

# UC Berkeley

## UC Berkeley Electronic Theses and Dissertations

### Title

Laying Those Bridges: A Case Study on the Construction of a Family Resource Center

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0dd0k29w>

### Author

Angoff, Elizabeth

### Publication Date

2011

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

Laying Those Bridges:  
A Case Study on the Construction of a Family Resource Center

By

Elizabeth Diane Angoff

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor John Hurst, Chair

Professor Zeus Leonardo

Professor Susan Stone

Spring 2011



## Abstract

Laying Those Bridges: A Case Study on the Construction of a Family Resource Center

by

Elizabeth Diane Angoff

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Berkeley

Professor John Hurst, Chair

Providing quality educational opportunities for minority children in poor, urban neighborhoods presents a significant and urgent problem for educators, activists, researchers and community members. To begin to address this problem, it is essential to clearly define the various components of the situation and be succinct about the questions we are trying to answer. This dissertation specifically addresses the issue of family resources and how the existence or lack thereof can profoundly affect students' home lives, which in turn affects their ability to perform in school. The project documents and analyzes the creation of a Family Resource Center (FRC) at a small school in a diverse, urban neighborhood, where most families live below the poverty line. The project documented here is a case study in the form of a "committed experiment," because the researcher was also intricately involved in the creation of the FRC over the course of the two and a half year study.

The current literature is markedly sparse in terms of studies examining effective models for developing Family Resource Centers in urban communities. The literature on full-service schools comes close and has provided a framework for the preliminary steps in creating the FRC in this study. In order to fully develop the literature base, I drew from three additional literatures: Parent Involvement, Consultee-Centered Consultation and Popular Education. These four areas of literature together build on each other to create a strong foundation for the creation of the FRC.

This study presents multiple findings. First, chapter 2 demonstrates the different perceptions of school staff and parents regarding the most important aspects of the FRC. Namely, the parents interviewed focused on the importance of the *space* itself while the school staff members interviewed named specific resources that might be offered. In chapter 3, a study within this study, which involved three parents in a Participatory Action Research project on parent involvement, laid the foundation for the development of our parent involvement practices of parent-focused conversations, establishing a safe space, and creating a 'backdoor' to the school. Finally, chapter 4 articulates the unique training process used to support parent employees in their work with families in need. The training method combines the philosophy and methods of Consultee-Centered Consultation, a mental health training model designed to support non-mental health professionals engaged in difficult cases, with Popular Education, an empowering process of engaging community members as experts in solving the problem at hand. This chapter

also demonstrates the methods of parent engagement and support developed by the parent employees themselves through their experience and the daily reflective process that was part of their training.

The conclusion further develops these findings into a multifaceted theory of FRC development and parent empowerment through education and action. The model focuses on engaging parents as equals, utilizing their knowledge and expertise to drive the creation of the FRC, and to successfully bridge the long-standing divide of culture, values, class and experience between school staff and disenfranchised parents within poor, urban communities.

This dissertation is dedicated to all those involved in the creation of the Family Resource Center, and especially to three coordinators – the work you do reaches far beyond anything you will ever imagine, and what you taught me is far greater than anything I ever imagined.

“...the best education is action, and the best action is the struggle for social justice.”  
– Myles Horton, Highlander Center

“I don’t care what you call it, but if you ain’t got no one laying those bridges, those bridges ain’t gonna get crossed.”  
– Nitiray, FRC Coordinator

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	p. i
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	p. ii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	p. iii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	p. 1
Literature Review	
Methods	
CHAPTER 2: DEVELOPING THE FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER.....	p. 38
Nine plus one areas of Family Resource Development	
CHAPTER 3: PARENT INVOLVEMENT.....	p. 70
The Exploration Team: A Participatory Action Research Project	
Implementing a Revised Theory: Relationships, Not Activities	
CHAPTER 4: PARENT-EMPLOYEE TRAINING: Consultation and Popular Education .....	p. 96
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION.....	p. 123
EPILOGUE.....	p. 137
REFERENCES.....	p. 143
APPENDICES.....	p. 151
A. Codes Used in Analysis of Journals and Meeting Notes	
B. ALCANCE Family Resource Center Needs Survey	
C. Family Resource Center Descriptions	

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Creating the ALCANCE Mission Statement.....	p. 50
---	-------



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Providing quality educational opportunities for minority children in poor, urban neighborhoods is a well-known problem with many levels, infinite stakeholders and no clear solution (Oaks and Lipton, 2003; Delpit, 1995; Anyon, 1997). To begin to address this problem, it is essential to clearly define the various components of the issue and be succinct about the questions we are trying to answer. The component addressed in this dissertation is that of family resources and how the existence or lack of resources can affect the ability of students to perform in school.

Many families at the ALCANCE<sup>1</sup> School, a small, urban school in a diverse neighborhood of a midsize, urban city, do not have the social, economic, educational or material resources to effectively support their children in obtaining a quality academic experience. This project originated as an assignment from the school's principal to solve a specific problem at the school: families needed more 'support', not specifically defined at the time, if they were to have a positive role in their children's learning. The principal requested that we create a Family Resource Center (FRC) designed around identified needs of the community. As the project continued, it became evident to me that the process of developing an FRC that would successfully address the principal's request was much more complex than outlined in the current literature, and that the consequences of developing the FRC reached far beyond providing tangible resources for parents. This case study will examine, analyze and document the development of the FRC and the empowering environment it was able to create.

### *The Questions*

In order to make my contribution to solving the great mystery of quality education for all students, I have developed what I call a 'committed experiment', where I worked with a team of individuals to solve an identified major problem in the school: *families do not have the necessary resources to support and enable their children to be successful in school*. This is a problem quite common in under-resourced schools serving poor and marginalized families. The design used in this project was deemed a 'committed experiment', because the actions were developed based on a set of interrelated hypotheses to solve a specific problem, yet the processes throughout the experiment were dynamic, producing at each point revised hypotheses and modified directions of study. In addition, the experiment involved a program as well as people who were constantly evolving and changing as the project continued, built on my *commitment* to the people and project over the long run, far beyond the course of the experiment or dissertation phase itself. In brief, the 'committed experiment' occurred in a natural setting as an on-going part of the school's operation, addressing a problem broadly identified by the school administration, and involving my continuing commitment to the school and the FRC as a vital part of the school's program, far beyond the time required by the dissertation project.

This 'committed experiment' consists of one main question and three subordinate questions. Each question addresses an essential component of creating a functioning, active and sustainable FRC. These questions and the research pertinent to them will be elaborated on in the literature review portion of this manuscript.

---

<sup>1</sup> Names of people and places have been changed for confidentiality purposes.

Main Question:

*How can a program, to be labeled a Family Resource Center, developed by drawing from the following applicable theoretical streams and literatures - notably: 1) Family Resource Centers; 2) parent involvement; 3) Consultee-Centered Consultation practices in school psychology; 4) Popular Education – successfully (to be defined below) address the lack of effective parental involvement and parental access to and use of critical resources in supporting their children’s education in a school in a poor and disenfranchised community?*

Specifically, this question will be addressed within the context of ALCANCE Public School. The dissertation will further attempt to construct a revised theoretical underpinning for developing functional, sustainable Family Resource Centers by integrating theoretical elements from these three literatures based on the understandings gained through our ‘committed experiment’.

As we embarked on the mission of creating a Family Resource Center at ALCANCE, we found that effectively adapting the current FRC literature to our specific site involved three components: locating and obtaining resources from our community, promoting and ensuring access to those resources for all families, and training parent coordinators to develop and run the FRC. While the current literature on developing Family Resource Centers outlines many of the issues pertaining to the effective implementation of such a program, this experiment is unique in that my analysis of the requirements for the program’s development and success necessitated that I draw on a variety of literatures to enhance my understanding of the processes I believed were required to create an impactful FRC. Additionally, this experiment is unique in its analysis and use of the Popular Education and Consultee-Centered Consultation principles and practices in my effort to build a successful FRC. In essence, we built our FRC on the premise that the parents themselves were the best source for solutions to the problems that plague our community. This unique component will be explained throughout the analysis.

To address the main question, it is necessary to incorporate the specific aspects of the literature referenced above and examine the ways in which they impacted the development of our FRC. The following questions more specifically address how the literature and our practices helped us to develop a functional program:

- 1. How did the findings and theories outlined in the research on FRC development, much of which operates within a deficit approach to helping families, both help and hinder the development of the FRC?*
- 2. How did the application of the findings and theories regarding Parent Involvement in schools contribute to building relationships with disenfranchised and alienated parents, often those most in need of resources such as food, health care, parenting classes, employment, housing or legal aide, so that they will be more likely to access the resources provided by the school?*
- 3. How did Consultee-Centered Consultation, seen through the lens of Popular Education practices and theories, contribute to the effective education and empowerment of community parents employed to develop and manage the FRC, and through them help empower other parents who use the center?*

While each of the above questions relates directly to a particular literature, I recognize that these theories are interactive and related, especially when put into practice, as I have done in

this experiment. For this reason, the above questions are stated in such a way that recognizes the importance of all four major literatures, while acknowledging that a specific set of theories may be most relevant for a particular question.

### *The Context*

This ‘committed experiment’ takes place in a small, low-income school in a large, urban district of approximately one hundred schools. The population is made up of approximately 60% Latino, 20% African American and 20% Mien (Asian) students. The study follows the development of the Family Resource Center over the course of its first three and a half years. It is important to note that the FRC is still alive and well in the present, 2010-2011 school year.

The Family Resource Center began in January of 2003, as an assignment for the Outreach Coordinator, Paxton. The principal of ALCANCE was looking to provide more services to the families of the school. I was a volunteer at the school at the time, heard about the project, and asked to be part of it. After one year of running the program with a team of school staff and *volunteer* parents, we decided to *hire* three parents to coordinate the development of the FRC: two of the parents had children at the school, one was a community member with a small child, and I acted as their supervisor. Each of the parents came from a different ethnic and racial background, closely representing the population of the school: the parents were Latino, African American and Mien. The parents involved in this study were all female. I am also female, my race is white, and my ethnic background is Jewish. At the time of employment, the parents with children enrolled at the school were involved in different capacities with the school; however, over the two year period documented here, they both became increasingly active and, more importantly, empowered participants in their own children’s schooling, as well as advocates for other parents and their children. The third parent, a Latino woman, was very active in the community and came with a strong program-organization background. Due to a number of reasons, including health and conflict with the program, she resigned halfway through the first year and we hired another longtime community member, a Latina woman with four children, though none were enrolled in the school. It was my responsibility to train and supervise the three coordinators, as well as document their work.

This dissertation chronicles, analyzes, and theorizes the intentional evolution of the FRC over this period of time, from January, 2003 to June, 2006.

## LITERATURE REVIEW: RESEARCH GUIDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PRACTICE

This section will outline the literature, research and background utilized in the analysis of my work with the ALCANCE Family Resource Center.

### *Defining the Problem: The Need for a Family Resource Center*

Research on family-school connections has shown the importance of strong relationships between a child’s caregivers and the school staff (Dryfoos, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Chrispeels et al., 1991; Gettinger and Guetschow, 1998; Griffith, 1996). Since parents and teachers bring different expertise to the development of a strong child, frequent quality communication and collaboration between home and school help to ensure a successful schooling career for the child. One subset of the home-school partnership literature focuses on school-based service integration, or Family Resource Centers, which aim to provide resources to parents beyond the expected academic support normally provided by the school. A Family

Resource Center may be defined as “a prevention-oriented, family-focused, community-based system of supportive and educational services provided to children and families” (Plant and King, 1995, p.289). While some FRCs are located within the community, this manuscript will focus on those programs within schools. The philosophy and theory behind these programs is simple: if the parents are supported, educated and are able to access resources, it is more likely that a child’s academic, social, emotional and physical needs will be met (UCLA Center for Mental Health, 2000; Taylor and Adelman, 2003; McPhee, et al., 1996). Alternatively, the more stress families feel due to an inability to access resources and the lack of knowledge about or support for various life changes and obstacles, the less likely it is that the child’s needs will be met and the more likely they are to be at risk for academic failure, behavioral issues and social-emotional difficulties (Dryfoos, 1994; Dohrenwend, 1996; Carveth and Gottlieb, 1979).

Three distinct theoretical and practical puzzles emerged as we embarked on this project. The first puzzle we identified was *families in poor, minority, urban communities often do not have sufficient resources to fully meet the academic, social, emotional and physical needs of their children*. FRCs aim to provide a wide range of resources to parents which may include medical care, legal guidance, help finding employment, counseling, housing assistance, parenting classes, advocacy, and connections to community resources outside the school (Plant and King, 1995). To solve this puzzle we needed to first figure out *what* to build.

In determining what to build, a review of the literature provided limited support. While many service integration efforts exist, there is a lack of scholarly articles, in part due to methodological difficulties in studying such programs, given their lack of standardization (Kalafat & Illback, 1998). These programs are not standardized on purpose: it is necessary to adjust and respond to the changing needs of the community and families. Additional reasons for the lack of FRC specific literature include a tendency for evaluations and analysis of such programs to be geared towards practitioners and advocacy work (Crowson and Boyd, 1993; Plant and King, 1995). The literature used to develop the foundation of our FRC examines the Full Service School model (e.g. Dryfoos, 1994), literature on service integration in schools (e.g. McMahan, 2002 and Miller 2002) and the literature on the development of specific centers such as the Kentucky Family Resource Centers (e.g. Smrekar & Mawhinney, 1994; Kalafat & Illback, 1998) and the Connecticut Family Resource Centers (Plant and King, 1995; Levy and Shepardson, 1992). (For more examples of Family Resource Centers, please see Appendix C, Family Resource Center Descriptions.)

While a Family Resource Center may offer a number of important resources to the community, the second puzzle I discovered from interviewing various school staff and parents, from my experiences during the first year of implementing the FRC on my own, as well as from the current research (see Miller, 2002), is that *parents often do not utilize the resources offered by the school*. In other words, simply providing the resources and services believed to address the difficulties experienced by families in poor, minority, urban communities is not a sufficient solution to the first puzzle. Documentation of some localized FRC efforts identify the difficulties in connecting with parents who are disenfranchised from the school. These reports repeatedly point out the importance of the FRC Coordinator in facilitating these connections (Levy and Shepardson, 1992; Smrekar and Mawhinney, 1994). The *how* of creating the space and culture of the FRC would be just as important, if not more so, as what we put in it. For this reason, I became aware that paying careful attention to the *process* by which we created the Family Resource Center and evaluated its success would be critical in addressing this second puzzle: as we developed the Family Center’s capacity, we needed to be sure that we were not

only providing resources, but actively and intentionally connecting parents to those resources. The parent involvement literature became critical to helping us conceptualize our process of creating these connections.

One component of the FRC development process that became critical to its evolution as a community-focused entity was employing community members, who are also parents, as the FRC staff. The available literature on FRCs does not appear to examine the idea of employing parents or community members as coordinators of the center; however, the literature of Popular Education (Freire, 1970; Gaventa, 1980) supports the idea that community members, those most involved in the problems the community faces, possess the solutions to these problems but lack the power to act, due to years of discrimination and disenfranchisement. The parents we hired during the second year of the FRC's development were not education professionals, nor were they social workers or of other professions that would otherwise qualify them to work with families in crisis, as is the case in many documented efforts of FRC development. Given that the problem was that parents were not accessing the resources provided by the school, we hypothesized that having community members working in the FRC would be critical for determining how to make the FRC an accessible place – physically, emotionally and psychologically.

Hiring community members without specific background qualifications meant that we faced a third puzzle: *how can we train, educate and empower parents to coordinate the FRC?* Embedded in this problem are personal obstacles for each of the three coordinators, including, for example, the lack of confidence, a negative history working with school staff, conflict with other parents in the community, and their own personal issues that constituted crises in their own lives. My approach to these puzzles will be outlined below as I elaborate on the literature utilized in the analysis of my own research questions.

*Question 1: How did the findings and theories outlined in the research on FRC development, much of which operates within a deficit approach to helping families, both help and hinder the development of the FRC?*

There is a limited body of research addressing social services integration within the school. In this section, I will address the range of programs from Full-Service Schools to site-based centers that broker services in the wider community. Due to the wide variety of possible service integration models it is important to explore the different structures for a better understanding of the components necessary to creating a functioning FRC.

In their research, Dryfoos (1994) and Dryfoos and Maguire (2002) detail the development of Full-Service Schools: schools that incorporate a variety of social services on the school campus and provide support to the whole family as part of standard school practice. In 1994, Dryfoos published an article detailing the rationale for establishing Full-Service Schools. These schools would provide an array of social support services, such as health care, mental health, parent education, help with finances, help finding a place to live, and other services depending on the needs of the community. Dryfoos points out that though there are federally funded initiatives, such as Head Start and Healthy Start, these programs continue to experience severe losses of funding and are not guaranteed sources of support for schools. In many cases, funding for social services exists, but it is not a clear part of educational policy or reform. The lack of formal recognition of the need for these services makes social services programs a low priority for districts. Dryfoos also points out that these programs, when they exist, tend to be

designed by community outsiders and are not responsive to the needs of the community. Often, programs who partner with the school site individually run into conflicts with each other due to competition for resources, different treatment philosophies, or a lack of overall coordination of services (Firestone and Drews, 1987). A Full-Service school, on the other hand, uses community-based resources and responds to the changing needs of the individuals in the school.

One of the main purposes of Full-Service Schools is to coordinate and centralize the services provided by community agencies. The purpose of housing satellite offices of local social services in a school is partly convenience, but mostly to increase the effectiveness of the individual resources. As Dryfoos states, “Too many families are being served in isolation, with unnecessary duplication of services and duplication of paperwork. Families might have to travel to several individual agencies for categorical services or have their homes invaded by many individual service providers” (p. 15; Dryfoos and Maguire, 2002). The very act of pursuing services that are supposed to help the family can confuse and frustrate parents to a point of paralysis, resulting in more stress and feelings of helplessness.

In her book about Full-Service Schools, Dryfoos (1994) describes a number of programs that were started in low-income, racially diverse schools where many parents were not involved in their children’s education for reasons ranging from a lack of time and resources to confrontational relationships with the school. While she states clearly that the successful programs were those that involved community members in their development, the programs were primarily run by outside professionals. While some programs did reportedly employ parents to run the services, there is nothing written about the training process or qualifications of the parents who were employed. Our process in exploring how to approach this issue will be explained below.

After establishing the theoretical basis for creating Full-Service schools, Dryfoos went on to study the effects of school-community programs in 49 schools over the course of three years. In this study, 36 out of 49 of the schools reported significant academic gains in both math and reading. It is compelling to note that for many of these schools, these gains were shown only for those students who partook in the school’s services. Additionally, 19 of the schools reported significant gains in attendance rates, and many of the high schools reported lower drop-out rates. Many schools also reported significant drops in the amount of behavior referrals and suspensions over the course of the study (Dryfoos and Maguire, 2002). It is important to note that in this analysis Dryfoos includes all programs focused on connecting the school to the community under the umbrella of Full-Service schools, including Family Resource Centers since FRCs – while structurally different – support the same goals.

Combined with the research cited above on the positive effects of involved parents and strong connections to community resources, it becomes clear that the Full-Service school model is an effective way to address the ecology of students’ needs. However, Dryfoos (2002) also addresses the reality of scarce funding for such programs and the difficulty of establishing them from the ground up. One answer is to have a Family Resource Center that provides some services, but mostly provides connections or bridges to resources in the greater community (Bouie-Scott, 1990). In other words, while a school might not be able to have a full array of services on campus, they are able to connect families with outside agencies within the community that can serve their needs.

The academic literature specific to FRCs is emerging, and academic articles or evaluations of programs are few and far between: the differences between FRC programs are so vast that it becomes very difficult to talk about them as any kind of movement or standardized

process (Knapp, 1995; Kalafat & Illback, 1998; Smrekar & Mawhinney, 1999). Much of the written work on these programs is locally drafted and presented as “best practice” or personal accounts (e.g. California Family Resource Center Learning Circle, 2000; Watson & Westheimer, 2000). Indeed, Smrekar and Mawhinney observe that “one of the concerns of researchers is that practical understanding has preceded the development of a rich knowledge base of research on collaborative initiatives [i.e. FRC and other community service integration programs]” (Smrekar & Mawhinney, 1999, p. 446). In addition, much of this work has been geared toward advocacy and policy making, as opposed to the development of a research-based practice of service integration. The question remains how can a school begin to develop a Family Resource Center capable of supporting a community in the ways described above? There is much more involved than simply aggregating the contact information for social services in the community.

Crowson and Boyd (1993, 1996) examine the framework for integrating community services in schools. First, they delineate the importance of pursuing service integration in the first place.

1. From the ecological perspective, the relationships between school, family and community must be taken into account in order to meet the needs of students.
2. From an investment perspective, schools will be much more effective in promoting academic success if students are socially and emotionally healthy, and if their families are able to meet basic needs.
3. From a child-development perspective, successful development happens simultaneously along academic, social, moral and emotional lines.

Addressing all of these areas at once is critical to engaging the child in successful academic achievement.

Once the need for integrated services in schools is established, Crowson and Boyd (1993) go on to describe the issues raised in attempting to bring outside players into the school day agenda. They explain that the work that has been done on integrating services, including Dryfoos’ Full Service School work, must

recognize the indeterminacies of added funding from outside the school system; the problems of space, facilities management, and differing personnel and salary policies; the necessary negotiation of new roles and relationships between educators and other client-service personnel; the need to nurture effective leadership and a necessity for careful planning; the challenge of professional preparation programs and professional procedures with little by way of a natural “glue” between them; and the tough issues of communication, confidentiality, and information retrieval that are present in any interagency or “net- working” initiative. (Crowson & Boyd, 1993, p. 152)

In general, a school’s culture is designed around buffering itself from community influences, not becoming part of them. Historically, public schools were developed in part to educate children in spite of the influences of their community, especially when referring to minority or immigrant children (Tyack, 1978). Even within the school, teachers, counselors, afterschool personnel and so on operate within separate silos, emphasizing a culture of competition instead of one of

collaboration (Smrekar & Mawhinney, 1999). Integrating services presents a significant challenge to the traditional structure of schools and to the act of schooling.

In the research on integrated services presented by Crowson and Boyd (1993, 1996), Smrekar (1994) and Smrekar and Mawhinney (1999), the issue of reconstituting roles and relationships comes up repeatedly. Teachers are trained to focus on what happens during school and within their specific classroom; however, the integration of community services within the school requires teachers to think beyond the school day and consider what happens in the home. While many teachers do think deeply and constantly about their children's home lives, the integration of services *formally* makes involvement in life beyond school part of their job description. Additionally, the norms, values and modes of operation may be different for various stakeholders in the educative process. While the ecological and child development perspectives mentioned above suggest that children will benefit from a holistic view of their education, questions of turf wars or, even more simply, questions of whether the school has a *right* to be involved beyond the school day, complicate the collaboration between school and community personnel.

Throughout all this discussion and the few evaluations that have been documented on school-based community service integration, there is little documenting how to overcome these barriers and turf wars. Smrekar and Mawhinney (1999), similar to the work done in this dissertation, drew on multiple literatures of organizational and institutional theory, power relations, sociological theories of community and intergovernmental relations, among others. They acknowledge that creating a full-service environment in a school, truly integrating, rather than aggregating, services requires much more than the gathering of resources, but rather a complete renovation of the ways in which parents, teachers and community members relate to each other.

A few theories of practice have emerged from the lessons learned of what has *not* worked for service integration. To solve the difficulties in home/school relationships, Smrekar and Mawhinney (1999) theorize a three-pronged approach to how one might restructure relationships between home and school: creating networks of communication, including home visits as part of teachers' duties, and teaming up teachers to provide continuity of care for students across multiple years of schooling. Crowson and Boyd (1993) suggest a "stakeholders" approach, where the multiple players involved in a service provision, including teachers, are brought together to develop a common mission, discuss issues of leadership and ownership over various parts of the educative and support process, and create ways for each to work together, while maintaining a sense of autonomy. These authors present these theories as a response to some of the difficulties emerging in FRC practice; however, the theories had not yet been examined in practice. In this project, the practice of creating relationships and connections is taken on explicitly, using Consultee-Centered Consultation and Popular Education to address the cultural, political and psychological divides between home and school. In the later sections of this manuscript, I will describe in detail how we addressed issues similar to those raised by these authors.

As mentioned above, while research on Full-Service Schools and general attempts at service integration exist, there is very little available specific to school-site based efforts of Family Resource Centers: it is very difficult for researchers to study and evaluate Family Resource Centers because of the site-specific, personal nature and need for adaptability to the surrounding community. For these reasons, standardization of programmatic implementation is virtually impossible (Plant and King, 1995). Luckily, a few researchers have documented the



FRC initiatives in Connecticut and Kentucky in the 1990s. Both of these programs were state-initiated and state-funded. These depictions of school-specific FRCs are more descriptive than they are evaluative, likely due to the difficulties of evaluating such personalized, dynamic programs or to the fact that they are statewide programs and detailed evaluations are difficult and costly (Plant and King, 1995).

The Connecticut Department of Education funded eighteen programs beginning with a small pilot initiative in 1990 and expanding to full capacity by 1994. The framework for these models entailed their location within an elementary school, as opposed to in a community base, though some centers were started in outside locations before the school-based policy was instituted. Another set of guidelines looked at creating places where parents would share resources and come together as a community. The design of the centers was intended to discourage a deficit model, avoiding a “fix it” mentality. Each of the centers contained seven required components: preschool child care, school-age child care, Positive Youth Development, Families in Training, adult and parenting education, support and training for daycare providers, and resource and referral services (Plant and King, 1995; Levy and Shepardson, 1992).

A report put out by the Connecticut Department of Education in 2009, reports positive results in many areas, including increasing parental knowledge in relation to child development, administering health screenings to infants and toddlers and training child care providers. This report was the only evaluative document found regarding the success or effectiveness of the programs. There is no report of increased student achievement, but the report does mention augmented support networks and access to resource for parents. The results presented were descriptive in nature and methods of data analysis or collection were not discussed at length (Finn-Stevenson, 2009).

The Kentucky FRCs are perhaps the most heavily documented in the literature, though this documentation appears to stop after the 1990s. Some researchers did begin evaluations of the FRCs, though it is interesting to note that these were focused on the program and not on specific family or child outcomes. In 1991, the state of Kentucky mandated the development of FRCs within the public schools serving 20% or more students receiving free and reduced lunch (an indicator of low socioeconomic status). The purpose of these centers was not to provide direct service, as would a Full-Service School, but to broker community resources and empower families to access their community independently. For this reason the description of the Kentucky FRCs is particularly relevant to ALCANCE’s development. In 1991, 133 schools applied for funding to create an FRC; by 1996, Kentucky boasted 560 FRCs serving 700 schools (Kalafat & Illback, 1998).

Kalafat and Illback conducted an evaluation of many of the FRCs over a three-year period. They found a number of themes emerged. First, the centers were able to remain family-focused as opposed to agency-focused, allowing coordinators to address a variety of issues important to families without extensive paperwork or bureaucratic procedures. Second, the staff of the FRC was well connected with the community, with families and with the school personnel, proving to be the bridge idealized between the institution and community members.

Another significant finding of this study was that the coordinator of the FRC contributed greatly to its success or failure: “The scope and quality of the services offered and the “feel” (psycho- logical, cultural, and temporal accessibility) of the centers was to great degree dependent upon the characteristics of the coordinators” (Kalafat & Illback, 1998, p.589). The “face” of the FRC impacted parents’ and teachers’ perception of the usefulness of services and community links. Much of the commentary from those interviewed involved the specific

personality, warmth and follow-through of the person in charge of the FRC. This was also supported by research from Doktor and Poertner (1996) in their investigation of the Kentucky FRCs: the leader of the FRC needed to be an activist with a community focus, able to frame and reframe a family's difficulties to thoroughly understand the multilayers of their needs and offer effective support. For ALCANCE, the face of the FRC would also become a significant factor in creating a successful FRC.

In addition to the above findings, the researchers noticed a developmental progression that ALCANCE would also aim to follow. The coordinators began by exploring the needs of the community and then developing programs and resources in response to the specific needs expressed by families. It is interesting to note that in their analysis, Kalafat and Illback did not address the influence of community politics or history on the ways in which the coordinators worked with the community: their analysis remains school-focused. These greater community issues will be addressed using a different framework below.

The lessons gleaned from the Kentucky FRCs appear to involve acting as a bridge between the school, community and families; paying close attention to who is coordinating the FRC, who is the "face" of the center; and beginning where the parents are. As we further explore the related literature on linking schools and families, these concepts will be fleshed out to explain the steps we took in establishing the ALCANCE FRC.

### *The Act of Developing a Family Resource Center*

In this current age of scarce funding and little institutional support from cash-strapped districts fighting to increase their academic scores, there is a great need to outline how a school might begin to serve the range of needs of its families without the major funding sources of yore or the comprehensive university support of some documented efforts (Bouie-Scott, 1990; California Family Resource Center Learning Circle, 2000). While it makes intuitive and theoretical sense to avoid a standardized model for FRCs, it seems necessary to have a framework for how to embark on this highly complex and personalized work. While there are reports on the "how to" of creating the physical center (e.g. what resources), there is little demonstrating the "how to" of building relationships between schools and communities, parents and teachers. Overall, it is clear that more FRC initiatives beyond the Kentucky and Connecticut efforts must be documented to fill in this dearth of knowledge and help struggling schools to empower their families and support the complete development of their children. At the same time, though there is little published specific to the development *process* of an FRC, the literature lends itself to a number of principles that may be used in creating a model for such a place.

Even when a state or a school is supportive of the initiative, the barriers and challenges to creating an FRC are many. McMahan, et. al. (2000) identify some of the larger political and cultural trends that have affected the integration of social services into the schools. Their work specifically addresses the establishment of Full-Service Schools; however, this framework is particularly helpful given the known psychological and physical boundaries in ALCANCE's community. First, these researchers point out that beginning in the 1930s, the United States saw a movement away from community-school collaboration. This collaboration was replaced by nursing and social work services specialized *for the school*, and different from the services found in the greater community. Though specializing services for a school sounds, in theory, like effective programming, as funding for these services in schools falls, so does the access to physical and mental health services for many students: the services disappear and the schools do

not necessarily have connections with community organizations to ensure families obtain these lacking services, or these services may simply not exist. The authors acknowledge that when schools do have services, they often only focus on issues of physical health and do not recognize the other factors related to school success.

Given that this framework is designed specifically for schools, as well as its attention to the external (political and community) and internal (resources and staffing) factors, I have chosen it as a structure for examining the workings of our project. The individual areas addressed helped us to create a type of “to do” list as we began to research and develop various parts of our program. While other frameworks exist, they are not as comprehensive (Smrekar, 1996), are too general in their descriptions to guide the building of a useable model (Adler, 1994), or are primarily focused on the internal workings of the school (Kalafat & Illback, 1998), and less attention is given to the very real and influential forces of surrounding politics and deep rooted history of the community.

Recognizing the cultural, social, and economic barriers to establishing Full-Service Schools and FRCs given the current socio-political environment, McMahon et. al. identify some important areas to address when developing this type of program:

1. Deciding what to build: what services or goals will this FRC focus on?
2. How to begin: which community members, school personnel and/or families are involved in the initial effort?
3. Local politics: what is the current political culture and how might this help or hinder the FRC’s development?
4. Fiscal issues: how will the FRC be funded?
5. “Gravel” in the collaborative process: how do people communicate about shared space, shared resources, and shared clientele?
6. Community-school relationship: what is the current status of the school’s relationship with the community and how can relationships be made stronger?
7. Parallel vs. integrated administrative structures: who is in charge of the FRC’s services and who makes decisions regarding implementation?
8. Legal and ethical issues: who is responsible for the services, how much information can/should the school know about a family, and what – ultimately – is the school’s responsibility to a family?
9. Access to services: how can the FRC reach out to parents who do not come to the school for practical or for psychological reasons?

