

**Parental Agency: Autonomy vs. Ability,
School Attendance in Low-Income Elementary Schools**
Charlotta Holt

Master's Thesis in Education
Spring Term 2018
Department of Education
Department of Social Sciences
University of Jyväskylä

ABSTRACT

Holt, Charlotta. 2018. Parental Agency: Autonomy vs. Ability, School Attendance in Low-Income Elementary Schools. Master's Thesis in Education. University of Jyväskylä. Department of Education.

The overall aim of this study is to examine the perceptions of low-income elementary school parents with outstanding attendance concerns. This analysis makes salient the need for more complex treatment of the term parental agency in current U.S. educational scholarship by using a cross-disciplinary framework.

Parental data subjects were collected within the context of a San Diegan NGO's attendance initiative at a low-income elementary school in San Diego Unified School District. As an "Every Student Every Day" attendance intern, at-risk students with outstanding attendance concerns were added to my case-load at the start of the 2017-2018 school year. Ethnographic data in the form of case notes was collected and stored in the Social Work Client Management system known as 2-1-1 San Diego. Case notes comprised summaries of all outreach, conversations, and engagements with students and families on the case load. Student attendance was tracked through PowerSchool and transcribed to Excel for the purposes of this study. Data in the form of focus groups was transcribed and collected on a monthly basis with interested parents who volunteered to attend.

The central contribution of the study is a renewed look at parental agency in low-income schools in the U.S. through the cross-disciplinary theoretical framework of the human capabilities approach. The research made evident that by treating agency with more nuance and care, a more productive examination of low-income families is made possible in current U.S. educational scholarship. Examining the data with this new theoretical framework encouraged a more genuine examination of family dynamics and parental decision-making.

Keywords: Parents, agency, elementary, low-income, San Diego

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	4
2	BACKGROUND	9
2.1	History of Family Engagement Scholarship	9
2.2	Examining Parental Agency with a Cross-Disciplinary Lens.....	14
3	PARENTAL POWER, ENGAGEMENT, AND ATTENDANCE	21
3.1	Elementary Schools and Parental Engagement	22
3.2	Studies of Elementary School Attendance.....	26
4	RESEARCH TASK	30
5	IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY	32
5.1	The Research Topic Defined	32
5.2	The Participants and the Research Process	32
5.3	Research Method.....	39
5.4	Data Analysis	41
5.5	Reliability.....	51
5.6	Ethical Solutions	54
6	RESULTS	56
6.1	Parental Agency Measured as Autonomy and Ability.....	56
6.2	Contributions to Anti-Deficit Scholarship in the U.S.....	61
6.3	Contributions to Attendance Scholarship in the U.S.	62
7	DISCUSSION	64
	REFERENCES	67
	APPENDICES	72

1 INTRODUCTION

The overall aim of the research is to inductively examine the experiences and perceptions of low-income parents with children attending low-income elementary schools in San Diego with the hope of problematising the word “agency” as it is currently used in U.S. educational scholarship. This is the core and explicit focus of my analysis and the first objective of the study. Due to the methods and context in which the data was collected, two implicit objectives are also present; contributing to anti-deficit understandings of parents and examining attendance in the context of a low-income elementary school.

As it is currently employed, the term “agency” is often used in a self-explanatory manner in studies examining low-income parents (Baequeando-Lopez et al., 2013). The U.S. field is primarily preoccupied with notions of agency as “involvement” that frequently retain white-middle class normative connotations amongst teachers and school leadership (as cited in Auerbach, 2007). Even amongst what one could refer to as “anti-deficit” research, [scholars who combat stereotypes of low-income and minority families by attempting to emphasise their social capital], lingering notes of patronisation ultimately allow the researcher to denote “good” parenting (Hubbard and Hands, 2011). In this regard, there is space for agency to be given a more nuanced and textured treatment in the U.S. educational academic landscape.

A cross-disciplinary theoretical reference is thus not only necessary when taking a deeper look at agency in the U.S., but appropriate when one considers the extensive treatment given to the subject by development studies. Development studies is here defined as the field of study devoted to the examination of international poverty alleviation efforts that arose following the second World War. The field is broad and encompasses many subfields which include, but are not limited to, anthropology, political science, economics, and sociology. It is development studies self-awareness however, in relation to those served by “development” that is useful especially in relation to the concept of agency.

Due to the extensive post-colonial critiques that arose in the late 1980s against the larger “top-down development apparatus,” as propagated by larger organisations like the World Bank, scholars began seeking the genuine voice of those supposedly “under development” (Escobar, 1995). This new examination of power dynamics between those “in need of development” and those who “managed the development,” fuelled an academic revolution within the field as normative conceptions of development were rejected in favour of postmodern relativism. Specific attention was given during this period to identifying organic mechanisms for understanding the real desires and wants of those development claimed to serve. This renewed focus on agency influenced many scholars, perhaps none so famously as that of the economist Amartya Sen, who utilised this paradigm shift to create an entirely new theoretical framework for development studies: the human capabilities framework (Sen, 2009).

The human capabilities framework was unique in that for the first time an economist gave real credence to the notion that development was not a universally uniform process, but rather the realisation of what each individual values (Sen, 1999). Agency thus became seminal to Sen’s work and led to many secondary scholars expanding upon this understanding of agency in relation to the human capabilities framework. This research has selected the specific definition of agency as it was conceptualised by the human capabilities scholar Sabina Alkire in 2008 in that she theorised agency as *autonomy* or as *ability* (Alkire, 2008). In other words, when agency is seen as autonomy, people are given free rein to act in accordance with what they value. When agency is seen as ability people exhibit it by acting in accordance with what *they have reason* to value (Alkire, 2008). The nuance is small but important, and reflects the current tension in U.S. scholarship in understanding parent involvement. Do we conceptualise parental agency by measuring it against an idealised list of parenting standards? Or is there room for the individual parent to exhibit their own decision making processes? By pulling a cross-disciplinary theoretical framework, one can more fully examine the complexity of agency within the U.S. educational landscape, and provide a more nuanced treatment of parents.

Analysing parental agency from a new theoretical framework required the collection of qualitative parental evidence over the course of several months. Gaining the trust of a school and that of parents is difficult as an outside individual, and therefore data was collected within the context of a larger program concerned to improve low-income student attendance. An inductive study was conducted in the context of an NGO's "Every Student Every Day" program which assigns an intern to local low-income elementary schools with chronic attendance issues. The intern is then given a "caseload" of students who are at risk, or have already fallen below a 10% attendance threshold, missing 18 or more days a year.

Having established the overarching aim of inductively examining the perceptions and feelings of parents in the context of attendance in a low-income elementary school, I will now briefly review the larger objectives.

The first explicit objective of the research was to utilise the experiences and perceptions of parents to illustrate the complex set of decision making processes low-income individuals face in relation to their children's education. Thus the core of my main data analysis is this examination of parental agency. By engaging in a three tiered qualitative data collection method, a detailed portrait was created in terms of family dynamics and cost-benefit analysis. The finely textured framework of agency offered by the human capabilities approach and Sabina Alkire in handling this kind of data makes evident the need for similar reflection and research in traditional U.S. educational scholarship. To more fully address this objective, I asked questions specifically around parental values. By establishing this understanding of what parents themselves value, I hoped to attain more autonomous measurements of agency for the parents. By at the same time asking parents to consider what they think the school valued, I hoped to juxtapose this autonomous definition with one of ability.

The secondary objective of the research was to further illuminate the barriers low-income families and parents face, and thus contribute to anti-deficit scholarship that works to debunk harmful stereotypes of low-income parents. By illustrating these needs, the study hopes to better inform and encourage organisations and schools to work with families on a more intimate and genuine level

of partnership. The specific questions I utilized to further this objective, revolved around asking parents about their life experiences, challenges, and also successes their families experience on a day to day basis.

The third objective, which arises out of the context from which the research was collected, is to make evident how family decision making processes revolve around the specific example of attendance. Although many studies have quantitatively discussed correlations between chronically absent students and low-income levels, this study hopes to give qualitative context. The question I asked to further this final objective, was primarily around what circumstances led to increased school attendance, and what circumstances do not.

While it is typical to first proceed with the literature review, and then contextualize the literature within the larger meta-scope and purpose of the study, due to the highly specific field that is parental involvement studies in the United States, I have intentionally reversed this order to allow for a deeper understanding of the scholarly landscape before situating my study in relation to other specific ones. Thus below in chapter two, "Background," I proceed first with creating a meta-text of the relevant parental involvement literature. After establishing the larger debates and conversations occurring at a high level in the field, I then proceed in chapter three, "Parental Power, Engagement, and Attendance," with a more classical examination of similar studies that have approached the topic with the same lens and methodologies. In chapter four, I once again establish and review the overall aim, the subsequent objectives, and the specific questions that drove the formation and execution of the study. In chapter five, "Implementation of the Study," I detail specifically the methods in which the data was collected, as well as reference how this influenced the data analysis process. In chapter six, "Results," the three objectives are one more reviewed in context of the data, and examined to observe how successfully they were addressed. In the final chapter, "Discussion," the overall knowledge gained from the research is reviewed, and further recommendations are made for any future studies that may occur on the topic.

In brief summation however, through the ethnographic case notes, focus groups, and personal interviews with parents as they were available, the research was able to reiterate the single salient truth: most parents do want what is best for their children. How that desire is translated into better student outcomes, is up to the multitudes of scholars, administrators, teachers, and programs that seek to foster genuine partnerships with families.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 History of Family Engagement Scholarship

The current debates within academia regarding parental involvement, are not just limited to the ivory tower, but hold very real policy implications for the livelihoods of millions of children and parents. Barnard (2004), McWayne, Campos, & Owisianik (2008), and Miedel & Reynolds (1999), along with a host of other scholars, have all clearly established the link between increased parental involvement and academic achievement, thereby emphasizing how critical parent participation is in terms of long-term student success (as cited in Calzada et al., 2015).

The point of real contestation however, is what kind of parental involvement maximizes student outcomes. In other words, with what standards does one use to define a “good” parent? Although the topic has been handled in many multi-faceted ways, it is quickly summarized here into the following four separate academic camps; 1) *neoliberal post positivists*, 2) *progressive post positivists*, 3) *anti-deficit critical theorists*, and 4) *neodeficit constructivists*. These groups are conceptual tools created for the study; however they take their bearings from an integration of the far larger surveys of parent literature in U.S. education scholarship provided by Baequeando-Lopez et al. (2013), Hubbard & Hands (2011), and Guerra & Nelson (2013). A brief examination of these groups reveals a struggle in conceptualizing parental agency and empowerment. While the *postpositivist* camp tends to operate with a deficit mindset towards low-income and minority parents, an increasing group of scholarship takes issue with this as a “white-middle class” normative bias (Auerbach, 2002; 2007). That being said, even amongst scholars that have adopted *anti-deficit* approaches, debates still linger in terms of how one can “empower” said parents without inadvertently giving way to any assumptive “*neodeficit*” tendencies that imply all parents are in need of help. This brief survey below attempts to address some of these debates in U.S. scholarship, while making theoretical space for the employment of the capabilities framework and agency, as defined by Sabina Alkire. Each group of the aforementioned

scholars is explained and categorized below in relation to how they study and perceive parents of students.

Neo-liberal Post-Positivists: This group of scholars takes their bearings from the notion that parents are primarily responsible for the educational welfare of their children, not the state. It was Epstein's original 1992 famous study which established the importance of the involvement of parents while also normatively listing out the six main actions of what she considered an "involved" parent to naturally engage in (as cited in Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013). Epstein thus falls within the same camp as Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997), and many others, who believe that parental involvement can be accounted for and explained in a positivist manner (as cited in Auerbach, 2007). These groups of Epstein-based quantitative studies on parental involvement are often frequently cited by neoliberal conservative education proponents who wish to cast blame on parents for the educational failings of their children, and not the larger structural systems of inequity and racism. (Hands & Hubbard, 2011). This was perhaps most poignantly seen in the 1991 Department of Education report jointly released with, sociologist, James Coleman, that cited a lack of parental involvement as the primary explanatory factor for failing low-income school districts (Baquedano-Lopez et al. 2013). This was again observed in the 2001 NCLB act, [No Child Left Behind], which placed increased monetary emphasis on parent outreach instead of increased school funding (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013). Although in fairness, post-positivism merely uses the tools of positivism without the notions of assumed universality, these kinds of studies are still easily operationalized as accepted normalized truths in educational policy. The unfortunate conclusions drawn from this line of thinking are thus clear, these scholars and policy makers believe the parents are responsible for the educational failings of their children, not larger structures of inequity.

Progressive Post-Positivists: The approach taken by many progressives uses the same logic established by those in the post positivist tradition; however they seek to "help" parents, rather than blame them. In other words, in this framework parents are not negligent, but simply, "...stilted adults in need of

guidance...,” (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013 pg. 153). This “deficit” perspective serves as the underlying justification for many programs that wish to “fix” parents through top-down family literacy initiatives, mentoring, or sometimes even counseling programs (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013, pg. 165). Although often benign in intention, they unwittingly or not, take their lineage from a line of colonial thinking that deems the parents of the ‘other’ unfit to raise their own children, and therefore seeks to either minimize or remedy their influence (Hand & Hubbard, 2011; Spring, 2012; Kozol, 2005). This line of “deficit” thinking has been overwhelmingly debunked from an academic perspective by a number of scholars such as Clark, 1983; Delgado-Gaitan; 1994; Lopez, 2001, Meyers, Dowdy, & Patterson, 2000, and Reese, Gallimore, Goldenberg & Balzano, 1995, (as cited in Auerbach, 2007). Still the “deficit” approach continues to persist in daily parent-teacher interactions, and even at the higher policy levels of school districts and the federal government (Guerra & Nelson, 2013). In other words, although such “deficit” thinking is now heavily stigmatized in academic circles, it still represents a very real problem with many teachers, administrators, and other service providers (Guerra & Nelson, 2013). This is not to say that all projects of this nature suffer from this line of thought, but it is worthy of self-reflection for those involved in the current family engagement landscape.

Anti-Deficit Critical Theorists: The approach taken by critical theorists heavily contrasts the two previous ones in that they take serious issue with the persistence of Epstein’s post positivist paradigm, and give high levels of credence to the multiple structural factors that could influence and shape parental involvement. In the tradition of Marx, these scholars posit that not only is the Epstein model heavily biased towards white-middle class experiences, but it fails to acknowledge the structural factors of ethnicity, class, and gender that could inhibit or uniquely shape parenting decision making power (Hands & Hubbard, 2011). Moll and Ruiz (2002) serve as an appropriate example of this kind of scholarship with their goal of, “educational sovereignty,” as not only the ultimate aim for parents, but a method that would combat the broader “...historical and unequal social structures underlying public education...” (as cited in Baequeando-

Lopez et al., 2013, pg. 163). Additional studies like that of Levine & Trickett (2000) and Ramirez (2003) also fall into this camp due to their documentation of the economic and social barriers faced by low-income families, and parents (as cited in Calzada et al., 2015). Unlike the neoliberal approach which also used the concept of parent sovereignty, critical discourse theory sees the power of low-income minority parents as, not negligently absent, but inherently repressed or misinterpreted by external structures (Hubbard & Hands, 2011).

