organizations were limited to those which could also accommodate organizational needs for survival. PYP protected its contractual relationship with the district by conducting parent engagement in ways that serve the resource needs of the organization and school. Through the process of structural elaboration, PYP demonstrated contract compliance even as practices of parent engagement were relegated to the periphery of the organization. PYP's parent engagement program offered information and activities which addressed parents' desire to be useful and helpful in school life while at the same time, staff suppressed criticisms and redirected parents toward school operations and away from the heart of school culture and life. In so doing, PYP maintained its reputation as a good *school* partner which increased the likelihood of contract renewal. ANU's ability to thrive in a complex political environment with growing numbers of advocacy organizations rested on its socio-political legitimacy. Organizers had to maintain ANU's ability to demonstrate political power through concrete wins in a policy environment operating on timelines and content independent of parents' expressed interests. Organizers often worked to bend parent leaders' immediate concerns about school issues towards more political arenas or shape parents' understanding to consider ANU positioning in district politics. Moreover, ANU's need to maintain political relevance focused organizing around district- and school-determined policy and content. Even as parents gained the skills and knowledge to advocate for and advance their interests in these arenas, organizing was limited to district-sanctioned spaces of engagement, leaving intact the power relations which maintained policy-making authority in the hands of district elites.

Contributions to Research

In line with scholarship which explores parent-school relationships within social and political contexts, I attend to the ways organizational mediation of parent-school relationships facilitate parent agency. As patterns of daily life are increasingly experienced through organizations, how the distinctive social structures of organizations operate and shape that experience is fundamental to our understanding of social and political outcomes as well as providing insight into opportunities to shift those outcomes (Small, 2009). The literature of parent-school relationships highlights the challenges to fostering parent agency for low-income parents and parents of color within a system with deeply entrenched racial and class inequalities. The growing numbers of organizations shaping the social relations of schooling have only been considered for the resources they provide for the task of parent engagement. I took an alternative approach and looked at fine-grained organizational structures which reflect, reproduce, and remake social processes, in addition to looking at organizational resources and legitimacy.

I confirm existing findings that organizations do bring important resources to parent-school relationships which increase parent presence on school sites (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011; Hong, 2011; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012; Mediratta, 2007; Sanders, 2001). Yet parent presence is only one component of parent agency. I extend our understanding of parent-school relationships by identifying the growing influence of an actor with distinct interests—that of the parent engagement organization. By demonstrating that inasmuch organizations provide resources to parent engagement, parent engagement becomes a resource to organizations, I argue that parent-school relationships are being shaped to accommodate organizational needs vis-à-vis forms of parent agency.

Scholars have used sociological and political lenses to discuss the host of historical and structural constraints that fracture relationships between low-income parents of color and schools including, among others, conflicts between parents and educators' conceptualizations of educational activities in the child's best interest (Cooper, 2009; Doucet, 2011; Nespor, 1997), the asymmetry in social and cultural capital which privileges the interests of education professionals over those of low-income parents of color (Fine, 1993; Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001), and the historical and institutional marginalization of low-income communities of color (Apple & Pedroni, 2005; Noguera, 2001; Schutz, 2006). In this space, organizations are understood as enabling parent agency by acting as pipelines of resources. Less understood are the ways organizations shape interactions between parents and educators and make viable certain forms of parent agency over others. I build our empirical understanding by specifying the features and phenomena unique to organizations which constrain their ability to empower low-income parents of color.

Implications for Practice

These research findings have implications for those engaged in efforts to push toward an equitable education system which reflects the diversity of the communities it serves. The story of PYP is a cautionary tale of subcontracting parent engagement. While some organizations may have a clear theory of action and thoughtfully articulated goals for parent engagement, other organizations, such as PYP, come to parent engagement by way of sub-contracting responsibilities. In our minimally-resourced educational environment, it is unlikely that organizations unfamiliar to the task of parent engagement are provided robust technical and material support for program development and implementation. By under-emphasizing and under-resourcing parent engagement even as it is mandated can easily reduce parent engagement to a compliance requirement.