Over the three years of the project, we attempted to answer the above questions through our creation, evaluation and re-creation of the ALCANCE FRC. In this manuscript I aim to analyze the implementation of these practices to determine how they both helped and hindered the development of the FRC.

Though the above research may have helped to illuminate the best structure for an FRC and established the fact that having an FRC would improve student outcomes for the families who accessed the resources, it did not outline a theoretical background for *connecting* with the parents who needed the resources we identified, located and obtained. Similar to the researchers focused on FRCs mentioned above, the majority of the literature I found specifically on FRCs came in the form of pamphlets and locally published handbooks for specific program initiatives at the city or state level (Bouie-Scott, 1990; California Family Resource Center Learning Circle,

2000). Thus, I needed to draw on additional theoretical frameworks to fully understand how to create a successful FRC.

*Question 2: How did the application of the findings and theories regarding Parent Involvement in schools contribute to building relationships with disenfranchised and alienated parents, often those most in need of resources such as food, health care, parenting classes, employment, housing or legal aide, so that they will be more likely to access the resources provided by the school?*

Addressing the second puzzle, *parents often do not utilize the resources offered by the school*, involved a much more extensive literature review and raised many more questions in crafting a solution. The Family Resource Center and Full-Service School literature guided us on how to bring in services, but was not enough to help us connect these services to the parents who most needed them. First, I needed to develop an understanding of *why* parents might not use resources offered by the school. Next, I needed to investigate ways that the school might work to undo or overcome the obstacles preventing families from accessing these resources. In the chapters that follow, I will show how these theories were manifested in our daily practice.

### *Parent Involvement Literature*

In essence, parent involvement in schools has come to be seen by many as a necessary part of a child's education. The literature appears to be divided into three main areas relevant to this study:

1. Research demonstrating the positive relationship between parent involvement in schools and student achievement
2. Research demonstrating the cultural mismatch between schools and families, and institutional barriers of the school environment that can have a detrimental effect on parent-school partnerships; this discussion includes issues of race and class that affect the way one interacts with other people in various positions of power in relation to oneself
3. Research demonstrating the ways in which schools can alter their practices and perspective to more effectively involve families, especially those from lower socioeconomic status and minority cultures

Throughout this section, I will review the literature in these three areas and demonstrate how they influenced our decision to hire parents to run the FRC.

### *Parent Involvement and School Achievement*

The primary and largest area of research in parent involvement demonstrates the overwhelmingly positive effect of parent involvement for children's success in school (e.g. Epstein, 1996; Sheldon and Epstein, 2002; Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Miller, 2002; Dryfoos, 2002; Gettinger and Guetschow, 1998; Hoover-Dempsey, 1992; Chrispeels et al., 1991). Within the current body of research, the term "parent involvement" carries varied definitions, ranging from attendance at school events, to bedtime rituals, to fulfilling basic needs such as food and clothing (Fan and Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2011). Some schools benefit from university-run research projects, where outside professionals come into the school to create parent education programs and coach teachers on using parents in the classroom. Other programs are initiated by the

parents themselves, building social networks and community culture to support parent involvement. Still, other attempts encourage parents to be involved in anything from bake sales to school government. Regardless of the nature of parent involvement, researchers are virtually unanimous in declaring that a parent's constructive involvement in their child's life, both in and out of school, has positive repercussions on the child's social, emotional and academic success in school. It is important to note that not all parent involvement in school is positive; however, schools and communities are learning the best ways to partner with parents to work toward the most positive results for students.

While the Parent Involvement literature is vast, one of the most predominant names is Joyce Epstein; thus, the literature search began here. Epstein (1996) outlines six areas of parent involvement which she has shown have positive effects on the child's ability to achieve in school. Briefly, her areas include (1) parenting practices, (2) communication with the child's school, (3) volunteering at the school, (4) encouraging learning at home, (5) being involved in school-wide decision making, and (6) collaborating with the larger community. Though she points out that not all interactions with the school lead to student achievement (i.e., negative interactions with the school may decrease student performance or enthusiasm), many schools find successful ways to increase communication with families, teach positive parenting skills, involve parents in school decision making, teach parents how to help their children learn at home, give opportunities for parents to become involved in the school, and collaborate with the wider community to help bridge the gap between home and school. In addition, Epstein and Sheldon (2002) found that family practices and the quality of communication with the school were associated with attendance, which in turn is positively associated with school achievement.

Other researchers also support this notion of the connection between parent involvement and scholastic achievement: for example, Dryfoos (1994) observed in her research on Full-Service Schools that the children whose parents are absent from the schools seem to struggle the most.

Given all the obstacles facing parents and educators in collaborating to support students, one might ask: is it necessary for parents to show up at the school if they want their child to succeed? While being involved in school by being physically *present* at the school site has an obvious impact, scattered research efforts suggest that "absent" parents are in fact able to contribute quite considerably to the success of their child in school (Lopez, 2001; Nicoll, 2002). This subset of research was important for our FRC because we were very aware of the large population of parents who were unable or unwilling to enter the school grounds. The literature from Lopez (2001) and Nicoll (2002) states that parents who create positive, safe environments in the home, who hold high expectations, who teach the value of hard work and emphasize effort, and who communicate regularly and with respect to their children also positively affect their child's ability to succeed in school.

A variety of studies have also shown a correlation between parenting styles and academic achievement (Miller, 2002; DeBaryshe, et. al., 1993; Center for Mental Health Services, 2000), demonstrating that parents who use discipline methods rooted in reasoning, logical consequences, problem-solving and consistency, as well as parents who operate from a predominately authoritarian style, as opposed to passive or authoritative, have children with higher levels of academic achievement. By extension, students showed gains in achievement when their parents attended workshops and classes specifically designed to teach positive discipline, problem solving techniques and home practices that can support learning (McDaniel, 1993).

Miller (2002) suggests that a significant challenge to schools is educating those parents who cannot attend school events on the ways that they can support their children in their everyday interactions: involving parents in their children's *education* even when they cannot be involved in their child's *school*. In this respect, the FRC might be thought of as a bridge, helping parents provide this indirect support to their children. On the one hand, the idea of educating parents to be better able to support their children instead of punishing them for not having these skills seems positive and aimed toward partnership. However, from another perspective, this line of thought puts schools in a position of telling parents how to parent without regard for the cultural background, beliefs, values or skills parents bring to the table which may be beyond the school's parent-involvement radar.

### *Cultural Dissonance*

The differences in background, culture and values between many families in disenfranchised and poor communities and the educators within the school constitute the second major area of the Parent Involvement literature. This area looks at the ways in which families and schools struggle to communicate and work together. In addition, it is important within this section to raise awareness of the cultural divides and differences in power *within* the parent community itself. Multiple cultural perspectives and varying degrees of power within different groupings of people cannot be ignored as we strive to understand the layers of parent and community involvement.

If parent involvement is so important to a child's success, and if schools are engaging in parent outreach and involvement practices, why are many parents still not involved in their children's school? For many practitioners and parents, this answer may seem obvious; however, a few researchers have tried to specify some of the more general reasons why some parents avoid schools (and some schools, despite claims to the contrary, actively or passively discourage parents).

Miller (2002) outlines some of the practical and psychological reasons why parents do not attend the parent involvement and education projects championed by schools. Practical barriers include:

- Lack of transportation
- Lack of time in workday
- Inability to take time off work
- Competing commitments of other children
- Lack of energy
- Lack of knowledge about problems

Psychological barriers include:

- Lack of interest
- Feeling unwelcome
- Cultural values that discourage participation
- Past poor history or poor relationship with school personnel
- Defeatist attitude toward a rebellious child

McAllister-Swap (1993) also outlines some very real and common barriers to parent involvement in the school and school involvement with the parents. These reasons include: (1) factors in the community, such as single parents, poverty, diversity of language and ethnicity,

and mothers in the workforce; and (2) school norms that work against establishing partnerships with parents, such as assuming parents do not care to be involved, not including collaboration with parents as part of regular teaching practice, avoiding conflict, and scripting parent involvement at a minimal level. McAllister-Swap also recognizes that school staff are not allotted *real time* to build relationships with parents, but rather are expected to squeeze in parent meetings along with the rest of their responsibilities.

The difficulties plaguing parent-school partnerships reach even deeper into the ways in which different cultures and individuals view the role of formal schooling, the role of educators and the role of parents in a child's overall development. Fine (1993) examines the lack of understanding schools have in regards to the expertise parents bring to the table. Despite the wealth of information parents have about their children and potential support a school might be able to gain from any given parent in the education of those children, when a caregiver does not participate in the traditional or established niches of involvement he or she is seen by the school as "absent" or "unavailable" and their contribution to the success of the child is potentially lost. In other words, there appear to be very few examples of schools reaching out to parents in a way that recognizes their expertise and knowledge about their children even though research suggests that teacher outreach has significant effects on parent participation (Chrispeels et al., 1991). While schools are often trying to bring parents to the school, one might argue that schools must learn more about parents and families before we will be able create a genuine understanding of the best ways to educate our children. As Fine (1993) states, "it is not enough for families to become more like schools; schools and districts must also become more like families." (Fine, 1993, p. 691). To reach all parents, even those currently seen as "absent," schools must drastically restructure their approach to parent involvement.

At this point, the research has revealed two important points: first, parents' involvement in school and schools' partnership with parents are helpful for student success; second, schools and families both face very real and unrelenting barriers to establishing these partnerships. For some, such as De Carvalho (2001), these barriers are insurmountable because of the current structure of schools and the prevailing attitudes towards parents. Based on this information, it can be assumed that schools will not be able to conquer the parent-school divide within the confines of their current mode of operation: new ways of reaching out to parents must be explored. Thus, crafting a solution to the problem of building a school culture where parents trust the Family Resource Center as a place to obtain resources and support requires an in-depth analysis of school-family relationships as well as a conscious, intentional process that addresses these psychological and practical obstacles as they arise.

At this point in my literature review, I came to see a separation of the term 'parent involvement' to sub-terms of 'educational involvement' and 'school involvement' as critical in conceptualizing how an FRC could help to *involve* the disenfranchised parents of the community. I believed that the FRC might be able to involve more parents, based on a goal to involve parents in their child's *education* as a whole, and not solely focus on a parent's physical presence at the school site. I began a new search to answer the question: why were many parents *not* involved in their child's education at all? According to research by De Carvalho (2001), one of the major barriers between families and schools lies in the nature of their values. Schools primarily operate according to "mainstream" or middle-class, white values, guided by assumptions and cultural frameworks of education, child rearing and family dynamics that are often foreign to minority or poor families. De Carvalho states that the difference between families and schools is such that effective parent involvement is not possible: there are differences in ideas around life goals, the

purpose of schooling, and how to impart new information, which make it difficult for parents to get involved at home as well, if they do not support the ideology expressed by teaching staff. De Carvalho states that this difference in values is true especially in poor and minority neighborhoods, where the teaching staff is often white and middle class. De Carvalho maintains that when a school becomes more and more involved in a family, they are essentially trying to make that family conform to the social norms of middle-class, white society instead of trying to gain an understanding of the workings of a particular family. This very obstacle of differences in values quickly became the FRC's challenge: we needed to identify where our values differed and find a way to bridge the differences.

In De Carvalho's research, she says that schools are seen as more and more responsible for the social and emotional growth of young people while parents are being held more and more responsible for the academic success of their children. The idea that schools can serve all the needs of a family puts the school in a position where it is expected to "fix" families and puts families in a position where they are automatically identified as inferior and unable to properly raise their children. De Carvalho states that the idea that one's schooling and one's overall education can be found in the same place is an American artifact: schools are responsible for teaching academics, not for 'fixing' families. In essence, she says that schools need to stay out of families' lives. While the FRC staff does not agree with this conclusion, we did recognize that the cultural divide between the community and school staff could potentially impede our mission to help families in an authentic way.

Other researchers have identified a mismatch between the values of schools and the values of parents, especially parents of lower socio-economic status (Lareau, 1987; Fine, 1993; Delpit, 1995). These authors see the difference in values displayed as a difference in power, where the school attempts to impose its values on the parents of the students it serves. Schools look to parents to "back them up" when parents might not agree with their approach to a specific problem such as discipline, presentation of a curricular topic, or the makeup of the daily schedule. Furthermore, parents and educators may simply be "out of sync" (Lareau, 2003) in their conceptions of how children might best be raised or the parental role in child development. The quality and type of parent involvement becomes dependent on what the school feels is an appropriate role for parents and what the school feels the parents are able to do.

Lareau (2003) elaborates on this point. In the study articulated in her book, Unequal Childhoods, Lareau worked with twelve families, white and African American, from middle- and working-class families. She focused on one child, who was nine or ten years old, in each family. Families were interviewed at home and observed in many different environments. Lareau took particular interest in the ways in which the children and their parents interacted with the institution of the school or other child-related activities. In middle-class families, both white and African American, children are encouraged to speak up for their needs, and activities are highly scheduled for the purpose of building a child's character and talents. It is a very child-centered, highly scheduled world focused on the "concerted cultivation" of their abilities. In working-class families, Lareau observes the parents' practices represent an effort to "facilitate natural growth" in their children, allowing children to develop as they naturally might, providing ample time for self-directed leisure, and the high importance of interaction with family. For these families, family life comes first and children are responsible for scheduling their own time. Parents defer to institutions such as the school, instead of negotiating with them to have their child's needs met. It is important to note that through all her research, Lareau found the cultural logic of child rearing practices split over class lines, not race lines.



Lareau is clear that both concerted cultivation and natural growth have potentially positive and negative consequences for children as they develop: children raised with the former feel empowered to negotiate with people in power to have their needs met; children raised with the latter benefit from strong kinship ties and maintain autonomy over their leisure time. The main issue Lareau discovered lies in the fact that the “cultural logic of child-rearing at home [for working-class families] is out of sync with that of institutions” (p. 3). While institutional practices and theories have changed throughout time, middle-class parents have more access to that information and more resources (educational and material) to be able to adapt quickly to these changes.

As middle-class families adapt to the values of the school and its expectations for child rearing, children raised by this cultural logic are better able to function within the school and its related “gatekeeping institutions,” such as getting medical needs met or entering the job market (Lareau, 1989). Lareau states that middle-class children “appear to (at least potentially) gain important institutional advantages. From the experience of concerted cultivation, they acquire skills that could be valuable in the future when they enter the world of work” (Lareau, 2003, p. 4). Conversely, working-class parents tend to try to maintain separation between themselves in the school: “working-class parents and poor parents are typically deferential rather than demanding toward school personnel; they seek guidance from educator rather than giving advice to them; and they try to maintain a separation between school and home rather than foster an interconnectedness” (2003, p.198). This separation presents an example to children that the institution is something to be feared as opposed to an opportunity for one’s own cultivation and growth.

Lareau is clear that “concerted cultivation is neither ‘the only’ way nor ‘the right’ way to raise children. However, it is the way that contemporary powerful professionals such as child development specialists assert as the most appropriate and helpful approach to child rearing” (Lareau, 2003, p. 173). Children whose families are more in tune with the “cultural logic” of institutions are more likely to fair better within those institutions. Families more in tune tend to be those who maintain “main-stream” or “middle-class” values.

To further understand the difference in values and perspective between schools and families cited above we first took a look at what it means to have “mainstream” values or to be “in sync” with the standards of institutions. The term ‘mainstream’ most often refers to the values of the dominant class, most often of white, middle class professionals, as referenced by Lareau (1989, 2003) above. These values are those by which one must operate in order to keep in step with the powerful institutions or people who act as gatekeepers between a person and his or her goals. For example, in this case, mainstream values might be those held by the institution of the school or the role of employer come hiring time. Drawing on the researchers mentioned above, I was able to develop a number of categories where values may differ among cultures.

First, mainstream culture may be generally described as oriented toward the individual’s aspirations and success. We see this in ideas such as “pulling one’s self by his own bootstraps,” meaning that the individual is responsible for his success. This may be compared with many cultures’ emphasis on the community and family: one’s purpose is to work to fulfill the aspirations of the whole. There are many places where these two ideas overlap: for example, if I work to succeed in my goals I will be better able to support my family. However, the difference in emphasis changes the reasons behind where I put my effort and how I measure my success.

Another area where we can see differences in values involves the family structure. In mainstream culture, the family is *child centered*, meaning that the family puts its efforts into the

well-being of the child first. In other cultures, there may be a focus on the needs of the family as a whole. For example, a family event may take priority over a school event. Other families may see the adults' needs as coming first, such as work or adult-specific events. Still, other families have a focus on the extended family: older generations are held in a place of absolute respect and reverence, and the family is focused on serving their needs as they have served the family for many years.

Perhaps the most relevant category of values lies in the family's perceived role *of* education, and their perceived role *in* education (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Reynolds, 1992). Many mainstream families see formal schooling as a necessary component to success in life. Other cultures may see the most important aspects of education as coming from multiple sources, including family, experiences and work. These families may not view formal education as directly linked to success in life. Furthermore, the role of the family in formal education varies according to one's cultural background. Mainstream culture, as described in the literature cited above, condones a high level of involvement in the academic development of a child, to the point where it is believed imperative to a child's success in school. Other cultures may believe that the school has an obligation to provide a formal education, while the family has an obligation to provide other aspects of education: manners, social interactions, life skills and discipline. In cultures outside the mainstream, parents may believe that it is not their job to teach their children math facts and it is not the teacher's job to teach their child life lessons.

As we first developed our FRC, the barriers between the school and some parents made it difficult if not impossible to provide these parents with needed services which, in our opinion, would ultimately improve their children's chances at "success." Though it was not always the case, we found that quite often the parents who were most alienated from the school were those most in need of the types of resources offered by the FRC such as health care or legal support. These parents, we hypothesized, were those affected by the psychological and practical barriers mentioned by Miller (2002) above, as well as the cultural differences outlined by De Carvalho (2001).

### *Fractals of Values and Power*

The parent involvement literature addresses the cultural divides and power differentials between parents and school staff; however, within the parent community, there are often equally powerful divides between cultures that carry with them their own power dynamics which highly influence the way parents interact with each other, the school, and its resources.

A fractal is a geometric shape whose pattern is infinitely complex and often repeats itself as one examines smaller and smaller parts of the whole. In this way, while the most obvious difference in culture and power resides at the school-community level, within the community, there are also complex patterns of cultural difference and degrees of power which influence the ways in which parents interact with the school as a system, not to mention the ways in which the staff interact (Warren, 2005).

The ALCANCE community is comprised of three major cultural groups: Latino, African American and Mien (Asian). While all families live within the same general area of the city and most families may be described as working-class or poor in regards to socio-economic status, there is a long history of cultural difference and dissonance between various groups within the community. In this section, I will demonstrate the struggles within the community by focusing primarily on African Americans and Latinos, as this is the focus of the available literature and

history of the city. However, one can imagine the many reaches of the fractal pattern of power if we were to examine different or more detailed parts of the community.

The area of the city where ALCANCE resides has a rich and shifting cultural history. The city itself has a history of a strong African American community and at one time many areas of the city could be characterized as predominately African American. According to the 2000 Census, approximately 36% of the city was African American while about 22% of the city's residents reported to be Latino. However, within the specific area where this project took place, 50% of residents were Latino and only 24% were African American.<sup>2</sup> Conflicts between Latino and African American people are frequent among youth and adults alike: gang violence within the community and bullying at school with highly charged racial themes are common, according to teachers, parents and other staff within the city schools.

Vaca (2004) and West (1994) both address the issue of differences in power and culture within the communities we often group together as 'non-mainstream' or 'people of color.' Vaca explains that in general, there is a "presumed alliance" between African Americans and Latinos because they share similar histories of poverty and disenfranchisement. Quite the contrary, Vaca found an incredible tension between African Americans and Latinos due to competition for employment, educational and political resources. In California specifically, this competition for resources has been at issue as the Latino population continues to increase, becoming the largest minority group. In addition, Vaca cites a feeling among the African American community that Latinos are unfairly benefitting from the work African Americans have done to establish civil rights within the country. One school trustee in Compton, CA even went as far as to say that the Affirmative Action policies were meant as reparations for African Americans for slavery, not as a reward for Latinos for crossing the boarder. Meanwhile, Latino people were consistently discriminated against, isolated in separate (and unequal) schools under the guise of language difference, and denied opportunities in the workplace. In fact, Vaca highlights Mendez vs. Westminster in California as a precursor to the national case of Brown vs. Board of Education in the fight against "separate but equal" in education.

Overall, Vaca demonstrates that the fact that two groups have "parallel histories of suffering at the hands of white America and that they also share a history of struggling to obtain social, economic and educational opportunities" (pp. 48-49) is not enough to create an alliance. The assumed empathy two disenfranchised groups might feel is quickly eclipsed by competition for resources.

West (1994) highlights a similar expectation of alliance between the African American and Jewish people who possess commonalities in their histories in regards to persecution, slavery and oppression. Similarly to Vaca, West found the reality to be quite different: at the time of his book, West observed a growing anti-Semitism among the African American community, again due primarily to competition for resources with Jewish people gaining economic power and leaving African Americans behind.

West's examination of African American culture and the struggle of a people to form a racial and cultural identity demonstrates yet a smaller microcosm of the fractal-like power structures that exist within our multi-layered community. While two different racial groups cannot be assumed to form an alliance based on common histories of oppression, neither can a single racial group be classified as unified in the struggle for empowerment and identity. West speaks at length about the "pervasive patriarchy and homophobia in black American life" (p. 44)

---

<sup>2</sup> www.unitycouncil.org

as African American men begin to form a “Black authenticity” based in part on oppressing and disregarding the humanity of African American women and African American homosexuals.

Thus, while the most obvious cultural and power differences lie between the middle-class school professionals and the working-class and poor families of our community, it is important to note that as we look more closely at smaller parts of our social system there are similar struggles at multiple levels. This fractal-like social structure can lead us to unwittingly push out a group or individual within the parent community despite our efforts to open the FRC to all parents. In our particular case, divides within the community were specifically manifested through the difficulties we had bringing African American parents into the FRC as well as the school’s overall difficulty in involving fathers in school activities. It is likely that there were also additional dynamics of which we remain unaware to this day; however, our hopes of identifying and addressing these issues are much better when we closely examine the intricate patterns of the fractal instead of assuming one simple shape can account for the entire community.

### *Bridging the Parent – School Divide*

Lareau (1989) observes that educators “frequently act as if there is only one ‘proper’ form of parent involvement in school” (p. 97). She explains that in looking at the differences between middle and working class families, her studies have shown little difference in the amount that parents value education or in the opportunities teachers present to parents to participate in their children’s schooling. The difference, rather, is in the cultural resources (also referred to as ‘cultural capital’) available to parents. As explained above, parents who are within middle-class and mainstream culture are better able to navigate the school system because of its synchronicity with this logic of child rearing. Additionally, parents in working class and poor communities often have less formal education, less confidence in working with professionals or those in positions of power, and less flexibility to attend conferences or volunteer at the school site. While Lareau states that the schools in her study did not discriminate against working class and poor families, it could be argued that in offering the exact same opportunities of participation to populations with drastically different resources is, in fact, a form of discrimination. By not recognizing what parents are and are not able to do, give or understand, the school (often unwittingly) shuts out and dismisses parents who in fact highly value their children’s scholarly success.

At this point, the research reveals a constructive avenue by which we might begin to repair the multi-leveled fractures within the school community: the third area of Parent Involvement research sheds some light on how to approach the very real cultural mismatch between schools and families. Given the demographic make up of ALCANCE (about 60% Latino), the research on immigrant Latino families by Lopez and Moll is particularly relevant to our work. Lopez (2001) presents a review of the literature and points out, similarly to Lareau, that Parent Involvement has been defined as a “role to be performed” such as attending events, participating in structures like the Parent-Teacher Association, or performing scripted routines at home, usually around homework. Lopez states, “instead of trying to get marginalized parents involved in specific ways, schools should begin to identify the unique ways that marginalize parents are already involved in their children’s education and search for creative ways to capitalize on these and other subjugated forms of involvement” (Lopez, 2001, p.434). Lopez employs educators to look for ways to validate students for achievements beyond perfect attendance and straight A’s.

Moll et al. (2001) articulates what might be meant by validating the expertise and experience of families. Moll also worked with immigrant Latino families, specifically from Mexico. This group of researchers examined families' 'funds of knowledge,' meaning "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (p. 133). While the families in this study did not have much in the way of formal education, they had extensive knowledge in agriculture, mining, business, medicine, construction, repair, religion and many other areas that were necessary or specialized skills developed through life experiences and passed down through family traditions. Moll et al. also identified very different roles for children within the family network: children were active, rather than passive, participants in the daily activities of the family. These areas of knowledge reach far beyond a surface level of cultural awareness or show-and-tell type presentations teachers might use to bond with families: the "funds of knowledge" recognized by Moll et al. are real and tangible skills that students bring to school but are rarely connected to their academic learning. In this research, the teachers involved in the project created lessons that drew on these "funds of knowledge" and helped students and families recognize that they were indeed coming to the table with much more than they previously believed.

Based on this research, it seemed we would be most likely to bridge the cultural divides between parents and school by employing these "funds of knowledge"; by finding a way to dig out the expertise of families, engaging that knowledge to propel students forward and empowering parents to take ownership and develop agency in working with schools (Flores et al., 1991).

As we created the FRC, we maintained awareness that not only were we looking to bridge the school-community divide, but there was also a need to ensure *all* parents felt welcomed. Within our community, the Latino families represent the largest percentage of the population and are often seen as "the face" of the school. Vaca lays out a framework for how two groups might effectively work together despite competition for resources and emotionally charged histories of struggle. In order to truly form an alliance, Vaca concludes, there must be a mutual benefit to both groups; there must be a specific and articulated purpose to the alliance; each group must maintain a power base and control over its own decision making; and there must be recognition of unique, self-interest on the part of each group. In essence, each group within the alliance must be recognized for and allowed its individuality as well as the commonality of struggle. In working with our community, it would be important to openly and specifically recognize and build on the individual strengths of each community as we built the structures for all of us to work together for the sake of all parents and families.

At this juncture, we hired parents to run the FRC: parents whose faces and experiences represented those of the major racial groups of the community. As mentioned earlier in this manuscript, hiring parents presented its own challenges: while there was great advantage to hiring individuals with expertise in parenting and the community, the fact that the parents did not have previous experience in this specific type of position meant that the training process used would be vital to the success of the FRC. How does one activate these "funds of knowledge" and the expertise we believed our parents had, despite a lack of formal education? The unique training process I used drew from the research of Consultee-Centered Consultation and Popular Education, discussed below.

*Question 3: How did Consultee-Centered Consultation seen through the lens of Popular Education practices and theories contribute to the effective education and empowerment of community parents employed to develop and manage the FRC, and through them help empower other parents who use the center?*

ALCANCE's response to the puzzle of connecting parents with necessary resources to help them better support their children in school was multifaceted, including teacher-led home visits, a partnership with Community Alliance for Schools, site counsel meetings and general expectations for staff to be intentional about their parent involvement practices. Still, the principal reported that many parents remain alienated and disenfranchised from the school. We hypothesized that the reasons for this alienation would be consistent with the psychological and practical barriers presented in the research above. Through the Family Resource Center, my coworker, Outreach Coordinator Paxton, and I attempted to bridge the gap between the school and the alienated parents, but we found that we were also viewed as part of the institution, making it difficult to approach the psychological barriers referred to in the list above. For this reason, we decided that parents would be best at connecting with parents: we needed to hire parent coordinators to build and run the Family Resource Center if it were to successfully conquer some of the psychological and practical barriers preventing families from accessing the resources offered by the Center. As mentioned above, the Popular Education literature clearly states that those most affected by the problem often are the ones who possess the solution to that problem. Therefore, hiring parents to help parents was the most logical solution.

Hiring parent coordinators created another puzzle, however: how could we train and empower parents to be liaisons between the school and community? It seemed to me that this would be a *reciprocal* educational process: the parents would need to learn the logistics of running an FRC and the skills of working with families in crisis, and I needed to learn effective practices for working with alienated, disenfranchised families. The training process, then, needed to reflect the goals of empowerment and shared power between the members of the group. The training process also needed to be sensitive to the fact that we began with an explicit power imbalance: I held the title of 'supervisor,' come from a privileged background, have degrees in psychology and education, and I am white. The parent coordinators came from disadvantaged backgrounds, are Mien, African-American and Latino, are often struggling to make ends meet financially, and have limited educational experiences (none of the coordinators finished college, though one did attend college level classes and one coordinator is trained as a medical assistant and licensed vocational nurse). Despite different levels of formally recognized education, each of us came to the table with valuable knowledge and each of us had much to learn. Throughout the project, there were also many examples of my own assumptions regarding the purpose of the FRC and the way it would fit into the community. Despite initial discussion specific to avoiding a deficit model of intervention, many of my and Paxton's, actions were geared towards identifying and fulfilling deficits in the community. Our initial assumptions seem to be that the community was lacking, and we would personally be able to fill those needs. Perhaps as a mark of our place of privilege and relative power in this context, we felt we would be able to solve problems of the community. One's interpretations of situations and reactions are highly influenced by background and culture. Paxton and I were in no way immune, in fact we were highly susceptible, to these forces. A large part of the story told here is that of the evolution of thinking and practice, as well as the developing cultural awareness, of myself and the other educators involved in the creation of the FRC.

### *Theoretical Framework for the Parent Employee Education-Training Process*

As stated above, when we looked to hire parents to coordinate the Family Resource Center, we looked to hire people that represented the community and not necessarily professionals in social work or other similar professions. The decision to hire parents was based on the idea that parents would be better at connecting with parents than school staff: the cultural, linguistic, class, and other barriers that may influence the trust between a parent and a staff member were less likely to be factors. This notion is supported by parent involvement literature, referenced above, that points out the many unstated and unrecognized barriers that strain relationships between school staff and parents as well as the positive arguments found in the Popular Education literature, referenced below.

In choosing to hire parents from the community, I had to choose a responsive method of training and education that would honor the expertise of the parent employees while acknowledging that there were specific skills they needed to learn in order to provide instrumental and emotional support to the rest of the community. If we wish to involve parents as partners in the education of children, we must see them as bringing valuable expertise to the table and engage them as equals. Otherwise, the power relationships is weighted towards the school and the potential for fostering resentment and distrust is great: telling parents what they need to do to meet the school's agenda may meet the goal of a simplistic form of parent involvement, where parents are more visible at the school; however, it will not help to foster parent involvement in the more complex way espoused by researchers and educators.

### *Consultee-Centered Consultation Literature*

The day-to-day objectives and activities of the training-education of the parent employees are based in the theoretical framework outlined by Consultee-Centered Consultation (CCC). The origin of Consultee-Centered Consultation lies with Gerald Caplan (1963). While working in Israel in mental health institutions, Caplan and his colleagues began to work with the health care professionals around specific work problems instead of seeing individual clients themselves. This practice allowed mental health professionals to be more efficient with their work, as the front-line caregivers often had more than one child with a similar problem, meaning that consulting with a mental health professional about one child often gave them the knowledge and skills to work with many children. Since Caplan's work, researchers and practitioners have used this model to work in a number of environments, including schools (Ingraham, 2000; Hylander, 2001; Ingraham, 2003).