In this regard, one observes the emergence of intentionally *anti-deficit* rhetoric that seeks to correctively emphasize the assets low-income parents bring to the education and raising of their children (Auerbach, 2007). This assets based approach, or sometimes referred to as, “...the *funds of knowledge* approach...,” seeks to show how, although parents may be involved in different ways, their deviation from the paradigm created by Epstein is not problematic (Baequeando-Lopez et al., 2013 pg. 162). In the last 15 years this has led to a wealth of studies like Auerbach, 2007; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, and Valdes, 1996, that all seek to demonstrate a positive correlation between low-income parenting styles, that deviate from Epstein’s norms, but still contribute to student success (as cited in Calzada et al., 2015). In terms of policy, many scholars call for the “decolonization” of family literacy programs, and family mentoring programs, and the creation of genuine partnerships in their stead (Baequeando-Lopez et al., 2013). Although Freire’s classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) is frequently referred to by this group of scholars, the similarities between his work and constructivist thought models renders it more appropriate to discuss him in the final grouping below (Hands & Hubbard, 2011).

Neo-Deficit Constructivists: This final grouping of parental involvement scholarship takes its bearing from the critical theorists, but believes that *anti-deficit* efforts are currently inadequate and continue to suffer from *neodeficit* tendencies in regards to how parents are viewed. In other words, as E. Auerbach (1995) preemptively predicted, “...this [anti-deficit] shift may operate as a *neodeficit* ideology in which even ‘strengths based’ [parent] program models could continue to function within a deficit framework...” (as cited in Baequeando-Lopez et al.,

2013, pg. 152). Baequeando-Lopez et al., (2013) explicitly explains this issue when they discuss how even in projects that champion “parents as partners,” there is still the continued role of a facilitator or researcher, outside the said community, that is given leadership in some capacity (pg. 172). In this regard, although they praise the effort of the *anti-deficit* movement, they maintain the concern that it is simply making way for a new kind of *anti-neodeficit* approach that is now focused on the lack of “empowerment” from parents to share their “funds of knowledge” (Baequeando-Lopez, et al., 2013, pg. 168).

This notion takes its bearings from what Hubbard & Hands (2011) view as the interpretivist or constructivist perspective on parental involvement in the United States. The authors argue that aside from physical or structural barriers that limit parent involvement, there are additionally ingrained co-constructed realities between parents and teachers, that allow the teacher to be seen as superior (Hands & Hubbard, 2011, pg. 20). In this sense, one should not view parents as “unempowered,” but instead working within complicated hierarchies involving their perception of themselves, and the world around them. Although the notion of “empowerment” is at surface level benign, if it discounts parent perceptions and decisions about how and when they choose to engage the power structures of their school, this can also function as a reproduced, albeit perhaps unconsciously so, deficit approach.

As previously mentioned, this thought model frequently refers to the work of Freire and his notion of “critical consciousness” or *concienticao*, as a method of examining the concepts of empowerment and agency (Larotta & Yamamura, 2011). Larotta & Yamamura (2011) describe their definition for “critical consciousness” as the process of working together to understand the, “...root causes of unsatisfactory circumstances...” (pg. 76). Unlike the previous notion of empowerment described, that is potentially riddled with what some scholars cite as the *neodeficit* issue, new studies like Bory & Mayo (2001), Rocha-Schmid (2010), Torres & Hurtado-Vivas (2011), have employed the Freirian “critical consciousness” to criticize not only deficit theories, but even assuming something as general as “parent involvement” can exist at all (as cited in Baequeando-Lopez et al.,

2013, pg. 164) By debunking all previous understandings of “involvement,” the authors reveal the lingering dependency upon the term by critical theorists, and also make theoretical space for interpretations more closely aligned to a more diverse array of parenting styles. The difference is nuanced but important. In layman’s terms a traditional *anti-deficit* family partnership model would seek to facilitate the parent’s empowerment. In a Freirean *anti-neodeficit* approach, parents would simply be given knowledge and then be allowed to facilitate their own empowerment. Essentially the argument here is that the critical consciousness framework would better serve “anti-deficit” projects whilst avoiding *neodeficit* issues. Due to the abundance of studies that have already used the Freirean approach to discuss *neodeficit* thinking, this research will attempt to contribute to the conversation through the use of the human capabilities approach.

Having outlined the main tenants of family engagement scholarship in the U.S., I now look towards a method of better defining the “agency” that is currently so loosely referred to by scholars of education. As was made salient in this discussion of parenting literature, there is a lack of clarity in how this term is operationalized.

2.2 Examining Parental Agency with a Cross-Disciplinary Lens

The following outlines a scholarly pivot in the terms of examining a U.S. educational issue, with a non-traditional theoretical framework. By outlining the many patterns of thought that are similar in evolution and their use between U.S. educational academics, and their counterparts in international development studies, one can more fully understand the connection and application of agency as defined by scholar Sabina Alkire in the research at hand.

Before outlining the parallels between the two schools, we briefly review the survey of U.S. educational scholarship completed in the earlier section. The survey indicated the following important descriptive elements of current U.S. research pertaining to parental involvement.

- I. Parental involvement is almost universally agreed upon in the U.S. as an essential component to any student's life, especially in the context of elementary education (Bower & Griffin, 2011).
- II. Epstein's 1992 positivist paradigm for what parental involvement should look like has been debunked as a white middle class construct, leading many critical theorists to engage in *anti-deficit* work that legitimizes and treats minority and low-income parenting methods as just as effective forms of involvement (Hill & Torres, 2010).
- III. *Anti-deficit* approaches have given way to a rise of parent "empowerment" and "inclusion" programs, that are now being criticized for still subtly maintaining power structures through the assumption that there is an initial "lack" of empowerment, and can thus be viewed as *neodeficit* (Baequedano-Lopez et al., 2013).
- IV. Most recent scholarship has thus grown critical to *neodeficit* thinking, and attempts to utilize Freirian "critical consciousness" to more promote more organic forms of agency and empowerment that are community led and facilitated (Larotta & Yamamura, 2011; Calzada et al., 2015).

The Freirean school has certainly advanced the progression of parent studies; however one could argue it is more appropriate for addressing issues related to organic community development, and less so when conceptualizing notions of agency and empowerment in the modern educational arena. The resources and framework provided by the scholarship of Amartya Sen, and the capabilities approach, however, have not only extensively defined agency and empowerment, but done so in such a way that may address some of the lingering issues within the current *neodeficit* critique raised by current U.S. education scholars (Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHDI), Samman & Santos, 2009). Amartya Sen's focus on allowing the community to define for themselves what agency looks like, and his nuanced separation between "capabilities" and "functionings," may allow for a more complex understanding of

low-income parent perceptions of their power within schools (OPHDI, Samman & Santos, 2009, pg. 4).

The reasoning for this is based on the striking similarities between current U.S. educational scholarship and development studies in terms of addressing issues of participation and agency. International NGOs must balance a need for non-normative community engagement, while also ensuring they meet quantitative donor driven outcomes. The U.S. education system similarly must organically engage their families, while securing federally and state mandated competitive academic outcomes. Schnee & Bose argued in their 2010 study that these similarities are not surprising considering how low-income minority populations are often treated as “development projects” by the primarily white middle-class teachers, administrators, and policy makers in charge of educational decisions in the U.S. (Schnee & Bose, 2010).

Amartya Sen and the human capability framework falls within the same group of scholars previously mentioned who are concerned with the genuine agency and empowerment of the populations being served in development (Sen, 1999). In this regard, he is similar to the same *neodeficit* critique recently vocalized by certain U.S. scholars who are concerned recent parent “empowerment” efforts are either disingenuous, or still riddled with deficit thinking in the form of assuming low-income minority parents inherently lack agency (Fuentes, 2005; Baquedano-López et al. 2013). A brief survey of Amartya Sen’s unique human capability framework, and how it has been conceptualized in recent development studies, illustrates the manner in which this approach could be used to contribute to existing conversations in the U.S. regarding parent empowerment and agency in relation to their child’s education. This is certainly not the first time the capability approach has been utilized outside the traditional context of development, as seen in Bovine et al.’s 2013 study in France discussing ways to restructure processes more efficiently in office environments from a human capabilities approach. To summate however, these capabilities and freedoms don’t just matter instrumentally to Sen in terms of economic achievement, but also intrinsically, due the very nature of his definition of development.

For the purposes of this study however, the focus on the individual in determining what capabilities are important for them in their own “development,” may provide a new way to conceptualize parental agency in U.S. scholarship that is removed from normative prescriptions that have been criticized as *neodeficit*. Sen is certainly not the only scholar who has discussed and furthered the main tenants of the capability approach; however his approach remains perhaps the most focused on the individual, and the most open to alternative visions for what development could look like (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). The work of Nussbaum agrees with Sen in many basic way, however deviates through her specific “list” of capabilities which all humans should have (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). Although her perspective is understandable from a justice perspective, and there are certainly limitations to the freedoms of parental agency in terms of the safety and the well-being of children, in general Sen’s framework holds greater theoretical power to address the current pitfalls of the current *neodeficit* debate than Nussbaum (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). It is acknowledged however, that Nussbaum’s arguments regarding how to protect and guarantee the welfare of young children in such a freeing framework, are well-founded, and are given more consideration in the analysis section. (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007).

Having discussed these basic concepts from the human capabilities framework in relation to the larger context of education, we can now finally explore the tricky notions of agency as presented by Sen. We will first take a closer look at the way agency is employed by the human capabilities framework, and then specifically that of Sabina Alkire.

In the human capabilities framework, agency and freedom are also closely related concepts that cannot independently exist without the other (OPHDI, Alkire, 2008). Sen defines agency as a person's ability to act on *behalf of the things they value* and also the things that *they have reason to value* (OPHDI, Samman & Santos, 2009). In this regard, in order to measure agency, a person must first understand how the subject values things, and what things they believe to comprise their ideal vision of agency for themselves (OPHDI, Alkire, 2008).

Alkire (2008) provides a brief summary of the multifaceted implications for Sen's conceptions of agency when she writes:

"...i) agency is exercised with respect to goals the person values; ii) agency includes effective power as well as direct control; iii) agency may advance well being or may address other regarding goals; iv) to identify agency also entails and assessment of the value of the agent's goals; v) the agent's responsibility for a state of affairs should be incorporated into his or her evaluation of it..." (OPHDI, Alkire, 2008, pg. 6).

One can easily notice the strong emphasis on utilizing what the individual values as the main form of assessment for determining the presence or lack of agency. Alkire (2008) goes on to argue that many current non-Sen forms of measuring agency use normative domains that they "presume" people value. This critique is similar to what is observed in current anti-*neodeficit* arguments in the U.S. criticizing family "empowerment" programs. Alkire (2008) attempts to address this issue but taking extensive time to detail the difference between autonomy and ability in relation to agency in the capabilities framework. She argues that *autonomy* refers to the first element of Sen's definition of agency, "...whether people are able to act on behalf of what they themselves value..." while *abilities* refer to "...whether people are able to act on behalf of they they are assumed to have reason to value..." (OPHDI, Alkire, 2008, pg. 19). This distinction thus dissects the current issues raised by those U.S. authors who view the new wave of parent "empowerment" program as still riddled with *neodeficit* thinking. Utilizing the terminology of Alkire (2008), these *anti-deficit* projects are using an abilities based definition of agency when attempting to empower parents. The *neodeficit* criticism of this is thus arguing in favor of an autonomy approach to defining agency in these projects instead, in that they may result in more organic non-normative engagements of parent communities. As made clear by Alkire (2008), sometimes autonomy and abilities will overlap, and in this case, the community and the facilitators will value the same thing, however, sometimes they will not, and in this regard, a researcher needs to specify what kind of agency they are measuring within the capabilities framework. For the purposes of this study, and to

contribute to existing to *neodeficit* conversation in U.S. educational scholarship, an autonomy definition of agency was defined.

This section has examined with greater detail some of the larger concepts observed within the multifaceted framework known as the capabilities approach. A careful presentation of the terms agency and empowerment, revealed the framework's potential for addressing some of the concerns surrounding parental involvement. With that being said, I now link this below in so far as how it related to attendance in this cross-disciplinary relationship.

Attendance is conceptually linked to the research by virtue of the context in which the data was collected in the Every Student Every Day program as funded by an intentionally unnamed NGO in San Diego county. Attendance is also however critically linked in terms of understanding a pivotal point of contact in which parents experience schools. Although subjects like that of homework and volunteering frequently arise when teachers and administration cite what they envision as ideal in terms of their parent involvement, it is often attendance that becomes a non-negotiable point of tension. This is not to say that the attendance of school is debatable in terms of its correlation with academic success, but merely to illustrate that if no other parent-school contact occurs, attendance is the final catalyst, and for some families, the first way they experience their child's school. In this regard it is not only coincidence, but academic intentionality, that converges to allow school attendance to become the setting from which data was primarily collected.

The literature on how coming from a low-income household can impact a child's developmental, psychological, and educational trajectories is far reaching and vast; however several examples from existing scholarship become particularly salient when considering attendance (Duncan et al. 2010). Low-income families often experience more mobility in terms of residencies due to changing economic needs and opportunities which make forming standard routines difficult for the family (Burkham et al., 2009). Additionally, families that are challenged with making adequate income are often forced to maintain "non-standard" working hours during the nights and weekends (Han, 2004). The list goes on with

factors like poorer nutrition, the environmental hazards of living in lower quality housing, the cognitive stress of poverty, and so on and so forth (Currie, 2005).

In this regard, attendance becomes a small microcosm where one can observe the various interactions, decision making processes, and power dynamics for a low-income family as they interact and engage with school staff and school administration. If we take our bearing from the new anti-deficit and neo-deficit lines of parental engagement scholarship, as mentioned in the previous section, then attendance does not become a question of inadequate parenting, but one of inadequate resources, and arguably, inadequate family engagement on the part of the school staff.