Additionally, the findings on PYP complicate the proliferation of reform models which emphasize social services such as full-service community schools (Crowson & Boyd, 1993). Programs oriented toward service provision acknowledge that schooling occurs within and shaped by its community context. However, these approaches are based on a uni-directional model in which institutional norms and authority of the school system are extended into home life. In these spaces, parent engagement helps individual parents in ways to facilitate their agency within the existing school system. The orientation to addressing the challenges of family life leaves unexplored the ways communities can invigorate and expand conceptions of schooling.

There is a need for models of community schools which position schools as sites of community life and history in addition to operating as hubs of social services.

ANU's efforts to ensure parents' political voice highlights the significant obstacles confronting grassroots-based organizing and the potential to fundamentally transform power relations. The focus on invited spaces is crucial as these offer venues to influence ongoing policy-making and effect concrete change in people's daily life. Yet without concomitant efforts in creating invented spaces that challenge the structure of invited spaces, organizing may contribute to parents' inclusion in processes which ultimately maintain institutional hierarchies. Likely there is a paucity of outside resources which can support the creation of invented spaces. Furthermore, the moderating tendencies of inter-organizational relationships likely would undermine the generative potential of invented spaces. As such, this speaks to the need for grassroots based organizations to develop independent sources of income, such as constituent contributions, which can invest in nurturing invented spaces in education.

Finally, the findings from both organizations suggest that organizational mediation of parent-school relationships focuses on parents rather than educators, leaving schools out of the equation of change. Parent engagement will always be marginalized unless educators in their practices and schools as organizations meaningfully incorporate parent interest and voice in their children's education (Fine, 1993; Rogers & Orr, 2010; Warren, 2005). New possibilities may emerge if parent engagement policies and initiatives provide resources for organizations dedicated to developing structured, ongoing opportunities for parents and educators, whether teachers or administrators, to develop trusting, meaningful relationships. PYP and ANU also demonstrate the ways in which work can be arranged to parents to the periphery or serve to focus work around parent interests. In the same way, these organizational lessons can be applied to schools. If PEOs can work with schools to develop school routines which accommodate parents in ways that intentionally rearrange power relations, PEOs may be able to mediate parent-school relationships in ways that bring together parents, community members, and educators to reimagine the possibilities of schooling.

Limitations and Future Research

Future studies of the challenges and possibilities of organizational efforts to empower parents can build on the limitations of this study. As with many other studies of parent engagement, this study is hampered by studying the effects of organizational mediation on parents who are already present and engaged on school sites. Parents who come to school sites looking for opportunities to be engaged likely have some sense of efficacy, which organizations hope to amplify or bolster (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). A comparison of how organizations support the engagement of reluctant parents or parents who participate and then drop out would provide further clarification of the mediation processes of organizations.

Organizations distribute opportunities and resources across regions, playing a role in producing how social life is experienced. Studying the field arrangement of PEOs would clarify how the environmental context of PEOs shapes the range of possibilities in parent engagement by allocating resources, sanctioning acceptable and unacceptable norms and practices, and privileging certain forms of parent engagement over others. When and how parents connect to and interact with this field arrangement is consequential for the ways they engage in the school

system and how they navigate their children's educational experience. In this way, field arrangements of PEOs shape how communities of color or low-income communities can influence the nature of urban schooling. Exploring the interaction between schools and parents mediated by the field of PEOs would demonstrate the socially productive role of outside organizations in shaping fundamental social relationships of schooling.

This study explored what organizations mean to parent agency within the context of parent-school relationship. The question of parent agency to serve parent interest is crucial in an institution that has historically marginalized the voices and interests of low-income communities of color and is characterized by inequitable outcomes for these communities. I submit that the struggle to provide a quality education for all would be enriched by the perspectives, experiences, and knowledge of parents. This is not to argue that the transformation of schools should be on the backs of parents. Rather, meaningful inclusion of low-income parents of color has rarely occurred and it remains to be seen how this type of inclusion could energize relationships between the public and education in new ways. As social life is increasingly experienced through organizations, organizations can and will play a role in all aspects of schooling. This study makes the case that organizations must be considered for their enabling and constraining roles by exploring the conditions created by phenomena specific to organizations. In so doing, I demonstrate the types of parent agency made possible, and limited, by organizational mediation. In many ways, this study offers a pessimistic view of the organizational ability to empower marginalized parents. However, the endless creativity of people and the collective power of communities, constituted by parents, young people, and professionals, leads me to believe that the organizational features and conditions identified here as constraints will be taken up as points of departures to new horizons.