Based on my experience with schools and families, I believed that CCC would provide one model for training parents within the FRC context to take on a supportive role of both parents and teachers, helping to build the types of relationships necessary for student success. This section will provide a brief description of Consultee-Centered Consultation and its use with teachers and other education professionals. It is important to note that there is no evidence in the current research that CCC has been used in the practice of training and working with non-professionals or non-credentialed personnel (i.e. parents).

CCC is a specific type of consultation where two professionals come together to collaborate in problem solving around a specific work issue. As mentioned above, this method is based on a mental health model which aims to address the many layers of emotional as well as practical issues that come in the way of solving or working through a problem (Caplan, 1963; James et al., 1986). The consultant is a specialist in the area in which the consultee is having

difficulty with a particular client. In schools, this often involves a teacher (consultee) who is having difficulty with a student (client) and asks for support from the school psychologist (consultant). The school psychologist, in this example, will work with the teacher on the specific problem s/he is having with the student. The school psychologist leads the teacher through a problem solving process, aimed at helping the teacher to re-conceptualize the problem, detach from any emotional issues that may be interfering with viewing the student objectively, and fill in any knowledge gaps that may be preventing effective intervention. Ultimately, the responsibility for making change is with the teacher. The school psychologist offers clarifications, interpretations or advice, but does not make decisions. In this theory, the consultation process not only helps with the particular student but also adds to the teacher's knowledge so that s/he is more effective in future situations (Lambert et al., 2004; Sandoval, 2003).

According to Caplan (1963), there are four types of difficulties that interfere with a consultee's ability to solve a problem:

1. Lack of understanding of the factors involved in the case
2. Lack of skill or resources to deal with the problems involved
3. Lack of professional objectivity regarding the specific child
4. Lack of confidence to deal with the problem at hand

CCC aims to help the consultant in all four of these areas. Lambert et al. (2004) presents a series of articles that look at the ways CCC addresses the above obstacles in schools and other community organizations. The theory and research included in this compilation of work shows the effectiveness of CCC practices in supporting professional development, in establishing preventative practices within an organization, and in supporting positive relationships between different professionals within an organization or school. This non-hierarchical model utilizes the skills of all those present without imposing obligations to act. This type of collaborative relationship building works to increase the effectiveness of the organization or school to provide its clients with the best service possible.

CCC made sense as the best method of educating the parent employees for a number of reasons: first, the model assumes that both parties bring valuable expertise to the table, thereby creating a situation where the power dynamics are more likely to be balanced. Second, CCC is a way to equip those without professional experience in a given area with the knowledge to work with clients, thereby offering a more efficient way of disseminating services. Third, the problem-solving method is meant to simultaneously address the issues of a particular client while educating the consultee in how to work with other clients with similar issues. Thus, this model would theoretically provide training for the parent employees, bring out the parents' own expertise, while at the same time, helping the client in need.

Though I felt that CCC was the best method for training our coordinators, I was unable to find research documenting the use of this type of consultation practice with parents to help build a school community, therefore, I had to invoke other theoretical frameworks to be able to appropriately alter the CCC methods to fit with the professional-parent dynamic, where power relationships are likely to be imbalanced at the beginning and need to be actively balanced, as opposed to a professional-professional dynamic, where power relationships are more likely to be balanced at the beginning.



One way to view the relationship between a parent and a school professional is that the consultee-parent is an empowered individual who may be dis-empowered in this particular situation; in fact, they feel powerless in facing the problem at hand. The idea is to help them use the skills they have in other areas to empower them in this problem situation. As educators, we must begin with the assumption that parents are not coming to us as completely powerless human beings, no matter what their background. Many parents are empowered within their homes, but not in relationship to the school. They may be empowered in their workplace, but not in relationship to the school. They may be empowered to make key decisions on extended family matters, but not in their relationship with the school. Just as is suggested in the CCC literature when working with professionals who feel powerless, I believe it is possible to capitalize on the empowerment that parents already possess and translate it into the context of the school. I aim to show this in my analysis of the growth of the parent employees in this study.

I imagine that another reason that parents are absent from the application of this model is the simple fact that CCC is a process which occurs between *two professionals*. In general, parents in low-income communities are not professionals in education, psychology, or other fields directly relevant to the support of children's academic success; the fact remains that CCC relies on an equal power balance between the consultant and the consultee, and in our situation there were stated and unstated differences in power between myself and the parent employees. At the same time, I stood by the idea that the way to create a strong, sustainable FRC was through recognizing and utilizing the tremendous strength and knowledge of the community, which meant recognizing the parents as experts, or professionals, in parenting and in their community. In order to address the difference in power and explore the idea that parents are experts in parenting and in their community, I drew on the literature of Popular Education.

### *Popular Education Literature*

The Popular Education literature brings into question the issue of power dynamics in relationships between parents and school staff. In the CCC literature, the assumption is that the individuals engaging in the consultation process share equal power in the relationship, which is perhaps the reason why utilizing CCC techniques with parents is apparently absent from the literature. The Popular Education literature faces the issue of power head-on and provides the foundation to acknowledge, understand and work to change the way power imbalances can impede productive relationships between schools and parents. By utilizing the principles of Popular Education, I hypothesized that we would be able to address many of these seemingly inevitable power imbalances.

Paulo Freire, one of the recognized fathers of Popular Education, addresses the issues of education among oppressed and disempowered people, specifically asking: "Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand asking the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation?" (Freire, 1970, p. 27). In research, we (the researchers) often make the error of studying a situation or perceived problem without consulting the very people whom it affects: often we study the people as if they were no different than the problem or system in question (Maguire, 1987; Hall, 1992). Freire (1970) strongly believes, "it is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours" (p. 77). Whether researching a particular area of education or community, or trying to solve a problem as in the case of this study, it is critical to meaningfully engage the people within the situation we are

studying. The parents, in this instance, are the disempowered group the FRC aims to support. If they are not actively involved in the theoretical and material creation of the FRC, we will risk recreating the patterns of oppression already plaguing our community. As Freire (1970) states:

To investigate the generative theme is to investigate people's thinking about reality and people's action upon reality, which is their praxis. For precisely this reason, the methodology proposed requires that the investigators and the people (who would normally be considered objects of that investigation) should act as co-investigators. The more active an attitude men and women take in regard to the exploration of their thematics, the more they deepen their critical awareness of reality and, in spelling out those thematics, take possession of that reality (p. 87).

In Freire's work, he found that engaging the oppressed in the work of examining and changing the world around them began with developing an awareness of the power differences at play. In the current situation, those in disempowered positions are often unaware or accepting of the order of things: the oppressed do not know they are oppressed. Freire's work sets up a practice of involving the oppressed in an active, reflective examination of the problem or situation being researched with the end goal of arming them with the power to make change and take action.

In a parallel development, a young Miles Horton was sent to Ozone, Tennessee in the late 1920s to teach summer bible studies to community workers (Adams, 1972). The people of Ozone were poor and uneducated, in the midst of their own depression years before the country as a whole took its devastating financial dive. Horton quickly understood that his teachings were far removed from what the people were eager to learn: they wanted to solve immediate problems such as finding jobs and maintaining the community's physical health. Horton brought his students together to talk about their problems. Though Horton did not know the answers, the group did not seem to mind. What Horton *was* able to do was to get people talking to each other, finding that many of the answers already existed within the community itself. By the end of that first summer, Horton "learned that the people knew the answers to their own problems. He'd learned that the teacher's job is to get them talking about those problems, to raise and sharpen questions, and to trust the people to come up with the answers" (Adams, 1972, p. 98).

The Highlander Folk School developed with the mission to guide community workers through a process of defining problems and finding answers within the community itself. Horton was dedicated to an education process that was focused not on teaching, but on learning. Highlander searched for educators who were

...capable of learning, and who can teach, not so much by his teaching, as by his capacity to learn. America's great lack at present is the lack of men of this sort. We have plenty of men and women who can teach what they know; we have very few who can teach their own capacity to learn. (pp.100-101)

According to Adams, the Highlander Folk School's success in empowering and educating community workers through facilitated conversations instead of crafted lessons stems from its ability to maintain a learner's perspective, constantly adapting and refining its practice with each new experience. In the 1950s and 1960s, Highlander became involved in the Civil Rights movement, again providing space for a disempowered community to address problems and

develop solutions for themselves. The formally educated staff members of the school acted as facilitators, not orators of knowledge. By the 1970s, Highlander became a center for community organizing.

With his work at Highlander, Horton is considered another father of Popular Education, a co-parent with Freire. Horton maintained that all parties come to the table with valuable knowledge, no matter their level of formal education or the prestige of their position. Adams tells of a blacklisted community worker who came to the school. This man, Vaughn, gave information to other workers, which they in turn used immediately. Highlander's staff observed that what Vaughn taught was no different than what they had been saying, but the workers ignored the words of the educated staff: "Vaughn was a bridge between staff and workers. Formally educated staff members, it turned out, were never as effective in teaching as the people themselves" (Adams, 1972, pp. 117-118).

Both Freire and Horton's work demonstrate the value of many types of education, both formal and informal. There is value in one's ability to facilitate, to bring knowledge out of people. There is value in one's ability to communicate knowledge, which varies greatly independently of a person's level of formal education. Finally, there is great value in one's experience as well as the collective experience of a people to overcome any obstacle. The educative process forged by Freire and Horton is a means of infiltrating and overcoming the multi-layered and impossibly intricate power dynamics of our society.

When engaging in the work of Popular Education, it is critical to understand the way that power works on many different levels. In the Parent Involvement literature described above, the existence of power differences is discussed; however, Gaventa sheds light on how these power differences are actually used to affect a person's actions. Gaventa (1980) provides a framework for understanding the different ways that power can be used to dominate a situation. In Gaventa's first 'dimension' of power, A makes B do something that he does not want to do. In this instance, there is an observable conflict where one person uses influence and resources to control another's actions. In the second 'dimension' of power, A prevents a conflict from arising by making it too costly for B to protest, or by making it so that rebellion is not an option. In this instance, A might change the rules of the game to prevent an issue from coming to light, or may threaten B with costly repercussions should a rebellion occur. In the third 'dimension', A alters the desires of B so that B does not perceive a conflict to begin with. This happens through social myths, media filtering, socialization processes and so forth. Gaventa also points out that the powerless are also prevented from reflecting on their activity, that they are denied the right of democracy and of praxis (the reflection-action cycle).

For Gaventa, the Popular Education model begins by raising consciousness and ends in action. This concept of consciousness raising is referred to by Freire as *conscientization* (Freire, 1970). Gaventa, in line with Freire's writings, explains that to overcome the powerlessness experienced by the oppressed, they must first become aware of their situation and understand the way they are being manipulated to believe the reality of those in power. Second, they must come together to create, collect and mobilize resources that will help them to obtain what they need, or to rebel effectively. The final step is to engage in open conflict when others are using power and influence to make them do things they do not want to do, or do not feel are right actions.

In schools in under-resourced areas, the imbalance of power is almost always in favor of the school staff. In this respect, if we wish to involve parents in meaningful and productive ways, it is necessary to engage in an empowering process, where parents come to feel empowered as well as have actual power to create change in their environment. Popular

Education can be most simply defined as a process by which a group of historically disempowered people define and explore the issues and obstacles of everyday life (Hall, 1992; Stoecker and Bonacich, 1992). This process is often facilitated by a person who is aware of the power imbalances and can work with the people to challenge the structures embedded within a given system. Thus, in training the parent employees, I needed to be aware of the power imbalances and actively bring them to the attention of the parent employees. This involved conscious examination of the relationships they had with staff and how these relationships evolved as they became more recognized as ‘employees’ of the school in addition to being ‘parents’, as well as an examination of how the dynamics between other parents and the school were affected by power imbalances and what we could do to help balance that power. As mentioned above, power dynamics emerge as a fractal, showing themselves on multiple levels in infinitely intricate patterns. The teachings of Popular Education help us see that it is the identification of these dynamics, naming them and dissecting them, that help a people or a person begin to reconfigure the pattern, taking ownership of a problem, of a situation, or of their life.

In Popular Education, as in CCC described above, the group assumes that each member brings expertise to the table and that power relationships are equal. This expertise is derived from his or her own experiences, and is termed “socially constructed knowledge” (Gaventa, 1970). The process of defining and approaching the problem is also similar to CCC. The first step involves relationship building among those involved as the project itself is organized. The next step is to define and explain the problem at hand. At this point, the group engages in a problem-posing process, where questions are raised and assumptions are challenged. The expertise of all those at the table is brought out at this time. Next, the group does research to answer those questions that the group cannot answer effectively by itself. From this process, the group decides on appropriate action.

One fundamental difference between CCC and Popular Education is the goal of action. In CCC, the end goal is increased understanding with an option to take action to change a situation: this is an *empowering* process, one that arms an individual with the skills and knowledge to take action if he or she wishes. CCC’s end goal is not necessarily to make widespread change. In Popular Education, the goal is to balance the power relationships between groups via some action on the part of the oppressed group: this process’ end goal is to create an *empowered* entity that will act for a greater goal. Thus, while CCC and Popular Education are closely related, one appears to focus more on gaining knowledge and skills, while the other focuses more on using the knowledge and skills to make wide-spread change.

By beginning with the CCC structure, I hypothesized that I would be able to create an environment where we were learning and developing professionally through socially constructed knowledge. With the added component of Popular Education theory, we would be working to make ourselves aware of the multiple levels of power relationships that affected our ability to build support systems with and among parents.

In training the FRC coordinators, I came to see that the coordinators needed to come to a sense of empowerment to create an organization that could in turn create change in the school and community. During the development of the FRC, I had not distinguished the two paths which in retrospect become apparent: one path involved empowering the individual parents who were being trained as coordinators; the second path involved empowering the organization, the FRC, to create change. One could not happen without the other.

In retrospect, the empowerment framework used by Minkler, et al. (2001) appropriately frames my goals in training the FRC coordinators. Minkler et al. explains the difference between ‘empowering organizations’ and ‘empowered organizations’. Briefly, an *empowering* organization focuses on the process of facilitating ownership and agency among its members, while an *empowered* organization focuses on the outcomes of change. In order to truly make change in the school, it was obvious to me that those charged with making that change must first develop the confidence and capacity to do so.

Minkler et al. explains a number of *strategies* for facilitating empowerment: enhance experience and competence, enhance group structure and capacity, remove social and environmental barriers, and enhance environmental support and resources. Minkler et al. also lists the *qualities* of an empowering organization:

- A culture of growth and community building
- Opportunities for members to take on meaningful and multiple roles
- Peer-based support system that helps members develop a social identity
- Shared leadership with a commitment to both members and the organization

While the concepts and vocabulary provided by Minkler et al. adequately explain the goals of the FRC training for the parent coordinators, it does not illuminate *how* one might create a “culture of growth and community building” or “enhance experience and competence.” For our purposes, the Consultee-Centered Consultation literature appeared to outline a way of accomplishing these goals.

In Minkler et al.’s (2001) terminology, the goal of Popular Education is for the group not only to be an *empowering* entity, but an *empowered* entity. Minkler et al. describes empowered organizations as having the following characteristics:

- Successful growth and development
- Effective competition for resources
- Network with other organizations
- Influence on policy

For obvious reasons, the goal of the FRC was action; thus, the Popular Education model and its underlying theory was an essential part of creating a successful vehicle for the FRC to become an *empowered* organization. The use of CCC gave us a process by which we could act as an *empowering* organization, helping families to find the knowledge and tools needed to bring themselves through life’s difficulties. The empowerment framework outlined by Minkler et al. will be used in the final analysis to examine the evolution of the FRC and the ways in which the theoretical frameworks detailed in this proposal helped us to create an organization that would be empowered to address the lack of parent involvement in children’s education.

### *Crafting a Solution*

The crafting of the solutions to the problem *families do not have the necessary resources to support and enable their children to be successful in school* was a multi-year process that is still evolving to this day as the FRC continues to develop. In response to the complex main question above regarding how the various literatures could be combined to successfully address the lack of parent involvement in their children’s education, a number of hypotheses were

developed. In this section, I will explain the genesis of my hypotheses in a chronological fashion.

In January of 2003, the principal of ALCANCE School charged my colleague and me with the task of creating a Family Resource Center. Her thinking was exactly that described above: if the parents are supported, educated and are able to access resources, it is more likely that a child's academic, social, emotional and physical needs will be met. Research and common sense say that children perform better in school when their needs are being met in the home as well as at school (Dryfoos, 1994; Moles and D'Angelo, 1993; Shatrand, 1996). While the question of whether or not this applied to our students is important, there were many other questions that first needed to be answered about creating the FRC itself. Thus, the questions outlined at the beginning of this proposal are those that are of interest at this time. It is my hope that in the future we will be able to show a link between our successful operation of the FRC and increases in student success.

Our first question involved *how* to create an FRC: *How did the findings and theories outlined in the research on FRC development both help and hinder the development of the FRC?* This involved determining which resources to provide and how to provide them so that they would be utilized. I conducted a literature search on Family Resource Centers to follow the lead of other efforts. According to the literature reviewed above, there are a number of factors that need to be taken into account when looking to establish a Family Resource Center. I hypothesized that *the most difficult and more important factors in establishing a successful Center would be (1) developing positive, productive relationships with pre-existing parent-involvement efforts in the school, i.e. addressing local politics, (2) identifying and addressing the power dynamics between individual parents and individual staff members in the school, and (3) working through the legal and ethical issues of where responsibility lies for a family's well-being.*

Once we found and developed the basic programmatic components of the FRC, our next step was to connect with parents. Our second question is: *How did the application of the findings and theories regarding Parent Involvement in schools contribute to building relationships with disenfranchised and alienated parents, often those most in need of resources such as food, health care, parenting classes, employment, housing or legal aide, so that they will be more likely to access the resources provided by the school?* Though we aimed to address many of the issues of trust, power, ethics, and outreach head-on, we were still unable to connect with the community in the way we had intended. In essence, parents still were not coming to the center and were not using the available resources. Based partly on the research and mostly on our experiences and feedback from involved parents, we believed that our failure to reach parents was not for lack of outreach, but because of historical factors or lack of trust in the community, linguistic factors, and cultural barriers involving race, class, limited time living in the community and no first-hand parenting experience on our part. Thus, based on our analysis, we hypothesized that *parents from the community would be best able to connect families to resources provided by the FRC.*

At the beginning of the 2004-2005 school year, we hired three parents to coordinate the FRC. As explained above, our intention was to utilize and build on the expertise of the parents we hired; however, we also had to recognize that they were not trained as mental health professionals or in related fields. Thus, our third question was: *How did Consultee-Centered Consultation seen through the lens of Popular Education practices and theories contribute to the*

*effective education and empowerment of community parents employed to develop and manage the FRC, and through them help empower other parents who use the center?*

It was important to recognize that these particular parents were not necessarily assertive or active members of the school community: we hired them because they were active in their homes and in the greater community, but this did not necessarily translate into feelings of empowerment in relationship to the school and its staff. The parents were hired based on one or more of the following criteria:

1. Recommendation by school staff or Community Alliance for Schools
2. Active involvement in the school and its activities
3. Experience working with parents and families
4. Connections with the most prominent cultural groups within the school

Since part of the goal of hiring parents was to encourage them to take action, make change and have a voice, I combined the empowering theories of Consultee-Centered Consultation and Popular Education with the hopes of simultaneously building the parent employees' skills, bringing out their own expertise, and solving the client's problem. My hypothesis was *through a combined Consultee-Centered Consultation and Popular Education, model parents would gain the skills and confidence to manage the Family Resource Center.*

#### *Integrating Theoretical Frameworks*

Based on my experience over the three years of the project, I found that building a Family Resource Center is a complex endeavor, involving many levels of construction: it involves building the physical space, training and developing the staff, creating a relationship with the school, establishing relationships with the community, and initiating (or sometimes repairing) relationships with parents. Given the many levels involved in this project, it was necessary to draw from multiple theoretical frameworks in order to truly understand the ways in which we responded to the problems of a lack of resources and lack of access of those resources.

The multiple theoretical frameworks presented in this paper all combine to form a *multifaceted theory of parent empowerment through education and action*. The combined theoretical framework will help me to explain how parents' own experiences can be used as empowering training tools to build quality relationships within schools, between school staff and parents as well as between parents and parents, and to support the whole family. In other words, it will help to answer the main question: *How can a program, to be labeled a Family Resource Center, developed by drawing from multiple theoretical streams, successfully address the lack of effective parental involvement in children's education in a poor and disenfranchised community?*

The literature on Family Resource Centers, Parent Involvement, Consultee-Centered Consultation, and Popular Education all contribute to our understanding of how parents come to be empowered members of the school community. If we look only through a lens of the literature on Parent Involvement, we lack a vocabulary to talk about the power issues that emerged over the development of the FRC. If we look only at Parent Involvement and Popular Education, we lack a vocabulary to talk about the importance of the education and training (Consultee-Centered Consultation) that the parent employees went through in order to successfully work with the school and the parents they served, as well as deepen their understanding of and draw from their own experiences as parents in the community. Finally, the literature on Full-Service Schools and Family Resource Centers provides the initial vocabulary

with which to frame this project and discuss its impact. Combined, these four bodies of literature will allow me to thoroughly analyze the process by which parents I worked with became empowered to create powerful, positive change in the school community.

A 'multifaceted theory of parent empowerment through education and action' involves institutional, programmatic, interpersonal and personal factors. For starters, what a parent brings to the table in terms of experience and skill is critical to the ways in which they will interact with the school. Literature on Parent Involvement suggests that parents' previous experiences and own feelings of competence play a significant role in their present interactions with the school. The Consultee-Centered Consultation literature provides the basis for this component of the theory; however, as discussed above, since we are talking about parents there are many other factors to be taken into consideration. Second, the relationships that parents have with school staff members, including teachers and administrators, can be characterized by a number of different attributes. As discussed above, while antagonistic relationships will obviously make collaborative efforts to help a child difficult, positive relationships may have differing characteristics determining the quality of communication and collaboration possible: parents may be superficially involved, more actively engaged or truly empowered in relation to the school (to be explained in more detail below). In all relationships, negative or positive, between parents and schools, the role of *power*, as outlined by Popular Education theory, must be examined and acknowledged. The unstated and often invisible (at least to those who have it) dimension of power affects the level and quality of communication between parents and the school, and can promote or inhibit action to make positive change.

The third element of this theory involves programmatic concerns. The context in which a school is trying to encourage parent empowerment is critical. Based on the theory presented above and my experiences creating the Family Resource Center, I believe that parent empowerment cannot happen without a programmatic structure to encourage its growth. For many families, while they want only the best for their children, their focus rests on the family as a unit; therefore, it is impossible to talk about the individual child without talking about the family as a whole. For this reason, the idea of approaching parent involvement at the level of *family*, in this case through the Family Resource Center, means parents are encouraged and supported to be better leaders of their families – not just enabled to help their child do better in school. It is not enough, nor is it effective, to empower parents just to help their child in the school context: we must expand our view to match the most important unit of analysis for parents - the family as a whole.

Finally, the theory presented here takes into account institutional factors. Put simply, the school itself needs to be ready to provide the space – both physically and philosophically – for parents to become fully engaged. As will be shown in this study, the school's attitude towards parents, the role of the FRC within the overall school structure, and the types of relationships accepted as 'the norm' within the institutional framework can encourage or impede parent empowerment. The institution must be ready to consider goals that encompass the family as a unit, as well as the individual child, and must be flexible enough to adapt to the changing character and needs of the families that pass through its doors.

In the process of analyzing the data collected over the three years of this study, I expect to refine and adapt this theory to most accurately represent the process of parent empowerment in our FRC. While the theories helped make the initial choices in the development of the FRC, our experiences in creating the FRC have contributed to further development and refinement of



the theory, as well as to articulating the interaction between varying elements of the theory and practices.

## METHODS

The Family Resource Center at ALCANCE was not designed originally as a research project. The project and theoretical frameworks developed together; the research questions were developed after the completion of the study period to help guide the analysis of the data collected. The analysis was therefore a dynamic process whereby our experiences determined the research investigated and these both influenced the data collected as we reflected on our process. At the end of the project, the areas of research that were most helpful in creating the FRC became the basis by which the data was analyzed.

In all of my data sources, I looked for indicators of the interactive relationship between theory and practice as I aimed to answer the main research question and three sub-questions. Primarily, I looked for ways in which journal entries from myself and the parent employees showed evidence of veering away from theory, where they contradicted the theory, and where theory and practice were consistent with each other. In this way, I am able to explain how theory and practice interacted in the actual creation of a Family Resource Center and all its parts and to suggest revised theoretical premises where appropriate.

One particularly important element of this analysis rests in the idea of parent empowerment. This study offers ample opportunities to examine empowerment: the empowerment of the organization itself, the empowerment of the coordinators, and the empowerment of the parents who came to the FRC for assistance, though the data on the empowerment of the clients of the FRC is mostly limited to reflections by the coordinators in their journals.

In the analysis, parent empowerment was defined as supporting parents in learning to:

- access resources in their communities and school,
- advocate for themselves and their children,
- ask questions, and
- be willing, positive participants in their child's development.

Evidence of empowerment was difficult to come by in the documentation maintained by the FRC staff. It is important to remember that this analysis is being conducted after the creation was completed: in other words, the notes recorded were not intended to track any specific theme. Therefore, we were not specifically trying to record elements of empowerment. In the following chapters, evidence of empowerment will be explored, as well as the reasons why we did not see parent empowerment in the ways suggested by the literature. In addition, the empowerment of the parent employees themselves will be explored as a vital element to the development of the FRC.

The research questions were approached using qualitative methods. Relevant data (listed below) was coded using terms and concepts presented by the four bodies of literature: Full-Service Schools, Consultee-Centered Consultation, Parent Involvement and Popular Education.

### *Main Data Sources*

- *Journals*: during a two year period, journals of everyday activities were kept by parent employees as well as by the researcher. The objective of these journals was to document the

daily practices of the FRC but were not aimed at collecting specific types of information. The parent employees were instructed to “record the daily events and share your feelings about the events of the day.”

- *Meeting notes*: each staff meeting was documented by the author, including comments and reflections from the parent employees.
- *Interviews*: recorded interviews and meetings with parent employees, school parents, and school staff.

For all the above data sources, permission was granted by the participants for use in this dissertation. Identities are protected by pseudonyms. Parent-employee journals were reviewed and edited (to remove confidential information) by the parent employees before they were analyzed.

#### *Supplementary Data Sources*

- *Referrals*: the actions made in response to each referral were recorded on the referral forms submitted by parents and teachers. These forms were used to document the community needs and our manner of responding to these needs. Forms include information on primary language spoken by parent, grade of child(ren), description of the problem, and actions taken to solve the problem in question.
- *Event records*: the type of event (parent education class, child-parent event, art class) and attendance was used to determine the number of additional community members who participated in Family Center services

#### *Terms and Definitions*

##### *Defining Parent Involvement*

In the development of the FRC, the ideas associated with ‘parent involvement’ were continuously challenged and redefined. We took the challenge of connecting with parents very seriously, attempting to define for ourselves how to support the connection between parents and school staff. In the parent involvement literature, there are many definitions of what is meant by ‘involvement’. Based on the available literature, I have identified and described three levels through a continuum of relationships parents may have with the school (Epstein, 1996; Christenson and Sheridan, (2001); Coleman, 1987; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). These definitions will serve as an operational definition of ‘parent involvement’ for the purpose of coding the data in this study.

1. *Involvement*: parents support the activities of the school and follow directions from school staff. Involvement usually takes place on school grounds. This may include the following:
  - a. Following directions given by school staff
  - b. Attending functions and conferences
  - c. Reading/receiving regular one-way communication from staff
  - d. Not openly expressing disagreement with school
2. *Engagement*: parents develop clear understanding of the goals of school; school supports parents’ development of skills to be able to support school activities; parents bring own experiences to school to augment current curriculum. Engagement takes place on and off

school grounds as parents begin to conduct activities at home that support school learning. This may include the following:

- a. Parent takes leadership over on-going activity at school, as directed by school staff
  - b. Parent offers ideas and feedback, questions the way school operates (this may or may not be presented in an effective manner from staff's POV)
  - c. Parent engages in evaluation process of school programs
  - d. Parent demonstrates understanding of school goals
  - e. Parent and teacher have regular two-way communication
  - f. Parent supports school learning through home activities
  - g. Parent defers to teacher in most cases for decisions and leadership
3. *Empowerment*: parents and teachers achieve equal parts in developing and implementing the education of the students; parents and teachers come to the table as equal partners and learn from each other. Empowerment may be evident as much at the school as outside of the school. This may include the following:
- a. Parent proposes new activity/program and takes steps to develop it
  - b. Parent demonstrates understanding of how the school system works and how to navigate the system to get their child's needs met
  - c. Parent actively engages other parents to become more active in children's education
  - d. Parent has goals for all students, not just their own
  - e. Parent and teacher have regular, collaborative communication
  - f. Parent comes to the table as school staff's equal – proposes new directions for programming, offers constructive evaluation of programs, asks for teachers' ideas and puts forth own
  - g. Parent demonstrates accurate understanding of their expertise and school staff's expertise
  - h. Parent acts as advocate for his/her children
  - i. Parent is able to advocate for child in a constructive manner

The above relationship definitions will be used to examine the parent employees' development over time with respect to their relationship with the school. In addition to looking at the ways the parent employees' relationship with the school developed over time, the above descriptions of parent-school relationships will be used to analyze the various ways we looked to connect parents with the school. To aid this analysis I will look at the different ways that parents use the FRC: attending FRC events, receiving information, consulting with FRC staff, and using the parent employees as advocates all represent different ways of interacting with the school, or different ways of being "involved."

It is important to note that in this model, moving from one type of relationship to another is not reliant on increased time at school, but rather increased confidence and understanding in working with the school. As many parents work full-time or are unable to attend the school on a regular basis due to different reasons, I believe it is unfair to judge a parent's involvement in their child's education simply by minutes spent on school grounds. In addition, there are many parents who spend large quantities of time on school grounds but are not effective advocates for their children. Also, depending on the situation, an individual may be more or less involved or empowered: empowerment is situational, and it is dynamic. In this study, I hope to find

evidence of effective involvement practices, how parents were encouraged to become more involved when it was appropriate, and what factors (e.g. skills, motivation, relationships) were needed to empower different parents.

In addition to the operational definition of empowerment provided above, the literature cited above from Minkler et al. (2001) provides a way to examine the environment created by the FRC that one might assume would best be able to produce the characteristics of an empowered individual described above. First, Minkler et al. lists the qualities of an *empowering* organization:

1. A culture of growth and community building
2. Opportunities for members to take on meaningful and multiple roles
3. A peer-based support system that helps members develop a social identity
4. Shared leadership with a commitment to both members and the organization

Second, Minkler et al. defines what it means to be an *empowered* organization:

1. Successful growth and development
2. Effective competition for resources
3. Network with other organizations
4. Policy influence

These definitions will be used to help analyze the FRC development as whole.

#### *Consultee-Centered Consultation*

According to the literature on Consultee-Centered Consultation, the consultation process can be outlined as follows (Lambert et al., 2004):

1. Relationship building
2. Defining problems
3. Gathering data
4. Sharing and organizing information with relevant parties
5. Generating interventions
6. Implementing interventions
7. Following up

Referrals and journal entries will be examined to see where these steps were followed and where the FRC staff practice differed from this process.