Plenty of low-income parent studies that have aligned themselves to the anti-deficit movement have attempted to reconceptualise, or more carefully examine, the decision making processes that occurs within low-income households as related to their child's education (Baquedano-López et al. 2013). There is perhaps no better example than that of Emily Schnee and Enakshi Bose's pivotal 2013 study, "*Parents Don't Do Nothing*," which attempted to use some of the limited agency research in U.S. scholarship to expand upon the concept of parental involvement in the school. Rather than interpret some of the parent's inaction as a lack of intention or care, Schnee and Bose questioned further to discover their decision making processes behind the inaction. One pivotal example is seen with a parent who stated she chose to not help her child with homework in order to teacher self-reliance, "I'm trying to teach my girls that, that's your responsibility, it's not mine....you have to get that done, and that reflects...on your grade (Schnee & Bose, 2013, pg. 101). The discovery is profound in that the additional exploration into the parent's decision to not help, debunks assumptions a researcher might make who merely observed the interaction without probing further.

Similar to the way Schnee & Bose took additional steps to discover nuanced forms of parent agency by studying parents and homework, attendance also presents small focal point with which to engage parents inductively. Therefore, studying attendance through the lens of genuine family engagement, and

the human capabilities approach allows a level of complexity to surface that makes apparent the need for more careful handling of agency in the U.S. educational research landscape when speaking of and discussing low-income parents.

3 PARENTAL POWER, ENGAGEMENT, AND ATTENDANCE

The section that follows now illustrates the specific context in which the study finds itself, and makes more salient those who are in very direct conversation with the finding. Having already expounded upon the larger terrain of current U.S. scholarship regarding low-income communities, parental involvement, and Sen's capability approach, this section is devoted to discussing previous research that most aligns with the purpose, methodology, and population of this study. Due to the large plethora of research that exists in relation to the topic, this review will confine itself only to those studies that have employed inductive qualitative methods. With these this limit in place, one discovers it is actually a fairly small group of scholars that have attempted to tackle parental power in school decisions from an inductive perspective. It should also be noted that some of these studies are more geared towards specific communities, and do not always approach parental involvement with a general objective, but rather from the perspective of a specific group, location, or experience. That being said they are still useful in terms of outlining the general history of methodologies used, and the underlying justifications that underpin the data collection processes this study chose to rely on.

Previous studies of attendance are also addressed in the following section, however more so for their ability to provide additional context to the data that was collected through case-notes through the Every Student Every Day initiative. The existing body of literature confirms many of the knowledge gaps previously addressed in the background section. The literature review is thus divided into the following two sub-sections.

- i. Elementary Schools and Parental Engagement
- ii. Studies of Elementary School Attendance

3.1 Elementary Schools and Parental Engagement

While the previous background section primarily addressed parental involvement at the elementary level from a general perspective, the next group provides more of a focus on a specific group or experience in relation to their role as a parent. Due to San Diego's large Hispanic community, and diverse immigrant population from southeast Asia, and east Africa, it is relevant and timely to survey those studies that may not focus on elementary school parents, but provide additional insight and context to the demographics served in San Diego Unified School District. As described in the background section, the majority of these studies align themselves with anti-deficit framework in terms of their treatment of parents and their desire to contextualize parent actions with the institutional and economic barriers they face.

One of the most relevant recent studies completed in recent years is that of Auerbach (2007), and her qualitative case study of 16 African-American and Latin[x] parents. The parents all had high-school aged children, in an unnamed California school district, who were attending a college-access program over the course of three years. The study was entitled, "From Moral Supporters to Struggling Advocates," and primarily focused on exploring how parents perceived their role in the context of their child's education through the use of semi-structured interviews over the course of the time period. Although confined to a very specific population of parents, Auerbach's work is frequently still referenced by other authors, especially due to the way she utilized her data to justify the need for additional qualitative studies within the field of parental involvement. Auerbach (2007) provides additional methodological justification for the present research in that she argued in in order to engage parents in a genuine manner; we

need more open ended qualitative methods that are more inductively driven, and less motivated by theory.

Another case study that also sought to debunk previous *deficit* notions of Latin[x] parents amongst teachers and administrators was that of McClain's 2010 study entitled, "Parental Agency in Educational Decision Making: A Mexican-American example." The case study followed the story of a single family who has to make an important curriculum choice for their nine-year old son. McClain utilized a phenomenological narrative approach in the study to engage in regular semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observation with the family. Through her relationship with the family, the study ultimately found that the teacher and school administrators paid very little attention to the family's beliefs and cultural concerns when they were brought up in meetings by the parents. McClain used her finding to conclude that despite rhetoric from school staff that supposedly promoted family partnerships, the actual actions taken by the staff with the family contradicted this. The phenomenological nature of this study makes it particularly relevant in that a similar approach will also be taken in my research. McClain was able to not only discern some barriers low-income parents face, but additionally reveal some of the "neo-deficit" tendencies that still linger in institutions that have outwardly adopted supposedly more progressive attitudes towards parents.

Unlike the previous studies examined, the work of Larotta & Yamamura (2011) represented one of the first studies that attempted to solve some of the arguments made by the *neodeficit* critique through a new way of engaging families. The study, entitled "A Community Cultural Wealth Approach to Latina/Latino Parent Involvement: The Promise of Family Literacy," utilized a combination of semi-structured interviews, diaries, focus groups and ethnographic observations to follow the experience of 10 Latina mothers as they engaged in a literacy parent empowerment program created by Larotta and Yamamura. The researchers wanted to observe how a parent empowerment program that took its theoretical foundations from Freirian critical consciousness and Yossi's community cultural wealth framework would compare to that of more

traditional models. They found that when group members were allowed to co-create leadership and objectives for themselves, more genuine and long lasting outcomes were realized for the group than traditional family literacy programs. The data methods selected for this study, attempted to mirror some of the triangulatory methods identified by Larrota and Yamamura in that data was collected through the process of utilizing case notes, from the Every Student Every Day program, and additionally through three focus group sessions with caseload and non-caseload parents.

As was emphasized by the previous two studies, the theme of debunking assumptions around low-income parents is common in many of the inductively driven qualitative studies. As previously mentioned, a large element of this kind of anti-deficit thinking relies on the notion of *fund of knowledge*, or the idea that low-income parents also have capital they can impart to their children. Durand's (2011) *funds of knowledge* study entitled, "Latina Mother's Cultural Beliefs About Their Children, Parental Roles, and Education," engaged in a qualitative examination of the perceptions and thoughts of six immigrant Latina mothers on their role as a parent in their child's education. The study contributed to the same line of *anti-deficit* scholarship as made evident by Auerbach (2007) and McClain (2010) in that it used a small case-study to debunk larger deficit narratives surrounding parents in education. In addition, the study made use of the "Integrative Model" as introduced by Garcia Coll et al. (1996) which provides a conceptual system for understanding societal phenomenon that are salient to the experiences of minority families and students like racism, and discrimination. The model proved interesting in that in addition to her interview data from the parents, she also had a ready-made model to compare their experiences with that of relevant societal phenomenon. Similar to the critical theorists, Durand thus wanted to emphasize structural and economic barriers as the source of parental challenges, and strength and perseverance as the sources of effective parental decision making. Although this study did not make of Garcia Coll's "Integrative Model," the human capabilities approach provides similar flexibility in

understanding parent motive, especially when as previously mentioned a distinction is made between agency as autonomy and agency as ability.

Jais & Ordonez-Jasis (2012) and their study entitled, "Latino Parent Involvement: Examining Commitment and Empowerment in Schools," examined three Latin[x]-led parent organizing efforts across the state of California, through a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic observation. Two of the projects, the *La Familia* initiative, and the Charter School Parent initiative, were primarily focused on school related issues, while the third, Project Avanzando, was a community and NGO agriculture project. The primary focus of the study was examining parent's "...journey of involvement..." in the education of their children (pg. 70). In terms of their methodology, all interviews were conducted in Spanish and made use of Brenner's 2005 concept of *testimonios*, or a Mesoamerican tradition of a participant, "...[recollecting] their significant, multilayered personal accounts of life events..." (pg. 71). Their findings indicated that Latino parents felt more comfortable engaging in group mobilization when the issues surrounding the immediate context of a school, and less comfortable working in partnership with larger NGOs. Once the outside partner of an interested NGO became present more complexity in terms of leadership vs. partnership became apparent in terms of their relationship with the parents. The study is relevant in that shows similarly to what Larotta & Yamamura found, when parents are given genuine leadership and participatory access to initiatives the ownership allows for more genuine outcomes. Although the methodological framework is not immediately relevant to the research at hand it does further point to thematic elements of genuine partnership that became apparent in the data collected in this study as well.

This concludes the group of studies that most directly function in concert with the present study. Although there a multitude of additional quantitative based studies on parent engagement, the number of which that are qualitatively based, and that have studies a population similar to that which is present in San Diego county, are extremely limited. In this regard, the methodology choice of qualitative semi-structured group interviews, is not only convenient to the larger

theoretical framework of the human capabilities approach, but the present knowledge gaps within the field of U.S. parental and family engagement.

3.2 Studies of Elementary School Attendance

The previous section primarily gave space to further explore the general topic of parental engagement in the U.S., both from a general perspective, and from the more specific lens of low-income and minority parents. Although not as central to the primary aim of this study, the following section engages in an exploration of the broader scholarly landscape in terms of elementary school attendance. As previously mentioned, the causes and issues associated with elementary school attendance are not the focal point of the research, but they are worth mentioning in that it is the subject of attendance that framed my role at the school, and often my interactions and discussions with parents. The following survey provides a brief understanding of this topic in terms of its relation to the setting and context within which data was collected, and was drawn from a larger meta-analysis completed on attendance literature at the educational level in the U.S. in recent years.

With the launch of more educational legislation at the federal level in the late 1980s, and early 1990s, scholars began examining and noticing larger trends and correlations in the American educational landscape, especially around topics like that of race, income, attendance, and academic achievement (Morrissey et al., 2014). While the body of literature, on absenteeism is still small, much work has been done to ascertain what sort of familial characteristics are associated with higher levels of absenteeism.

In general it has been found that high absenteeism, at the elementary level is often associated with higher levels of neighbourhood violence, lower incomes, and overall more childhood risk factors that are correlated with higher risk adult outcomes such as gang activity, drug use, and potential incarceration (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2004 as cited in Morrissey et al., 2014). In a broader way, the

attendance scholarship strands have thus also been linked to the larger intellectual movement that has recently emerged in U.S. educational scholarship known as the “pre-school to prison pipeline,” which focuses on unpacking the historical and structural injustices children of colour, and children of low-income families experience in the United States (Morrissey et al., 2014).

Although in general studies on attendance do have strong correlations with broader movement for social justice in the U.S., there are opposing scholars who utilise lack of attendance to affirm blame based notions of deficit perceptions of low-income parents and parents of colour (Baquedano-López., et al. 2013). In this regard, we observe again elements of both the anti-deficit and neodeficit strands coming into play in another specific educational topic in the United States. In one regards, we observe a strong sense of social justice from scholars attempting to illustrate the present structural inequities faced by families, but also unwittingly still contributing to stereotyped notions of poverty and educational challenges. On the other side, we observe another strand of scholars utilizing the same information to affirm a neoliberal blame based view of inequity. In this regard, although attendance is not the focal point of this study, it again provides a small microcosm with which we can observe the issue of agency at the parent level, while also further debunking the reasoning which may guide low-income parents, or parents of color in their decision making process of sending or not sending their child to school. Rather than observing absenteeism as a byproduct of poverty and challenge, instead leaving open the possibility it could be a proactive decision on the part of the parent that was made with intention and consideration of potentially unseen factors by traditional scholarship methods. This again justifies the need for more qualitative based inquiries in the field, and again that are primarily parent led, as was used in this study, and explained further in the methodology section. Prior to moving on to the next section however, it is important to give brief context into how attendance was and is currently being conceptualized in the larger San Diego Unified School District.

The site that provided the main context of data collection and the context of the study was that of an intentionally unnamed low-income elementary school

located within the community of City Heights, San Diego in San Diego Unified School District. The school is one of 7 elementary schools that are known to be located in the “Hoover Cluster,” or the cluster of elementary schools that feed students into Hoover high school. The school serves just over 200 students, and is an open campus with free access to the public during school hours. The principal is in her second year at the school, and has overhauled the previously punitive school culture in favour of more positive discipline measures and programs such as “Restorative Justice” and PBIS, (Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports). As a small school, the regular Kindergarten through 5th grade teaching staff and administration combined comprises less than 15 people. Due to the schools issues with chronic attendance, a classroom teacher was forced to leave the school in September 2017 due to the dwindling numbers of students present, and the district’s policy on student to teacher ratio in relation to budgetary concerns.

As is the nature of the U.S. education system, it is important to understand however, not only the school individually, but the larger school district that it functions within. San Diego Unified School District serves over 130,000 students and is the second largest district within the state of California. 46.5% of the population of the school district is classified as “Hispanic,” as related from self-reported data, and ¼ of the student population are English language learners. Almost 60% of the students and families qualify for free and reduced lunch. With a diverse and large population, San Diego Unified has faced unique challenges in recent years particularly in relation to funding and student outcomes. Despite new initiatives like Vision 2020 launched by the local Board of Education, in the 2016-2017 school year, San Diego Unified suffered a 124 million budget deficit. The board voted to cut over 850 jobs to help make up the deficit, with a remaining deficit of 50 million still expected for the 2017-2018 school year. The loss of positions is not the only way the district has attempted to compensate for the budget loss. Extra-curricular activities, wrap around services, and transportation resources have all been cut or downsized for families and students.

Although these larger programmatic changes are not directly related to the topic at hand, they provide a context for the actions and environment teachers and administrators currently find themselves operating in. Much of the budgetary loss was due to a lack of attendance from students, in that when fewer students attend the school, less money is allocated for the next school year. In addition to the NGO's "Every Student, Every Day" initiative, the district has now launch their own version of an attendance initiative to contribute to more students in seats every day.

There are many additional factors that have shaped the district in recent years; however this section provided a brief overview for the larger structures in which the data was collected. Additional elements of district policy are expounding upon in the analysis section in relation to how they appeared in the data collection process.

4 RESEARCH TASK

The larger aim of the research is to create a more nuanced, textured, portrait of the family decision making process for low-income families with children attending low-income elementary schools to make salient the need for a renewed look at the use of agency in parental involvement studies. As previously stated, in light of the current academic debates in the U.S. educational scholarly landscape, and the striking parallels with development studies literature, the human capability approach will be utilised. By approaching the data with a more nuanced and refined approach in terms of what agency can be; greater ingenuity was made possible in understanding the internal structures and decisions of families. By offering a more imaginative interpretation of parental agency, the research makes the case for U.S. academic circles to give greater consideration to the concept's definition when studying families. Considering the recent, *neodeficit* critique of *antideficit* scholarship, the research is relevant and timely in terms of furthering attempts to enter into genuine engagement with families and students.

In this regard, the research is phenomenologically driven, and does not seek any specific correlation, but rather to illustrate the great complexity faced by families in their daily decision making process. Agencies as it was conceptualised by Sabina Alkire, serves as a theoretical tool for framing decisions that larger societal structures may not view as rational, but hold validity and are the best choice for the family at the time.