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Appendix A.1: General Organization Interview Protocol

Opening Questions

1. I'd like to hear about your background, how you came to [organization], and your current role at [organization].
2. Who do you work closely with? How?
3. What are examples of how [organization] is fulfilling its mission?

Resource questions

4. What's your funding strategy? What has been successful? What has been a challenge? Why?
 - a. Probe: Which funding sources do you prefer? Why? Which ones are frustrating? Why?
 - b. Probe: I've heard people say that good nonprofits often reinvent themselves because funders' preferences change so often. How have you experienced this? Have you ever had to do something you were reluctant to do or you felt pressured to do or felt reluctance from the staff?
 - c. How do you prioritize among different funding needs (such as programming and organizational structures)?***
5. Can you describe a time there was a conflict in funding priorities? How did it get resolved?
6. What other resources does [organization] need or is able to get?
 - a. Probe: How does [resource] help your organization do what it needs to do?
 - b. How do you get [resource]?
 - c. How do you make sure you keep [resource]?

Reputation: Reputation is critical to funding, so I'd like to hear your thoughts on the reputation of the org.

7. What's the reputation of the organization? How do you know? What gives you a sense of that or who do you turn to get a sense of your reputation?
 - a. Probe: Whose opinion matters to you in terms of the reputation of the org?
8. What kinds of things did you do to establish your [use their word] reputation? Tell me about a situation or time when you felt satisfied with how people saw and thought about [organization]? What are things you do to make sure you're staying in good standing?
9. Can you describe a situation or issue in which the organization looked bad OR Describe a situation where you wanted the organization to look better. What was at stake? What did you do to address that problem?
 - a. Probe (if something controversial not mentioned): This is really difficult work given the complex lives of students and families, and then layering the education system on top of it with all its issues. Has [organization] done anything that you felt was controversial? How did you deal with it? What was the response?

Mobilization and institutionalization

10. You've mentioned that your organization runs X and Y programs. How do these programs contribute to the mission of the org?

11. know that [organization] has grown a lot in the past few years. What has helped [organization] to grow? What did those things do for the organization?
12. What other orgs are doing this type of work? How do you carve out your niche?
13. What are your concerns for [organization] right now? What are things that [organization] can improve on?
14. Is there anything else you want to tell me about [orgnanzation] that you think is important to for me to know and understand?

Appendix A.2 Parent Engagement Practices

Powerful Youth Projects Protocol

1. What are the goals of your work?
 - a. Probe: If a parent attends your workshops consistently and all the workshops you offer, how will they have changed?
2. Your day is full. I've seen the [list activities]. What is the purpose of [X or Y activity]?
 - a. Probe: What other workshops and activities are there? What are their goals?
3. How do you plan the workshops and activities? Do you work with anyone? Run them by anyone?
 - a. Probe: How do you determine topics?
 - b. Probe: How do you prioritize among the topics?
 - c. Probe: How does funding influence how you determine topics or workshops? Are there district requirements that you have to meet?
4. Have the workshops or goals changed from last year to this year?
5. One of the big goals of [organization] this year was to strengthen family engagement. How do you feel like the organization helped you in your parent engagement work? What could it do that it doesn't do?
 - a. Probe: How did [PYP] as an organization help you in your work?
 - b. Probe: People, trainings, staff
 - c. Probe: Describe collaboration meetings across the sites? With district? Have those been helpful or not?
6. How do you know you've been successful in your work with parents?
 - a. Probe: Grant deliverables, self-assessment, evaluations by parents/school/managers?
7. In your eyes, what's the relationship like between parents and the school? What's the relationship like among parents?
 - a. Probe: What contributes to that situation (asymmetry/imbalance)?
 - b. Probe: Is this similar or different than what you see is the relationship overall between district and parents?
8. What change would you like to see in the schools? How could your program bring about some of that change?