According to the same body of literature, the following key concepts are also essential to successful consultation:

1. *Shared expertise*: all parties at the table bring expertise regarding the problem at hand; consultation is a problem solving process between equals
2. *Maintaining objectivity*: one's emotional reaction or attachment to a situation can make it difficult to see a solution
3. *Consultee maintains the power to act*: consultant is not responsible for fixing the problem but rather for supporting the consultee through a problem solving process

4. *Focus on immediate problem*: consultant concentrates on the immediate issue and does not make assumptions about larger themes in the consultee's life
5. *Theme interference*: consultant maintains awareness of possible experiences and/or emotions held by the consultee that may be interfering with the problem solving process
6. *Conceptual change*: consultant aims to help the consultee view the problem from a new perspective

Analysis of the available data will look to reveal (1) which aspects of Consultee-Centered Consultation practice were preserved in the training and which concepts were not applicable in this unique situation, (2) which aspects of consultation were practiced and/or recognized by the parent employees, (3) the ways in which the parent employees adapted consultation practices to fit a situation with particular parent to be more responsive in meeting that parent's needs, and (4) if the consultation process correlated with increased involvement, engagement or empowerment on the part of a school parent or parent employee.

### *Popular Education*

The available data will be analyzed to examine the role of Popular Education practice in the development of the parent employees' roles in the Family Resource Center. These aspects are closely related to concepts of empowerment and the consultation method explained above.

Some key terms associated with Popular Education are listed below.

1. *Conscienziation*: practice of raising awareness of many sides of an issue, result of problem posing education
2. *Problem posing*: a method of education that involves a dialogue between experts promoting analysis of a situation and action to make positive change
3. *Limit Situations*: obstacles that prevent one from accessing actual issues, created by time and history; 'givens'
4. *Praxis*: reflection-action cycle
5. *Equality*: real and perceived power of those involved

Through the literature review accompanying this project, I combined the concepts of Popular Education with the notions of parent involvement and CCC practice. By combining these three bodies of literature with the research on Family Resource Centers, I was able to generate a theory of multifaceted parent empowerment through education and action that provides a vocabulary for explaining the many levels of the creation of a successful Family Resource Center. By integrating these separate concepts into a coherent whole, I have outlined a process that engages parent employees in problem posing practices to support, empower, and advocate for other parents as they interact with the school and its greater community, while at the same time empowering the parent employees themselves to take ownership over the creation of the FRC and their own children's education.

The following chapters will explain our journey in creating the Family Resource Center of ALCANCE School.

## CHAPTER 2

### DEVELOPING THE FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER

In this chapter, I will address the first of the three sub-questions outlined in the introduction: *How did the findings and theories outlined in the research on Family Resource Center development, much of which operate within a deficit approach to helping families, both help and hinder the development of our FRC?* Throughout history, poor and urban communities have been seen as lacking the necessary resources to provide quality education to their children (Lewis, 1959; Office of Policy Planning and Research, 1965; Valentine, 1968; Tyack, 1974). Some have argued that by seeing these communities as only *lacking* we are missing our chance to empower the community into a place of sustainable growth (Leichter, 1974; Hoover-Dempsey, 1997; De Carvalho, 2001). In this chapter, I will argue that in order to create a sustainable FRC we needed to *simultaneously* view the community through a lens of deficit as well as a lens of empowerment: it was the interplay of need and knowledge that propelled the growth of ALCANCE's FRC.

Within this chapter I will show that the struggle between the deficits and strengths of our families was played out in how the FRC came to relate to the existing structures of the school and community: specifically through our relationship with Community Alliance for Schools (CAS). While there is no doubt in the minds of educators, parents or community members that parents and children are struggling, this chapter will demonstrate a significant difference in the ways we aim to support families in this struggle. Specifically, we (the educators initiating the design of the FRC) focused on increasing the number of resources available to parents and the number of parents involved with the school, similar to the focus of the FRC literature. In contrast, the parents themselves and members of the community focused on the *time spent* and the quality of the relationships built as a measure of increasing support for families. Ultimately, it was the factors of *time spent* and *relationships built* that made it possible for us to provide resources to meet the material and informational needs of the community. A focus on *both* deficits and strengths was critical to our FRC development.

#### *The Initial Premise*

By definition, the primary occupation of a Family Resource Center (FRC) is to provide resources for families: according to the research this means identifying the places in which the community lacks and filling those gaps with necessary people, money, skills or material goods. A common expectation of the outcome of having an FRC is increased parent involvement: if you build it, they will come. We operated under two common assumptions focused on deficits within the community and school: first, that families lack resources and the school could provide those resources; second, that the school lacked ample parent participation in order to successfully support all students. Our FRC was initially designed to respond to a deficit in community resources *and* a deficit in parent participation.

In the research conducted by Dryfoos (1994) and Dryfoos and Maguire (2002) described previously, there is a clear connection between providing services for families and improvement in student achievement. Dryfoos cites data that shows students whose families used the school's support services were more likely to show improvements in academics and behavior than students whose families did not use the services. Based on this presentation of the connection

between serving families and student achievement, we began with a simple concept of FRC development. When we began our project at the end of 2002, our framework for building the center involved the following premises:

1. Families in our community lack resources
2. We (the school) can supply many of those resources
3. When families have the resources they need, they will feel empowered and their students will do better in school

Despite our using language referring to empowerment and community strengths, our true initial concept of the FRC fell in line with a deficit model: the reason you have a problem is because you lack something; we can give you that something. We made the common assumption that the result of our efforts would automatically be “empowerment,” that the community would be able to effectively utilize and maintain the needed resources after we initially supplied them. However, there was little in our working model or what we were able to find in the research that helped us to see a way to connect “providing resources” to “empowered families” besides a theoretical leap of faith.

In some of the literature that looks at empowerment of disenfranchised people, the deficit model is seen negatively because it focuses on what people lack, not on what they are able to bring to the table. Cochran (1987) defines a deficit model as one in which “the client must *demonstrate inadequacy* before being defined as ‘eligible’ for assistance” (p.106). These models also tend to “blame the victim” or hold people personally responsible for situations that are out of their control. A common example of the deficit model at work in its most dangerous and degrading displays is described by Valenzuela (1999) in her work with Latino immigrants in American schools: “students’ cultural identities are systematically derogated and diminished...ESL [English as a second language] youth, for example, are regarded as ‘limited English proficient’ rather than as ‘Spanish dominant’ or potentially bilingual” (p.173). Their bilingual abilities are seen as a barrier to acquiring American culture, not as an asset to their understanding of the world. Another example is explained by McNamara-Horvat (2006) in describing African American students and perceptions by educators that the reason they are not achieving is because they “lack” the social and cultural knowledge or skills to succeed in school. The institution of school, as discussed above, is built primarily on white, middle-class values which while pervasive are neither ‘best’ nor ‘right’.

In contrast to the deficit perspective, Paulo Freire (1970) would argue that any person, no matter how poor or uneducated, has knowledge and experience to offer in solving a problem. Nonetheless, in our education system and in providing services, the existing models seem to focus on what families and students DO NOT have, and filling those holes. In doing this, we run the risk of viewing the families we work with as deficient and incapable while defining ourselves as ‘he who has the answers’. While as progressive educators we do not aim to think of our families this way, the fact remained that our families do lack certain things their children need, such as health care, clothing and food.

While our premises focused on lacks and needs, we were also actively aware of the strengths and power of the parents and wanted to use these strengths to help the school become stronger. As stated above, there was also a deficit of parent involvement and we believed the FRC could address this problem. In other words, we were operating under a fourth premise:

4. If families see the school as a resource, they will become more involved in the school

Research shows the importance of parent involvement, which will be addressed at length in the next chapter. At this point, it is important to observe our assumptions that by creating the FRC, parents would use the resources, become empowered, and use that new found power to give back to the school. The history of schooling and research on successful students supports these notions; however, as we found out, this is not the whole story.

### *Deficit Schooling*

The history of schooling is very much entrenched in a deficit model approach: the very basis of schooling from the beginning of public education was to serve a perceived and real growing “lack” of parental influence and lack of moral values. In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century most of the country’s youth were educated in their homes and churches (Tyack, 1974). As the age of industrialization and urbanization came about, more families were working outside the home and had less time to educate their children. Thus, education became more centralized: one-room schoolhouses became more common and were eventually regulated by hired officials. As families had less time to educate their children, organized schooling emerged as a way to fill this need. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, immigration was also a main focus for Americans: the popular notion was that the new immigrant population would not have the moral standing and foundation necessary to be proper American citizens: in order to maintain the moral fabric of the United States, centralized and regulated education was necessary. Again, this perceived deficit in morality became the motivating force behind educational reform.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, school reforms evolved in a cyclical fashion. Over time a pattern emerged: too many children are being educated in too many different ways, thus a centralized system must be created and regulated; as schooling becomes more regulated we realize we have not paid enough attention to the individual needs of families and children on a social and emotional level, thus progressivism takes route and mental health, medical and other services enter the school; next our government realizes we are frightfully behind other nations in our academic achievement resulting in a “back to basics” movement that again looks at the systematization and regulation of schooling to ensure all students are achieving at desired academic levels (Tyack, 1976; National Commission on Excellence, 1983; Tyack and Cuban, 1995).

Regardless of which part of the cycle we are in, schools and school reform aim to provide what is perceived to be lacking: be it morality, social and emotional resources, or knowledge. Reforms by definition aim to restructure and change a system that is perceived to be failing. Education experts such as Freire (1970), Meir (2002), and Bryk and Schneider (2002), among others, illuminated the much overlooked fact that the communities themselves have a lot of say about how to change their current situation: a failing system is not necessarily devoid of resources; however, they may not know how to use these resources, or there may be historical or institutional boundaries preventing them from utilizing what they do have. Freire argues that the disenfranchised are those with the most knowledge of the problem and therefore they are the most capable of solving the problem. In this case study, it was CAS that brought this much needed perspective to the table. For our part, we saw many immediate issues that needed to be solved for the sake of a child, or, as will be shown below, for demonstrating to the funders and principal that we were making a real, tangible difference. Bryk and Schneider (2002) argue that building trust and relationships is the most important factor in creating a quality educational



environment and empowering parents; yet we maintained our focus on the material resources, holding onto the premise that providing resources would result in empowerment.

This wider view of the research suggests that there are two parts to the failing school: one is a true “lack” of some resource that may or may not be able to be provided from outside of the community (i.e. funding or expertise); the second is an inability of the members of a community to use what they have to solve the problem. To solve the first part of the problem, a deficit focus that examines what is lacking in a community is necessary to identify the holes which must be patched. For example, Ainsworth and Wiggin (2006) argue that being “armed with the knowledge” of structural inequalities such as systems of oppression and racial tensions can lead to overcoming these very obstacles and achieving to one’s highest level. Once the person who is struggling identifies a need, this knowledge can lead to asking the right questions and gathering the right tools to fight the battle. In the case of the African American, Latino and other minority communities as described above, it is important to first identify what the actual need is: in this case, the need is not to become more “white” but to gain an understanding of the structural inequalities that stand in the way of achievement and how to navigate the system. In another study, new teachers who were identified as having a deficit, or “blaming the family,” perspective on student difficulties were asked to conduct home visits and get to know the families more (Comber and Kalmer, 2004). Once they got to know the families and their situations, culture and strengths, the authors describe a shift from a “deficits perspective” to a “strengths perspective.” Another way to explain this shift may be that the teachers’ comments towards the end of the study actually reveal a change in their *definition* of the problem: one teacher, for example, defined the problem as a poor home life at the beginning of the study and defined the problem as a spelling skill deficit at the end of the study. Here, perhaps the difference is recognizing the true lack as one of spelling skill and not family support. Seeing what the problem is and what it is not stems from getting to know the community at a profound level.

To solve the second part of the problem, the community itself needs to find the power and knowledge to utilize the resources and information it has to sustain any changes involved in the reform or new program. When laid side by side there is an obvious interplay between the two: as the actual needs or “lacks” are identified within the deficit model, it must be determined if the need can be served by resources already within the community. To answer this question, an assessment of community *resources*, as well as community needs, must be conducted. As in the Comber and Kalmer study cited above, getting to know the community at a deep level can help to determine the actual needs and the strengths. For every resource identified within the community, one must also be aware of who has access to this resource, who knows how to use it, and what must be done to teach others to utilize it. CAS taught us that this begins with relationships.

Thus a deficit model in its most basic definition is not enough to determine the needs of a community and can be dangerous or stifling to community growth; however, a focus on “lacks” is a necessary part of the whole: community building, relationship building, empowerment and change all begin by correctly identifying the needs within the community. However, sustainable, positive change evolves from an understanding that the needs are not always directly related to the “lacks”: one must be aware of the multiple levels of needs, resources and how they are related in order to truly establish a program that will not only solve a current problem but adapt to the changing needs of a community to become a sustainable part of a school community’s constant push to better serve its students.

## *Background*

Our journey began in November of 2002. ALCANCE was in its second year of operation and a model for a district initiative to create small schools with more autonomy and a stronger community focus. ALCANCE was born in community activism and sought to create an even playing field for students and their families. Later in this chapter, I will provide more in depth background on the political history of ALCANCE and how it shaped some of the decisions we made in developing the FRC. It is important to note here that we began creating the FRC in an environment that was very family and community focused, as well as supportive of the concept of a dedicated place for families within the school.

Paxton was at that time in charge of Community Outreach. The principal bestowed on him the project of creating ALCANCE's Family Resource Center, a project far too involved for one person. Also at this time, I was beginning my graduate work for school psychology and had a strong interest in families and family support. It was a match made in heaven. In an interview at that time, Paxton laid out the history and vision of the FRC:

What I just heard recently from [Principal] is that last year the kind of situation was that the parents would utilize the school whenever they could. You know come and take resources. And that was kind of a new thing. It's not the ideal relationship that we want but it's an improvement on the traditional or the established relationship that parents have with schools right now which is, I think, antagonistic, for [our city] at least. So at least they saw the school as a place where they could come and pull out resources that they needed. This year, the idea is to provide more family assistance and then also to develop a model that really incorporates them. Not only empowers them but also brings about the responsibility that they can take on. So that's kind of the crossroads we're at right now. Because we thought before if you just build the services for them then they'll naturally - the participation and empowerment will just happen but it's just like, oh wow - they really have something. Let's go take that and take that. Not like, oh this is my place. This is a place that I can take care of, you know, provide services, provide help and receive all these services. We're looking for a full circle relationship (Paxton, 11/22/02).

In this quote, Paxton describes our starting point: the school was providing resources, parents were taking resources, and this situation was viewed as a marked improvement on the antagonism that typically characterized school-community relationships in the district. However, Paxton saw the FRC as a way to improve on a 'take what you need' situation: he wanted parents to see the school as 'my place'. He believed that this would result in parents giving back to the school because it would be an investment in the school itself.

Later in the interview in response to a question about the antagonism and other obstacles he referred to above, Paxton explained that the difficulties to creating an FRC that truly incorporates and empowers all parents ranged from political to historical to racial:

Or what are the political limitations? There's a big political arena that they'll have to deal with - some heavy players. There's not many models for that type of development in this country. Other community obstacles. I just think there's a major schism between the Asian, Latino and African populations in [our city]. So that's a challenge that needs to be met. I know that it used to be sort of a Black Mecca [our city] was, early on. And then through ... crack cocaine and other phenomenon it was just so fractured, [our city]

was, for whatever reason. So then there's just this major immigration of Latino and Asian people into [our city which causes racial conflict] (Paxton, 11/22/02).

Paxton was clear in his interview that the school's design team had hoped that if they provided resources, parents would automatically be more committed to the school. He stated that while this seemed to be a positive starting point and an improvement from the antagonism seen before, he still wanted to see a full-circle relationship (though I do not believe we knew exactly what we meant by this at the time). Also, as he mentioned, there is a history of antagonism between schools and communities that would be difficult to break from completely, as well as within the community itself, and which provided a more significant roadblock than initially imagined. We could not "presume alliance" between the various cultural and racial groups within our community as explained by Vaca (2004) and West (1994) in the first chapter. This also relates back to the psychological barriers mentioned by Miller (2002): parents often have previously difficult relationships with schools, feelings of inferiority, defeatist attitudes, and cultural conflicts with the school. One of the major goals of the FRC development process, then, would be to figure out how to conquer these psychological barriers. Throughout this story it will be shown that the psychological barriers persist and it is the ongoing work of the FRC to work with parents and school staff to resolve these conflicts.

Right away, it appears that there would be many difficulties in breaking away from the deficit model: first, there are few models for what a non-deficit model would look like; second, the historical relationship between schools and communities in general presents roadblocks to collaborating with parents. Since ALCANCE emerged from community action, it was easy to overlook the long and contentious history between families and schools from a larger perspective.

Further in the interview, Paxton moved on from the philosophy of the FRC. We began to speak about the practical aspects of creating the FRC and what the expectations would be over the years. Paxton's depiction of the FRC vision represents his own as well as that of the school's design team.

Well, in a larger sense, I think that schools are one of the only potential zones, or social zones for community work and empowerment work right now. They sort of lie vacant I think after 3:30 and before 7:00 in the morning, the majority of the schools. So there's this incredible asset or opportunity there to empower the community and mobilize the community, that isn't being used. So that's why I think it's essential. Transform [schools] into a community center – cause it can happen. [Schools] already exist physically, they're staffed, they are already a gateway between professional world and the community worlds and hopefully, ideally, they're staffed with people who genuinely care about the children and the community they're working with to want to offer the assistance and guidance and support for whatever sort of organizing or empowerment work that could take place for that community. But then on a more pragmatic scale I think that it allows us to expect more out of our parents. Maybe if we can offer more to them we can ask for more from them also.

The idea is that by 2004 we have a brand new facility (Note: the new facility was not completed until February of 2006). And to create a partnership program with service providers, they call them, where we would have almost like a mini-wing of our school staff with lots of health workers – [a clinic], physicians, eyes, mental, hearing,

immunizations and then also legal services, immigration services, and employment services, housing services. So to have a team of staff through partnerships with these programs who generally have money to provide the workers but they don't have the space to work so we would be able to provide the space – a satellite clinic with the school. And we'd be willing to design it with their needs, also. (11/22/02)

The vision set forth by the principal and detailed by Paxton above follows the Full-Service school model (Dryfoos, 1994) in many aspects: schools act as the hub for a variety of community needs and services are seamlessly integrated into the operation of the school. While the vision aspired to a full-service model, our capacity as an individual school site with limited funding allowed us to create a resource center that we hoped could act as a bridge between the community and school: creating a network of resources that could act in conjunction with and in support of the school's mission. As part of creating this bridge, Paxton puts equal emphasis on the importance of recognizing and facing the psychological barriers between families and schools and the importance of providing the practical resources needed by poor families. A statement he makes regarding parent involvement follows a pattern displayed by the school staff members who will be quoted later on in this thesis: the main goal of the FRC seems to be to increase parent involvement at the school: *“But then on a more pragmatic scale I think that it allows us to expect more out of our parents. Maybe if we can offer more to them we can ask for more from them also.”* While parent involvement is important to truly create a school that represents its community, there is great danger (in retrospect) to creating a resource center whose function is to leverage more from parents. Do we gain the right to ask “more” of parents when we provide them with resources? Is that what creating an FRC is about?

While our philosophical notions of the purpose and mission of the FRC continued to evolve, we began the work of creating the Family Resource Center space and filling it with the resources imagined by the school's design team.

#### *Family Resource Center Development Team*

During the first semester of the FRC – January 2003 to June 2003 –Paxton and I recruited a team of three parents and three educators, including ourselves, to be the development team. This team was composed of different parents than the parent employees referred to later in chapter 4. The three parents were of diverse backgrounds (Mien, Latino, and African-American), were already active in the school, and had positive relationships with many of the parents. Two of the parents were employed at the school as tutors. These parents helped to recruit community resources, to advise Paxton and me on what books to include in the library, and what needs they saw in the community. They also worked to bring parents into the physical space to show them the books and pamphlets we had collected. The third educator, Mark, was a grant writer and Executive Director of The Leaf Project, an organization that provided ALCANCE's after school program. In addition, we created a weekly coffee hour when parents were invited with the hopes of striking up conversations about child-rearing, finances, legal issues, or any other community issue that was on their minds. Our six-person team met often to write a grant for the FRC as well as create a mission statement. This team provided a creative and reflective space: a time to merge the philosophical, practical, relational, fiscal and research related perspectives. Below, I describe the various aspect of our work during the initial develop of the FRC according to nine critical questions outlined by McMahan et al. (2000). While we were not specifically following these nine areas of FRC development articulated below, many of

these issues became our focus during the initial development by circumstance. The work reported below was the result of the efforts of this team. We met regularly to discuss our progress and reflect on our actions.

This development team was the first of many ways that we involved the community in creating the FRC from the very beginning. The practice we developed over time began here, as we started to see the many nuances of working with our diverse community through the eyes of the parent members of this team.

### *Center on Families, Center on Resources*

The following section is an analysis of my journal writings and reflections from the first year and a half of the FRC. I will organize my analysis using the areas outlined by McMahon et al. (2000) outlined above. I believe that organizing my notes in this way will best demonstrate the push and pull between deficits and strengths within the community, as well as how the push and pull between CAS and the FRC team helped to propel the creation of our unique space.

During this initial development time we gathered our six-person development team on many occasions to plan, evaluate, question and problem solve. Paxton was the only person paid at that time. Mark, as the primary grant writer, would be paid if we were awarded a grant; I was a volunteer, though I received a stipend for my work in later years; the three parents volunteered their time for the purpose of contributing to the school. The data below comes from my journals, field observations, records of conversations and meeting notes.

## NINE PLUS ONE AREAS OF FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER DEVELOPMENT

### *1. Deciding what to build: what services or goals will this FRC focus on?*

Our first step in deciding what we wanted to build was to consult with as many “experts” as possible. To this end, I began talking to everyone and anyone. I was looking for examples of successful FRCs, or anything similar, as well as a vocabulary with which to begin thinking about our own endeavor.

[Our guest speaker] outlined four significant areas for our center: After-school, Medical, Mental Health and Other Community Resources (including housing, jobs, etc.). He will help us get connections with the appropriate people to create our [Coordination of Services Team]. He will get us the forms he has used in the past, we will meet with the teachers to see how they feel about the process and get their input, teachers will begin referring cases, we will call a meeting with Paxton, myself, perhaps the teacher and see what the needs are. From there we will work with Norman to contact the appropriate people to join our team. (author’s journal, 1/13/03)

Today I visited Hanover [Elementary School]. The center is amazing. It is funded by Healthy Start, 21<sup>st</sup> Century, [local foundation], [local university reading program] helps out and they have an AmeriCorps volunteer. They also employ parents and have many parent volunteers. The director has promised to email me with a number of contacts for grants, AmeriCorps and other partnerships. They have parent drop in hours each day – I

think we should start doing this on Thursdays and perhaps another day if Paxton wants to do it. Monday coffee hours can also serve as a drop-in time. (author's journal, 1/22/03)

I attended a dinner with the folks from County Nutrition Services. The Principals from [two local elementary schools] were there with very positive stories regarding the programs that are now at their schools. The programs at their schools are very inclusive and are integrated into all aspects of the school. The County people have come to do lessons in the classrooms, training parents to be active in the cafeterias, helped parents fill out reduced lunch forms and they even got the corner store to change what they sold there. They have seen a lot more participation from their parents. They seem very flexible in thinking about different forms that the program could take. (author's journal, 3/11/04)

Our conversations with local service providers and the 'experts' on providing family services lead us mostly to accumulating as many resources as we could. Each person we interviewed offered to connect us with various service providers. We left no gift unaccepted. At this point in time our emphasis was on collecting, though these resources did not always match up with the actual needs of the community. The next step was to prioritize the needs of the community and be strategic about which leads we pursued.

My main strategy for finding out "what" parents wanted was having individual conversations with whomever stopped by the FRC. This instinct to speak one-on-one with the parents served us well in the end as our practice became one based in these very types of conversation. Getting to know the parents individually and intimately was critical to understanding how to work with the community and build on its strengths as well as serve its needs. While our official investigation into "what to build" came from the above school district "experts," an analysis of my journal from this first year and a half reveals that many of our decisions on what to build actually came from conversations with parents, or from parents coming to the FRC to request a specific resources or workshop.

As educators, we tend to operate from a deficit perspective, and it is interesting to note that my focus in speaking with parents during this time was to find out what they *needed*. At this stage one might note that these initial attempts at connecting with the community are highly weighted by my own assumptions and perspective. I first assumed that all parents would feel comfortable talking to me. Second, I believed that parents would be open and eager to ask for things they lacked. Finally, I failed to consider that my idea of what was "missing" or lacking from their lives was the same as their own idea of what they needed. I also made careful note to tally how many parents came by, trying to demonstrate to our potential funders that we were increasing involvement. I continued to operate from the point of view that our community was lacking something, and that I, from my position and with my knowledge, could fill that void.

Monday coffee hour: L\_\_\_, R\_\_\_ and M\_\_\_. Topics: peer influences on kids – if they'll be bad; "mica" and license for immigrants – R\_\_\_ lost her license and is having trouble getting it back, she was told because she doesn't have her mica; M\_\_\_ is making arrangements for her daughter to stay after school for homework because she can't help her at home. R\_\_\_ talked a lot about her own experiences growing up. She is one of 10 kids and had most of the responsibility of taking care of them. She is still called on to

give money, take care of their mom and deal with other family issues even now. She though they were too used to having her take care of them. (author's journal, 2/24/03)

Meeting with Laura, Lottie and Mark [the FRC development team] today. Presented worksheet Paxton and I filled out a few weeks ago. Comments from [parents] Laura and Lottie: parents don't listen to other parents – the tutors – and don't seem to really pay attention to the problems their kids are having. Or perhaps they do not notice. Both Laura and Lottie would like to see a professional in the school to work with parents on educational issues and also broader family issues. There is a need for family intervention and family counseling – to help kids adjust to different lifestyles and changes in their lives. (author's journal, 4/17/03)

R\_\_\_ was talking about looking for a job. She is not having any luck because of her early schedule. After this encounter I was thinking I should have just given her a day care number to help. Anyway, I gave her the [adult education] info in case she was interested in taking classes and then getting a higher paying job. (author's journal, 9/12/03)

I was talking with L\_\_\_ today informally and then it turned into a conversation about parenting. She doesn't feel she is doing a good job disciplining her son. She said it's fine with the older one but Isaac is causing a lot of problems. I gave her the number for the Clinic for parenting classes and spent a lot of time explaining why classes for her did not mean that she was a bad parent but rather that it was a way to learn about why her child is doing the things that he's doing and the other doesn't. (author's journal, 9/18/03)

Workshops: I met with three 7<sup>th</sup> grade parent leaders today. We discussed the issue of the parent workshops and I asked them 2 questions: what are the issues of concern for your grade and how should we present parent education so that parents should come. Some of the issues are safety, having control over your children, helping them with their work, how to talk to kids about what is the reality of life, how to get to know your kids well, how to develop trust among parents in the grade, how to get your kids thinking about the future and the steps that make that future happen, how to help your child choose between right and wrong, etc. Two ideas that came up for presentation were to offer a certificate to parents who complete a series of workshops and to do a survey at the next meeting – which is next week. I need to develop a survey and send it home so that they can evaluate it. (author's journal, 2/24/04)

I have been approached by a number of parents lately with little questions about where to get a check-up, after school programs, summer programs and counseling. These conversations have all been on the fly when I'm just walking around... The conversation starts something like "Liz, someone told me that you would know..." (author's journal, 3/31/04)

This week I was approached by L\_\_\_\_\_ for a counseling referral (she approached me outside as I was going to my car and asked me what one should do if they feel they are going into a depression). I sent her two numbers by way of her daughter. C\_\_\_ and I were in touch about her contact with Parental Stress Organization. She has made contact with them but no appointments have been made. She is working on it. M\_\_\_ asked me for Spanish literacy classes for her friend. I connected her with Hanover which served her needs perfectly. (author's journal, 5/6/04)

Many of the conversations with parents that I documented fueled a search for a specific resource that was immediately used: MICA registration, parenting books, health care and counseling, for example. Many of the “experts” spoke generally about families’ needs; however, these conversations with parents are what put the amorphous “needs” into achievable actions. In retrospect it is interesting to note that our focus in speaking with parents and building connections with them was generally to find out what they *lacked* and what their problems were, not what they knew or what they might be able to offer to other parents by way of support and resources. We would find out later that maintaining this position that the community lacked and fulfilling those needs was neither a sustainable nor a fruitful model of building community resources. At this point, we measured our success by how many new parents came to the school. We believed that by connecting to parents we were developing trust and finding ways to creating strong bonds between the school and home; however, we were instead trying to fill perceived gaps in families and the school instead of working to strengthen and empower what already existed.

Our interviews with the local “experts” on families and/or resources – including the families themselves – lead to the question: “what do we mean when we say ‘resource’?” The above quotes are all related to determining what to build – what the FRC should entail; however, my journal shows that individual parents, educators and community organization members have different ways of looking at or asking for resources. We were quickly aware that in creating a Family Resource Center we were gathering many different types of resources. These may be categorized in the following ways:

1. *Material Resources* – “things” people may need such as a computer, resource books, food, clothing, etc.; the items you can see and touch in the FRC itself
2. *Informational Resources* – pamphlets, phone numbers, application forms and other information to connect families with local organizations that will be able to help them solve a problem, find support or answer a question
3. *Relational Resources* – people who are available to provide support and encouragement; creating a community of parents and caregivers at the school who were available for conversation, advice giving and advocacy; creating personal relationships with individual providers from various community organizations who would be particularly attuned to the needs of our families

While in retrospect the interviews recorded in my journal notes clearly advise us to pursue all three types of resources listed above, we had not delineated nor internalized the importance of attending to all three. We assumed, rather, that by supplying the material and informational resources, the relationships would automatically appear. It is ironic that this was exactly what Paxton advised us *not* to do: he specifically stated that the school had made this



assumption in the previous year and it had backfired. However, our experience was showing us that this model was extremely difficult to break away from. As educators, we are in the habit of providing, fixing and teaching. As people of privilege we assumed we knew *what* to provide, fix and teach. For example, one might notice that in my documented conversations with parents, I focused on recording what organization we connected them to or what advice we could dispense. It is true that parents needed these resources – they asked for them – however, along with a service model it is important to take into account what we do to build relationships and establish a sense of community. Many of our actions were naturally geared toward relationship building, but this did not become a specific or intentional practice until later in the FRC development process.

Overall, by the end of our first year it appears we began to suddenly have many material and informational resources at the FRC, but few parents utilizing the services. Workshop and coffee-hour attendance, while we began with an average of ten parents per event, quickly dwindled to two or three parents per event. A handful of parents were also referred to the FRC for resources and support, but these were few and far between.

In the next chapter I will look at how our concept of ‘what to build’ changed in the second full year of the FRC within the context of parent involvement. When we sat down to reflect on our first year, we realized that we had not been as successful in establishing relationships as we needed to be able to create a successful FRC. Therefore, we hired parent coordinators and tried to restart our efforts and redefine the way we looked at providing resources for the community.

## *2. How to begin: which community members, school personnel and/or families are involved in the initial effort?*

As part of our first attempt to authentically involve the parent population we utilized our FRC development team of three educators and three parents to create a vision for the FRC. The parents on this team were very involved with the school and had various roles ranging from childcare to tutoring to classroom assistance. We involved these parents because they were aware of many of the larger goals of the school, had children of varying ages, were of different ethnic backgrounds, and were passionate about helping families.