To achieve this overarching aim, the subjects to be addressed by the data are thus inductively three fold, and are detailed below into the following three objectives. Underneath each objective, several larger questions that were used within the context of the study to examine the objectives are detailed as well.

1. Objective #1: To explicitly create a more nuanced portrait of the decision making process of low-income families with children attending Title 1 elementary schools by using the human capabilities approach, and specifically the Sabina Alkire's progressive definition of agency. The specific larger questions utilized to accomplish this task are as follows:

- a. What do parents value in terms of their child's education and attendance, and what is not as valued?
 - b. What do the parents perceive the school values in terms of parents and how they relate to their child's education and attendance?
 - c. Where do these duelling sets of values intersect, and where do they overlap?
2. Objective #2: To contribute to existing anti-deficit research by further illustrating the barriers faced by low-income families and students. The specific larger questions utilized to accomplish this task are as follows:
 - a. What additional barriers and challenges due families face when interacting with a school district or administration?
 - b. How do families relationally interact with the school, and what are their perceptions of those interactions?
3. Objective #3: Through the context of how the data was collected, contribute to existing literature surrounding attendance amongst low-income students and families at the elementary level. The specific larger questions utilized to accomplish this task are as follows:
 - a. How do families perceive attendance, and its relation to their child's education?
 - b. How do families perceive the school's understanding of attendance, and its relation to their child's education?
 - c. Where do these duelling sets of values intersect, and where do they overlap?

5 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

5.1 The Research Topic Defined

When collecting the data, the primary topic of consideration was an emphasis on discerning parental perceptions of their experiences with the school and school staff. (In terms of the larger theoretical framework, this can be thought of as discovering what parents are told/expected to value or *ability* as defined by Alkire). The secondary topic of consideration is thus what parents themselves value, or what they individually bring to the school environment in terms of decision making and perception. (In terms of Alkire's larger theoretical framework this can be thought of as the secondary alternative to defining agency, agency as *autonomy*). For the sake of conducting a data collection in an environment that was phenomenological and participant driven, these topics were explored in indirect conversational ways, especially within the context of the focus groups. These larger definitions served as the primary guiding points of thematic analysis upon later examination of the transcripts from the focus groups, and the ethnographic notices collected from case notes.

5.2 The Participants and the Research Process

A. Case Notes

Case notes were not originally intended as formal element of data collection but were produced as a byproduct of the requirements needed for my internship, and to gain the trust and access of a school school in San Diego. Due to the extensive time given to their production, they are included in the data collection process in that they would/still have a large influence over my interpretation and weight given to the data collected through the later formal focus groups. Although there were not an originally intended element of the study, the case notes were utilised in gaining a sense of the reliability of the study. In this

sense, data collection officially began at the school on September 12th, 2017 in the form of “case notes” that were collected and written to describe every interaction with a caseload family, student, or collateral person related to the student or family. The school utilised data collected from their own “Attendance Logging” system known as “Powerschool,” to determine which families and students with outstanding attendance issues they would like placed on my caseload. Students that were labelled as “chronically” absent, (missing 10% or more of the school year), were selected for caseload services. Caseload services included the following:

- Meeting with the student once a week to check-in
- Contacting the family once a week to check-in
- Meeting with willing families to discuss issues around attendance
- Providing case management to willing families to connect them to resources like housing, transportation, food assistance, medical assistance to aid student attendance
- Serving as an on-site attendance consultant at the school 16 hours a week in the office of the school counsellor

Since I was serving in the “Every Student, Every Day” program in the technical capacity of a “social worker” I was required by the state of California to log my case note in 2-1-1, the social work client management system utilised by my NGO. The specific formatting requirements of each case note can be found in the following example below. Each case note began with the date, and then each sub section of information organised into the “social work” DAP format. “D” stands for “Data” and refers to an objective recounting of the interaction. “A” stands for “Assessment” and stand for how I analysed the interaction. “P” stands for “Plan” or what next steps I will take now that I have this information.

All names have been redacted to protect the privacy of my former families and clients.

10/10/17: (D) I left a voicemail for [REDACTED] to let him know that myself and a Health and Human Services Agency health care options counsellor had spoken as per his request for free/low cost health care choices for his daughter. As requested by [REDACTED] I gave the counsellor his cell phone number so that he could leave his information to [REDACTED]. I also let [REDACTED] know that if he did not have time to call, or wanted to make the call together we could do so during our meeting on Thursday. (A) I followed [REDACTED] instructions to give his cell phone number to HHSA services per our cell-phone conversation last week. (P) I will make sure I have all documentation prepared for our meeting on Thursday.

As one can observe, the level of detail the “DAP” formatting requires served the study well in that, even attempted forms of contact needed to be documented for all relevant parties related to the family and/or student. Since my role fell under the “mandated” reporting penal code of the state of California, my case notes could technically be subpoenaed by a court of law, and therefore required a more formal protocol than traditional ethnographic notes. Although conversations can only be summated, case workers are encouraged to be as specific as possible in terms of remembered language, and conversational terms used with clients.

Case notes were collected between the dates of September 12th, 2017 to December 15th, 2017, and were logged “live” or within 15 minutes following the actual interaction or attempted interaction into the 2-1-1 client data management system. A total of 325 case notes were compiled over the course of 4 months, and a total of 22 students and their families were actively present on the caseload at that time. Although demographic data on caseload students and families, is protected by 2-1-1 and the NGO, the lower socioeconomic statistical ranges common for Title 1 schools, can be loosely applied to my caseload population as well.

In general, although not all the case notes are directly useful for the study in that some may simply document an attempted call, or a brief conversation with a child, a good portion do provide additional contextual nuance to parental perceptions and issues at the school level. In this regard the case notes, will function of affirming or negating the reliability of the data found within the focus groups. As part of an agreement with my NGO, I was granted provisional long-term access to my case notes provided that I maintain the confidentiality of all associated names and parties.

B. Focus Groups

Unlike the case notes which were collected and produced as a function of a state and NGO requirements, the focus groups functioned as the primary intended source of data collection for the study. In order to establish a positive, repoire with the larger school community, and gain the trust of the staff and leadership, focus groups did not begin until the end of October. Since the NGO I was interning with at the time was also interesting in the data collected in that they wished to improve their understanding of the families and students their attendance program served, I received additional funding and resources to conduct the groups. Groups were held monthly from October to December on the following dates in the counselling room at the school.

- October 26th, 2017, 4-5 PM(3 attendees)
- November 30th, 2017, 4-5 PM (5 attendees)
- December 14th, 2017, 4-5 PM (6 attendees)

My NGO provided sponsorship for each group in the following manner:

1. \$10 gift cards to a local grocery store “Von’s” for all participants who completed a session.
2. Paid simultaneous Spanish translation with San Diego Unified School District’s official Spanish translation service utilizing headsets.
3. Additional funds for snacks/activities for children while parents completed data.
4. Staff support to help welcome families, sign them in, and note taking.

In exchange for this additional funding, and the utilisation of families from one of their participating school sites, the NGO asked that I incorporate the following elements into the groups.

1. Adding a few additional questions regarding attendance when possible or appropriate.
2. Utilising their “Community Conversations” protocol when interacting and speaking with families. (See Appendix)
3. Access to the transcribed conversations upon completion of the focus groups.

Once the NGO gave their permission, and support of the study, permission was also secured from the school and the school leadership. The school did not require any additional stipulations to gain access to their parents. It was agreed upon however with the principal of the school, and the school counsellor, that they would have access to the “redacted versions” of the transcripts after the focus group were completed. “Redacted versions” refer to versions of the transcripts with any remotely identifying information removed: names, reference, phrases, places, unique details etc. This allowed the school to feel somewhat

informed by the study, while the parents could still feel free to speak how they wished without fear of retribution by school staff.

Once all permissions and arrangements were secure, the next task that remained was to formalise strategy for promoting the groups to parents. The following protocol was followed in the two weeks that led up to each focus group to ensure similar strategies of attendance/exposure were used to incentivise parents to come.

- i. Two Weeks Prior to Group: Flyers distributed into the backpack of every child advertising the date, time, location, purpose, and gift card opportunity. Additional flyers were given to teachers to give to children who did not own backpacks.
- ii. Sign-Up: Families were offered the opportunity to sign up for the group in one of three ways.
 - In-person in the front office
 - Text message confirmation to my phone
 - Email confirmation to my account
 - Call-in confirmation to my phone
- iii. Day of Group: One reminder text sent to all families to confirm final participation.
- iv. Last -Minute: If parents chose to cancel last minute, the secondary plan was to stand by the front office during school dismissal with gift cards to incentivise new families to stay after school and participate in the group.

The groups were made open to any family on campus who had a child actively attending the school. In addition to direct parents/guardians, the group was also open to other families who may have also been helping to raise the child

ie. grandmothers, aunts, uncles, etc. A maximum of three family members could attend per child, and groups were limited to seven people total to ensure enough time would be given for each person to speak. Any children that were brought were given the choice to watch a movie, create art, or play in the yard outside during the session. Parents were informed that although they were welcome to late the children play outside, no additional supervision could be given to them from NGO staff.

Once in session families were asked to fill out the following forms all of which were translated into both English and Spanish so all parties could easily access them.

- i. Sign-In Sheet (For attendance purposes)
- ii. Authorisation of Consent (To confirm the data gathered could be used in my thesis, and “Redacted Versions” that protected their identities could be shared with the NGO and school leadership).

A recorder was set up in the centre of the table, and families were notified when the it was turned on at the beginning of the session, and when it was turned off at the end of the session. A welcome greeting was given, and general norms and protocols were gone over with the family in terms of using the translation service. Families who required Spanish translation wore headsets, to hear simultaneous translation provided by the translator. Spanish speakers were translated using consecutive translation when speaking themselves through the translation specialist provided by the NGO. The specific formatting of the protocols and questions that were used while in session can be found in the “Focus Group Protocol” document (See Appendix).

Following the session, families were made aware of the next focus group opportunity if they would like to attend again or let friends know. These final items were given to families at the end.

- i. Demographic Survey (Optional)
- ii. \$10 Von's Gift card
- iii. My Business Card (For additional questions/concerns)

Overall, the focus groups were conducted without any major obstacles. Although they were open to all families, it should be noted that most participants came from my caseload of families with Every Student, Every Day program. It could be inferred that in addition to the \$10 incentive, relational trust and security may also have played a factor in the decision-making process of attendance. The demographic information that was volunteered by focus group participants is broken down and analysed by group in "Data Analysis," and in the Appendix.

5.3 Research Method

As has already been discussed, the case notes that were collected in conjunction with the program were a bi-product of gaining access to the real data which arose through the focus group. As such the case notes cannot be considered so much as a methodology, but instead a more formalised element of contextual observations. In this sense the primary methodological justification here will be the selected use of a semi-structured focus group format to guide the sessions.

As was referenced in the Literature Review, there is a limited amount of studies that have chosen to use more phenomenological community driven forms of data collection when engaging with parents. The use of this kind of qualitative inductive methods are thus not only reflective of the growing need for parent led and structured information regarding their experiences, but the larger

theoretical framework with the study is operating under. If a true “neodeficit” understanding of parent empowerment or agency is to be reflected upon and assessed for its validity, then the information must be parent driven, not researcher driven. In other words, as stated previously, if U.S. educational scholars are to move away from an ability centred approach to understanding parent agency and discover instead a more autonomy centred approach on parent agency then they must first begin with what a parent will autonomously value as their measure. In this regard, by allowing the parents to drive the conversation as much as possible, there is less of a change the researcher will “taint” or influence what the parent reports in terms of their decision-making process or priorities.

In this regard, the research methodology utilised in this study perhaps most closely mirrors that of Jais & Ordonnez-Jais (2012) or Larotta & Yamamura (2011) in that group dynamics, and community led conversation are the heart of the data collection process for the focus group. The official resource utilized for the constructing the focus groups was “Moderating Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Group Facilitation.”

Due to some of the constraints in terms of environments and the influence and support of my NGO, and their “Community Conversations” protocol documents, some of these best practices that I wished to engage in were impossible to fully implement. That being said, for the most part they were integrated in spirit, and many of the “Conversations” document recommendations did represent some of the best practice in terms of family engagement and were drawn from a larger research study completed by the Hardwood Institute. Which had conducted research to create an entire hand book for family engagement and exploration in the non-profit sector.

The questions that were prompted, and the follow ups that were used, are given their justifications in the table below that was drawn from the focus group protocol. (See Appendix 1). As is made evident below, the general

structuring of questions gets at the larger concepts of autonomy and ability previously mentioned as part of the theoretical framework. It was very rare that the additional prompts were needed during the sessions, in that the parents were willing to explore the topics once each was introduced. Each session covered each initial prompt in terms of content, although some chose to spend more time on certain topics than others. (See Appendix 1).

5.4 Data Analysis

As previously mentioned, since the case notes collected were primarily a by-product of the requirements of my internship, and not as a formal mode of data collection, they are not included in the formal data analysis but instead as a mode of corroboration in the “Reliability” section found below.

In this regard, it was primarily the focus group transcripts that served as the main and primary source of data analysis, and were constructed as such to answer the main research questions. Due to the semi-structured nature of the focus groups, the selected mode of data examination was thematic analysis. Although other forms of analysis could have been utilised, thematic analysis provided the most broad way to carefully code for and consider each element of data that may have arisen from the parents.

Using the funds provided by the NGO, each recorded focus group conversation was transcribed through the use of an online transcription service. Once the transcribed data was compiled it, the transcripts were read through several times before the thematic coding was created. Once the coding systems was created, each transcript was divided into sub sections of text that fell into each coded topic. Codes were added or removed as needed during the coding process based on how relevant or frequently they were needed. Once each transcript was coded appropriately, and all the information divided into its appropriate code, the

codes were grouped into larger thematic groups that reflected the broader essences of their nature. These larger themes, and their subsequent smaller coded sections were then examined for how they may or may not provide answers to the larger research questions articulated at the start of the study.

This process of analysis was applied at both the transcript level, and at the overall level across transcripts. Analysis was completed at both levels to allow for the opportunity to control for associated demographic information that was collected at the group level for every focus group.

The table below captures all of the codes that were used in the initial interpretation and examination of the data both at the overall level, and at the individual focus group level.