All Nelson United Protocol

1. How did you start your work at (the school)?
 - a. Probe: Do you need access (talk to principal or partner org or another way) or do you just start reaching out to parents?
 - b. Probe: What did you need to get started? Like what relationships did you need to build, what resources did you need, how did you involve the district or school or parents?
2. What's your goal at the school?
3. It seems like the organizing at the school consists of 1-1s, research meetings, and actions.
 - a. Probe: How do you do outreach with parents? Teachers? Staff? Admin?

- b. Probe: Who do you focus 1-1's with? Teachers, staff, parents? Why? What's the purpose of 1-1's?
 - c. Probe: It seems like organizing is deeply relational. How do you maintain relationships with parents and teachers? Among parents or among teachers? Can you give me an example when there was a conflict of interest? How did you navigate?
- 4. In your eyes, what's the relationship like between parents and the school? What's the relationship like among parents?
 - a. Probe: What contributes to that situation (asymmetry/imbalance)?
 - b. Probe: Is this similar or different than what you see is the relationship overall between district and parents?
- 5. How has your organizing at the school impacted the relationship between parents and schools?
 - a. Probe: What does it do for parents? For themselves, for their children, what they do in the schools? What's at stake for parents?
 - b. Probe: What does it do for schools? For the teachers/leaders? For the young people? For the curriculum? What's at stake for teachers? Could the schools/teachers use your help?
- 6. What is a turning point in the organizing? What changed? What contributed to the change?
- 7. How do you identify schools or issues to work on?
- 8. Schools and education are pretty complex and fast moving. You have to stay on top of a lot. I'm curious about the balance between the need to confront district policy and action (from your perspective) with the concerns of parents or what parents might be willing to do (which might not be the same).
 - a. Probe: Conflict between organizer interest and leader interest?
 - b. Probe: How do you deal with disappointment if things don't change?
- 9. The research meetings have so much information. How do you decide what to do research on? What is their goal? What do you want parents to walk away and be able to do from them?
- 10. What is what you're doing different from what the district is doing? Other organizations are doing?
 - a. Probe: How do you organize with these other organizations out there?
 - b. Probe: I'm curious about concerns I've heard about getting credit for organizing work, investment of resources. It seems like there is a sense of competition. Can you tell me an example that would help me to understand that? What's at stake?
- 11. How does [ANU] as an organization support your work as an organizer? What organizational supports exist for you as an organizer?
- 12. What resources are important to your organizing? How does X impact organizing?
 - a. Probe: Has funding opened up opportunities for you to do organizing work that might not have been an opportunity?
 - b. Probe: Has funding ever changed (positively or negative) organizing priorities?

Appendix A.3 Parent Perspectives of Parent Engagement Practices

1. How did you start volunteering at _____? What kinds of things do you do at _____? What do you hope to accomplish by volunteering?
 - a. Probe: What obstacles do you face in trying to get that done?
2. How did you start coming to the meetings at [school]? How long have you been coming?
3. What have you gained from participating with [organization]?
 - a. Probe on information (about what), relationships (for what)
 - b. Probe: Does it help you accomplish [above stated goal]?
4. What is a workshop or activity you really liked? Why did you like it? How was it useful for you? How did it help you in your goal?
 - a. Probe: [Organization] has a lot of workshops on [topic]. Have those been helpful for you in what you're trying to accomplish? How so?
 - b. Probe: What other kinds of things would you like to talk about, do, or know about that [organization] hasn't done?
 - c. Probe: What's a workshop or activity you didn't like? Why?
 - d. Probe: Have you ever suggested a topic? What happened?
5. I see there are friendships within the group. For you, did the friendships happen in [organization] or did they exist before? If new, what do you get out of these relationships/do these relationships help you in what you need to accomplish? If old, have the relationships impacted/changed by being part of [organization]?
6. I've noticed that the people coming to the meetings are mostly [X] which seems to make it a comfortable space. What does it mean to you to have this kind of space? Does having this type of space influence your attendance/participation? How?
 - a. Probe: What would change for you if the space included dads, people of other races?
 - b. Probe: What are things you've talked about or learned about in this space that might not be possible in spaces that include men or people of other races? How does having a space with mostly [X] help you in what you're trying to accomplish?
7. What would you add to [organization] to help you in what you're trying to accomplish?
8. How have the workshops impacted/influenced how you interact with the school? How do they help you with things you want to do at your school? Personally? Community? In what ways, what specifically about the workshops help?
 - a. Probe: What are other ways you want to be involved in the school?
9. You're all working really hard to improve your schools and I'm sure you see a lot of things going on at the school. It seems like the [actions/community impact projects] is one way to do something about the things you see going on at the school. How has [organization] help with the [action/community impact project]? Would you have done the project without [organization]? What kinds of support did you get from [organization] to accomplish it?
 - a. Probe: What are other your concerns you have about your school?
 - b. Probe: Do you talk about the issues at your school or your work at the schools in [organization]? What usually happens to those concerns?
10. What would change for you if [organization] was gone? How would it impact your work at the school, personally?