The first official activity of the six parents and educators who comprised the FRC development team was to create a mission statement. I borrowed a mission writing activity from an after-school program I worked for previously. Below is the summary of our afternoon. Note how as a group we chose to emphasize the aspects of empowerment and equity, as opposed to the physical resources we would supply. This change is quite likely due to the inclusion of three parents on the team: the voice of the community members helped to shift the conversation from the pattern of white, middle-class educators trying to fulfill the needs of the working-class and poor families of color. Issues related to providing resources, increasing parent involvement and helping students academically were part of our brainstorm, but when choosing the most important aspects of the FRC, we chose to focus on the issues emphasized by the parent interviews above.

## **FIGURE 1: CREATING THE ALCANCE FRC MISSION STATEMENT**

*To create the FRC mission statement, we engaged in a mission statement writing activity passed down from another community resource center. In the following pages you will find a description of the activity, the notes from our mission statement writing process, and finally the mission statement for the ALCANCE Family Center.*

### **MISSION STATEMENT EXERCISE PROCEDURES<sup>3</sup>**

You now have the opportunity to create a mission statement for your Family Center. Hopefully this will make you think about why you're doing what you're doing, who you're serving, why it's important, and what your values are as a site. You might even choose to add something about what you're doing and how. It's up to you. Assume that whoever reads this has no idea what your organization does.

To do this exercise, follow these steps (everyone needs a pen and some paper):

1. Take a few minutes and write down what you believe to be the three most important values of your site. For example: "Our center values having a confidential environment..."
2. Each person should now state one value from his or her list (write these down on the board).
3. Now go around the group one more time until there are no more original values (if there are duplicates don't write them down but say them.)
4. Now take a few minutes and write down 3 or 4 adjectives that best characterize your center. For example "Resourceful..."
5. Go around the group and list all the adjectives and write them on the board.
6. Once all the values have been identified and all the adjectives listed, all the members of the group are asked to complete the sentence: "Our center exists because..." Avoid using the infinitive form of the verb i.e. "Our center exists to educate, to inform..." Instead, try to incorporate the values that the group has identified, using some of the adjectives as well, to express the reasons why the organization exists.
7. Once everyone has taken some time to write a sentence, each person should read his or her sentence to the group. Write them on the board.
8. Next, the group should discuss all the different sentences. Does the sentence express who you are? What your values are? What's important to you?
9. After the discussion the group should try and formulate a complete mission statement that may be a mixture of several of their sentences, a completely new sentence or even several of the sentences put together. Don't get stuck on individual words, try and work out the overall feeling of the statement first. It's not necessary for everyone to be in total agreement- there is often disagreement when it comes to mission statements. What you want is consensus.

#### **Notes from ALCANCE's Mission Writing Activity**

Participants: Three parents, three school staff members

---

<sup>3</sup> Provided by Richmond District After-School Collaborative; San Francisco, CA

### Values

- people involvement
- participation in the classroom
- trust
- access to help
  - information
  - services
- school readiness (i.e.. pre-school)
- empowerment of families
- inside and outside of school family as a whole
- mental health
- diversity and unity
- safety: physical, emotional, intellectual
- communication
- parent-teacher trust
- parent-owned space
- we are part of a team

### Adjectives

- positive\*
- educational \*
- information-rich
- effective\*
- safe
- collaborative \*
- open and inviting\*
- comfortable and cozy
- resourceful \*
- friendly
- caring
- fun
- private ('what is said stays ')
- sensitive
- dynamic
- enjoyable

(Items marked with a \* were considered most essential.)

### Individual Visions

The Family Resource Center at our school exists because...

- "... ALCANCE is a diverse team and each part needs empowerment."
- "... our students and families need an open space where they can communicate, access information and resources, and effectively confront problems in their lives."
- "... Of our caring community."
- "... of family concerns, the needs of families, and to create a more positive environment." ("...preocupaciones familiares, las necesidades de las familias y mejor ambiente "positivo.")
- "... provide an equitable experience to families at ALCANCE."
- "... we believe in the capacity of the ALCANCE community to empower and inform each other." [and/or ] "... we exist to provide a safe, open space for families to share and gain information.

### Synthesized Mission Statement

The mission of the ALCANCE Family Resource Center is to empower our diverse community. We are dedicated to providing an open, caring space where families can share information and access the resources they need to have an equitable experience at ALCANCE.

The mission statement above remained the guiding concept for the FRC for many years after. Even in the present day, the FRC strives to empower and seek equity in its practice. The mission we created was also in line with the overall philosophy of the school. In practice, however, the journals I kept of our activities during the first year and a half reveal that our focus was on obtaining physical resources and getting more parents to come to the school: again, a strictly deficit practice is extremely difficult to break from given the reality of the needs of the community. Actively engaging a team of educators *and* parents from the beginning was critical in maintaining our focus on empowerment despite the pull to act from a place of deficit: as educators we were constantly drawn towards enumerating resources and bodies present at the school; however, the parents brought us back, over and over again, to the true mission of the FRC: “to empower our diverse community.” Perhaps it was the balance between numbers and relationships that allowed the FRC to keep growing over the years.

*3. Local Politics: what is the current political culture and how might this help or hinder the FRC’s development?*

ALCANCE was birthed by a political movement and maintains its highly politically charged mission to this day. The school design team included parents, community members and educators whose mission was to change education in our school district as we know it by creating small schools with autonomy. The major forces backing the small schools initiative were Community Alliance for Schools (CAS) and Equitable Schools Project (ESP).

The small school movement took flight in 2000, when the newly appointed superintendent put out a request for proposals for design teams interested in starting autonomous schools. The community members fighting for these smaller schools primarily came from the flat lands, or the poorer areas of the district. CAS presented data showing that the schools in the hills, or more wealthy areas, were significantly smaller than the flats schools: averaging 200-300 students as opposed to 800-1400 students. District maps also showed a severe discrepancy between test scores at the small schools in the hills and the large schools in the flats (Dyrness, 2004; Vasudeva, 2009). The district as a whole was suffering; the parents from the flats’ schools believed that creating small, autonomous schools was a viable solution. So they fought, and they won.

As stated above, the movement took flight in 2000, with the request for proposals. These Small Schools would have “autonomies” in the following six areas: curriculum and instruction, budget, staffing, schedules, governance, and facilities. Based on research presented by ESP and largely gathered from a similar movement in New York ([www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org)), Small Schools were cost effective and produced a higher level of achievement. While the research seemed clear, the school community found itself fighting to maintain its autonomy over the years, battling a severe district deficit, a state takeover in 2003, and seemingly incessant skepticism about the true cost effectiveness of these schools. Nevertheless, new small schools continued to open and the community continues to fight for more of the same.

With this political framework for the creation and growth of the school, the creation of the FRC was also highly politically charged. Serving the whole family was based in the schools’ mission of creating *equitable opportunities for students* – not just in school but in life. Given that the FRC did not begin until the school was well into its

second year, there was already a strong, active parent leadership team, organized and run by CAS organizer, Eva, who was also a parent at ALCANCE.

Eva organized a group of Parent Leaders. The idea was to have two Leaders in every classroom who would meet to discuss issues in the community, their classrooms, the school, etc. This team and the individuals on it were consulted by the administration regularly in regards to school policies, budgetary decisions, and hiring. The Leaders were responsible for getting to know the other parents in their classrooms by “one-to-ones,” or intentional relationship building, to make phone calls in regards to important events at the school, and to be supportive, resourceful members of the school community. Many of these Leaders were also CAS members, meaning that they were involved in larger community actions.

On the surface, both CAS and the FRC were aiming to involve parents in the school, empower them in their communities, and connect them with resources. Also on the surface, I (the face of the FRC) was taking away Eva’s (the face of CAS) most empowered parents and changing their focus at the school from being a Leader to being an FRC coordinator. This apparent conflict led to initial, in-school, political tension. In truth, the parents who worked with me to start the FRC were also Parent Leaders with CAS, with Eva. They were the most active parents in the school, knew the most families, and were generally quite savvy about their community. These parents were also committed to having as many supports for parents as possible at the school and were, therefore, naturally inclined to help create an FRC.

The story of the FRC and CAS is one of conflict, misunderstandings, assumptions, and ultimately learning and collaboration. By the official end of this project in 2006, we lived together at the school in harmony; however, bridging the political divide between the two efforts was the first significant obstacle to creating the FRC.

From Eva’s perspective, a young white student (myself) from outside the community intended to take over parent involvement efforts at ALCANCE for a short time for the purpose of a research project that would have little sustainable impact and would inevitably undermine her efforts. Her assumptions and fears were not far-fetched: when Eva and I finally sat down to talk, she stated that at another school a graduate student had come into the district to do a research project involving parents and, from Eva’s perspective, had effectively undermined the parent-school partnership intended by the school. Eva saw these types of ethnographic research projects as an abuse of privilege: entering a community to study, and in the end upset, the workings of a struggling community. Fortunately, Eva was well trained in conflict management, and after a few strained conversations between us, she arranged for a meeting mediated by the principal of ALCANCE.

In May of 2003, Eva, the principal and I sat down for a meeting. In my journal, I state, “We have a meeting scheduled to discuss the threat of me.” At this meeting, Eva asked very simply, “What are your intentions here?” I explained that I was an individual – not part of a larger group or organization – interested in parent involvement and empowerment, interested in helping with the creation of the FRC, and my intent was to build relationships and find resources, not to take over the parent involvement objectives of ALCANCE.

According to my journal, Eva used this meeting to explain to me, with the help of the principal, the larger political context in which my little FRC would be created. First,

the small schools were part of a mission to change education in our city. They were not looking simply to build a school but to build a model that could be replicated and would create significant, positive change. In addition, CAS had very specific objectives at the school that were part of this larger mission to improve education for our city's poorest students: they were worried that my objective was to start another 'movement' in the school which would detract from the school's and CAS's mission. If the FRC were to be a successful component of ALCANCE's overall mission, we would have to work closely with CAS and be aware of the whole picture at all times. During this meeting the principal was clear that above all, the school must be unified in its mission to help students succeed academically and in life, to support them in achieving equitable opportunities for success, and to empower their families to do the same.

Over the three and a half years of this project, there are many references in my journal to conflicts with Eva regarding the role of the FRC. Some of these conflicts will be addressed in the following chapters, but I will summarize them here. First, Eva expressed to me that she believed parents should be involved out of their dedication to the school, not in response to incentives such as salary. When the FRC expanded during its second full year, I decided to employ three parents, paying them for their work. This was a source of conflict because parents did not get paid to participate as a Parent Leader, but three select parents would be paid to lead the FRC. I argued that because of the degree of confidentiality and the regular schedules required of the FRC coordinators, I needed some leverage for my expectations of them. Also, I wanted to be choosy about who worked in the FRC.

Second, when a parent event was put on by the FRC, such as a workshop or resource fair, Eva wanted CAS to be fully represented – and vice-versa. This is a primary example of keeping one's focus on the larger picture: even when an event was coordinated by the FRC, making CAS a visible part of the event was important for the unity of the school, to show that CAS had a positive influence on the parent involvement practices.

Third, based on my records of conversations with parents – and in revisiting my own feelings about the matter – acting in association with a religious-based organization (as CAS was) with such widespread political aspirations was uncomfortable for many, and specifically it was uncomfortable for me. My discomfort with CAS highly influenced the way I interacted with Eva, and for a long time I remained on the defense when talking to her, which did not facilitate our relationship. There were also many parents who simply wanted to participate in their child's school, and in doing so, they were automatically included in a wider political movement and encouraged (some reported feeling pressured) to join in other actions and meetings that addressed larger issues of the school and community. ALCANCE was quite focused on its mission to involve all parties – teachers, students and their families – in education reform; however, some parents simply did not want to be that involved.

Many of the above conflicts became critical in defining the FRC and its mission. I believe the openness with which Eva engaged with me and challenged my discomfort, my assumptions and essentially my "white, middle-classness" was critical to developing a participatory model where the goal was primarily to *understand* the community, not fix it. In addition, the school prided itself on its empowered community, plethora of knowledgeable people, and family-focused mission; however, not all parents were fired

up by ALCANCE's energy. Due to the largely welcoming, culturally competent staff, many families felt comfortable bringing their concerns directly to the teacher or principal, or volunteering to be part of their classroom. Additionally, due to the community-based, empowered structure of CAS, many parents felt supported and encouraged to make a difference in their children's education through participation in the Parent Leaders group. Still, many parents did not see a door by which they could comfortably enter the school: from their perspective the principal was scary, the teachers would only criticize, and CAS was overwhelming. As demonstrated in the literature review above, the dynamics of power and cultural differences *within* the school community can have a powerful, and often invisible, effect on who gets access to which resources. If the school is seen as a place of Latino empowerment, many African-American families may feel it is not "their" place, despite our lip service to the contrary. If the school was really going to support ALL families, we would need to provide another *point of entry* – another way for parents to connect with the school, to find the support they needed to help their children have successful academic careers.

Over time, the FRC became an alternative point of entry into the school. While we communicated often with Eva and CAS, we did not attempt to duplicate nor participate in their events (though we often promoted them). The FRC would come to be a completely separate entity. Instead of fighting the political movement of the school, we found our niche and stayed within it. Our goal was and continues to be reaching out to families who do not feel the school is accessible, find out why, and discover how to connect with the family.

#### *4. Fiscal issues: how will the FRC be funded?*

With all our political and non-political passion, research based plans, community voices, and a physical room, we still lacked any kind of funding. The school provided some start-up funds, such as a few hundred dollars for reference books and some basic supplies. Everything else we found by donations and association: a parent worked at a donut shop and brought pastries; I established a connection with Starbucks and got free coffee; community organizations brought pamphlets and business cards; friends of ours in the community came to do workshops and help parents with, for example, taxes or getting insurance. In the meantime, we set our sights on creating an aesthetically beautiful, full-functioning FRC with all the resources possible.

Our first grant writing team was the development team mentioned above: three educators and three school parents of various occupations and backgrounds. In essence, we met as a group, reviewed the grant questions orally, the grant writer wrote a draft, and the group revised it together. This initial grant-writing experience was the beginning of a long string of disappointments: our family center was too small, our sights set too big for significant financial backing. Mark, the grant writer, and I spent days on the phone with funders, writing grants, meeting with ALCANCE's administration, collecting signatures, obtaining letters of support, and so forth. We told the funders we had plans to expand the scope of the FRC, to include new schools and other organizations; alas, we were too much of a risk for them, as we did not have a significant foundation: to get money, we needed money. We also tried many times to get seed funding to increase our foundation; however, this also fell through.

At this point, it is important to insert a side story from another Small School looking to create an FRC. College Prep Elementary, located a few blocks from ALCANCE, was able to obtain full funding for their FRC from a foundation associated with a local university. I wrote this grant as well; in fact, I wrote the grant for College Prep Elementary using much of the same language I used for ALCANCE. The difference between these two FRCs was in their mission: College Prep Elementary's school-wide mission was to support a college-going culture at the school; their FRC was in line with this mission. Given such a strong and specific focus on college, the university foundation was eager to fund them. Along with this funding, came many obligations and a new collaboration with the university. Though we began to understand that narrowing the focus of our FRC might increase our chances of securing funding from specific organizations, we decided we would not change the mission of our FRC, our focus on equity and access for families, for funding: we wanted to create a place for parents who were not otherwise connected with the school, who could not find another 'entry point' to connect with their child's schooling. We wanted to stay independent from any politically or philosophically motivated missions. Our focus was to provide support in whatever manner parents needed, that the school was not already offering, in order to provide a separate entry point into the school.

In funding terms, the main obstacle for us to get fiscal support was that we maintained an *indirect* link to student success: we believed that by focusing on the family's wellbeing, students would be better able to learn in school. This is research-based and well-documented, as shown above; however, the funding sources available wanted to see direct services to students, not to their parents: College Prep Elementary was able to secure funding, because a college-going mission was directly related to student success. In my analysis, this struggle with funders best explains how we as educators became stuck in the deficit focus referenced throughout this chapter: we were focused on giving things (resources) and increasing numbers (parent involvement), because this is how we could show funders we were successful.

Eventually, we found a way to maintain our focus while finding funding: we connected with the afterschool program. By the end of this dissertation project in 2006, the FRC was a subset of the afterschool program at ALCANCE. It was funded primarily through The Leaf Project, an outside organization that partnered with the school. The FRC was able to maintain much of its autonomy from the afterschool program's agenda and goals because the school paid for a portion of the FRC coordinator's hours from its more flexible funds. The FRC had obligations to its funding source to provide a certain number of parent education opportunities, which was well within our original vision of the FRC. Beyond that, the afterschool program allowed the FRC freedom to conduct itself in the manner it chose.

5. *"Gravel" in the collaborative process: how do people communicate about shared space, shared resources, and shared clientele?*

ALCANCE is a school of many collaborations, associations and partnerships. Maintaining the harmony among the many well-intentioned, equity-seeking organizations and individuals who become involved with the school is a complex endeavor. The journals and interviews documenting this project are freckled with meetings and systems aimed at facilitating communication and collaboration. The main foci of our efforts in



this area, however, were CAS and The Leaf Project. Over time it became apparent that in order to build our FRC, we needed to speak two languages: that of the funders and that of the community.

The work of CAS was explained above and will not be restated here. The Leaf Project is non-profit organization developed by our grant writer, Mark. Its mission is “to manifest creative educational environments for children, youth, families, and elders in [our city]. Our programs derived their strength and beauty from the interweaving of four essential strands: Social Justice, Urban Ecology, Youth Empowerment, and the Arts.” In the fall of 2004, our second full year, The Leaf Project began providing the afterschool activities for ALCANCE. Due to Mark’s dedication and involvement with the FRC, he also agreed to write a parent involvement component into his afterschool grants. Through this partnership we obtained our funding. Building and maintaining relationships with these two organizations required consistent, intentional work from all parties.

In the journal from the first year and a half, there are many references to the attempts to collaborate with CAS and Eva. As stated above, the political drive of the school and of CAS were important factors in the creation of the FRC. To avoid conflict and pursue collaboration, I began attending as many CAS and Parent Leadership meetings as I could. I spoke to parent leaders about their involvement in CAS and tried my best to understand their experiences.

At the Parent Leadership meetings, I learned some of the key principles of CAS and their philosophy of being an active parent. First, the role of Parent Leader is more than a role at the school: it is a way of being. In a conversation on 8/29/03, Eva stated that many parents, especially the mothers, are actually quite empowered in their homes: “in your home, first, you are a leader.” Yet, she elaborated that when these same parents enter the school environment they become reserved and withdrawn. This is reminiscent of Lareau’s (2003) studies which indicate that working-class and poor parents’ interactions with school authorities are drastically less empowered than their interactions with other institutions such as the phone company or a store. Eva’s goal was to harness the leadership qualities that parents show in their households and help them translate those energies to help their children’s education. Eva also stated that often, when parents are empowered to take part in supporting their school, they actually become more empowered to take care of their families. All this effort was part of a global vision of improving the quality of life for children in the context of the community and also the context of their families.

It is important to note the difference between Eva’s approach to supporting parents and ours at the time. Eva, a mother herself, a woman of color and a member of the community which she served, was modeling a viable break from a deficit model: she was searching for strengths within the same people we viewed as needy. Eva’s actions and approach were missing from our literature review: the way she conducted her work was simply not part of the FRC literature available.

The second principle of operation I learned from CAS was that of ‘1-to-1s’. The 1-to-1 is a type of interview where the object is to bring out a person’s story, to learn as much as you can about their experience in the community. It is a way to build relationships. Eva also stressed that 1-to-1s were the key to creating an empowered community. At the end of these interviews she stressed that one should ask the

interviewee to join in the efforts of CAS. If a person revealed struggles and concerns during their interview, joining CAS would give them the tools to help address these issues; if a person revealed personal strengths and talents during their interview, joining CAS would give them an opportunity to use these gifts to help others. The 1-to-1 format changed the way I conducted interviews from the deficit model – looking for only needs – to an empowerment model – looking for needs, strengths, experiences and relationships.

Given the emphasis on relationship building, I found that the best way to smooth out the tension between Eva and I was to show my interest and dedication to the school and its families at every opportunity and learn from her ways of empowering the community. For this reason, I attended all the meetings I could. In September of 2003, Eva invited me to the meeting mediated by the principal to discuss my intentions at the school. As stated above, she was concerned I was trying to start a ‘movement’ within the school. While I explained my objectives, that I was there to collaborate and not to interfere, my journal shows many incidents where Eva and I continued to butt heads. Both Eva and I were still trying to figure each other out. The quotes below show some references to the conflicts between Eva and me. Eva often expressed that I was not acting in a way that supported the larger mission and goals of the school; for my part, I was increasingly uncomfortable with the level of political involvement required by parents who wished to volunteer. These accounts show my struggle with being an outsider, trying to do the work of a community member. In the final quote, I relate a valuable lesson from Paxton of deferring to CAS as the expert in the community.

Paxton said he heard some heat between Eva and me. It might have been the part where I was insisting that it be clear [during the meeting] that parents don’t have to be community organizers if they agree to participate in the school. She says that “leader” is just a way of being. (author’s journal, 8/29/03)

Eva pulled me aside to speak at length about the issue with K parents... At first I thought she was asking for support - then I realized that she was asking me not to step on her territory. It's like this: she said that she does not want me to confuse parents about their identity as parent leader for CAS. Their role as CAS leaders is important because the political power is very empowering to them - by having efficacy in the larger picture they maintain their power on the immediate environment. In the end, Eva asked me to stay out of the kindergarten territory because those parents are for her to work with and that is her job. She said that I can support her by working with the middle school - especially eighth grade parents. She asked if the Exploration Team [a mini research project I was doing with parents at the time] could focus on them, too. We talked about the necessity of our communication being good and consistent because that was the fault with [the other school where a graduate student had started a parent group]. I am very wary right now that I will be stepping on her toes somehow. She seems to still view me as an outsider - she said that she now sees me as part of the school but she was clear that she knows the Latino community really well. I realize that I don't and do think of myself as an outsider. However, she is really supportive of

the Exploration Team and likes the idea that we are doing research for the community. (author's journal, 11/10/03)

Eva today told me that she wanted to be clear about setting up the community fair as an CAS event. I had no idea that this was an CAS event. I thought she was just reminding me about the fact that we had one last year. She is concerned that people at ALCANCE see her as just Eva and not as an CAS organizer. I am concerned because the community fair is Paxton's baby... Paxton says he likes to defer to CAS on all things because of their relationship to the school. (author's journal, 1/16/04)

While we struggled with philosophical conflicts, I had the great fortune of being informally mentored by Paxton in the ways of school politics: his reflex was to defer to CAS, to Eva, because she knew better than we about the overall mission of the school. All too often, outside people, so-called "experts" on parent involvement and education with impressive degrees, waltz into schools with their new program, with little consideration for the community's expertise and experience. Eva's insistence that the long term objective for all parents was to have them politically involved in the improvement of the city as a whole seemed overwhelming to me. However, her experience and expertise said otherwise. It took time before I could truly understand this.

As time progressed, my journal had fewer reports of conflicts and more reports of meetings where Eva and I shared information or planned events. Beginning in December of 2003, one year after the FRC first opened, Eva began asking for my support in translations, editing and distribution of flyers. She then began asking for my assistance in looking up resources for parents. Finally, she began referring families to the FRC. We met monthly to be kept abreast of each other's intentions and activities. The more we spoke and the more we collaborated, the more I came to understand the community in which I was working. Through my experience, I have come to see a major hole within the literature cited above. The relationships I built and information I learned by simply *being present* made a significant difference in my ability to collaborate with CAS. The literature talks about parent input and hearing every person's voice, but the time spent simply being with people gives birth to an understanding that fueled our successful collaboration with CAS. Perhaps we should have been measuring the progress of the FRC not by the number of resources we collected or number of parents we served, but by the number of minutes we spent connecting with the community. The concept of 'time spent' became a critical part of the parent-involvement practice we developed over time, which will be explained in more detail in the next chapter.

The second group we had to collaborate with was The Leaf Project, or the afterschool program. There is little written about our beginnings with The Leaf Project as they gave us complete freedom to operate the program at first. However, by the 2005-2006 school year, The Leaf Project found that it had to be more specific about its activities to its funders. We had to start showing we were providing a specific amount of parents with a specific number of workshops: funders like numbers. Still, this was in line with our goal to provide parent education – we just had to provide more of it.

I believe that the reason there is little written about our collaboration with The Leaf Project is that it began after we were fully established as an organization: by that

time, we had a mission, we had systems in place, and we had proven ourselves as an important element of the school. Since we were well-defined, and Mark had been part of that definition process, The Leaf Project knew what to expect. It may also be noted here that The Leaf Project was an organization of educators and Mark, the director, had a similar background to my own: white, middle-class and formally educated. It seemed that we (the educators initiating the FRC) spoke the same language as The Leaf Project; however, we did not speak the same language as CAS: when the FRC first opened, Eva did not know what to expect, saw another white college student trying to study her community, and felt threatened. The more defined we became as an entity within the school, the more we listened and came to understand the people with whom we worked, and the more able we were to collaborate with other members of the ALCANCE family.

*6. Parallel vs. integrated administrative structures: who is in charge of the FRC's services and who makes decisions regarding implementation?*

ALCANCE's original vision includes the creation of an FRC; however, there was little thought about exactly what it would look like. Paxton and I were fortunate to have the support of the administration from the beginning to the end. We were 100% trusted to make decisions regarding services and implementation. In addition, because our funding came from one of the initial developers of the FRC, our activities were not dictated by grant requirements. Therefore, in the first year and a half of journal records, there is little said about the administrative structures involved in FRC development.

During the 2004-2005 school year, we hired three parents to coordinate the FRC and its services. I took on the role as their supervisor. The principal and I communicated regularly, but again I was trusted with the design and implementation. As time went on, the FRC became more and more of its own entity. Within our team we used a collaborative model, making decisions as a group. We continued to communicate and collaborate with CAS as much as we could but were not under Eva's direction. As a team, we decided that maintaining an independent identity from the school would serve our goal in providing an alternative point of entry into the school: a way for parents to seek support and contribute to their children's education without having to be involved in CAS, without having to face the principal alone, and hopefully surpassing some of the physical and psychological barriers that prevent many parents from having an authentic relationship with the school. The concept of creating an alternative entry point, or a 'backdoor' to the school, would also become a critical part of our FRC practice. The 'backdoor' allowed us to work with parents who otherwise would not have trusted the school. This will be outlined in more detail in the next chapter.

*7. Legal and ethical issues: who is responsible for the services, how much information can/should the school know about a family, and what – ultimately – is the school's responsibility to a family?*

Legal and ethical issues will be discussed at length in the following chapters, as these issues mainly came about when we employed parents to coordinate the FRC. When Paxton and I first started the FRC, we constantly asked ourselves if it was really our business what families go through. The research on Parent Involvement in the first chapter clearly shows that many people feel the school has a specific job: to provide academic instruction. However, the larger philosophy and mission of ALCANCE clearly

emphasizes the importance of serving the *whole* child: academically, socially, and emotionally, in the community as well as at school. Supporting the whole family is extremely important to ALCANCE and its staff.

One important ethical issue was that of confidentiality. While we believed that utilizing the community's strengths by hiring parents as our FRC coordinators was the best way to support families, some expressed a concern that by sharing their struggles with their peers they would be exposing themselves to the whole school. My training and supervision of the coordinators often focused on this issue of confidentiality and what the school or teachers needed to know about a particular family in order to support the child. This also included training about being a mandated reporter for child abuse and neglect.

The premise of building an FRC includes the notion that a school should be involved in families' lives in ways that pertain to the wellbeing of their children. It was important for the development team to recognize that we were making this statement, that not everyone would agree, and to put forth decisive effort to maintain confidentiality as a mark of respect to the families who trusted us with their private affairs for the sake of the child's success.

*8. Community-school relationship: what is the current status of the school's relationship with the community and how can relationships be made stronger?*

In general, ALCANCE has always had strong and plentiful community relationships. We were extremely fortunate to be able to create our FRC within this supportive and fertile environment. Many of the community organizations we contacted already had trust and respect for ALCANCE because of its reputation in the community. Two areas discussed above explain our journey in creating our community relationships. First, the conversations we had with various community organizations and local experts regarding "what to build" and "how to begin" planted seeds for later collaboration. Second, my conversations, presence at meetings, and eventual collaborations with Eva fueled a strong relationship with CAS.

Through our first year of development, we learned that the most productive way to create and maintain community relationships was to attend meetings, show consistent interest, and establish personal connections with individuals in a given organization: in other words, the concept of 'time spent' also applied to building relationships with organizations within the community. Many of my journal entries that describe a successful referral also include the name of an individual with whom we connected at the organization in question. Below are two quotes from incidents where I did not know a specific person at the agency, followed by a quote from a situation where I connected with an individual. When provided with a phone number or connected with a large agency, parents were largely unsuccessful in getting their needs met. When I was able to contact a specific person, the family got exactly what it needed, and quickly. Notice that the third entry is from a year after the first two as these individual relationships took time to develop.

We went to the N\_\_\_ Health Center to investigate the possibilities of setting up an appointment with the nutritionist. It turns out that there is no way to set up an appointment for just M\_\_\_ a without transferring complete care for the whole family. She has just changed providers to County Provider and says that she will

make check-up appointments for her kids with them and investigate the possibilities of finding a nutritionist through them. I felt like it was a bit of a waste of energy but she was very appreciative. (author's journal, 6/5/03)

The other important part of today was that Rosa had not had any luck with the legal number I gave her and so I talked to Eva and Eva wanted to catch up with her anyway to try to find her some work. I feel that she will be in good hands with that referral. I'm a bit disillusioned that the community legal agency was not of any help. It seems Eva is the great resource of our school. (author's journal, 6/7/03)

Note: Eva would often take out her resource book and locate an *individual* in an organization – not simply a phone number for an organization as a whole – who would be able to help the family.

[The principal] asked me to give her a referral for a student (who was attacked and beat up pretty badly) for counseling. I called C\_\_\_ [whom I know from his work in conflict management at ALCANCE] and was able to get her an appointment with N\_\_\_ Health Center for the next day. (author's journal, 6/17/04)

Our experience over the following three years clearly showed us that the more personal our connection with an organization, the more successful we were in helping families find what they needed. The importance of these very personal connections with organizations does not show up in the research on FRC development.

*9. Access to services: how can the FRC reach out to parents who do not come to the school for practical or for psychological reasons?*

At the end of the year, Paxton and I were faced with the reality that while we had developed a resource base, the number of parents making use of the FRC was still painfully small. Our vision of having a place where all parents could feel at home and find support was still an amorphous concept and far from our reality.

A specific event led us to completely change our tactics for the following years. During the 2003-2004 school year, I led many parent workshops, pulling anywhere from zero to ten parents. Attendance was inconsistent and dwindled over time, even though the workshops were set up to build on each other. My workshops received great feedback; however, they were not enough to keep parents coming back. One of our collaborations was with a Latina women's center. A young woman named Marisol came to lead a series of parenting workshops, in the spring of 2004. Her workshops consistently had ten to fifteen participants. Our material for the classes and the information given was pretty much the same. What was the difference?

Through conversations with Paxton, the parents on the FRC development team and through personal reflection, it became apparent that Marisol herself made the difference. Marisol is an immigrant to this country but has lived in the community for many years. She is a single mother with strong Latino roots. As the workshops progressed, it became more and more apparent how critical these factors were in determining the culture within the class. Marisol was able to quickly establish rapport

and create community with the parents who attended her workshop. There was a cohort of eight parents who attended all five of the workshops, while five or six others dropped in from time to time. Marisol shared many of her own stories about talking to her parents about sex, abuse, and cultural differences between her homeland and American culture. The parents responded to this by sharing many of their own personal stories, asking questions and sharing advice with each other. Parents utilized our services because Marisol was able to help them over many of the psychological barriers discussed by McMahon et al. (2000).