Table 1. Thematic Coding System

Thematic Analysis Coding System					
Main Elements	Communication Perceptions			Resources Desired	Agency Based Choices
Overall Themes	Positive Experience	Ambiguous Experience	Negative Experience		
Sub-Theme Codes	-Family (FM) -Small (SM) -Generation(GN) -Students (STU)	-Limited (LC) -Too Much (TM) -Judgment (JG)	-Racism (RC) -Bias (BS) -Uncaring (UC) -Angry (AG)	-Security (SEC) -Enrichment (ERC) -Better Staff (BST) -Building (BLD)	-Values (VLE) -School (SCL) -Self (SLF) - Better Life (LFE)

As one can observe in the above table, the findings can generally be grouped into three larger elements of: **communication perceptions, resources, desired, and agency based choices**. In other words, the majority of the parents wished to discuss their experiences in interacting with the school, and the resources that they viewed as missing in their student’s academic experience. Within those two larger fields, what frequently emerged were the subject of choices, or more

specifically, choices vocalised with intention and as the byproduct of complex decision making processes. The final element of agency based choices is highlighted in blue to reflect how this more mannerist is element shown through as a byproduct of the other two more content based elements. All three elements, and their subsequent sub-theme grouping are expanded upon more fully below.

A. Communication Perceptions

The majority of parents across all focus groups, often brought their perceptions of the school toward one specific moment or interaction they had experienced with a specific individual or staff member at the school. For some parents this one experience worked to form the foundation for what they held as an overall positive image of the school. For other parents, this one particular memorable interaction worked to undermine any potential trust they could have ever held towards administration or staff. The **positive experiences** usually made some reference towards the generational aspects of the school, citing how their own parents, or grandparents had attended the school. Such experiences, also frequently cited words like “family,” or “student focused,” and particularly focused on the small nature of the school community.

Other responses references a more **ambiguous relationship** with their school communication experiences citing phrases such as “never heard back,” or “all they ever talk about is...” In this regard, these forms of discussion that emerged throughout the groups were not necessarily negative or positive in perception, but usually made some reference to a subtle undertone of judgement from staff or a misalignment of values/communication styles. As made evident by Alkire, these moments of ambiguity often highlighted what appeared to be a contrast between autonomy and ability agency definitions. The school believed it knew what parents should have reason to value, however, in actuality it had very little understanding of what parents themselves valued.

Perhaps nowhere else was this contrast of values made more evident than the blatantly **negative moments of communication** and interactions parents elected to share during the sessions. In addition to moments of unarmed ambiguity and misunderstanding, parents described in great detail interactions they had experienced that were self-identified as “racist” or “biased.” These were coded in the data separately in that specific events or quotes were given by parents to illustrate how clearly negative the experiences were. Events such as children being given to the wrong parents, parents being shamed publicly, or witness accounts of staff verbally or physically abusing children all frequently emerged in the later parts of group sessions as parents grew more comfortable and trusting of the group.

B. Resources Desired

In addition to directly discussing communication interactions with administrators, and staff, parents also frequently made clear what they valued when discussing resources they wished to see be made available at the school. The resources became important in that they often captured what the parents themselves valued without in a non-leading manner. The dominant codes that came through, would not be surprising for anti-deficit or neo-deficit scholars of family engagement, however for those who consciously or unconsciously have operated with a deficit mindset of parents of Title 1 school in the U.S, the results would run counter-intuitive to large blame based views.

Like their high income counterparts, the parent participants in this study were concerned with **lack of security on campus**, and the fact that children could leave and enter at will throughout the day. Like their high income counterparts, they longed for more elite and **enriching activities** to be offered to their children after school. Like their high income counterparts, they hungered for a more **diverse competent staff** who was focused on developing each individual child.

And finally, like their high income counterparts, they wished for a **hygienic protective building** for their children to learn in that would be free of insects, dirt, and leaks, and provide basic air-conditioning. The constant and frequent coding that emerged from the data for more basic resources for their children is not revolutionary, but unfortunately for many scholars in the field of educational studies who focus on the parents as the project, they would view these as counterintuitive. While this will be further elaborated on in the results section, one can observe how the decision to not send a child to school is not necessarily a lack of education on the parents part, but could in fact be a highly sophisticated move in ensuring what is best for their child in an uncertain, potentially unsafe, school environment on that day and time.

C. Agency Based Choices

While the previous two larger elements that emerged from the data, were primarily that of content based trends that emerged through the process of data analysis. The last larger element that emerged from the data of “Agency Based Choices,” often overlapped or followed each content based response. In other words, with each negative or positive communication experience, or lack/presence of resources in the school, parents followed with their responsive action thereby inadvertently revealing insight into their own autonomous definition of agency in the world of parent engagement at the elementary level. The sub-codes that emerged through this kind of responsive action, reflect what things parents were generally measuring their external experiences with the school against. The most dominant of valued things that parents seemed to weigh when making educational decisions, or interacting with school administrators or staff were the following: 1) **Better Life**, or how this will impact their children’s immediate and long term economic future, 2) **Values**, or how does this weigh against the values and skills I am trying to impart in my child, ie. compassion etc. , 3) **School**, or

how does this compare with the vision I have for my child's academic life, 4) **Self**, or how does this compare with my particularly life experiences, and sense of justice.

While further analysis will be provided in the results section, at a general level, many families weighed the risk factors of sending their children to school on a daily basis from an attendance perspective. Although almost every parent, valued a better life and long term future for their children, all parents also had to consider the immediate obstacles of limited health care access, a lack of security on campus, and the deterrent of biased potentially emotionally harmful teachers. The risks both physically and emotionally it often posed to their children on that immediate day, seemed to outweigh the long term goals, leaving many parents frustrated, and exhausted in the group as they described the many factors and decisions that ran through their mind on a daily basis. While absenteeism was often interpreted by the school as a lack of education, or caring, on their children's future, the group sessions made evident, absenteeism could also be interpreted as a sophisticated decision made with child's best interest in mind by the parent at that particular time. Again, we observe a misaligned intersection of perceived reasons to value, and what parents actually valued, as mirrored again by Alkire' juxtaposition between agency as autonomy or agency as ability.

Having discussed the larger thematic coding elements, and the ways in which they emerged from the larger data set provided by the focus groups, we now briefly present the demographic data that was additionally collected from each focus group session, and also at the broader total levels. While the demographic data is not crucial to the analysis or the study, it does establish that the level of income and socio-economic background of the parents who participated is synonymous with other educational studies who also have chosen to exclusively focus on a Title 1 school population. One will notice that there are some

discrepancies between groups that may have some correlative power when associated with the some of the small differences in answers. Since participant demographic data was collected anonymously however, in order to be respectful of the current tense political climate, we can only observe data at the group levels. There are much more inclusive and appropriate ways one could garner this information, that did not make use of such large categories. Unfortunately, the NGO required that I utilise their generic demographic survey when collecting data, thus those labels are utilised in the table below since it is what was selected by families.

Table 2. Demographic Information by Focus Group

Informational Category	Focus Group #1 (10/26/17)	Focus Group #2 (11/30/17)	Focus Group #3 (12/14/17)
Race			
Asian/ Native Hawaiian...	33.33 % N=1		
Black/African American...		40.00%. N=2	
White/Caucasian...			16.66% N=1
Latino/Hispanic...	66.66% N=2	60.00%. N=3	83.30% N=5
Other...			
Income			
\$0-20,000	33.33% N=1	80.00% N=4	16.66% N=1
\$20,001-40,000	66.66% N=2	20.00% N=1	49.98% N=3
\$40,001-60,000			33.20% N=2
\$60,001-80,000			
\$80,001-\$100,000			
\$100,000+			
Gender			
Male		20.00% N=1	16.66% N=1
Female	100.00% N=3	80.00% N=4	83.30% N=5
Non-Binary			
Age			
8-15			
16-34	100.00% N=3	40.00% N=2	83.30% N=5
35-54		40.00% N=2	16.66% N=1
55-74		20.00% N=1	

75+			
Total Participants	3	5	6

As is made evident in the table above, the majority of participants were female, and from predominantly lower income brackets. Most parents that attended were relatively young, or in the 16-34 age group bracket. In terms of race or ethnicity, the majority of participants self identified that they were “Latino/Hispanic.” As previously stated, the specific demographic information is not highly key to the study, but merely relevant in that the population of parents that participated in the focus group process is typical to other studies that have work with parents from Title 1 schools in the United States. Establishing commonality with similar Title 1 populations, even at a superficial level, was crucial in creating the relevance of the study.

This next table correlates the coding used in each group according to the dominance in which it became apparent in the data through thematic analysis and basic frequency calculations. Codes were assigned to conversational content that was relevant and in response to the group discussion questions, with sometimes multiple codes being used to analyse one sentence or response depending on the complexity of the parent’s intended meaning. This first table allows the reader to observe how each of the larger thematic elements and their subsequent sub-codes became present at the small group level. To see the overall cumulative distributions that summate all group findings, please refer to table 4, where they juxtaposed next to the overarching summarised coding gathered for reliability testing against the case notes which we drawn from a larger population from the school.

The percentage of responses that held a specific thematic code were calculated by dividing total number of responses per session, or later in table 4 at the cumulative group level, by the number of responses associated with that code.

Sometimes a response was tagged with multiple codes, sometimes only one depending on the context. As previously stated, a single response was counted when a parent completed a thought or sentence group in response to a direct related question to the topic at hand. Across all three groups, 555 total instances or moments were able to be coded. The thematic analysis coding system was converted into quantitative frequencies to allow for a reasonable degree of objectivity in the later results section when certain trends or conclusions are described as “dominant” or “overwhelmingly present.” That being said, as with all forms of qualitative interpretation, these numerical trends are by no means concrete, but merely tools in guiding the analysis. (See Next Page)

Table 3. Thematic Coding Frequencies by Focus Group

Thematic Codes	Focus Group #1 (10/26/17)	Focus Group #2 (11/30/17)	Focus Group #3 (12/14/17)
Communication-Positive Exp.	7.17% N=15	17.32% N=35	15.97% N=23
Family (FM)	N=6	N=12	N=7
Small (SM)	N=5	N=9	N=7
Generational (GN)	N=0	N=8	N=4
Student Focus (ST)	N=4	N=6	N=5
Communication- Ambiguous Exp.	22.09% N=46	9.40% N=19	13.19% N=19
Lack Communication (LC)	N=12	N=5	N=7
Too Much Comm. (TM)	N=7	N=1	N=3
Judgement Comm. (JG)	N=27	N=13	N=9
Communication-Negative Exp.	24.40% N=51	25.74% N=52	23.61% N=34
Racism (RC)	N=16	N=9	N=3
Economic Bias (BS)	N=3	N=8	N=1
Uncaring	N=23	N=24	N=17
Aggression	N=9	N=11	N=13
Resources	10.04% N=21	15.34% N=31	22.22% N=32
Security (SEC)	N=12	N=7	N=10
Enrichment (ENC)	N=4	N=6	N=12
Better Staff (BST)	N=3	N=16	N=7
Building (BLD)	N=3	N=2	N=3
Agency Based Choices	35.88% N=75	32.17% N=65	25.00% N=36
Better Life (LFE)	N=13	N=11	N=15
Values (VLE)	N=29	N=28	N=15
School (SCL)	N=7	N=5	N=7
Self (SLF)	N=26	N=21	N=9
Total Coded Moments	100% N=209	100% N=202	100% N=144

As one can observe in the table above, the majority of the content garnered from parents was related to their own decision making processes, and methods

for interpreting educational situations, and determining the best course of action forward. This can be observed numerically by seeing the high frequency of coding that was possible in the larger thematic element of "Agency Based Choices." Although further discussion of the results is discussed in the following section, it is worth noting other moment of particular high frequency across the groups. Across all three focus group, with different parents, the majority of communications they experienced with the school were described with negative connotations, examples, or quotes from their interactions with staff. Phrases that somehow implied a lack of "care" from the staff or administration were the most popular within this particular field. Within the larger theme of ambiguous communication, lingering undertones of judgment from staff and administrators towards parents prevailed as the most common emergent experience. Many parent were unable to provide specific examples or quotes, but would describe a distinct feeling of patronisation, or "being looked down on." When integrating these experiences of positive to negative communication with staff and administration with their own strong life values and experiences, parents often circled back to the sharp contrast between their personal values, and the contrast between their's and the schools. This once again refers back to the same contrast Alkire highlighted in her original study, and is further unpacked in the results section of the thesis.

5.5 Reliability

Reliability in terms of the results of the study was garnered primarily in terms of the case notes gathered through case management with case load families, and general informal observations made while working at the school site 16 hours a week. The larger elements of the data analysis are broken down according to subject below with the reliability analysis placed in the associating row in

the table below. In total, over 300 case notes were collected during my time working within the context of the “Every Student Every Day” program. While the case notes themselves could easily have been incorporated as potentially the sole focus of a more ethnographically based study, and not all are immediately relevant to the topic at hand, they are used in this study as primarily a reliability point. While some families participated in both the program, and the focus groups, applying the same coding and procedural thematic analysis to the case notes allows for a sense of how the same content emerged when applied to a randomised selection of parents that did not feel compelled to join a focus group.

The table below juxtaposes the overall thematic trends seen previously within all three focus groups combined, and the same thematic trends when applied to the ethnographic observations garnered through the case notes. Since the case notes are more observational, and were gathered without participants necessarily having a sense of what I was observing for, they do provide a strong meter of reliability through comparison. (See Next Page)

Table 4. Thematic Coding Frequencies from Case Notes Compared to Focus Groups

Thematic Coding	Summative Case Notes Coding Results	Summative Focus Group Coding Results
Communication-Positive Exp.	17.07 % N=35	13.15% N=73
Family (FM)	N=18	N=25
Small (SM)	N=3	N=21
Generational (GN)	N=10	N=12
Student Focus (ST)	N=4	N=15
Communication- Ambiguous Exp.	35.12% N=72	15.13% N=84
Lack Communication (LC)	N=31	N=24
Too Much Comm. (TM)	N=35	N=11
Judgement Comm. (JG)	N=6	N=49
Communication-Negative Exp.	21.95% N=45	24.68% N=137
Racism (RC)	N=2	N=28
Economic Bias (BS)	N=14	N=12
Uncaring	N=29	N=64
Aggression	N=0	N=33
Resources	9.75% N=20	15.13% N=84
Security (SEC)	N=3	N=29
Enrichment (ENC)	N=10	N=22
Better Staff (BST)	N=2	N=26
Building (BLD)	N=5	N=8
Agency Based Choices	16.09% N=33	31.71% N=176
Better Life (LFE)	N=12	N=39
Values (VLE)	N=4	N=72
School (SCL)	N=17	N=19
Self (SLF)	N=0	N=56
Total Coded Moments	100% N=205	100% N=555

As the table above suggests, there does seem to be a degree of difference between the dominance of opinions from the particular focus groups, and the total population of families observed throughout the course of the “Every Student Every Day,” program. As with many qualitative participant gathered studies, there is always to a certain extent the “selection effect,” in that those who elect to participant in any kind of focus group or interview process, are often not only motivated by a monetary reward, but tend to have either a more positively or negatively extreme opinion. With that being said, as with any measurement of reliability, utilising case notes from the “Every Student Every Day” program as a whole is still rather limiting in that it is not the same form of data collection, and therefore individuals may be less forthcoming in that they weren’t as directly asked about the subject as were their focus group counterparts.