- a. Probe: How has participating in [organization] helped you?
11. What is a concern you have with the [organization]?
 12. Is there anything else you want to share with me about your experience in [organization] or your school?

Appendix B: Demographics of Interviewees

Powerful Youth Projects Staff

| Name | Department | Role | Race |
|----------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Quincy | Administrative | Executive Director | Latino |
| Perla | Administrative | Chief Operating Officer | Afro-Latina |
| Betsy | Administrative | Director of Community Programs | Bi-racial: Latino and White |
| Kyla | Administrative | Fund Development Director | White |
| Wayman | Operations | Volunteer and Marketing Development | White |
| Melinda | Community Programs | Director | African American |
| Lemuel | Community Programs | Manager | African American |
| Donna | Community Programs | Parent Coordinator | African American |
| Tonya | Community Programs | Director | White |
| Tim | Community Programs | Manager—High School | South Asian |
| Davina | Community Programs | Manager—Middle School | Latina |
| Nylea | Community Programs | Parent Coach | Latina |
| Beatriz | Community Programs | Parent Coach | Latina |
| Sam | Community Programs | Manager | Filipino |
| Destiny | Community Programs | Family and Student Engagement | Latina |
| Queenie | Community Programs | Parent Coach | Latina |

All Nelson United Staff

| Staff | Department | Role | Race |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Bonnie | Administrative | Executive Director | White |
| Leon | Administrative | Chief Operating Officer | African American |
| Cheryl | Administrative | Operations Manager | African American |
| Franco | Staff | Organizer | Latino |
| Joni | Staff | Organizer | White |
| Celeste | Staff | Organizer | African American |
| Ernestine | Staff | Organizer | African American |

Appendix C: Coding Framework

- A. Organizational Identity
 - a. Mission/Vision
 - b. Relationships
 - i. With district
 - ii. With school
 - iii. With parents
 - iv. With students
 - v. With funders
 - vi. With community/neighborhoods
 - vii. With other organizations
 - c. Resources
 - d. Formal Structures
 - e. Norms/Values
 - f. Goals
 - g. Reputation
- B. Organizational Routines: Maintenance
 - a. Goal/Purpose
 - i. Connection to organization
 - ii. Connection to practice
 - b. Norm
 - i. Assertion
 - ii. Break
 - c. Rule
 - i. Assertion
 - ii. Break
 - d. Conflict
 - e. Consensus
 - f. Activity
- C. Organizational Routines: Parents
 - a. Goal/Purpose
 - i. Connection to parent
 - ii. Connection to school
 - b. Norm
 - i. Assertion
 - ii. Break
 - c. Rule
 - i. Assertion
 - ii. Break
 - d. Conflict
 - e. Consensus
 - f. Activity
- D. School
 - a. Interactions
 - i. With parents
 - ii. With organization

- iii. With district
 - b. Demographics/Descriptions
- E. Parent
 - a. Interactions
 - i. With organization
 - ii. With school
 - iii. With district
 - b. Goals
 - c. Activities
 - d. Interests/Hopes
 - e. Demographics/Descriptions