Based on these reflections, the psychological barriers around culture and communication described in the Parent Involvement literature and the principles of Consultee-Centered Consultation, we decided to hire and train a team of parents, including Marisol herself, to coordinate the FRC, for the 2004-2005 school year and beyond. The following chapters describe the development of our parent involvement and coordinator training methods. Based in research and modified by our experiences over the two years documented by this project, we developed an FRC that I believe is truly focused on empowering our employees to empower their community, not solely on a deficit model focused on defining and fulfilling *needs* or number quotas. Through the CCC training (to be described later in this manuscript) and relationship-building practices of the FRC coordinators, we were able to develop an alternative point of entry into the school for families to find support as well as contribute their own talents and experiences to the unsuspected wealth of knowledge in our community.

*The 10<sup>th</sup> Area – Space: Where will the FRC be located and what will it look like?*

While not specifically addressed within MacMahon's theoretical framework, my interviews led to another critical component of FRC development: the creation of the *space*. Of all the research on Family Resource Centers, there is little stated about the space that parents can call their own. What type of impression does the FRC give off if it is located within the main office? Will the feeling and quality of the center change if it is located instead in a portable classroom? In an unused office? If it has a rug instead of tile floors? If it has a couch instead of chairs?

One exception to the lack of attention to space is the research on the Kentucky FRCs conducted by Kalafat and Illback (1998) and Smrekar (1994). In these accounts, very specific to school-based FRCs, the importance of where the FRC is located and what it looks like comes up in interviews on many occasions:

[T]here was ongoing unresolved discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the center being located in the school building or in an outbuilding or trailer near the school. (Kalafat & Illack, 1998, p. 586)

In a quote cited by Smrekar (1994), a coordinator comments, "If I'm part of the building, I'm part of the problem" (p. 425). It is interesting to note that articles on systematic implementation of service integration programs focus on the logistics of obtaining and offering services, while this unique capture of the *process* of creating a center brings up space as a significant issue, just as we found in our experience.

At ALCANCE, the principal located a room at the end of the lower elementary hallway, at the time used for storage, and declared it the FRC. To her credit, it was the

best choice of rooms at the time. After cleaning it out and stuffing an entire room full of contents into the back closet, Paxton and I spent the next six months of the FRC's development defending that space, continuously clearing it of empty boxes and unused materials which teachers were in the habit of throwing in that room to get them out of the way.

Over the course of the first year and a half of creating the FRC, I conducted interviews with six staff members and seven parents. I asked all those who passed by the Family Resource Center for an interview. Many said they did not have time but a few obliged. I also asked for recommendations of those to interview from staff members and parents in order to get a diverse sample of respondents. During the second full year of the FRC, a school-wide "needs survey" (See Appendix B), asking specifically about resources, was also completed by seventy families (about a third of the school) and revealed the following needs:

Programs labeled "highly needed" were the following:

- Workshops for parents on homework strategies
- ESL classes
- Summer programs for youth
- Drug/Sex education or rehabilitation
- Resource library
- Advice for parent about college preparation

Programs labeled "need by some families" were the following:

- Job placement services
- Workshops on discipline
- Computer classes
- GED classes
- Housing, dental, vision and legal services
- Translation
- Counseling services
- Loans and credit information and help
- Toddler/infant day care

Families easily identified what the community needed when asked to check off items on a list; however, when asked the open-ended question of what they would like to see in a Family Resource Center, these same needs did not emerge. The following excerpts illustrate the importance of the physical space. While we knew that the room itself should look nice, we were taken aback by the emphasis placed on the appearance, contents, ambiance, location, and specific people identified as important to the FRC, before even beginning to talk about the actual resources that would be there. All interviewees were asked "*If you were a consultant to the FRC, what would you like to see happen? In your opinion, what are the next steps for the FRC?*"

In response to this question, two issues were prominent among the parents interviewed: that there be a *quiet* physical space that did not have the chaos of the main office, and that it be a *confidential* space where parents could talk to each other about their problems. The emphasis was on a space where they could talk freely and be heard,



not necessarily on a space where they could find community resources. Two parents also spoke of having resources for families experiencing issues such as domestic violence or health care. Mostly, however, the parents focused on having a physical space where parents could meet and seek advice confidentially for family and community issues.

I think the main need for people is a place where they feel like they are welcome to. A place where they feel like someone will listen to them and they gonna feel the confidence that the person that's going to listen to them...that they gonna get respect from that person about whatever situation they're dealing with. It's gonna be confidential between he or she (Latino parent with two students at ALCANCE, 2/13/03)

This parent stated later in her interview that she believed more people would use the FRC once we moved to the new building (which occurred in February of 2006) and had an official FRC space.

Well, I know that not every parent feels like I do, that I feel the freedom to talk to the teachers and principal about anything. But there are people that ... need to talk more and I have tried to get them to participate, speak up, more but it's really hard because you think that you can't or if you don't speak the language of the principal...And sometimes there are so many people there – so we need an advice center. If you have some problem you go to the advice center with you problem or something that you want to know...where people can feel free. ... At times they don't feel free to ask someone – because it's confidential – the question – they don't feel free to go ask someone because there are many ears, many people there (Latino parent of four students at ALCANCE, 2/4/03)

Well, in truth I think it should be a place where we have a dialogue for parents. So that we have conversations with other parents – just with, say, parents of the first grade we're going to have this family night...We don't have the trust or the comfort level to talks about a lot of things. So it's important to have the family center and to have groups at different times [for these conversations] (Latino parent of Kindergartener, 6/4/03)

A Mien parent with a student in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade did not wish to be tape recorded. When asked what should be in the FRC, she said first that evening classes are really important. She then stated that the FRC should be a private place for parents, with no kids or teachers allowed, where they can get together and talk and meet each other (7/19/03).

Well if it's up to me I think it's like more for the behaviors children and domestic violence with the partner or the wife and husband at home. And I think maybe we need counseling for the parents. And maybe education how you discipline the children or you might want to learn more about how the school system or how you can help your children at home. Things like that are important to me. That's how I feel. (Mien parent of first grader at ALCANCE, 5/15/03)

The parents were clear that it was most important to feel comfortable in the school: despite the intentions of the school design team, many parents did not feel at ease with the principal or in the classrooms. Also there was a concern about gossip among parents and keeping private information private.

In response to the same question – *“If you were a consultant to the FRC, what would you like to see happen? In your opinion, what are the next steps for the FRC?”* – the staff focused mostly on increasing parents’ presence on campus as well as the diversity of the active parent group, specifically focusing on bringing in more African American parents.

It may be noted that no African American parents were willing to participate in the interviews, though many were invited to do so. This lack of participation from African American parents may be a manifestation of the power dynamics *within* the school community. One teacher specifically identified the visible face of the school as Latino, leaving out a large portion of the rest of the community:

The way we want to start the family center is really, really increase the participation among families. So bring in more people, not only mothers but bring in fathers in at some capacity, bring in African American families in, bring our Asian community in and just get people here in the school, hanging out in any type of capacity. So looking at more volunteer projects, either people working in the classroom or working in the school somehow. For example, something that we talked about last year when we were having break-ins was actually having parent volunteers doing even like foot patrol... coming in at lunch time and play games with kids... doing yard duty, cafeteria duty... and the parent room being like you know their office. (second/third grade teacher, not a parent, 6/4/03)

I think we still have 50% of the people who do not look represented at all. That what you put up there, you know the picture you hung up, there is nobody there but Spanish women. I agree that that’s who comes in there. But I think that we have to bend over the other way. And that even if you have to call someone up and get them in there, take the picture, even if you have to stage it initially. Because if I was African American or Mien and I came and looked at this, probably wouldn’t be there. Because what I would look at is that is not [me]... (kindergarten/first grade teacher, not a parent, 6/4/03)

This second teacher’s statements clearly illustrate a reality that the minority communities of our school do not, as Vaca (2004) explains (see Chapter 1), have a natural alliance, nor can we, as school staff, group parents into one unit. Within our community, the Latino families have visible ownership over the space, leaving African American parents and Mien parents out of the picture. All families were offered the same opportunity to enter the FRC, to use its resources, and to seek counsel from its staff; however, it was mostly Latino families who felt empowered or invited to do so. Equal invitation did not provide for equal opportunity within the community because the space was perceived as a Latino space. While the staff was aware of this imbalance of power within the parent community, the fallacy resides in the idea that “reaching out” more to African American and Mien parents would solve the problem. As we have learned from the literature,

changing this dynamic would not be as much about changing what we, as school staff members, offered, but changing the way that these opportunities were presented and perhaps even changing the opportunities for *involvement* themselves.

A second prominent theme brought up by the staff was that of the types of resources they believed their families needed: counseling, academic support, nutrition, conflict management, and survival needs. Lastly, the staff spoke of a safe, confidential, physical space for parents to gather. It is interesting to note that the two staff members who are also parents pointed to the issue of safety and trust first, similar to the quotes from the parents above.

You may have to have, that family room there may have to be something set up for evening time. I don't know how functional that is. I think when you're 27 with 3 kids and you and your husband are getting home, coming back here and listening to somebody talk doesn't hit high on your radar.. As long as their kid is not having too many troubles at school. Cuz for a lot of our families, this school is fine mostly because they can drop the kid off at quarter to 8 and pick the kid up at 10 minutes to five and it doesn't cost me anything, so we're quite happy to have a kid here. So when you start pushing them for participation, it's been a long hard road, [...] the monthly meetings last year, the numbers just dropped way off. The leadership team is saying the same thing. They always get the same set of parents who participate. And I think to some degree that's the nature of the beast. And to some degree we've created it. We've made this cradle to grave, this early in the morning, late in the afternoon to parent to come in. I think that maybe like welfare, we give it to them for free, so therefore, it's now entitlement? And that's what caused some of the angst when we asked for money because we were running out. (kindergarten/first grade teacher, not a parent, 6/4/03)

In an ideal view? Just like totally idealistic? Ok. I think that one of the most important, and I see it happening, providing a very comfortable and friendly environment to get support and link to services that are needed. But what I'm thinking is that in a community that because of linguistic limitations or other limitations there might not be access that you would have in, say, an upper middle class community. (Reading Specialist, not a parent, 5/29/03)

I think expanding the counseling services to not just kids but adults as well because I see one of the greatest needs is counseling for families. That, you know you can give the kid counseling but if it's not changing at home how much of a real effect is it gonna have so that's probably, that might be my number one priority is trying to hook them up with resources. Whether it's counseling or support groups or AA or whatever... I'd really like to see some parent liaisons running out of the family center, like particularly to draw in African American families. Having someone like one of our current African American leaders like L--- or L-----, having one of them work at the school as a liaison and actively visit the families. Find out what they need in order to feel comfortable. (fourth/fifth grade teacher, not a parent, 2/13/03)

I think it would have...parents there like not just one at a time early in the morning but there all day or half day or give certain hours for a parent to be there so parents can feel comfortable. (Office Manager, grandparent of 6<sup>th</sup> grader at a different school, 5/15/03)

I think that there's a lot of parents who feel very cut off and alone in their dealings with their kids when they have hard kids. And I think that if they could feel that they were coming to a place that was safe and that they weren't going to be judged about their kid and I think that's a real tricky thing because personally I've had a naughty kid and it's a very tricky thing I think where the parent does not feel that they're bad, that they've failed. That they want to maybe talk about issues or get help but you don't want to get your kid or you stamped, judged whatever. Um, so a safe place for that. (second/third grade teacher, parent of three adult children, 6/3/03)

The staff members interviewed, especially those who are not parents themselves, were much more likely than the parents to mention increasing parent involvement and providing specific resources (counseling, food, job skills, etc.), as is generally the focus of FRCs described in the literature. Those who are parents were quick to identify the need for comfortable and safe environment first and foremost. The premise from the educators (us) in creating the FRC was primarily that there was a deficit: parents need things and we could put those things in the FRC, hoping they would come to the school to take them, thereby increasing involvement and helping out at the school. Yet when we asked the *parents* what they thought should be in the FRC, they spoke mostly about the space and its ambience – not its contents.

While the research on Family Resource Centers points to finding out what resources families lack and what to put into the space, the parents we interviewed clearly stated that the most important aspect of the FRC is the space itself. As we found out during the three and a half years of this project, when we focused on creating personal connections with small-talk, supplied ample food and coffee and made sure that the FRC was clean and organized, more parents utilized the material resources such as phone numbers, pamphlets, and workshops. Also, in this environment more parents opened up to each other to share knowledge and support each other. When our primary focus was on the material resources and giving them out to parents, fewer parents showed up.

As stated above, the research and the general views of the staff members quoted above predominately follow a deficit model. While both parents and staff members agreed the FRC must be a welcoming place where parents feel comfortable, there was a significant difference in the lens, or way of viewing, the purpose of having a resource center for parents within a school. While we, Paxton and I, had intentions of creating a collaborative effort where parents were equal partners at the school, we discovered over time that we were, in fact, still operating from this deficit platform. Over the course of the first year we experienced the pitfalls of following such a model, and slowly learned how to rise out of it.

Throughout this chapter I have demonstrated the constant tug between addressing known deficits in the community and working to empower parents by building on the resources and knowledge that already exists. Specifically, there is a tug between speaking the language of educators, funders and those who can provide material or informational resources to meet the many needs of families, and speaking the language of the community and its members. Those who provide resources are looking for numbers of people, numbers of resources provided, and measures of deficit. If we do not keep track of numbers or ignore the deficits that exist, families will continue to lack critical resources such as health care, legal advice, housing, and so forth. If we ignore the need to spend time for the sole purpose of building relationships and activating the knowledge that already exists within the community, such as CAS, the services and supports we are trying to provide will never reach the parents for whom they are meant. Educators and community members looking to build successful FRCs must learn to speak each other's language, recognizing both the needs and the power resting within the community.

## CHAPTER 3

### INVOLVING DIFFERENT PARENTS, INVOLVING PARENTS DIFFERENTLY

As we begin to examine the day-to-day work of the Family Resource Center, the process of involving families becomes the focus of attention. This chapter will address the second sub-question outlined in the introduction: *How did the application of the findings and theories regarding Parent Involvement in schools contribute to building relationships with disenfranchised and alienated parents, often those most in need of resources such as food, health care, parenting classes, employment, housing or legal aide, so that they would be more likely to access the resources provided by the school?*

Based on the ALCANCE principal's original vision of the FRC, one of the main goals, beyond providing support and resources, was to encourage parents to become more *involved* in school. While this may seem like an obvious part of the mission, defining what parent involvement means in the context of an FRC is more complex. As shown in the previous chapter, there were many efforts to involve families already in progress at the school. The idea that the FRC was being created in part to "increase parent involvement" automatically put us in place for political conflict: Community Alliance for Schools represented a significant effort to involve parents at the school and immediately felt threatened by our creation (see "Local Politics" section of previous chapter). In addition, the term *empowerment* was often used interchangeably with *involvement*: what did we mean by these terms?

Given that the concept of 'parent involvement' is as vast as it is ambiguous, Paxton (Community Outreach Coordinator) and I felt that there would be plenty of room for us to *involve parents* while not conflicting with the efforts of CAS. We also knew through our initial interviews with parents that while CAS is extremely effective at involving and empowering parents, not all parents were comfortable working with CAS. Therefore, Paxton and I began our journey by figuring out ways that we could *involve parents differently* to strengthen their relationship with the school, or *involve different parents* than CAS.

While much of the research on FRC general structure presented in chapter 2 was applied in retrospective analysis, I recognized early on that the question of parent involvement and empowerment required some foresight and planning. I began first by looking at the current literature on Parent Involvement to try to gather a conceptual framework for what was meant by this term: what did researchers and practitioners have to say about the why, the how and the effect of engaging with parents? Second, I recruited volunteer parents from the community (different parents from those on the development team and different from those who eventually became the parent employees) to work with me in a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project to develop a definition of parent involvement that was conceptually consistent with the actions and beliefs of our community. Finally, the three parent employees, Nitiaray, Taina, Koi and I were able to develop a practice of "relationship-focused parent involvement" by combining the research I had collected with the experiences of the PAR project done by community members, and finally with our own daily practices. This chapter will outline

these three steps to developing our FRC's unique way of involving parents in their children's education by way of intentional, parent-focused relationship building.

### *Applying the Literature*

Parent involvement in schools has come to be seen as a necessary part of a child's education. As stated previously, countless researchers have found parent involvement to be vital for children's success in school both academically and behaviorally (e.g. Epstein, 1996; Miller, 2002; Dryfoos, 2002; Bell, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey, 1992; Jeynes, 2011). Within the current body of research, the term "parent involvement" carries varied definitions, ranging from participation in school governance, to attendance at school events, to bedtime rituals, to fulfilling basic needs such as food and clothing. The overwhelmingly positive presentation of parents' involvement at school drove the initial conceptualization and creation of the FRC: the more families and schools work together, the better the student outcomes in terms of academic and behavioral measures (Dryfoos, 2002; Jeynes, 2011). However, as was presented in the literature review, additional research has revealed significant cultural, economic and psychological barriers to school-parent partnerships due to significant differences in values, variance in cultural norms and inequality in power dynamics (e.g. Fine, 1993; Delpit, 1995; De Carvalho, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

In many conversations about parent involvement, the term 'parent empowerment' is also present. In all too many cases, the terms 'involvement' and 'empowerment' are actually used interchangeably. To engage in culturally sensitive and sustainable practice with the creation of the FRC, I felt it was important not to confuse the two: involving parents on our terms (at school-created events) means making "families more like schools" as opposed to Fine's point that if we are to effectively engage and empower parents, schools must "become more like families" (Fine, 1963, p. 691).

The term 'empowerment' is highly charged with connotations of individual and group action, change and initiative. The term can also connote conflict, which is precisely the issue De Carvalho raises in her research (see chapter 1). When analyzing my journals to determine the development of what became our parent involvement practice, I looked for the ways in which we worked to "empower" and/or "involve" parents. The first step in this task was to create a functional definition of each of these terms. If we think of "involvement" as an umbrella term, there are many different ways that parents can be involved in the school with varying levels of power and agency. As Lareau observes, the school tends to view "involvement" very strictly:

[E]ducators frequently adopt a relatively rigid definition of what constitutes helpful behavior; parents' actions that fall outside those bounds are ignored or discredited. Thus parents who repeatedly fail to sign and promptly return to school the forms teachers send home, for example, are considered seriously remiss" (Lareau, 2003, pp. 196-197).

However, as described in chapter 1, the literature seemed to reveal multiple levels of potentially positive involvement, from Basic Involvement, to Active Engagement, to full Empowerment. The ways that schools and parents interact at each of these levels varies. At one end, the school determines how and when parents can or should be involved with

the school: the school has power. On the other end of the spectrum, the empowered parent has a voice that is heard and respected by the school staff and has power to make change at the school.

The one end of the empowerment spectrum might be described as Basic Involvement. At this level, parent involvement happens in a more traditional sense, where the school provides the structure for parents to become involved and the majority of involvement activities are actions that support the school and its goals. At this level, parents may be present at the school, expected to respond to newsletters or other school-originated communication, attend events, and volunteer as needed. Examples of this level may be found in Epstein's description of volunteering, communicating with the school about assignments and behavior, and attending workshops on parenting practices (Epstein, 1996). Interestingly enough, five years after the completion of this project, in 2011, Jeynes' meta-analysis of parent involvement practices found that attendance and participation in school events had a small, though still positive, effect size on overall academic achievement for students; however, these types of involvement are the easiest to create and count.

A second level of parent involvement may be described as Active Engagement. At this level, parents have a clear understanding of the goals of the school and the school supports the parents in developing various skills needed to support their students through workshops and trainings: parents learn to help their children be successful in the eyes of the school. At this level, parents may be invited to bring their own experiences and expertise to the school to enhance curriculum and may take part in activity planning. There may also be opportunities for parents to initiate contact with the school and dialogue about programming, budget items, and so forth. However, the school still maintains the power to make final decisions about governance, budget, curriculum and student expectations. It is also important to note that at this level, parents are invited to be involved within the goals and expectations of the school: for many parents, these goals and expectations may not match their own and involvement might be difficult. This situation is particularly concerning for researchers like De Carvalho who highlight the cultural differences between schools and many families. When parents disagree with the school's goals and expectations in this involvement situation, there may be conflict and difficulty in understanding the other's perspective. The parent has power to participate in their child's education within the parameters set by the school but may not have power to make change outside of these parameters.

Ultimately, educators speak of helping parents become truly empowered. At this level, there is an even power balance between the school and the families. Parents are active and highly regarded participants in decisions about programming, have a true voice in government (as opposed to a symbolic position where their presence is requested but their voice is not heard), and the teachers recognize their need to learn from the parents of their students. Parents in this situation are active advocates for their children in a forum that promotes communal problem solving in response to difficulty. Working with an 'empowered' family is not always comfortable for educators especially when there are cultural or philosophical conflicts in regards to the best steps for helping a child or how a school functions. We believed in our FRC practice that empowerment did not have to always mean taking action in a political manner or working to change something. As mentioned above, Community Alliance for Schools encouraged active political



involvement as the way to empower parents to take positive action for their child's education, yet many parents were not comfortable with this role. Were there other ways to be empowered without acting politically or taking some sort of public action?

Based on the literature available as well as our own research and experience, the FRC staff set out to develop a practice of parent involvement that would address some of the long standing barriers between schools and families. We subscribed to the idea that empowerment was the end goal, but not necessarily measured by activities such as school governance. If empowerment is simply both parties coming to the table with power and agency, then we expected there would be many different ways of being empowered. In theory our end goal was to build capacity among the members of our community, measured not necessarily by increased attendance at events but by the type of interactions between parents and educators: we, the FRC staff, were interested in quality, not quantity. Still, the literature did not seem to inform a process of "how to" create these relationships of mutual trust and respect.

#### *Addressing Cultural Differences*

With respect to quality interactions, there are many examples of parents attending school events with negative consequences for parents or staff, or attempts by the school to engage parents that fall flat without response or that ended in conflict. As an FRC team, we needed to address these issues head on from the beginning if we were going to truly involve parents successfully, as was the principal's goal. The literature presented in chapter 1 addresses some of the Practical Barriers and Psychological Barriers that impede parents and schools from working together (Miller, 2002). The obstacles preventing positive and supportive collaboration include community factors, school norms and issues of time (McAllister-Swap, 1993) as well as significant cultural differences between school staff and families (De Carvalho, 2001).

Many researchers argue that the way schools work with families is highly influenced by the idea that the child should be the main focus of the family, that children should be raised with a focus on individuality, that the parents must support academic learning, that education is the foundation for one's life goals, and that institutions (i.e. school) are a primary way to establish one's connection to the wider community. Many families do not operate this way and may therefore not understand or not agree with the opinions, recommendations or actions of the school. Furthermore, when parents and schools have different ideas of where children fit in the grand scheme, it becomes difficult if not impossible to truly work together for the betterment of the children. Epstein speaks of higher achievement when parents are more involved in the school. The other research by Lareau, Fine and De Carvalho cited above suggests that perhaps a better explanation would be that students whose parents have similar values as, or whose values are more in sync with, the school have higher academic achievement. In other words, when families become more like schools, students succeed. However, as Fine states, if we wish to reach all children, schools need to become more like the families they are trying to reach.

At the very beginning of the creation of the FRC, I interviewed a number of parents and teachers about their experiences at ALCANCE, their hopes and wishes for the FRC, and their ideas of success for their children. In this last area, "what does it

mean to be ‘successful’ in school?” the answers seemed to imply differing values. When parents were asked “What does it mean for your child to be successful in school?” many answered that their meter of success revolved around behavior:

She says that she knows he’s doing well if in class he is following the directions of the teacher and behaving well. She says it’s important for kids to follow the teacher and to switch work with other kids and correct it well because she doesn’t speak English so she really relies on what goes on in class. (Notes from interview with parent who did not want to be recorded, 7-19-03)

Success is to see that he has learned what he supposed to. That his behavior is good and everything. First it’s to learn writing and reading and to count, all of this is important and as a person, as a child as a human being, how we works with his peers. To me the behavior is really important for kids because it’s being a good person. I see it’s important for getting good grades because if you’re not behaving you can’t learn. Maybe I’m mistaken but for me it’s important. Because with my children here and there in Mexico in the schools I always went to say what is the child behavior like? I say okay he’s fine in his grades but how is his behavior? I worry because simply I know that sometimes kids have different ways of behaving in the house and in the school and I always say, I want to know what’s going on here. Also he has to arrive early and be on time. Because I am a person that is always on time and this is important for me that it’s not because of me that they are late to school. No more than one time I was late to school and that was because of an accident in the road. [...] For me this is what success is in the school. And thank God that now they have it. Since he was a small child I’ve never had problems with him with his behavior and still up to know thank God I don’t have any problems with him. [Child’s scream drowns out mom’s words] Well, it’s not easy being a single mom, with four children. (M\_\_\_, mother of second grader, 5-19-03)

The parents’ saw a successful education as measured by the child’s ability to follow rules and respect the authority of their teachers. In contrast, the teachers’ responses were more focused on problem-solving skills and developing independence:

I would say the way that I define success for my kids is that if they can make their own decisions and their own value judgments about how they’re doing academically and emotionally and behaviorally. Behavior-wise. So if kids can kind of self evaluate and say, this is my best work, no I need to revise this, I can do way better than this, I need to spend more time on this, I’m finished I don’t need to spend more time on this. Or if they can say, I’m a good person, I’m working well with the people in my group, I’m treating people with respect, I’m not causing any major problems, I’m not constantly getting in trouble for whatever reason. I think that if they can kind of check that for themselves, that’s, for me that’s successful because really what it means that you know, they’re pretty much starting to take control of what’s going on in school. So they’re

going to be much less dependent on the teacher, much less – it’s going to come from themselves. (second grade teacher, 6-4-03)

Oh god, you want all million things? I think success is like being a problem solver like not getting freaked out when you face something hard whether it’s academic, emotional, social, whatever. Being somebody who feels good enough about themselves to be able to make good choices – yeah, that you make good choices for yourself and others, that would be a successful person. And of course there’s academic success too, like you know how to tackle academic problems and you know how to apply your knowledge to other, new situations. I think success is to be able to have good peer relationships. I also think that a successful kids is someone who is able to – kind of like the ways to ALCANCE – like take responsibility for their actions, that’s huge. (fourth grade teacher, 2-13-03)

The two views of “success” in education are not mutually exclusive, nor do they contradict each other. However, the different views do reflect a difference in values that could, for example, make for a difficult conversation if a parent is focused on the child’s behavior and the teacher is more concerned about his ability to problem solve. The primary goal of education for the parent and the teacher are just different enough to complicate communication.

While designing our plans for the FRC, Paxton and I were very much aware that many of the values implied by the very creation of an FRC were within the mainstream culture which was not necessarily representative of the beliefs and values of many of our families. For example, we were setting up a structure designed to build a more intimate connection between schools and families, which may not be desired by many of the families who choose to keep their family lives separate from the school. Also, the focus of the FRC always came back to the success of the child and not necessarily of the family as a whole: a child-centered vision that was in line with mainstream values. While we had very strong ideas of what we wanted to see in the FRC, we knew that we would not be successful if we remained within our own perceptions of what ‘should be’. The literature I referenced at the time seemed to suggest that parents needed to be at the school, involved in leadership or governance, talking often and openly with teachers, and taking parenting classes to be ‘involved’ enough to effect their children’s achievement in school. However, many parents could not or would not come to the school and many did not want leadership roles. In order to gain an authentic vision of the community’s values that might be incorporated into our FRC and ways we might be able to authentically engage parents in their children’s education, I decided to work directly with community members to develop our own definition and practice of parent involvement.

#### THE EXPLORATION TEAM: A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

In an effort to build a center that was “more like families,” our first step in the creation of the FRC was to interview and get to know our families. The idea that helping families meant starting with the families themselves, finding a way to start where the parents are instead of where we believed they should be, made this project unique in many ways. By combining the theories presented in the literature with this community-

based project, we were able to inform a practice of parent involvement that would be directly applicable to our FRC. The work conducted in this mini project laid the foundation for the development of our articulated practice of building relationships with families.

Though my intent was to engage a large group of parents, the project involved three parents of different cultural backgrounds who were each able to interview a handful of other parents in the community. Each of the parents had a child in the sixth grade at the time. While the data gleaned from this project is limited, the knowledge gained from the experience of creating this parent research team, and working with them throughout the project became invaluable in developing our practice of building relationships with parents, and eventually the parent employee training model.

These parents volunteered to participate in this project because they were interested in helping build the FRC. When I first presented the idea of ‘research’, the parents were afraid to participate, believing that they could not possibly participate in a ‘research project’. In fact, three parents who were originally committed backed out, specifically citing the idea that they could not ‘do research’. Another parent who did end up working with me commented, “Research? Is that like statistics? I’m not about statistics – that’s just a way of manipulating people” (10/7/03).

The terminology was intimidating. For this reason, we called ourselves the “Exploration Team” and determined that our goal would be to “explore” the ways in which parents were involved in their children’s education in our community. It may be relevant to note that changing the terminology I used to describe our project was the first of many steps I took to “start where the parents were.” For the parents, the terms “research” and “exploration” had very different connotations, even though for me they referred to virtually the same concept. If we were going to communicate effectively during this project, we needed to be speaking the same language, or using words in the same way.

#### *Method for Exploration Team Project*

The project, named “The Exploration Team,” was designed as a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project. In PAR, community members are engaged in active research of their community, the idea being that community members are not subjects of, but rather active participants in the investigation of the problems of their community. This is related to Popular Education in the idea that the people themselves have the foundation of knowledge and experience necessary to tackle the issues that impact their lives. (For a more in-depth review of PAR, please see Gitlin, 1994 and Taggart, 1991.) I engaged in this project because I believed the specific research method would serve as an empowering framework for engaging parents in the FRC. In the end, this participatory research model was not a model that successfully involved a plethora of parents as I had hoped. Instead, the lessons learned from the PAR project became foundational to developing our practice of working with the community. Over a series of about a dozen weekly meetings, the parents in this group were encouraged to conceive of and implement an investigation that they believed was useful for the school and its children. It was known that this project would be helpful in creating the Family Resource Center. I facilitated each of these meetings at the school site. Below, I will present this “study within a study” and tie it into the larger context of the development of the FRC.

### *Participants*

At the beginning of the school year, parents from ALCANCE were recruited to participate in the Exploration Team, advertised as a project that would help build the Family Resource Center. Parents were recruited by announcements at school-wide meetings and by teacher recommendations. Three parents of diverse ethnic backgrounds were willing to make the time commitment to the project. All three parents were mothers of sixth grade children, had one child, and had been at the school for three years (since its inception as a new school). One parent was Latina, one was Mien and one was African-American. From this point forward, these three parents will be referred to as 'participants'.

### *Procedure*

In line with the objectives of PAR, the research question was developed by the parents through conversations about their interests and concerns around the school. In order to maintain the participatory nature of this project, I did not develop a specific procedure ahead of time. This section will describe a retrospective description of the procedure as it developed during the course of the research project. While I intended to keep the research topic as open as possible, the project was cast as being part of the development of the FRC. In addition, all three parents knew that my job at the school was within the FRC. This lens surely influenced the topic which we investigated.

The group met for one hour each week over the course of one semester (September through December), at which point the participants began to meet individually with me to track their data collection progress. I translated each meeting between Spanish and English, given that the Latina parent did not speak English and the Mien and African American parent did not speak Spanish.