5.6 Ethical Solutions

Due to the rising political tensions in the United States as a result of the Trump administration, additional precautions were taken to ensure the safety of all participants and their families. San Diego is positioned very close to the United State-Mexico border, and as such there is a heightened sense of concern for families who may be influence by new legislation formulated by the administration regarding immigration status. Since many families who attend the elementary school are second or first generation immigrants from Mexico, it was of heightened importance that additional steps were taken to take into consideration their feelings of safety.

As previously mentioned, each family was asked to participate voluntarily, and participants were not required to respond to every question if they did not feel comfortable. In addition, no school staff, school leadership, or anyone who might recognize the parents was present in the room. By signing an

“Authorization of Information Release,” families promised that they would allow the sharing of the information, as long as all identifying information was redacted from the transcripts (See Appendix). In addition, the release provided a clause that would allow families to email or call me if they ever felt uncomfortable, and no longer wished the information to be used. Although no families felt compelled to utilize this option, it was important to offer in the case that a family ever changed their mind following a session.

It was made clear to all families during the course of the groups that they were able to come and go at any time they felt necessary. The majority of families however chose to stay for 75% or more of each session. It is also worth noting that some families did choose to disclose their former or current immigration status during the sessions.

6 RESULTS

The results section of the study explores how the data collected through the focus groups contributes to and adds potentially new perspectives to the original three research objectives as laid out in the in the research task section. While much data was gathered that makes evident the high degree of initiative and choice that parents and families already have in the educational space, far more than given credence by traditional anti-deficit perspectives, the data gathered was somewhat limited in potentially adding new perspectives to attendance scholarship in the U.S.. Since this was not the original function, nor intention of the study, but merely a byproduct of how and when the data was gathered, it is understandable that this is the outcome that came into passing. That being said, many of what the parent discussed around the topic of attendance, works to further confirm the larger theory that there is indeed conflicting definitions of what agency looks like between school staff/administration and the parents themselves. While the analysis below seeks to be summative and overarching in nature, several direct quotes from parents are utilised throughout this final action to elevate their voices, and their own self-definitions of what they view as valued, hence their autonomous vision of agency, as Alkire would phrase it.

6.1 Parental Agency Measured as Autonomy and Ability

Although the context of the study provides additional clarity to the fields of attendance studies and anti-deficit studies, its primary goal of making clear the need for greater nuance in the handling of parental agency, is made salient in this first section. As was made evident by Sabina Alkire, in accordance with the human capabilities framework, agency can be conceptualised in a manner two fold. The agency of parents can be viewed as something that is measured *autonomously* or as something that is measured as a form of *ability* (Alkire, 2008). To review, according to Alkire, when we utilise agency as something akin to *ability*, we are measuring it in accordance with what people have reason to value. Conversely,

according to Alkire, when we utilise agency as something to *autonomy*, we are now measuring it against what the individual they themselves value. During the earlier discussion of present educational forays in the field of parental engagement in the U.S., unwittingly or not, the majority of the studies appeared to be operating with an understanding of agency that was confined to the realm of *ability* only. This is made evident by the multitude of previously discussed *anti-deficit* studies that are primarily focused on showing that all parents have the same abilities, but have not quite taken the time yet to self-examine the measuring stick they are using to determine the nature of these “abilities” in the first place. As previously discussed, we are then left with calls for parent “empowerment” that haven’t self-examined their own definition of parent empowerment. The borrowing of this more nuanced approach to agency and empowerment from development studies, and the human capabilities approach, not only allowed for a more careful handling of the terms in a parental engagement study, but phenomenological space for new realities to be considered.

In the course of the collection of data, the groups revealed many things that some scholars would deem typical of a low-income school population, while other items of knowledge that emerged appeared to have very little precedent in the existing literature. This of course could be merely a function of the specific location and circumstances, however many of the nuanced decision making processes parents appeared to engage in on a daily basis made clear factors that school administrators or staff were clearly either not observing or even aware of. This lack of awareness whether perceived by parents, or made clear through parent staff interactions, has several correlations with the intersection between agency as autonomy and agency as ability as defined by Alkire.

As previously discussed, in terms of how each parent worked through decisions for their children, the most common of considerations coded for was how each interaction or decision lined up with their own personal family values, and wishes for their child. The second most common consideration, was trying to be conscious of how a certain development or choice would teach children acceptance of themselves. Several examples abound in the transcript of moments

where parents prioritised the self-acceptance and self-worth over of the child over traditional teacher-student compliance. In this regard, the intersection between school values and parent values was very apparent in different contexts throughout the study. This is very evident in the example given below:

"It's the same thing with teachers but it's kinda harder when a teacher's being mean to a student because can they get away from a teacher? No. They have to sit there, and they have to listen it's like, I don't like forcing my kids to do something that they don't wanna do, if it's something about that they don't wanna hang out with a certain person, I'm not gonna stand here and say, "Oh you have to hang out with that person". And I shouldn't have to make my son sit there at school with a teacher that's yelling at him and is making him feel uncomfortable where he doesn't wanna sit there..." (Focus Group #3).

As can be seen in the text example above, from an agency as ability perspective, teacher and administrators may perceive a lack of enforcement from the parent around teacher-student compliance to be a symptom of lack of caring. From an agency as autonomy perspective however, one can see how the parent not forcing the child to listen to yelling educator in question is actually a form of agency. Rather than ask the child to suffer through what felt like a "bully" relationship with the teacher, the parent proactively is allowing them to ignore the adult as a form of emotional self-preservation. Other examples abound throughout the transcripts of clear conflicts of what is valued for the child between the school staff and the parent in question. A common example of this and reoccurring theme throughout the data was the topic of security as it relates to attendance.

The school often believed that the poor attendance shown by many students at the school was a product of either parent's lack of education, or a lack of care for their child's future. Traditional anti-deficit scholars would attempt to combat such thinking, by showing the many efforts that parents were making to send their children to school, and juxtaposing them to the many harsh economic and socioeconomic barriers that prevented attendance (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013). While this is needed, and certainly is necessary to help fight against

implicit or assumptive battles, it doesn't give space to explore the fact that some parents may intentionally not send their child to school because in their decision making process on that day and time they have determined school is not the best option for their child. While this may seem counterintuitive, or not possible, the current challenges and conditions the American public school system finds itself in certainly does leave open the possibility that parents may self-elect to not send a child to school in that they costs outweigh the benefits. No where else did this become more evident or clear, than when parents began discussing security and structural resources at the school. The school was an open campus which mean that all students or outside adults, could technically leave or enter the campus as they wished. Parents felt very uncomfortable with this, and frequently juxtaposed it next to the push for better attendance. A poignant example of this can be found in the quote below:

"Cause safety and then [crosstalk 00:35:49] like she said, her daughter's gonna run out or her child's gonna run out like I would be worried too. And even my kids are not special needs but I worry about them. What if I'm not here on time and he's looking for me or he just ... they're little, I mean he's five years old, what if he just walks off- Wanders off and thinks mommy's over there-I told the Principal about that before too and there was, she said they were trying to do something about it but that's I think that's a concern for a lot of parents. Having gates around. And there's also adults that I've seen, that I've come in here like being loud or yelling and I'm like, "What a minute, who's that?", basically they just walk in here..." (Focus Group #3)

The fears of parents for the safety for their children were not unfounded. Throughout the focus groups parents were able to offer frequent and specific examples of moments where children had either escaped from the school, or were given to the wrong adult or family at pick up. From my own case notes and observations, I was also able to corroborate these fears having witnessed children even as young as 4 years old often wandering around the school without adult supervision for extended periods of time with full access to the nearby road and residential houses.

In the space of three short one hour focus groups, it would of course be impossible to definitively say what parents would autonomously value as important for their children's development and success. That being said, the larger trends of wanting self-actualisation for their children, sufficient school resources, and the need for a kind understanding staff consistently emerged. The school however did not see these things as within the jurisdiction of parents to desire, and consistently brought it back to academic achievement, in terms of defining what parents should concern themselves with. The misalignment of what was seen as proper parent agency results in many tense altercations between staff and parents that also intersected larger issues of racism and socioeconomic biases staff unconsciously or consciously seemed to hold against parents. One of the most stark examples of not only this misalignment, but the long term damage strained relationships can have with early educators can be seen in this final example offered below:

"I think that my daughter's teacher I noticed is being a little racist, that's my feeling. And I noticed that lately especially with my daughter. [crosstalk 00:07:13] [foreign language 00:07:13] [foreign language 00:07:15] Because she has preference with children. My daughter arrives, she's first in line, and she moves the other, first in line to the back. She says the kid she always puts in front of the line. I've see that happen. So she has preference for three kids specially. My daughter is noticing that, so I think it's racism. Other parents are noticing that too." (Focus Group #1)

When the parent values a loving committed educator, but does not receive this for their children, and instead is told to focus only on attendance and homework, one can see how this contrast of parental agency can hold long term ramifications. The parent in the previous quote is clearly actively involved her child's education. She notices how her daughter is treated, and attempts to advocate. This kind of advocacy however is not seen as agency or empowerment by the school, but a distraction. The parent, in this case, was repeatedly told to focus on attendance. Once again, we observe the central question of agency as Sammon Alkire made evident: are we discussing agency as autonomy or ability? The

question clearly holds larger ramifications in the early educational spheres in the U.S. scholarly landscape than is currently being given consideration.

6.2 Contributions to Anti-Deficit Scholarship in the U.S.

Although the central question was primarily learning more regarding the distinction between agency within the parental involvement sphere, due to the phenomenological function of the research methods, indirect contributions toward anti-deficit scholarship are also made evident. As has been previously established in other anti-deficit scholarship strands, parents from low-income households experience additional barriers when attempting to participate in their son or daughter's education. One common theme that arose that illustrates the additional burdens faced by families from low-income household was the limited support the school offered to working families who could not pick up their child with school hours. San Diego Unified School District made every Wednesday a half day for students, and did not have school start until 9:00 AM in the morning officially. The district provided some limited before and after school programming, however the wait lists were long, and not accessible for all families. One parent made this particularly clear when they described the difficulty of simply getting a child to school, when the district further cut their before and after school programming to less hours.

"Like, I volunteered for prime time and then I found out they were starting at seven o'clock instead of six o'clock, we'll, I know most jobs start at seven o'clock and traffic is backed up from here to way back down in east lake someplace. How are you going to do that? How are you going to manage that? We're already waking up early. I live in spring valley, so just from spring valley to here in the morning is almost forty minutes with traffic. So, we, like, get families resources. Hey, I'm not working in the morning, I can sit here for ten, fifteen, twenty minutes with kids who don't have parents who can stay here and wait ten, fifteen, twenty minutes. Another parent, I'm safe, get your, whatever they do for volunteer up in that office, volunteer at your school. You got to be involved." (Focus Group #2)

While this adds to much of the ant-deficit scholarship canon which seeks to make salient the multiple additional challenges families face in school systems that were and still are structured to support a middle class economic experience, it also shows additional forms of agency. The parent in question in the example, is not simply perplexed by the change of hours, but is already seeking self-made solutions. Many of the parents in the focus groups expressed a desire to help, or assist with school processes but felt rebuffed by the traditional forms of parent involvement offered by the school. (I.e. Volunteering at school events, bringing donations of supplies to school etc.) By not allowing, families to self-select the methods of their involvement, or be active co-creators in their child's educational world, one could theorise this worked at the detriment of the school's engagement with all parents. In this regard, this study's contribution to the anti-deficit lens of family engagement, is that there is a need to not just simply assume families are doing their best, but extend it further. Assume families would like to be involved, and ask them their opinions on what that involvement might look like. In the case of this particular school, there was still much to be done in this realm of family engagement.

6.3 Contributions to Attendance Scholarship in the U.S.

The final contribution of the study is to the larger field of attendance related scholarship in the United States. Although this was not the express purpose of the study, by proximity of the way in which the data was collected, certain new nuances in the way of attendance related scholarship were unearthed. While the attendance scholarship in the United States in many way mirrors that of the anti-deficit and positivist strands, there are certain facets of attendance specific findings that emerged.

The largest and perhaps more surprising finding in relation to attendance that emerged across all three focus group, was the common theme of health care related absenteeism. Many families express concerned related to the lack of hygiene

the school classrooms exhibited, and many parents held the strong belief that not sending the child to school during many of the winter days would improve their child's chance of avoiding illness. With health care costs continuing to rise in the United States, more and more families are becoming increasingly wary of any additional health care related costs. This was made salient by one particular quote from a parent expressing their decision making process in relation to school hygiene and attendance.

"And my daughter, uh, did miss a lot of school, but then she caught asthma. [inaudible 00:49:32] told her that the carpets dirty, they never wash it, it's older than this one. There's another class room that smells, carpets dirty, I don't think they're keeping the rooms clean. We've mentioned that to the principal in meetings, and I told her I wanted to to try to see what they can do. See if they can shampoo the carpet. They never did it. I don't think they take care of the rooms. And if the carpet gets wet, then obviously it's going to smell and that's when it [crosstalk 00:50:14] because of the smell and all that.

So, this classroom is smelling like [inaudible 00:50:24] class. Winters coming, so she's going to start missing, because she's starts getting sick, and I can't do anything if she's sick. So the school principal is not helping with the situation in the class room so, the doctor said he would give me a letter..." (Focus Group #1)

As made evident by the quote above, there is a clear disconnect between the focus of the parent, and the focus of school administration. While budget concerns are certainly a reality for all those involved in managing a school, the simple factor of hygiene had not been considered by staff or administration when thinking of ways to increase school attendance. Future attendance studies may benefit from more phenomenologically based studies that don't assume.

7 DISCUSSION

Having addressed the specific research objectives and questions in the previous chapter, I end by discussing specifically what the participants said through the process, and possible implication for future studies. This study has worked to make clear the need for more phenomenologically based studies in the field of parental engagement, and when examining parental agency. Much was learned in regards to what influences parent decision making processes, and how these perceptions may differ from what schools would traditionally perceive as a parent role. This intersection and at time seeming conflict between values often mirrored the same duelling relationship described by Sabina Alkire. Although the school, held signage and messaging that advertised “parent-teacher collaboration,” or “parents as partners,” the reality of what parents experienced was far different. This separation makes evident not only a misalignment between what the school and parents see as “agency,” but additionally some of the larger issue of the previously mentioned *neo-deficit* mindset that continues to emerge in modern American educational arenas. The verbiage and messaging may appear to emphasise collaborative, open minded ways of working with parents, however the reality is far different and much more top-down. Through what I observed in the focus groups, and in my case notes working at the school, parents felt this disconnect from school staff and administration.

Perhaps one of the most clear examples of this was the monthly “Coffee with the Principal,” that was hosted by school administration for parents. The name sounded intimate, something akin to a small gathering where parents could casually vocalise their concerns. The reality was far different. The principal had the parents sit in rows far from her, and used the meeting as a time to give presentations on certain topics she felt the parents were somehow “lacking in knowledge.” Parents were not given an opportunity to provide feedback, or to vocalise any concerns.

The larger points one can draw from this example and others are three fold for future parental engagement studies. While the contributions of this

small study are limited, the amount of misalignment seen in regards to what the school perceives parents should value, and parents actually value, different more ontologically curious studies would be necessary to further explore the depths of this separation. More traditional positivist scholars like that of Epstein, have always adopted the perspective of the school when looking at the various way parents should be involved, assuming that the school will inherently work towards the best outcomes of the children. What was made evident through the study, is that the perceptions of what children and need and how parents should be involved from the school perspective, are not always in the full spectrum of children's interest, especially when it comes to non-academic concerns like emotional well-being, or even simple school hygiene. Studies that seek to examine parental engagement or agency, must also consider what they are measuring that agency with, and if it is drawn from the parents themselves or not. The study thus makes the following three small recommendations for future parental engagement studies.

➔ Acknowledge Entrenched Ontological Realities in the School System:

While much of the anti-deficit scholarship has sought to debunk biases against low-income parents, they don't often seek to examine the entire system of interactions between parents and schools themselves. In other words, many are still confined to certain modalities of conceptualising parent actions, which limits the argumentative power of their research. Rather than showing how different styles of parenting can lead to the same academic outcomes, it should also be of interest to show how different parenting goals, can lead to perhaps new but still valued academic outcomes.

➔ Stay Curious about any "Null Actions" from Parents:

As was also made evident in Schnee and Boise's 2013 study, "Parents Don't Do Nothing," this study also echoes the call for more open minded interpretation of absenteeism, or what schools may perceive as a lack of participation. The

focus groups captured such a high proportion of active decision making processes on the part of the parents, that it is not so much that parents are not participating, but instead they are participating and seeking involvement in ways the school does not count as “traditional participation.” As several examples showed, even the act of not sending a child to school is often times a carefully considered choice in a myriad of external stressors and factors that the school themselves have often not sought to make themselves more aware of.

➔ Unconscious and Conscious Biases Impact Student Success:

While not explicitly vocalised by all parents, in the majority of ambiguous or negative interactions that parents described or experienced the most common codes that emerged in the analysis were that of “Uncaring,” or “Judgement.” The interactions or words that school staff may have dismissed as inconsequential stayed with parents for far longer. Moments of explicit racism or judgment did emerge through the study, indicating that beyond simply a misalignment of understanding agency, there existed very real degrees of separation that were both fostered and maintained by the staff. The indescribable feeling of disrespect or not truly being heard continued to emerge again and again, indicating that for all of the verbiage about parents as partners, and inclusivity that has emerged in recent years, the on the ground day to day realities are far different. More active work around what these biases are, and how to address them with staff is needed both at the scholarly and professional levels in the educational field.

While small in scope, this study has sought to emphasise the lingering need for a more careful nuanced handling of parent engagement in the elementary educational sphere. Although much progress has been made in term of combatting deficit thinking with parents, a more nuanced handling, and a debunking of on the ground ontological realities, would go far in terms of seeking genuine collaborative relationships between parents and teachers that are based

on mutual respect. Further research and work is needed to make the lovely sounding verbiage, “parents as partners,” a reality.

REFERENCES

Arbona, C., Olvera, N., Rodriguez, N., Hagan, J., Linares, A., & Wiesner, M. (2010). Acculturative stress among documented and undocumented latino immigrants in the united states. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 32(3), 362-384. doi:10.1177/0739986310373210

Auerbach, S. (2002). "Why do they give the good classes to some and not to others?" latino parent narratives of struggle in a college access program. *Teachers College Record*, 104(7), 1369-1392. doi:10.1111/1467-9620.00207

----- (2007). From moral supporters to struggling advocates: Reconceptualizing parent roles in education through the experience of working-class families of color. *Urban Education*, 42, 250-283. doi:10.1177/0042085907300433

Baquedano-López, P., Alexander, R. A., & Hernandez, S. J. (2013). Equity issues in parental and community involvement in schools: What teacher educators need to know. *Review of Research in Education*, 37(1), 149-182. doi:10.3102/0091732X12459718

Bonvin, J., Dif-Pradalier, M., & Moachon, E. (2013). A capability approach to restructuring processes: Lessons from a swiss and a french case study. *International Journal of Manpower*, 34(4), 382-396. doi:10.1108/IJM-05-2013-0096

Burkam, D. T., Lee, V. E., & Dwyer, J. (2009). *School mobility in the early elementary grades: Frequency and impact from nationally representative data*. Paper commissioned by the Committee on Impact of Mobility and Change on the Lives of Young Children, Schools, and Neighborhoods. Retrieved from

Calzada, E. J., Huang, K., Hernandez, M., Soriano, E., Acra, C. F., Dawson-McClure, S., . . . Brotman, L. (2015). Family and teacher characteristics as predictors of parent involvement in education during early childhood among afro-caribbean and latino immigrant families. *Urban Education*, 50(7), 870-896. doi:10.1177/0042085914534862

- Chang, H. N., & Romero, M. (2008). *Present, engaged, and accounted for: The critical importance of addressing chronic absence in the early grades*. New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty
- Clay, M.M., (2005). *Literacy lessons designed for individuals*. Durham, NC: Heinemann Inc.
- Crawford, G. (2003). Partnership or power? Deconstructing the 'partnership for governance' reform in Indonesia. *Third World Quarterly*, 24(1), 139-159. doi:10.1080/713701365.
- Currie, J. (2005). Health disparities and gaps in school readiness. *Future of Children*, 15, 117-138. doi:10.1353/foc.2005.0002
- Daisy D Alfaro, Karen O'Reilly-Díaz, & Gerardo R López. (2014). Operationalizing consejos in the P-20 educational pipeline: Interrogating the nuances of latino parent involvement. *Multicultural Education*, 21(3/4), 11. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1648093545>
- Delgado-Gaitain, C. (1994). Consejos: the power of cultural narratives. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 25(3), 298-316. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3195848.pdf>.
- Duncan, G., Ziol-Guest, K., & Kalil, A. (2010). Early childhood poverty and adult attainment, behavior and health. *Child Development*, 81, 306 -325. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2009.01396.x
- Durand, T. (2011). Latina mothers' cultural beliefs about their children, parental roles, and education: Implications for effective and empowering home-school partnerships. *The Urban Review*, 43(2), 255-278. doi:10.1007/s11256-010-0167-5
- Emily Schnee, & Enakshi Bose. (2010). Parents don't do nothing: Reconceptualizing parental null actions as agency. *School Community Journal*, 20(2), 91. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/818940225>
- Escobar, A. (1995). *Encountering development* (Paperback reissue ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.
- Fuentes, E.H. (2005). *Just parents: the politics and practices of community organizing for school change* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Dissertations and Theses @ University of California (AAT 3187035)
- Family Housing Fund. (1998). *A report from the Kids Mobility Project*. Minneapolis, MN: Author
- Gandara, P. (2010). The latino education crisis. *Educational Leadership*, 67(5), 24-30. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb10/vol67/num05/abstract.aspx>

- Gasper, D. (2010). Understanding the diversity of conceptions of well-being and quality of life. *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 39(3), 351-360.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.socec.2009.11.006>
- Gottfried, M. A. (2009). Excused versus unexcused: How student absences in elementary school affect academic achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 31, 392- 415.
- (2011). The detrimental effects of missing school: Evidence from urban siblings. *American Journal of Education*, 117, 147- 182. doi:10.1086/657886
- Guerra, P. L., & Nelson, S. W. (2013). Latino parent involvement: Seeing what has always been there. *Journal of School Leadership*, 23(3), 424. Retrieved from <https://rowman.com/page/ISL>
- Guzman-Lopez, A. (2017, Jan 6). New research shows broad academic benefits for students taking ethnic studies classes. 89.3 KPCC. Retrieved from <http://www.scpr.org/news/2017/01/06/67850/new-research-shows-broad-academic-benefits-for-stu/>
- Hands, C. M., & Hubbard, L. (2011). *Including families and communities in urban education*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc. Retrieved from <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=fa29fbf7-e44b-4511-886c-c4873cf2cbd9%40ses-sionmgr4007&vid=0&hid=4206&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=469992&db=nlebk>
- Han, W.-J. (2004). Nonstandard work schedules and child care decisions: Evidence from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 19, 231-256. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2004.04.003
- Heather A. Bower, & Dana Griffin. (2011). Can the Epstein model of parental involvement work in a high-minority, high-poverty elementary school? A case study. *Professional School Counseling*, 15(2), 77-87. doi:10.5330/PSC.n.2011-15.77
- Hepburn A., & Potter J. (2007). Discourse Analytic Practice. In C. Seale (Ed.), *Qualitative Research Practice*, (Chapter 11). Retrieved from <https://jyu.finna.fi/PrimoRecord/pci.sagesrm%20ob10.4135%2F9781848608191>
- Hill, N. E., & Torres, K. (2010). Negotiating the American dream: The paradox of aspirations and achievement among Latino students and engagement between their families and schools. *Journal of Social Issues*, 66(1), 95-112. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.2009.01635.x
- Jais, P. M., & Ordonez-Jasis, R. (2012). Latino parent involvement: Examining commitment and empowerment in schools. *Urban Education*, 47(1), 65-89. doi:10.1177/0042085911416013
- Joan M. T. Walker, Christa L. Ice, Kathleen V. Hoover-Dempsey, & Howard M. Sandler. (2011). Latino parents' motivations for involvement in their children's

- schooling: An exploratory study. *The Elementary School Journal*, 111(3), 409-429. doi:10.1086/657653
- Koran, M. (2017, Jan 5). California said yes to bilingual education now what? *The Voice of San Diego*. Retrieved from <http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/topics/education/california-said-yes-bilingual-education-now/>
- Kozol, J. (2005). *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*. New York: Random House. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/58731882>.
- Larotta, C., & Yamamura, E. K. (2011). A community cultural wealth approach to latina/latino parent involvement: The promise of family literacy; *Adult Basic Education and Literacy Journal*, 5(2), 74-83. Retrieved from <https://jyu.finna.fi/PrimoRecord/pci.ericEJ936695>
- LeFevre, A. L., & Shaw, T. V. (2012). Latino parent involvement and school success. *Education and Urban Society*, 44(6), 707-723. doi:10.1177/0013124511406719
- Libby, S. (2017, Jan 25). Is san diego a sanctuary city and what does that even mean? *The Voice of San Diego*. Retrieved from <http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/topics/news/san-diego-sanctuary-city-even-mean/>
- McClain, M. (2010). Parental agency in educational decision making: A mexican american example. *Teachers College Record*, 112(12), 3074. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/857813282>
- Morrissey, T., Hutchison, L. and Winsler, A. (2014). Family income, school attendance, and academic achievement in elementary school. *Developmental Psychology*, 50(3), pp.741-753.
- Nazaryan, A. (2017, Jan 23). California vs. trump: The fight begins for health care, immigration, and the future of america. *Newsweek*. Retrieved from <http://europe.newsweek.com/california-can-defeat-trump-heres-how-542758?rm=eu>
- Nixon, R., & Shear, M. D. (2017, Feb 21). New Trump deportation rules allow far more expulsions. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/21/us/politics/dhs-immigration-trump.html>
- Olivos, E. M., & Mendoza, M. (2010). Immigration and educational inequality: Examining latino immigrant parents' engagement in U.S. public schools. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 8(3), 339-357. doi:10.1080/15562948.2010.501301
- Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. (2009). (2009). *Agency and empowerment: A review of concepts, indicators, and empirical evidence*. Oxford University: Emma Samman, E., & Maria Emma Santos
- Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. (2008). *Concepts and measures of agency*. Oxford University: Sabina Alkire.

- Patch Staff. (2017). San diego school district faces 124 million budget shortfall. *La Jolla Patch*. Retrieved from <http://patch.com/california/lajolla/san-diego-school-district-faces-124-million-budget-shortfall>
- Quioco, A. M. L., & Daoud, A. M. (2006). Dispelling myths about latino parent participation in schools. *The Educational Forum*, 70(3), 255-267. doi:10.1080/00131720608984901
- Robeyns, I. (2005). The capability approach: A theoretical survey. *Journal of Human Development*, 6(1), 38-51. Retrieved from <http://www.narcis.nl/publication/RecordID/oai:uva.nl:262054>
- Robeyns, I. (2006). Three models of education: Rights, capabilities, and human capital; *Theory and Research in Education*, 4(69), 69-84. doi:10.1177/1477878506060683
- Rodriguez, P.M. (2012). Labor and community organization in alliance?: alternative development vision in the Caribbean regions of Columbia, *Globalizations*, 9(6), 835-850. doi: 10.1080/14747731.2012.739344
- Rostow, W.W., (1971). *Politics and the Stages of Growth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/CBO9780511562778.
- Ryan, C. S., Casas, J. F., Kelly-Vance, L., Ryalls, B. O., & Nero, C. (2010). Parent involvement and views of school success: The role of parents' latino and white american cultural orientations. *Psychology in the Schools*, , n/a. doi:10.1002/pits.20477
- Sen, A. (2009). *Development as freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Spring, J. H. (2012). *Deculturalization and the struggle for equality : A brief history of the education of dominated cultures in the united states*. New York, NY: Routledge. Retrieved from <http://www.amazon.com>
- Steward, R. J., Steward, A. D., Blair, J., Jo, H., & Hill, M. F. (2008). School attendance revisited: A study of urban African American students' grade point averages and coping strategies. *Urban Education*, 43, 519 -536. doi:10.1177/0042085907311807
- Vincent, C. (2001). Social class and parental agency. *Journal of Education Policy*, 16(4), 347-364. doi:10.1080/0268093011-54344
- Walker, M., & Unterhalter, E. (2007). *Amartya sen's capability approach and social justice in education* (1. publ. ed.). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. Retrieved from <http://link.springer.com/bo ok/10.1057%2F9780230604810>

APPENDICES

**All forms included in Appendices were also translated into Spanish for families.*

Appendix 1: Focus Group Protocol



Charlotta Holt

University of Jyväskylä

Focus Group Prompting Template for Discussion Guidance

Designed as a 45-60 Minute Session

Objective: To better understand the strengths, challenges, and decisions making processes of families with children attending Title 1 elementary schools in San Diego Unified School District.