The group began by a discussion of their own reasons for becoming involved in the school. Through this self-exploration, parents began to articulate their values around schooling and childrearing. Following this discussion, the parents began to ask about and hypothesize reasons why other parents were not involved in the school. This led to a debate about what it means to be 'involved'. From this debate arose the research question: *in what ways are parents involved in their children's education outside of the school building?* In other words, what sorts of things do parents do to support their children which may not be obvious to other parents or educators? The answer to this question became important to Paxton and me, as we tried to operationalize 'involvement' for our school.

The group felt that parent involvement within the school was quite obvious; what was less obvious were the ways in which parents could support their children when they could not participate in the traditional avenues of parent involvement. This discussion was supported by literature review I had done on the positive affects of parent involvement discussed above, specifically the work of Lopez (2001) and Nicoll (2002) which emphasize home interactions and relationships between parent and child as key forms of parent involvement. In addition, we felt that the more we understood about the ways in which parents involve themselves in their children's education, the better we would understand ways to strengthen the connection between home and school.

Over the course of the next few months, the three mothers created potential interview questions to get at what parents do to support their children. The mothers slowly began to experiment with different types of questions, directly and indirectly addressing the issue of educational support in the home. Later meetings were devoted to training on interviewing skills from the CAS organizer, Eva, revision of questions based on expert advice from another community researcher, and I implemented various trainings on data collection logistics. At the beginning of the second semester of this project, the mothers identified their target population (the sixth grade) and began to complete the interviews. About two weeks and then two months into the data collection process, I interviewed each member of the team and recorded their reflections on the process which included their own answers to the questions they were asking others.

### *Measures*

The data analyzed in this section comes from four sources: my own process log; interviews conducted with each participant at the end of the training period; interviews conducted with each participant after they had a chance to conduct a handful of interviews; and from the interviews conducted by the participants with other parents in the community. My log is a running narrative of each meeting from my perspective. The interviews with each participant consisted of reflection questions about the process, the individual's learning and remaining thoughts, questions or suggestions. Finally, under my guidance, each participant analyzed the interviews they had conducted. From this process, we discussed theories about the ways in which members of our community are involved in their children's education and, by association, how we might better connect with our families.

### *Dialoguing with Data*

The three mothers each completed three formal interviews over the course of the semester. Each was asked to listen to each interview and take notes on what they felt was important and any patterns they heard or comments from individual interviews that stood out. All three of the mothers were able to report back to me their own analyses of the interviews; however, only two mothers moved on to the next stage. At this point, the Mien mother moved and was unable to participate in the remainder of the project. The Latina and African American mothers both met individually with me to discuss their initial analyses of their interviews.

I first met with the African American mother. She had interviewed two mothers and one father, all African Americans with children in the sixth grade. At the beginning of our meeting, she reported that she had noted the following patterns in the responses of her interviewees:

- These parents do not realize how much they already do to support their children.
- Parenting is not just something you do, but it is in itself a form of supporting your child.
- These parents feel it is important to talk to their children and ask a lot of questions.
- These parents feel that walking children to school is an important time for conversation and bonding.

- These parents watch a lot of television or movies with their children and consider this to be important bonding time.

At this point, she played each interview for me and we listened for the above patterns together. At the same time, I listened for new patterns or comments of particular interest. During this session this participant noticed some additional points:

- One mother commented that she makes a point to treat her children differently, as individuals, so that they may develop their own sense of self.
- The second mother believed that teaching children to be comfortable with themselves was one of the most important lessons a mother could teach.
- This same mother emphasized the importance of providing a safe and nurturing home environment for your child.
- This same mother stated that she is always sure to let her children express themselves before giving them a lecture on what she believes is right or wrong. This practice, the participant felt, encourages children to articulate their ideas, gives value to their ideas, and readies them to listen to what the parent has to say since they know their ideas are valued.
- The father stated that he tries to teach obedience and kindness by setting a positive example.
- This same father stated that he tries to become involved in community activities himself and to bring his daughter with him to help build her character.

The observations of this participant seem to focus on the development of the individual character and strength of the child: asking questions of the child, treating the children differently as needed, teaching comfort with the self and encouraging self-expression. In this case, the concept of promoting the individual strength of the child *is* in line with part of the description of ‘mainstream’ values in chapter 1: a focus on the individual’s aspirations and successes.

In her research on the differences between middle-class and working-class families, Lareau (2002) observes that, independent of race, working-class families tend to provide space for the *natural growth* of the child’s intellectual, social and emotional self, as opposed to middle-class families who are more likely to use the language of questions and challenges to intentionally *cultivate* the child’s growth. Lareau’s conclusions were based on an analysis of observation of parenting styles and records of conversations between parents and their children. In this study, we asked parents themselves to articulate their beliefs. It is interesting to note that the parents’ responses in these interviews reflected intentional *cultivation* of their children’s sense of self, reasoning skills, and character. While this sample size is limited, it raises the question of the difference between what we, as researchers, observe to be the parenting practices that encourage or create conflict in educational growth, and the parents’ own concept of what they are doing to support their children’s educational growth. The parent voice articulating their own parenting practices has much less of a presence in the literature than the analysis of educators and researchers examining those practices.

In the interviews reported above we can also see places where beliefs, values and practices may come into conflict with the school. For example, one parent expressed the idea of using television as a bonding activity. Educators are often trying to reduce the amount of time students watch television; yet, in this small sample the parents articulated that they felt able to use this time to talk to their children about many different topics. Another area of conflict may arise in the ways children express themselves or stand up for themselves. One parents emphasized giving each child a chance to state their case when a transgression had occurred. In a school, children may not be given space to explain and justify, but rather be expected to accept certain rules and adult authority.

Through our conversations and reflections on these interviews, this participant and I also concluded that these parents were expressing very high expectations for the behavior, communication, and character of their children. We hypothesized that these high expectations were key in helping children be prepared for learning at school. One might also say that these parents *value* appropriate behavior, good communication and strong character.

The Latina participant was unable to record her interviews due to technical difficulties. Her reflections came from her notes on each of the three interviews she completed. Two of her interviewees were mothers and one was a father, all three were Latino. These parents had children of all different ages, though they also had children in the sixth grade. This participant shared what she had heard from all three participants, and then what she believed was additionally important from each of the individual interviews. As she did not have the interviews recorded, we could not analyze the conversations together as the African American participant and I had done. The following is a list of the ideas this Latina participant heard from all of her interviewees.

- The first mother mentioned that she dedicated one hour each week as a “family date” where they would talk about the difficulties they were having as a family during that particular week.
- This same mother noted that most parents are not comfortable talking about their parenting practices which makes it difficult to know if you are doing things correctly or not.
- The second mother interviewed noted that parents do have the resources in this country to accomplish what they need but are unable or unmotivated to find and use them.
- The father interviewed stated that the school does not reach out to fathers as much as it should. He believes that having an involved and interested father can support a child’s schooling.
- This father also stated that it is important to set a strong example for your children by acting as you wish them to act.
- This father additionally stated that he takes advantage of time in the car, walking to school or playing to talk to his children about their days or important issues.
- These parents motivate their children to go to bed on time, make sure they eat well, and they know what is happening at school; however, these parents did not think of these activities as supportive of education.



The Latina parent-participant found many ways that, in her opinion, parents were supporting their children's education by setting good examples, helping them to express themselves and helping them to process information but marveled at the parents' lack of confidence as she reported the following observations:

- These parents want to support their children but feel limited in their capacity to do so due to linguistic and educational barriers.
- These parents think that they do not do very much to support their children; however, through the interview process, they began to figure out how much they do.
- These parents felt that their jobs make it difficult to support their children in school as much as they would like to.
- These parents did not feel they had support from their parents as children.
- These parents expressed that in this country the education system is very different and therefore it is more difficult to know how to support one's child.
- These parents did not have a lot of schooling themselves and felt that this impeded their ability to support their children effectively.

The Latino parents interviewed here did not demonstrate the focus on their child's individual aspirations and successes: we did not find a focus on self expression or individuality but rather a focus on the parents' lack of ability to support their children within an unfamiliar system and culture. It is difficult to speak of specific goals for one's child when one does not know the options, yet the interviewer observed and heard many strengths within the parents' laments. In this case, it may be hypothesized that the parents did not have the vocabulary or experience to articulate how their practices would relate to this foreign school context.

As researchers, there are a number of comments from the parents interviewed that may be viewed as having great influence on the child's educational success. In the statements above, one can see parents reported on actions that engaged the whole family as opposed to a focus on the individual child: one parent mentioned a family meeting, another spoke of having an involved father and generally acting as a positive example. As mentioned above, the difference between a child-centered perspective and a family-centered perspective can make understanding between the school and family difficult. Educators may not view actions taken to support the whole family as 'involvement' if the parent is not specifically engaged with the child in question.

The Mien participant was unable to participate in this part of the process because she moved away; however, during previous interviews she had commented on the responses of her three interviewees, all Mien mothers. Her main observations were as follows:

- The difference between education in this country and these parents' home country made it difficult to know how to support children in school.
- Language difference created a large barrier between home and school for these parents.
- These parents did not have the opportunity to go to school.

- One mother was very interested in learning from the interviewer (who did have the chance to attend school in the United States as a child) about ways to support their children. This mother had never been in a situation where she was comfortable enough to ask anyone this question before.

It is interesting to note that there were many similar feelings expressed about linguistic and cultural barriers as the Latino parents. Beyond the language barrier, the great differences between one's home country and this country can make parents feel disempowered and discouraged when faced with any type of communication or involvement with the school. Despite limited data, one can begin to see some of the same patterns as emerged with the Latino parents: the Mien parents felt their lack of understanding of American schools meant that they were not able to support their children's education. This third data set, again, highlights the notion that, while researchers (Moles, 1996; Fine, 1993; Lareau and Shumar, 1996) may rightly argue that these families are not without critical influence on their children's success in school, the parents' own conception of their effect on schooling is lacking: even if educators come to the table understanding that the families have much to offer in the ways of parenting practices as well as experiential and cultural knowledge, if parents do not understand their contributions it will be difficult to activate this knowledge to create positive and influential parent involvement practice. The immigrant parents interviewed in this study believed they had very little to contribute to their child's American education.

From the experiences presented above, I began to draw out a few key concepts that informed the development of our practice. First, the simple act of asking how parents support their children's schooling brought parents to think about their actions and be more intentional about the ways they interacted with their children around the subject of schooling. Reflection alone became the teacher. In other words, parent involvement may begin with a simple conversation with a *parent* about what 'involvement' means.

Second, there is great variation in values and perceptions of parents even within a small, seemingly homogeneous group. In order to understand how parents perceive education and know the content of their conversations with their children about education, we must speak directly to these parents to find out what they want their children to learn. Some parents expressed the importance of learning independence; other parents expressed the importance of learning good manners and obedience. We will not know what is important to families unless we are listening closely to the parents themselves. Given the variation in values among the few families we interviewed, despite being all parents of sixth-grade students within the same community, it should be evident that we cannot make assumptions about where the school and the family will be able to interact. Involving parents requires real time spent understanding individual families' stories and perspectives.

Third, the parent interviews revealed examples of areas where parents need skills and lack confidence. Parents who were not raised in the United States felt that the differences in school experience and school systems made it difficult to support their children due to their own lack of educational opportunities, lack of support from parents during their own schooling, language barriers and cultural differences. This was expressed mainly as a lack of confidence in one's own ability to communicate and a lack of knowledge about how this system, or this school, works. This experience supports the

reality of psychological barriers to parental involvement which must be addressed consistently and intentionally by the school and the FRC. Here the conversations and time spent with parents turn to identifying what skills parents do have and in what areas they would like to gain more knowledge: bringing about again the lenses of deficit and empowerment referred to in chapter 2. Helping parents identify the skills they already have encourages a dynamic where parents are empowered to ask for the specific support they need.

## IMPLEMENTING A REVISED THEORY: RELATIONSHIPS, NOT ACTIVITIES

### *Research Meets Experience*

When examining the current research against our own investigations into the community, we found that our methods of involving parents had to be developed from a different lens than that suggested by the literature. Epstein and Dryfoos, for example, go into great detail about what types of activities school must provide or engage in to increase meaningful parent involvement. The focus of the research appears to be on the *types of opportunities provided by the school* for increased parent involvement. In Epstein's work, she refers to workshops, events and parent classes that she statistically links to student success in school. In Dryfoos' work, she refers to family-oriented services such as medical, legal and mental health resources that attract parents to the school and, when utilized by families, are statistically linked to academic and behavioral success for students. Other researchers such as Lopez and Nicoll put emphasis on what is done at home and relate certain home activities to increased achievement for students.

While our own research in our community did not discount this literature, we began to see that the actual *activity* of involvement was less important than the *content* of that involvement. In the present day, this experience is supported by Jeynes (2011): "Thus, it was not particular actions like attending school functions, establishing household rules, and checking student homework that yielded statistically significant results" (p. 54). We found that the most positively impactful parent involvement needed to be custom designed for the family in question: what are the needs, concerns and desires of this family and what type of involvement with the school or community will help them to achieve their goals? How can we support the creation of a culture of support and partnership with the school among diverse parents and families?

In essence, while researchers seem to point to the *types* of activities that lead to increased achievement, we began to hypothesize that increased *understanding* of the family and child's needs might lead to increased achievement, or at least increases in child success in the larger life sense. Therefore, the act of involving a parent did not start with an event or an opportunity to engage with the school, but with a relationship. Warren (2005) supports this by explaining that time spent building relationships with parents in urban communities is critical for building 'social capital', or the resources one gains from having a variety of relationships with people who have different types of knowledge, access or power: "when people have close ties and trust each other, they are better able to achieve collective ends" (p.4). The resources inherent in relationships within a community are critical for all those involved in a child's education to increase support and collaboration between each party. A parent's specific involvement with their child's education in the broad sense may take on many forms; however, the way to know

how the school's and family's interactions will help support a student's education requires an in-depth understanding of the family in question.

### *Parent Involvement at ALCANCE*

Parent involvement at ALCANCE happens on many different levels. There are teacher initiated efforts such as daily volunteer opportunities in the classroom, Math Night and parent-teacher conferences. Community Alliance for Schools does organizing work on campus, involving parents in school governance and community activism. Various parents in leadership roles collaborate to create cultural events such as for Black History Month and the Mien Cultural Celebration. However, there are still many parents who are not involved in the school, and in fact, may feel intimidated or ostracized. Furthermore, there are many parents who are very involved in the school but still do not see the school as a potential resource for life's difficulties that are indirectly affecting their children's performance in school. The FRC, however, was in a position to fill this gap by reaching out to new parents as well as by building different relationships with parents who already were present, though perhaps not in the most positive ways: *involving different parents* and *involving parents differently*.

In our work, we did not find a need to question previous literature on parent involvement; however, we needed to expand our theories of involving parents in a way that would help us reach parents who were not able or willing to be involved in traditional ways: the current literature did not inform the "how to" of building relationships with parents. Researchers such as Fine and De Carvalho focus on the breakdown of communication between parents and schools and why many attempts at communication and involvement are often unsuccessful: assumptions and practices that stem from a narrow view of education and family values inadvertently put barriers between schools and families. When parents are not involved in traditional means, there is little opportunity for teachers or school staff to interact with or develop an understanding of parents, and the school sends a message to the parents that "it's our way or the highway." Despite this extensive explanation of how relationships break down, there is an absence of guidance on how to build them back up.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the FRC staff made intentional choices to try to empower parents in nonthreatening and nonpolitical ways. When I examined my and the parent employees' journals, I found that while we spoke of 'empowerment' our practices more closely represented the 'active engagement' level of involving parents: we sought relationships, but not action. When I coded our journals for 'empowerment', 'active engagement', and 'basic involvement', I found that these categories could not accurately represent our interactions with parents: we did not consistently try to 'empower' parents according to this definition, nor was it always the best way to connect and help someone become more engaged in the school. Instead, I found consistent language and documentation of our focus on building relationships with parents. In some cases, the act of building a relationship led to empowered actions by the parent as defined by the code explained in chapter 1; sometimes these actions involved the school (i.e. talking to a teacher, being present for a school concert) and other times they involved community concerns (i.e. calling a lawyer). Sometimes, the very act of speaking with a parent provided increased understanding so that they might be more emotionally supportive of their child, but no specific action came of this type of support.

Since the traditional definition of ‘empowerment’ found in the research before beginning this project pointed to actions, change and political involvement, our engagement with parents seemed to fall short of empowerment by this definition. However, as stated above, we wondered if there were many ways to empower parents: our experience showed us that parents were developing more agency, more awareness, and a greater trust in the school regardless of their attendance at events or participation in CAS. As a group, the FRC staff began to see involving parents as a process of building relationships that supported the development of agency and awareness in parents.

In their research, Cochran and Dean (1991) found and articulated what we discovered in our practice:

empowerment is an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources. In this definition, the term "mutual respect" means we assume that both parents and teachers have strengths, are able to assess their own needs, and will make responsible choices when given the opportunity and power to choose. (p. 266-7)

These researchers looked at the difference between simply providing resources and working to strengthen a community. FRCs are capable of operating on a simplistic level of offering a number of services and resources determined to be necessary for the community, but they are also capable of much more. The idea that empowerment is an *ongoing process* of developing *mutual respect* and involving *critical reflection* best represents the practices we used to involve parents at ALCANCE based on the reflections by the parent employees of the FRC. Our focus on building relationships and understanding between parents and educators became the key to *involving parents differently* and *involving different parents*.

#### *A Practice of Relationship Building: On Beyond Tradition*

The practice of parent involvement that we developed focused on building relationships with individual families, deepening our understanding of their story and how it related to the child’s school and life success. We aimed to empower both parents and educators in their interaction with each other by deepening mutual respect and understanding through a collaborative reflective process, as mentioned in the definition of empowerment above. A specific example of this focus on understanding the family and school perspectives as equally relevant comes from our own research in the Exploration Team. In this project we learned that there are many ways that parent involvement happens outside of the school building. In addition, we learned that parents are not always aware of what they can do or are doing to support their children, nor were they ever asked. By taking the time to talk to parents about their interactions with their children, we were able to raise awareness around which parenting practices make a difference to a child’s education. In other words, taking time to have meaningful conversations with parents seemed to have the potential for increasing involvement in some subtle but important ways: parents themselves, not just educators, become more aware of how their daily lives affect education and have the potential to utilize those

‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll, 1992) and experiences to promote educational success. Unfortunately, the real time for building relationships is not part of many parent involvement practices: McAllister-Swap (1993) shows that most schools do not give “real time” to build relationships, but rather are expected to squeeze in parent meetings along with other responsibilities, and that many school norms work against establishing these relationships because of assumptions that parents who do not physically appear at the school do not care to be involved. One might also assume by this presentation that parents are expected to come to the school as a prerequisite to involvement.

As stated above, ALCANCE has many ways of involving parents and seems to know its parent community quite well. We understood as we were developing our practices that traditional avenues of parent involvement were already established at ALCANCE: classroom activities, volunteer opportunities, a voice in governance and connections to community activism opportunities. Many parents saw these events and opportunities as ways to connect with their child’s school and become involved in their community. At the same time, some of our parents were not coming to the school or attending these events and many of the children from these very families were struggling significantly in their classes. In line with much of the Parent Involvement research, the school is constantly looking for new ways that they can attract parents to become more involved; however, as stated above, we hypothesized that involving parents has less to do with the *event* and more to do with the *content* of the interaction. Our first challenge was to reach these parents who were disconnected and disenfranchised from the school: the parents for whom traditional avenues of participation and connection were not working. According to our evolving theory of parent involvement, we needed to get to know these families to find out what ways of involving would best support their children’s educational success. Our second challenge was to create new types of relationships with parents who were present at the school but still needed additional support for their children to be successful.

A reflection from Koi, one of the parent employees, on parent involvement accurately reflects our developing theory of helping parents become more involved in their children’s education:

Koi reported that she is learning that “parent involvement” is not always enough – she talked about seeing parents who are so involved and their kids are doing poorly and visa versa. She is wondering how to help parents be involved in a way that is useful since it is a not a cookie-cutter formula. (Family Center Journal, 12/3/04)

This reflection stemmed from Koi’s work with two families who were both very much involved (at school, speaking with the teacher) but their children were still not doing well. She also believed that the parents’ conflicts with the teacher were actually hurting the children’s academic success. The adverse affects of confrontational involvement are reflected in the research by De Carvalho mentioned above. Koi used this experience to focus her efforts not on bringing more parents to the school (increasing the numbers of parents present) but on the quality of interaction between parents and their children around educational matters. As Koi is often involved in conferences to do translation for Mien speaking parents, she spent much of her time working with parents on how to talk

to teachers in a way that would get their message across. She helped parents identify a problem, piece apart what the teacher may or may not be able to do, and practice an approach that would result in a constructive solution. This manner of helping parents communicate with the school staff is discussed further in the next chapter.

When faced with the challenge of involving parents in ways that would be beneficial to the unique situation of each family, we quickly understood that our concept of parent involvement needed to include a broad concept of educational support (as ‘education’ reaches far beyond the specific tasks of school work), and a broad concept of ‘involvement’. While I initially approached this project looking for evidence of ‘empowerment’, it became apparent that the more important measure of our success in working with parents was the quality of the relationships we built with parents who came to the FRC for support, parents involved in the development team, parents involved in the Exploration Project, and in working with the parent employees. As a consequence, I went back over the journals using the conceptual framework implied by our developing work. Combined with the lessons learned from the Exploration Team, our practice developed based on the following key principles:

1. Focusing on *building individual relationships* is critical to learning how different families can best support their children’s education. If we wanted to involve the ‘absent’ or reluctant parent, we needed to learn more about the parents and their families so we could meet them where they were, both psychologically and physically (see Miller’s work cited below). This began with conversations focused on the parent’s perspective, thoughts and beliefs regarding their child’s education, in the broadest terms.
2. Families need a *safe space* within the school where they feel comfortable addressing difficult issues. Many parents feel misunderstood or embarrassed when bringing sensitive topics to teachers or the principal. A safe space would give us a starting point for building individual relationships with parents.
3. While traditional avenues of parent involvement were effective for many families, others would need a ‘backdoor’, or a non-traditional way, into the school in order to become ‘involved’. Many parents feel intimidated by school staff, therefore we (the FRC) needed to be different than school staff and refrain from the temptation to pressure a parent to be more physically present at a school that makes them uncomfortable for whatever reason.

These three concepts come together to create a practice whereby we could invite parents to connect with the school by opening a new, safe way to interact via relationships with staff who were able to forge a genuine relationship with families.

Over time *relationship building* became perhaps the most vital component of our parent involvement and FRC practice. The luxury of the FRC was that we were able to spend the time getting to know parents without having a specific task that we needed to accomplish: we were able to spend time getting to know parents outside of “how to help Johnny get better grades” or “how to make sure Amy behaves better in class.” Providing

the time and the space to connect on a personal level with parents was critical in working to overcome the many barriers between home and school. Furthermore, once we had developed this relationship, conversations such as “how to help Johnny get better grades” were much easier to navigate. While ALCANCE was successful in involving many parents, there were still many invisible barriers that prevented all parents from showing up or feeling welcome at the school.

### *Barriers to Involvement*

Two authors in the current Parent Involvement literature helped to connect what we learned from our own research experience and what we learned from the Parent Involvement literature cited above in chapter 1. Miller (2002) outlines some of the practical and psychological reasons why parents do not attend the parent involvement and education projects championed by schools. Practical barriers include:

- Lack of transportation
- Lack of time in workday
- Inability to take time off work
- Competing commitments of other children
- Lack of energy
- Lack of knowledge about problems

Our own research showed that many of these barriers are present in our community. Many parents spoke in interviews about their hectic work schedules and multiple children. While none of the parents spoke of not knowing about the problems at school, they did speak of not knowing how to support their children in their school problems. These very barriers were the impetus behind our Exploration Team project in the first place: how do parents support their children outside of the traditional avenues of parent involvement? When we began talking about the many ways to support one’s child, parents began to realize how much they already do and stated they wanted to be more intentional about their actions. This was later supported by work Nitiaray (parent employee) did with some of the parents who came into the FRC for support.

In the literature cited above, there is also mention of psychological barriers that prevent parents from connecting with the school. It is our experience that these barriers are more difficult to conquer than the physical ones. Psychological barriers include:

- Lack of interest
- Feeling unwelcome
- Cultural values that discourage participation
- Past poor history or poor relationship with school personnel
- Defeatist attitude toward a rebellious child

While we found in our experience that talking about parenting practices and involvement helped many parents to see ways of supporting their children even when they could not physically attend the events at the school, many parents expressed not feeling confident or welcome at the school, especially our immigrant parents in this small group interviewed. Many of the parents in our community did not complete their



schooling, went to school in a different country, or have a poor history with school personnel in general (not necessarily with staff at ALCANCE). Again, it is important to note that by opening up conversations about these very topics we were able to find ways to surmount the barriers they create.

In one example from the first year of the FRC, a parent who was quite ‘empowered’ was having many conflicts with the school staff: she took the initiative to speak her opinion, was not afraid to contradict teachers, and was quite resourceful in finding outside people to support her (such as lawyers). As became the common practice of the FRC, I intended to ‘involve her differently’ by trying to gain a better understanding of her and her son’s struggles.

I also met with M\_\_\_\_\_ 1-1 and she expressed again that she feels Nitiray and Taina are neglectful of their jobs. She also expressed frustration that the school did not know how to deal with her son and wanted more information about dyslexia. She had a lot of complaints and talked in an angry voice for most of the time. She feels the teachers don’t know what they are doing. (FRC Journal, 11/18/05)

Her child is in Special Education and she had to battle the school district to get him the support he needed; in other words, her history with schools in general has given her the impression that teachers and school staff do not care about a child’s special needs, even though he was indeed receiving services for his disability (a psychological barrier). At this point, I began to work with her to find out more about her child’s disability and about the teachers’ actual responsibility in the classroom. As she began to better understand why her son struggled, she became less ‘involved’ and gave him and his teachers more space: in this case, a strong relationship and less time being ‘involved’ at the school helped the child be more successful.

Nitiray’s experience connecting with one parent also illustrates the power of this focus on relationships. The mother would not come to the school and the staff had been trying to contact her for a long time because of some behavioral issues with her child. Nitiray offered to start trying to work with the parent and build her up to a point where she might feel more comfortable talking to the teacher about her daughter’s difficulties. Nitiray tried for many weeks to catch this parent and start a conversation with her but it was not successful. She then tried a different tactic:

Yesterday’s Creative Women Circle [a weekly event Nitiray created] didn’t turn out with many parents—just I and N\_\_\_ and L\_\_\_. I thought it was good because they pick it up really quick. I went out on the yard and the kids were really interested one of the twins wanted to learn so I showed her and as I was showing her, her mother came, (this is the mother that had said I don’t want to talk to you go away) and we talked and had a one on one that was the light of my day. She’s not interested in anything that the school may have to provide. It was still a good one on one. Sometimes we have to work thru the children to get the parents attention. (Nitiray, 12/16/04)

After breaking the ice through getting to know the daughter, Nitiaray continued to talk to this mother casually over a few weeks. By the end of February, the mother had committed to helping out with Black History Month. Once Nitiaray had established a level of trust with this mother, a barrier between her and the school came down: she was becoming more involved in the school's activities and was available to speak with the teachers. Nitiaray reflected later that this parent simply needed to know someone was on her side; her relationship with Nitiaray changed her entire interaction with the school.

The parent employees were also very effective at bridging physical barriers. In one instance, Koi mentions running into a parent at the Laundromat and discussing the best ways to help her family as the clothes dried. In other examples, Nitiaray and Taina often drove parents to doctors' appointments, court dates and the Food Bank. Our parent employees were able to physically meet the parents where they were, as well as psychologically.

The second aspect of our developing practice of involving parents within the context of the FRC involved the creation of a 'safe space'. An analysis of my journals as well as the interviews from the initial planning period (first year and a half) of the FRC reveals the intent to have a safe space for parents, full of resources and available peer counseling. We had ideas of expanding to serve larger needs of the community, such as health care and legal aide. In the previous chapter, the parents we spoke with were clear that having a 'safe space' was most important to them in creating an FRC and for them to feel comfortable coming to the school.

While school staff often talked about the resources they would like to see in the FRC, when parents were asked what they would like their first answer was often about a physical space where there was a level of confidentiality in the conversation; they were less concerned about the contents or resources within that space. Some of the comments from parents were along these lines:

I think the main need for people is a place where they feel like they are welcome to. A place where they feel like someone will listen to them and they gonna feel the confidence that the person that's going to listen to them...that they gonna get respect from that person about whatever situation they're dealing with. It's gonna be confidential between he or she. (ALCANCE parent in interview, 2/13/03)

Well, in truth I think it should be a place where we have a dialogue for parents. So that we have conversations with other parents – just with, say, parents of the first grade we're going to have this family night...We don't have the trust or the comfort level to talk about a lot of things. So it's important to have the family center and to have groups at different times [for these conversations].  
(ALCANCE parent in interview, 6/4/03)

The concept of a safe space gave way to another concept we began to use regularly in developing our practice: the 'backdoor' to school involvement. Many parents did not feel comfortable interacting with school staff: the office, the principal or the teachers. As Lareau observed in her work around family involvement policies in schools, "as we have shown, working-class and lower-class parents often fear school authorities, perceiving the school as a potential threat in their lives. Increasing parents'

involvement would only heighten these parents' fear of exposure and vulnerability" (1996, p.33). We came to call these traditional forms of parent involvement the 'front door', since the main office by the front door is often the first place one must go when coming to the school for any reason. However, many parents do not want or cannot have these interactions due to the psychological and physical barriers discussed earlier. If we were to build confidential, safe relationships with parents, we would need to create a metaphorical 'backdoor' to the school. Our 'backdoor' would be the way that parents who faced psychological and physical barriers would be able to still support their children and find ways to support themselves. We also believed, and often witnessed, that if parents could be connected with the school through the 'backdoor', they might eventually walk through the front.

The concept of starting with the parents themselves to learn about them and their lives is a rare concept in the parent involvement literature; it is more common to find literature describing the ways in which parents must be involved to promote student success from a school's perspective. Over time, this project shows that the FRC can provide a much needed addition to parent involvement practices in that we were able to find ways to connect with families that the school was previously unable to manage. While the 'backdoor' may not have increased the physical number of bodies present at the school in traditional avenues of parent involvement, we saw more parents who were having productive conversations with teachers, feeling comfortable at the school, and thinking critically about their interactions with the children around education.

All three parent employees were often able to open this 'backdoor' to parents by getting to know the children, running into parents in the neighborhood (by coincidence), or doing what Nitiaray coined 'the drive-by'.<sup>4</sup> In essence, the parent employees were looking for ways to bond with parents that did not involve school. If the school was intimidating or a source of conflict, the relationship should not start with school-related topics. Instead, the parent employees began to get to know the children of the family in question. When the parent came to pick up the child after school, the parent employee would talk to the parent about the child's interests at recess ("Your child is quite strong on the monkey bars.")

Other times, a relationship with a parent started because of an accidental run-in at the Laundromat or playground during the weekend. Koi noticed that when she was able to start a conversation with a parent in a non-school environment, they were later more willing to talk to her at the school. Finally, the 'drive-by' was the parent employee's way of slowly working up to a conversation with a parent: they would be sure to be around when the parent came to pick up their child, greet them, then walk on or "keep on pushin," as Nitiaray would say. After a time of simply saying hello to a parent, they would slowly work up to a full conversation, again keeping the topics focused on non-school or light issues. Eventually, the parent would often bring up difficulties they were

---

<sup>4</sup> Traditionally, the term 'drive-by' refers to a sudden, unexpected shooting from a moving vehicle on unsuspecting victims. It is a violent term that, unfortunately, is very common in this community. Nitiaray's use of the term is playful, implying that her approach to interacting with parents was to suddenly and unexpectedly 'shoot' some nice, welcoming words at them and 'escape' before they had a chance to respond. While the author recognizes the implied violence of this term, it was used throughout the project by the parent employees in a playful, ironic manner: our version of the 'drive-by' aimed to build community, not destroy it.

having with the school and the parent employee could begin their work to help support the family.