Focus Group Rules:

1. Members may take a break if they feel they need one by signaling to Charlotta that they are okay and stepping out of the room. (If no signal is given, someone will follow to check-on participant).
2. Cell phones and other electronic devices will be turned off, or if not possible, minimized.
3. Members will make every effort to allow other members to finish speaking before taking their turn to contribute to the discussion. They may raise a hand to indicate they would like to reserve the next opportunity to speak while they wait if they find it helpful. Members can also use a silent “Me too,” sign or a silent “I disagree” sign to indicate their desire to expand or refute what someone else had said once that person has finished speaking.
4. Members will not share any personal information provided by other group member with anyone outside of the room.
5. Members must sign a “Release of Information” to [REDACTED], and the University of Jyvaskyla to be eligible to receive a gift card. Demographic survey is optional.

Focus Group Protocol:

1. All focus group participants introduce themselves if they wish. (Not required).
2. Charlotta reviews the general purpose of the group and rules.
3. Charlotta gives participants notes/comments clipboards and pens. Ice breaker is given to group.
4. Charlotta gives initial prompt of a first thematic element.
5. All participants are given opportunity to answer initial prompt around in a circle without comment/question from other group members.
6. Thematic element is then opened up for general discussion.
7. Charlotta gives additional prompts as needed, or until topic has been exhausted. (10 minutes is maximum that can be devoted to each element in order to cover all topics).
8. Charlotta reminds participants all other things that they were not able to state can be captured on their clipboard.
9. Process repeats until all thematic elements have been addressed.
10. Once the focus group has concluded \$10 gift cards/demographic surveys will be distributed.

Thematic Element	Potential Additional Prompts	Relation to Data Objectives
<i>Hope and Dreams for My Child's School Experience</i>	→What are the things you want most for your student?	→Auerbach (2007) sought to emphasize a strengths based approach in all of her inductive interactions with families and parents. Other scholars like that of Larotta &
<u>Initial Prompt:</u> What are your hopes and your	→What is most important to you when you envision your student as an adult someday?	

<p>dreams for your student/students?</p> <p>AGENCY DEFINED: AUTONOMY</p>	<p>→ Are you confident these things will occur for your student? Why or why not?</p> <p>→ Why are these things important for your student and/or yourself?</p> <p>→ Do you see yourself taking actions towards these goals? Why or why not?</p>	<p>Yamamura (2011) emphasized the need for not only strengths based thinking in working with families, but for families to feel ownership and investment in any partnerships. By beginnings with a question that asks the parents for their goals and dreams for their children, we enter into comfortable ground, while also making space parents to vocalize what they value, not necessarily what we think they would have reason to value. This will allow space and time to ascertain what is agency for them, and what intersects with commonly understood agency (Alkire, 2008).</p>
<p><i>Relationship with My Student's School</i></p> <p>Initial Prompt: What comes to mind when you think of your child's school?</p> <p>AGENCY MEASURED: SCHOOL</p>	<p>→ Who are your most important relationships at the school? For example, a teacher, an office staff member, another student, etc.</p> <p>→ What are things you enjoy about your student's school?</p> <p>→ What are things you wish you could change about your student's school?</p> <p>→ What do you think of this sentence? "I am an equal partner with my student's school."</p> <p>→ What emotions do you feel when you are contacted by your child's school?</p> <p>→ Do you feel welcome to visit/volunteer at your child's school?</p>	<p>→ The second prompt attempts to dive into parent perceptions of school administration and staff. If we take the theoretical framework as provided by Santiago et al. (2016), which argued the lower the income a parent possesses the less trust they will have towards their school, as a theory of parent decision making, we can observe its credibility. The question additionally begins to ask parents to now compare how their original vision, or the agency they defined autonomously, compares to the reality they experience with the school. McDowall & Schaughency (2017) predict there will be disconnect between their vision and reality at the school. The parent may vocalize other versions of agency as ability that they may be aware of.</p>
<p><i>Strengths My Family Has</i></p> <p>Initial Prompt: What makes your family feel</p>	<p>→ What are some things that have gone really well this year for your family?</p>	<p>→ Schnee and Bose (2013) discovered a large undercurrent of parental decision making processes that occur that are not always intuitively</p>

<p>strong? (or) What are you proud of in your family?</p> <p>AGENCY MEASURED: DECISION MAKING</p>	<p>→What are some things from your home that you feel help your student?</p> <p>→What are some things that you feel your student has learned from you for the better?</p> <p>→What are some things you know you do really well as a parent/guardian?</p>	<p>seen through observation. By discussing successes, we can become privy to what strategies for success the family is already employing. Within the human capabilities framework we are observing what capabilities are already there, or if the families feel strained in those capabilities (Sen 1999). We continue again the best practice methodology recommended by Auerbach (2007) of beginning with strengths with the order of questioning. Again we are observing places where autonomy and ability may not always align with these processes the parent engages in (Schnee & Bose, 2013; Alkire, 2008).</p>
<p><i>Challenges My Family Faces</i></p> <p>Initial Prompt: Are there some challenges that you have faced as a family? If so, please explain, if not please explain how you prevent or avoid difficulties.</p> <p>AGENCY MEASURED: DECISION MAKING</p>	<p>→Are there some things that have been hard for you this year for your family? If so, please explain, if not, what strategies do you use to prevent difficult moments?</p> <p>→Are there some things at home that you sometimes worry about for your student? If so, please explain, if not please explain how you avoid challenges with your student.</p> <p>→Are there some things you wish you could change or improve with your student? If so, please explain, if not please explain any preventative strategies you use?</p> <p>→Are there some things you would like to improve upon as a parent/guardian? If none, please explain how you came to his position of strength.</p>	<p>→As propagated heavily by Hubbard and Hands (2011), we continue further exploration into the decision making process without assuming that there are challenges. As Hubbard and Hands (2011) argued there are often methodological issues with studies that encounter low-income parents with questions that lean towards assumptions of deficit whether they intend to or not. The question also allows the families to potentially vocalize their priorities with minimal guidance from the researcher. Baequeando-Lopez et al. (2013) commented on the need for a more nuance understanding of how parents solve problems, and those align with school perceptions. In this regard we return to the tension established by Alkire between autonomy instead of ability, and can observe if intersection occurs.</p>
<p><i>Hopes and Dreams for My Student's School</i></p>	<p>→What are the things you want most for your students at school?</p>	<p>→If this hadn't been developed within the previous prompts in terms of the parent's preferences for how the</p>

<p>Initial Prompt: What are your hopes and dreams for [REDACTED] Elementary?</p> <p>AGENCY DEFINED: AUTONOMY (OPTIONAL)</p>	<p>→How would you have the school give you information/news if you could pick any method?</p> <p>→What kind of information would you want from your child’s school, and how frequently, if anything was possible?</p> <p>→What resources would like available for your child and yourself if you could have anything? ie. Transportation, communication, etc.</p> <p>→What are your hopes and dreams for the relationship between your child and their teachers?</p> <p>→ What are your hopes and dreams for the relationship between your child and the school administration? ie. Principal, office staff etc.</p>	<p>school treats them and interacts with them, then this additional prompt allows the space for a more expanded definition of agency to be defined by the parent. As Guerra & Nelson (2013) argued, along with many other scholars, there is significant scholarly evidence to support a lack of genuine relationships present between school staff and parents, despite the shift in rhetoric towards “parent as partners.” By focusing on parents stating their idea what school should be for them, they are able to articulate spaces for improvement without being led by the facilitator to that conclusion (Auerbach, 2007). This question also again aligns with Alkire’s theoretical framework in that it allows for more unexpected intersections between autonomy vs. ability in terms of how parents want a school to function instead of staff.</p>
<p><i>Participant Raised Thoughts</i></p> <p>Initial Prompt: Is there anything that we have not talking about today that you would like to discuss?</p> <p>AGENCY DEFINED: AUTONOMY OR ABILITY (OPTIONAL)</p>	<p>→Is there anything that we discussed today that you would like to revisit?</p> <p>→What feedback do you have about this session today?</p> <p>→Were their questions that were not asked today that you wish were asked?</p>	<p>→Even in staying within an inductive mindset, and utilizing best practice ideology, there is still space for a researcher, especially one with a different background than the parent group, to overlook certain factors or realities that could be salient to the group. In order to maintain fidelity with the groups it is necessary to allow for free discussion so that unexpected details are given opportunity to arise. (Baqueando-Lopez et al., 2013; Alkire, 2008).</p>

Focus Group Integration with

“Community Conversations”

Protocol

Community Conversations: Roles

1. Staff Coordinator: Charlotta Holt

- a. Organizer of conversation location, space, materials, and any additional on-site coordination.
- b. Welcomes the group, sees them to their seating area, introduces interpreter, and goes over general group rules.
- c. Conducts initial ice breaker, and initial talking prompt. Times the group for each prompt, and switches to the next thematic element with a new prompt after every ten minutes. Will use discretion with timing so that participants' voices and opinions are given the opportunity to be fully vocalized. If conversation naturally progressed towards other targeted elements, a formal transition will not be utilized.
- d. Concludes the group, and passes out the demographic survey at the end.
- e. Passes out gift cards and thanks them for their participation.
- f. Manages recording device by hitting play and pause when appropriate.
- g. Charlotta will not participate in the conversation, other than facilitate.
- h. Collects notes and themes and will post raw versions within 24 hours on the Community Impact Drive. Clean versions of both will be available within 5 business days for CI reflections and analysis.

2. Note Taker: TBD

- a. Take verbatim notes using the note-taking template provided by the [REDACTED] community conversations protocol.
- b. Notes will be logged on a laptop computer. Raw notes will be submitted with minimal spelling corrections and grammar corrections to the U: drive.
- c. Note taker will sit outside the circle so participants are not able to see or notice the notes being taken.
- d. It is not necessary to attribute names to participant's responses, but identifying information can be provided so that demographic surveys can be linked to the participants.

3. Theme Taker: TBD

- a. Take thematic notes throughout the conversation using the template and tools provided by the community conversations protocol.
- b. Integrate thematic notes with other community conversations to occur on November 30th, and December 14th, and engage in a larger thematic analysis.

4. Interpreter (Spanish)

- a. The interpreter is selected from San Diego Unified School District, and will provide Spanish translation to those who are in need of it.

- b. Will provide headsets to those who need Spanish translation so that the translation is simultaneous. Will vocalize their English responses for the benefit of the note taker and tape recorder.
- 5. Community Partner/Site Host: [REDACTED] (If deemed necessary by site.)
 - a. Will observe if deemed necessary, and unlock any doors needed.

Protocols Drawn from Community Conversations UWSD

- Use of interpreter, note taker, thematic note taker, and site staff (if requested)
- Use of an icebreaker in the opening conversation.
- Use of UWSD sign-in sheet at beginning.
- Use of Hardwood Institute tools and “ground rules”
- Use of UWSD demographic survey at the end of the community conversation.
- Use of UWSD recommended community engagement strategies (ie. Humor, welcoming atmosphere, emotional intelligence etc.)
- Use of UWSD recommended logistical coordination
- Use of UWSD recommended problem solving techniques for unexpected items (ie. Late arrival, emotional outbursts etc.)
- Use of post Community Conversation protocols or “debriefs” sessions to be completed with note taker and the theme taker.

Protocols that Deviate from UWSD Community Conversations

- Semi-structured initial prompting
- Semi-structured thematic elements that are introduced to the group in flexible 10 minute increments
- The use of an incentive to draw participants (\$10 Gift Cards to Von’s)
- The use of a tape recorder in addition to that of a note taker.

Appendix 2: Focus Group Letter Home



Rowan Parents and Guardians Make Your Voice Heard This School Year!

Sign Up for a Group Discussion Today to Share Your Thoughts and Ideas for Your Child's School!

October 11th, 2017

Dear Parents and Guardians of [REDACTED],

My name is Charlotta Holt, the Student and Family Support intern at [REDACTED]. For my master's degree, I am studying elementary education and I would like to kindly invite you to participate in a research project for the Fall 2017 semester.

Parents/guardians will receive a \$10 gift card to Von's for participating.

Data will be gathered through group discussions that will last a minimum of 45 minutes and a maximum of one hour. There will be a total of three opportunities to participate in a focus group this fall: October 26th, November 30th, and December 14th. Focus groups will be limited to seven people at one time, and selection will be based on a first come, first served basis.

Group discussions will talk about the following topics:

- Your experiences at school events
- Your experiences with teachers and school administration
- Discussing family life and school life
- Your desires and goals for your child

Everything discussed during the group conversations will be confidential. Fake names will be used in the research report for all parents/guardians who participate.

To sign up for the first group discussion in October, visit the front office at Rowan Elementary by October 24th and ask for the sign-up sheet. You can also text or call Charlotta's business cell at 619-560-6319 to sign up.

Charlotta Holt

InternRowanES@gmail.com, 619-560-6319

Master of Education Candidate, University of Jyväskylä

Student and Family Support Intern, United Way of San Diego County

Appendix 3: Information Release Form



AUTHORIZATION FOR RELEASE/EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION

I, _____,
_____, authorize the release of information
Parent/Guardian Name

between the Student & Family Support Intern in the Every Student, Every Day initiative and partners who are planning to evaluate the collected data.

I understand that United Way's ESED initiative and the University of Jyväskylä has an obligation to keep my personal information, identifying information, and my records confidential.

The information which may be disclosed/exchanged includes:

- transcripts from the group discussion with my personal name and identifying information removed from the record
- the nature of work with Student & Family Support Intern (if applicable) with personal name and identifying information removed from the record
- demographic information from survey with personal name and identifying information removed from the record

I authorize ESED to share information with:

Name: University of Jyväskylä, Finland
 Agency, and specific office within agency: Department of Education
 Contact information: charlotta.a.holt@student.jyu.fi

This form does not authorize release to any other person or agency except the agency listed above. Unless revoked in writing, this release shall expire in one (1) calendar year from the date it was signed. At that time all of the above mentioned data will be destroyed.

In order for a revocation to be effective, United Way must receive the revocation in writing. The revocation is to be given to the Student & Family Support Intern and must contain the following:

- Client's name and address
- Effective date of this authorization

- The individual/agency authorized to receive protected health information in this authorization
- Client's desire to revoke this authorization
- The date of the revocation and the client's signature

I understand that:

- Signing a release form is completely voluntary. This release is limited to what I write above. If I would like ESED to release information about me to other individuals/agencies, I will need to sign another written, time-limited release.
- Releasing information about me could give another agency or person information about my location and would confirm that I have been receiving services from United Way's ESED initiative.
- I agree that a photocopy or fax of this authorization is considered as effective as the original.
- I may revoke this authorization at any time before the information has been released.

I may retain a copy of this authorization. Initial here if you desire a copy _____.

I confirm that the purpose of this form has been explained to me and I understand its content. I have discussed the pros and cons of authorizing this release of information with the Student & Family Support Intern. My signature below indicates my consent.

I confirm that I received the \$10 Von's gift card at the completion of the group discussion, and am not expecting any other form of compensation for my time.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