### *Relationship-Focused Parent Involvement in Practice*

The above-described development of the parent involvement theory in the context of the FRC happened over the first two and a half years. This includes one and half years of two school personnel (the Outreach Coordinator and myself) running the FRC, including the time span of the Exploration Team, and one year of the parent employees being involved under my supervision. During this time, there was a constant interaction between the theories and practices of parent involvement as both simultaneously evolved in our minds. As the section above described the evolution of our emerging theory of parent involvement, this section will describe how our daily practices reflected our philosophical conceptions.

When I analyzed my journals from the first two and a half years of the FRC, I found that, contrary to our present-day practices, we focused most of our time on figuring out ways to attract more parents to the school and provide more parents with resources: in line with the research I had read, we focused on the best school-based *activities* to increase parents' physical presence at the school. My journals are full of references to searching for or connecting with resources, hoping that the more we were able to provide, the more parents would come to the center. I often rated the success of an event by the number of parents who attended. This pattern was especially apparent during the first year and a half of development, before we hired the parent employees. After the parent employees were hired, the pattern is only apparent in my notes, not in the journals of the parent employees.

At the beginning of the 2004 school year, we hired the three parent employees, supervised by me, to run the FRC. At this point in the journals, there is a sharp turn of the focus from the quantity of parents using the FRC to relationship building: conducting conversations with parents about their lives, their values, their experiences and what type of support they might need or be able to offer to help students succeed. This shift seems to stem from our evolving understanding of connecting with parents, based on the experience of the Exploration Team project in combination with the inclusion of parents as employees of the FRC.

Hiring parents is a qualitatively different approach from the original idea that the purpose of the FRC would be to *provide* resources to fill a *need*, as well as provide activities that would increase numbers of parents at the school. The school staff was looking to the FRC to find new opportunities for parent involvement in the hopes that this would bring more parents to the school; however, we now know that more opportunities do not necessarily breed more involvement or more effective parent support for students. Instead, we need to provide more opportunities to understand our families.

While I pushed us to focus on developing ways to attract more parents to the school, I documented in my journals that the parent employees were mostly concerned with building their relationships with other parents:

(After visiting another FRC) Nitiray said that she felt the reason it was so successful over there was the time they've been there, the fact that they are there for 25-35 hours each week, the fact that there are consistent events that happen every month, and the

general stability of the center. She observed that parents could come in for physical resources, consultation or just to hang out. (FRC Journal, 11/19/04)

Koi reported at our staff meeting that she is connecting with more parents during conferences and is able to help them understand what the teacher is talking about. It is an informal connection; for example, one family was crying during the conference and she let them know she was there for them if they needed any support. (FRC Journal, 12/3/04)

Koi reported that she spoke to one parent (who would not come to the school) at the Laundromat. Another parent she checked in with says her child no longer needs counseling but she will ask again if the child goes back to where he was. Nitiaray was proud of herself for connecting with a reluctant parent by playing with the parent's child during the end of the day. Through this interaction she was able to talk to the parent. (FRC Journal, 1/5/05)

In each of the above quotes a different barrier is addressed. It is important to note that this is a retrospective analysis and the parent employees were not specifically trained to focus on Miller's barriers, per se, yet it naturally emerges. First, Nitiaray presents a need to provide real time for relationship building by having consistent and increased FRC time. Second, Koi addresses the importance of cultural connections as she not only translates between languages for a parent but is also able to comfort her when what she hears during a conference is upsetting. In the final quote, Koi overcomes a physical barrier by connecting with a parent at the Laundromat.

While the parent employees appear to have naturally stepped into a role of identifying and surmounting Miller's barriers, my focus remained on creating activities that would attract more parents: this is evident through multiple entries where I enumerate how many parents show up at an event and brainstorm ways to increase that number, with little comment about the actual quality of interactions. Perhaps my own focus on parent involvement as a question of school presence is a reflection of my own values in regards to schooling and family support. I was working to increase our numbers in order to make us more attractive to funders, which at times, put me in conflict with our philosophical goals. While I spoke the language of relationships to the parent employees, I was also in constant search of material resources and events: I wanted more people involved, more organizations connected to us, and more faces in the FRC. The main grant we were applying for at the time required that we be supported by a network of public agencies. They also required that we prove we were actively serving a large number of families. For this reason, I was focused on numbers and was applauded for "increasing parent involvement." While numbers are important, they are never the whole story.

Meanwhile, the parent employees show consistent examples of focusing on the quality of their interactions with parents, not the quantity of parents with whom they interacted:

Today was OK! I learned about the issues that parents have with administration, so that was good because I get to know the school in a better way. (Marisol, 9/20/04)

I really enjoyed talking to parents today and getting their pic taking seeing smile on their faces. I feel good when I see people look happy and smile back to me. (Koi, 9/20/04)

I was in the meeting with parent leader planning the agenda. They think we should work together and want to see Nitiaray and Marisol at the meeting so that parent get to know us. More than a few parent leader haven't meet Marisol, I think today went well. One parent that I talk to took few can food. (Koi, 11/3/04)

In the quotes above, the parent employees clearly based their perception of success on the quality of the interaction with the parents, not by the quantity of parents who attended a given event. Even when it is evident that they were interacting with many parents, they are more focused on the fact that the interaction was positive and there were smiles. While at first I felt much frustration in the parent employee's inability to attract large numbers of parents to events, we eventually discovered that the time spent working with individual parents paid off in the end by a higher commitment to involvement in their child's education in the broad sense identified by the Exploration Team. Our experiences reinforce the conceptual and practical divide between the school and families' definition of 'increasing parent involvement': the school looks to increase numbers, assuming that more is better when it comes to parent involvement. The parents in this study focused on increasing the quality of parent-school interactions, an undertaking that often seems impossible given current school culture (De Carvalho, 2001) and which the literature does not currently demonstrate in the form of an articulated practice.

The parent employee's focus proved to be critical to our developing theory of parent involvement. In one quote above from Koi, she is describing some critical feedback from the parent leaders of CAS. She states that she feels the FRC is not doing its job as well as it could because the parent leaders do not *know* us well enough: the emphasis is on the personal connection and the implication is that we would be able to work better with CAS if we spent more time to build relationships with those involved. In another quote cited earlier in the chapter, Nitiaray is very clear that her Creative Women's Circle, an art class of her design, did not attract many parents; however, through the art she was able to make a connection with one parent who previously would not speak with her. This was a gigantic success for her because of the quality of the one interaction. According to the words in her journal entry, she did not seem fazed by the fact that her art class was not attended.

During the third full year of the FRC and the second year with the parent employees, we began to do more intentional advocacy work: we specifically offered to work with parents who were in conflict with teachers. Nitiaray took naturally to this role as she had become skilled at building informal relationships and trust with parents: her 'drive-bys'. In January of 2006, Nitiaray made reference to her work in setting up a meeting between a parent and a teacher: "I spoke with C\_\_\_ today about trying to get a

date so that we can talk with Ms. Y, she will let me know this week” (Nitiaray, 1/28/06). In this situation, the school was asking the parent to be more present at the school, but the parent felt disrespected and did not understand what the teacher was trying to get her to do. With knowledge about the teacher’s and the parent’s perspective, Nitiaray went to this meeting as a support for C \_\_\_\_’s voice, helping her to advocate for what she felt was the best way to work with the school to support her son. While this was the only incidence of the parent employees being advocates in the journals, this practice of having an FRC advocate at a contentious meeting became common.

### *Supporting Relationship-Focused Parent Involvement*

Parent involvement addresses many types of relationships and interactions between parents and schools. In the literature, there is often a focus on the most effective versions of parent involvement, or on the higher success of the students of involved parents. Other literature focuses on the reasons many parents are not involved in schools: physical and psychological barriers stand in the way of positive, productive relationships between school staff and family members. In our Exploration Team research as well as our daily practice, we learned that by focusing on the quality of our relationships with individual parents, providing a safe space for creating those relationships, and opening a ‘backdoor’ to connecting with the school, we were able to involve parents who had historically been ‘uninvolved’ or unable to develop strong, positive connections with the school. Our practice of starting where the parents are, hiring parent employees who acted as advocates, and giving real time to building relationships led to a higher quality of interaction.

In the next chapter I will discuss my training methods for the parent employees and show how this method, a combination of Consultee-Centered Consultation and Popular Education, was useful in preparing the parent employees to address the cultural, racial, practical and psychological barriers between families and schools. This method helped me capitalize on their knowledge of the community as well as their natural inclinations toward building relationships in a safe, supportive environment.

## CHAPTER 4

### PARENT-EMPLOYEE TRAINING: CONSULTATION AND POPULAR EDUCATION

This chapter aims to answer the final sub-question: *How will the practices derived from these theories, most specifically those in the research on Consultee-Centered Consultation modified in light of the research, theory and practices of Popular Education, to be specified below, contribute to the effective education and empowerment of community parents employed to develop and manage the FRC?*

ALCANCE's response to the problem of connecting parents with necessary resources to help them better support their children in school was and continues to be multifaceted, including teacher-led home visits, a partnership with Community Alliance for Schools, site council meetings and general expectations for staff to be intentional about their parent involvement practices. Still, the principal reported that many parents remain alienated and disenfranchised from the school. Paxton (Outreach Coordinator in 2003-2004) and I hypothesized that the reasons for this alienation would be consistent with the psychological and practical barriers presented in the research above (see chapter 1 and chapter 3). Through the Family Resource Center, my coworker and I attempted to bridge the gap between the school and the alienated parents, but we found that we were also viewed as part of the institution, making it difficult to approach the psychological barriers referred to in the list above. For this reason, we hypothesized that *parents* would be best at connecting with *parents*: we needed to hire parent coordinators to build and run the FRC if it were to successfully conquer some of the psychological and practical barriers preventing families from accessing the resources offered by the FRC. As mentioned above in chapter 1, the Popular Education literature clearly states that those most affected by the problem often are the ones who possess the solution to that problem. Therefore, by all accounts, hiring parents to help parents was the most logical solution.

Hiring parent coordinators also created a problem, however: how could we train and empower parents to be liaisons between the school and community? As discussed in chapter 2, my own perception of the problem was influenced by my values and background: at the beginning of this project I generally saw parents as lacking and was fearful of the political nature of CAS. Also, many parents did not accept invitations for interviews or attend classes from me because, we hypothesized, I was not part of the community, not yet a person to trust. At the same time, I possessed a good deal of knowledge on how to create an organization as well as theory of practice in working with people in crisis. The parents we hired lacked formal education but possessed infinite knowledge about working in and with the community.

It seemed to me that this would be a *reciprocal* educational process: the parents would need to learn the logistics of running an FRC and the skills of working with families in crisis, and I needed to learn effective practices for working with alienated, disenfranchised families within our community. The training process, then, needed to reflect the goals of empowerment (as defined above: "an intentional process of building mutual respect") and shared power between the members of the group. The training process also needed to be sensitive to the fact that we began with an explicit power



imbalance between me and the coordinators. Yet as much as I may be an expert in theory, the expertise of parenting and the community lies with them.

### *Theoretical Framework for the Parent Employee Education-Training Process*

As stated above, when we looked to hire parents to coordinate the FRC, we looked to hire people that represented and understood the community and not necessarily professionals in social work or other relevant areas. In choosing to hire parents from the community, I had to choose a method of training and education that would honor the expertise of the parent employees while acknowledging that there were specific skills they needed to learn in order to provide instrumental and emotional support to the rest of the community. If we wish to involve parents as partners in the education of children, we must see them as bringing valuable expertise to the table and engage them as equals. Otherwise, the power relationship is weighted toward the school and the potential for fostering resentment and distrust as well as perpetuating institutionalized inequities is great: telling parents what they need to do to meet the school's agenda may meet the goal of a simplistic form of parent involvement, where parents are more visible at the school; however, it will not help to foster parent involvement in the more complex, power-balanced, change-focused ways espoused by the educators at ALCANCE.

In order to offer specific, focused training while engaging and building off the expertise of the parents' experiences, I combined the theories and practices referred to in the literature of Consultee-Centered Consultation (CCC) and Popular Education. As stated in chapter 1, we were not politically motivated, nor were we trying to organize parents in the ways that CAS worked with parents. My stated goal in this process was to educate, train and build capacity in our parents and our school. When talking about disadvantaged and oppressed populations, the lines between education and organizing, or action, are unclear. Paulo Freire and Miles Horton (1990) debate this very point in a publication documenting their conversations. Freire believes that education and organizing are one in the same, but Horton makes a distinction:

If the purpose is to solve the problem, there are a lot of ways to solve the problem that are so much simpler than going through all this educational process. Solving the problem can't be the goal of education. It can be the goal of organizations. That's why I don't think organizing and education are the same thing. Organizing implies a specific, limited goal that needs to be achieved, and the purpose is to achieve that goal...If education is part of the process, then you may not actually get that problem solved, but you've educated a lot of people. (Horton & Freire, 1990)

The FRC is the organization: its goal is to solve the problem of resource deficits in the ALCANCE community. The goal of training the parent employees was not to solve one problem but to prepare them for many: to understand the great complexity of the problems in our community and to support individuals through whatever situation presented itself. Increasing understanding may not directly solve the problems at hand, but it creates a dialogue and a knowledge base accessible to all involved which may or may not be used in the immediate situation. It may be argued that the FRC and all its components are a work of organized activism, but that was not the goal of the parent

employee education model. The goal of the education model was to help the parent employees better understand the parents they were working with and access the many levels of knowledge and expertise they have so that they could support the parents in whatever direction they chose to go. In this respect we can distinguish between organizing – with a specific action goal in mind – and our training model which names “action” as one of many possible outcomes.

### *Consultee-Centered Consultation*

The day-to-day objectives and activities of the training-education of the parent employees are based in the theoretical framework outlined by Consultee-Centered Consultation. As described in chapter 1, CCC is a specific type of consultation where two professionals come together to collaborate in problem solving around a specific work issue. The combined expertise drives the Consultee toward a solution, not through direct advice but through increased understanding of the problem. In my practice, I aimed to operate under the assumption that the parents we hired were ‘experts’ in their community, in their experiences as parents, and in their experiences solving the problems life brings them. Horton, reflecting on his work at The Highlander Research and Education Center (formally called the Highlander Folk School) ([www.highlandercenter.org](http://www.highlandercenter.org)), a place of grassroots organizing and Popular Education, articulates this point:

We thought we had a lot of answers to things, and we suddenly realized we didn’t know much...It took something like that for us to move over and start with experience, letting book knowledge throw whatever light it could on that. We became less important in the process than the people we were working with. (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 49)

Horton explains that the experiences of the ‘uneducated’ people he was working with were just as valuable, and often more so, in solving the problems than his own book-knowledge. For this reason, I believed that CCC, a practice between professionals, would apply in our training process. However, it is important to note that there is no precedent in the literature for applying CCC to training community members: mostly, I suspect, because community members are not typically seen as experts.

To review the literature briefly, according to Caplan (1963), there are four types of difficulties that interfere with a Consultee’s ability to solve a problem:

1. Lack of understanding of the factors involved in the case
2. Lack of skill or resources to deal with the problems involved
3. Lack of professional objectivity regarding the specific child
4. Lack of confidence to deal with the problem at hand

In CCC, there is a Client who is having the problem, the Consultee who is working directly with the Client, and the Consultant, who is helping the Consultee find ways to help the Client. The Consultant will help the Consultee examine each of the four “lacks” above in an effort to find ways to guide the Client on a path towards solving the problem.

In the training of the parent employees, the parent employees were considered the Consultees, the parents of the school their Clients, and I was the Consultant. In this

analysis, the focus will be more on the development of the parent employees and less on the empowerment of the parents in crisis. The results of the analysis describe a model for training parent employees to help parents in crisis and cultivate the continued growth of the FRC.

Of the many concepts presented in the CCC literature, a few were chosen as vital in the training of the parent employees. These concepts are listed below:

1. *Shared Expertise*: the idea that each person has some level of expertise to bring to the table helped us to maintain that all parties at the table were seen as equals in the process of helping families
2. *Focusing on the Immediate Problem*: the act of working with the immediate problem and not becoming lost in the larger issues we believed were at stake was a way to help the parent employees avoid becoming overwhelmed by the many faces of any given crisis or the larger agenda of the school
3. *Theme Interference*: a concept addressing the fact that many times we may inadvertently see our own difficulties in another person's crisis; many of the difficulties parents face are not only emotional but some may trigger one's own unresolved issues
4. *Power to Act*: in CCC the Consultee maintains the power to act on their situation (*not* the Consultant); in the course of training, the parent employees were encouraged to come to their own conclusions about what action should be taken. It is also important to note that we applied this same concept to working with parents in crisis: we could not take action for them if we wanted them to be able to help themselves out of a situation
5. *Objectivity*: as support staff it was important that we maintained a certain amount of objectivity so that our actions, while certainly influenced by emotion, would not be driven by it, and so that we might see as many sides of a given issue as possible
6. *Conceptual Change*: through the consultation process, I expected that the parent employees would learn and grow; this would be evident through conceptual changes, or changes in the ways in which they perceived various problems and worked with parents; conceptual change is often represented by increased understanding of the issue at hand from both the Consultant's and the Consultee's point of view

Training any person in a position of helping or giving advice to instead ask questions and explore different perspectives is challenging. It is our nature within care-giving professions, such as working in an FRC, to *give care* or immediately try to solve the problem at hand. The model of CCC is designed to dig out the knowledge already held by the Consultee and help the Consultee find the power to make calculated decisions and perhaps to act. In training the parent employees in this method, I was simultaneously modeling this practice as I was explicitly teaching the concepts. I believe that the greatest challenge was not so much communicating the concept, but to create an environment where the parent employees could operate as equals as we addressed individual cases: to *feel* as equal professionals within the CCC process.

The theory of CCC assumes two professionals, perhaps with different areas of expertise, engaging in a problem-solving process around a Client. Often in a typical CCC situation there is a power imbalance: the Consultee is expecting the Consultant to tell him what to do, to solve the problem for him since he has already tried many things on his own. The power imbalances between the parent employees and me were more complex. The parent employees came in with an expectation that they would be told what to do, not only because I was the Consultant, but also because I looked the part of the institution: white, formally educated, and middle class. My goal, in line with CCC practice, was to help the parent employees recognize the true expanse of their own knowledge and power and work with them as equals to help the families in our community. In this case, however, the expertise came from life, not books. In order to address the deep-rooted inequities implied by our respective positions, I drew on the Popular Education literature to enhance the CCC practice and face the inequities head on.

### *Popular Education Literature*

As described in the introductory chapter, the Popular Education literature brings into question the issue of power dynamics in relationships between parents and school staff. For both Gaventa (1980) and Freire (1970), the Popular Education model begins by creating understanding and raising consciousness, and ends in action. Differences in power, the dynamic of institutionalized oppression, and the knowledge and expertise of those who live and breathe the daily life of the community compose the curriculum of this educational model. There are many areas of overlap with CCC: for example, Horton (1990) reports that the beginning of the Popular Education process was in “understanding that there’s knowledge there that [the people] didn’t recognize” (p. 49). However, in Popular Education the end goal is most often decisive action, as opposed to the CCC goals of increased understanding first, and possibly action second and only if driven by the Consultee.

Popular Education is different than a standard, traditional adult education process in that it does not intend to be neutral: Popular Education specifically recognizes the differences in power that are replicated and perpetuated through a traditional education process where the teacher offers knowledge and the student receives it. Popular Education is a *reciprocal* education process where both Teacher and Student are recognized for their expertise and at the same time in a position to learn. Perhaps most relevant to this study, Popular Education aims to promote a dialogue between popular knowledge and systematized scientific knowledge (Schugurensky, 2000). If we could bring both popular knowledge and scientific knowledge to the table as equal participants, we could apply CCC to our work with the ALCANCE community: both educators and parents at the table as professionals consulting to solve a problem.

Many of the concepts of Popular Education helped us to create an environment where all came to the table with different and respected areas of expertise. The concepts below were critical to the development of the FRC as we addressed the complex power dynamics of the school setting:

1. *Conscienziation*: the practice of raising awareness of many sides of an issue, a result of problem-posing education; in our practice this became closely related to the concept of maintaining objectivity

2. *Problem posing*: a method of education that involves a dialogue between experts promoting analysis of a situation; in our practice problem-posing drove much of our analysis of individual situations where we attempted to view the problem through multiple lenses
3. *Limit Situations*: obstacles that prevent one from accessing actual issues, created by time and history; the ‘givens’
4. *Praxis*: the reflection-action cycle where examination and explanation of a situation within a group dialogue provides a space to articulate the current situation, examine past actions, congregate knowledge, and create new action towards solving the problem
5. *Equality*: all those at the table are experts in their own right due to the experiences that make up their life, an understanding meant to foster mutual trust and respect

### *Consultee-Centered Consultation and Popular Education in Action*

The parent employees were trained using CCC practices conveyed through a Popular Education lens. In this section I have combined many of the concepts from both literatures in order to analyze the training process using overlapping codes for analysis of the parent employees’ and my journals. The combinations below demonstrate the ways in which these concepts came together in practice over the course of this committed experiment. It will become evident that the CCC theories, combined with elements of PE, provided valuable training for the parent employees at our FRC. Below is a brief description of how these concepts were linked together:

1. *Shared Expertise and Equality*: all parties at the table bring expertise regarding the problem at hand; problem solving occurs based on a dialogue between equals. These two concepts were combined in the coding because they represent the same concept from the two theoretical bases applied in this project.
2. *Problem Posing and Focusing on the Immediate Problem*: focus on the problem at hand to try to develop a more thorough understanding of the person involved in this particular crisis; the immediate problem is a more realistic focus than changing life-long patterns or problems. These two concepts were combined in the coding of our journals and my notes because they were part of the same process in case management.
3. *Theme Interference*: maintaining awareness of the possible experiences and/or emotions one holds that may be interfering with the problem solving process.
4. The individual maintains the *Power to Act*: the Consultant is not responsible for fixing the problem but rather for supporting the Consultee through a problem solving process; this approach helps to empower the Consultee to find a solution on their own terms.
5. *Conscienziation and Objectivity*: the processes of gathering as many perspectives as possible and becoming aware of the multiple possible sources for a specific problem, so as not to be confined by one view of a situation; emotional attachment to a situation can prevent one from seeing the solution. These two concepts were combined because, while conceptually distinctive, they are both part of a constant process of maintaining awareness of many aspects of an issue

- both from a personal and removed perspective. One must constantly be looking at the immediate as well as the more global viewpoints of any presented problem.
6. *Limit Situations*: obstacles that prevent one from accessing actual issues, created by time and history; the ‘givens’.
  7. *Conceptual Change and Praxis*: the Consultant aims to help the Consultee view the problem from a new perspective; the reflection-action process. These two concepts were combined because it is believed that the reflection-action process (praxis) is a necessary precursor to conceptual change.

An analysis of my journal entries, including records of our group meetings, revealed that all areas referred to above were addressed in the ongoing training of the parent employees. However, when looking at the parent employees’ journals, these same elements are not always as obvious. Their journals do, however, over time show ample evidence of increased empowerment, understanding, reflection, objectivity, awareness and change as they recorded their actions and personal growth as FRC coordinators.

The remainder of this chapter will address the concepts above and show evidence of the CCC and Popular Education process in the context of the development of an FRC. Through analysis of the parent employees’ and my journals according to these concepts, one can see that the practices of CCC combined with the theories guiding Popular Education are effectively implemented and contribute to the growth and empowerment of the parent employees, as well as the development of a functional Family Resource Center.

### *Shared Experiences and Equality*

The primary reason that I chose Consultee-Centered Consultation and Popular Education as the methods for training the parent employees is that I believed that the expertise of the parents was equally important as the expertise that I had to provide them. However, upon hiring, they automatically assumed that I was in charge and would tell them what to do. The first step in training the parents was training them to approach our meetings as equals.

Each of our meetings had the following basic agenda:

1. Personal check-in: each of us relayed something about our personal or professional week; a positive or negative experience, victory or defeat, or any tidbit we chose to let others know what was happening in our world in that moment.
2. Presentation of a case: one person would volunteer to present the details of their work with a specific client; the presentation consisted of the story, any actions taken, concerns or questions and any other relevant comments. During this time, only the presenter spoke.
3. Question and answer: in this part of the meeting those who did not present asked clarifying questions and posed possible problems, or additional ideas that the parent employee might want to consider. The parent employees were trained to present their thoughts as questions such as “I wonder...” or “Have you asked the parent...” instead of statements such as “You should...” or “The parent must...”

4. Wrap-up: as a group we summarized the conversations, highlighting any new insights, and the parent employee who presented stated her next steps in regards to the case.

At the beginning, the parent employees would often look to me for answers when presenting a case or problem. My response, in line with the practices of consultation, was to throw the question back at the group: “based on what you have heard today, what questions or thoughts do you have about this family/this crisis?”

The parent employees also added to the format of the discussion described above. For example, after a case was presented, the other parent employees would often start their reflections and questions with an appreciation of what the presenter had already done to help the family. This initial appreciation automatically recognized the presenter as having some expertise in the situation: they had done something right from the beginning.

In many of my journals I refer to the “staff’s decision” or list a number of different ideas or thoughts that came up during a discussion. While at first there are many references to my thoughts or opinions, there are less and less references to my own thoughts as the journals go on. Also, there are many instances where I record efforts to ensure that each parent employee gets a chance to say their thoughts. For example, Koi was extremely shy at first and often simply agreed to what others said. However, over time she was encouraged by Nitiray to express her ideas more. Creating a culture of equality, where all felt safe to speak their voice, took time. In the same way that we found ‘time spent’ was the best way to create relationships with parents, taking time to get to know each other and relate on a personal as well as professional level was critical to creating a space where everyone felt they could contribute, with expertise, to the conversation. Beginning the meeting with a personal check-in was one way we ‘spent time’ and maintaining an awareness of who had spoken and who had not was another. It is very easy to forget the importance of each voice and simply listen to the loudest.

Another area in which equality came to the forefront was in building the parent employees’ identity as school staff. In essence, they instinctively saw teachers as having more knowledge and experience, and generally felt nervous and anxious when interacting with them. For an FRC to be a successful advocate for the disenfranchised members of the community, the parent employees needed to see and be seen as equal to the school staff. All four parent employees at first struggled with the very act of walking into a classroom to observe. Over time, their journals demonstrate increased comfort with this activity:

In 2004:

I wasn’t very comfortable going into the classroom but I did and it wasn’t so bad.  
(Nitiray, 9/14/04)

I feel very uncomfortable to walk in the class at first but I took a deep breath and I did. (Koi, 9/16/04)

In 2005:

Today I went to Mr. G's and Ms. S. [to talk about Family Reading Night]. I hope I remember it right. The kids were really excited about Harry Potter but I didn't tell them which book it was. I felt much more comfortable than I did last year. (Nitiaray, 10/11/05)

I talk to the teacher about talking to the parent and she say she ok. I told her it is very important to listen to the parent and what she have to say. (Koi, 12/16/05)

Nitiaray was especially vocal about her initial anxiety about talking to teachers and the principal. At one point we had a one-to-one conversation about her fears. I asked her to describe the experience, her physical reaction (what it feels like), the thoughts that went through her head, and what she observed the principal doing when she met with her. After much exploration, she realized that she was nervous because her only interactions with teachers and the principal as a child were negative: she was often in trouble at school and therefore she felt that the teachers were looking for ways to prove she had done something wrong. While Nitiaray was aware that this was unfounded in her adult life, she still was unable to present her ideas and opinions with authority. As she talked through the experience, she decided her main trigger was being physically in the principal's office or physically at the teacher's desk. From that moment on, when she had meetings with school staff she invited them to meet in the FRC office. Being on her 'own turf', Nitiaray said, made her feel she could speak to the school staff as their equal. Nitiaray's experience is another example of the recurring importance of space, the identified missing element of the FRC research referenced in chapter 2. The space designated for the work of the parent employees within the FRC maintained a critical importance throughout the work.

#### *Problem Posing and Focus on the Immediate Problem*

The two concepts combined in this code are linked because in concentrating on the problem at hand, it is important to be able to examine all possible sides of the issue. In order to change one's own lens, one must continue to ask questions and hypothesize possible problems to encourage new avenues for solutions to current and future difficulties. My main objective in training the parent employees was to encourage a practice of asking good questions and maintaining a healthy skepticism that would allow them to truly hear the entirety of a family's difficulties. I did not want them to be tempted to make assumptions about a family's problems based on their own experiences or other perceptions; I also did not want them to make assumptions based on the parent's initial presentation of a story, as people often do not themselves recognize the root of their problem when they begin to relay their story. My own training in CCC emphasized the idea that the "first story is never the actual story."

Finally, I wanted the parent employees to be in the practice of encouraging other parents to take charge of their own problems instead of handing out a prescription of what to do, creating a ground for fostering empowerment instead of dependence. The practice of 'problem-posing' and 'focusing on the immediate problem' in our own meetings was a way to teach the parent employees, by experience, a method of helping people by bringing them to see a problem through multiple lenses, or viewpoints.



In the fall of 2005, I presented a formal training on CCC and the four ‘lacks’ to the coordinators, and we began to use this framework to help problem-pose and problem-solve. When a parent is in crisis the group is now accustomed to asking the following questions during the question and answer part of the meeting:

1. Does the parent lack an understanding of all or part of the problem?
2. Does the parent lack skills needed to solve the problem?
3. Is the parent experiencing a strong emotional response to the situation? Does she lack objectivity?
4. Does the parent lack the confidence she needs to act on the solution?

For the many years during and beyond this project, these questions often helped us to successfully identify the root of the problem and to develop a plan to guide the parent through a seemingly impossible crisis.

The idea of ‘problem posing’ and ‘focusing on the immediate problem’ is difficult to see in the parent employees’ journal. This was mostly a dynamic process that was recognized as part of our meetings. In the journals, the parent employees shied away from describing specific problems parents were having, perhaps for respect of confidentiality. Much of what was written involved personal reflection on their accomplishments. In notes from our meetings, however, there is much evidence of the focus of our conversations to help each other help families.

Many examples from my own meetings notes show how the parent employees developed their professional skills overall when we focused on the immediate problem at hand. In November of 2005, Nitiray became increasingly frustrated with the parents at the school and their lack of participation and commitment to events. I directed the meeting to focus on the most recent example, the most immediate event. The group asked her questions about the event and her interactions with parents. Was there:

1. A lack of understanding? How did the parents view the purpose of the event?
2. A lack of resources? Did Nitiray have the supports and materials she needed to properly roll out the event?
3. A lack of objectivity? Were Nitiray’s personal feelings about the importance of the event preventing her from seeing ways to engage others?
4. A lack of confidence? Was Nitiray overly nervous about putting on an event and therefore more sensitive about small setbacks?

During the wrap-up part of our meeting, I documented this reflection from Nitiray:

Nitiray said she learned from this experience the importance of her body language and word use in communicating with parents around events they want to put on. Nitiray also asked if I would follow up with other parents to see how the event went from their perspective. (author’s journal, 11/4/05)

In this example, Nitiray entered the conversation with complaints about what everyone else was doing wrong, but left the conversation with a personal change she could make in her interactions with others. This structured reflection led her to have

more positive interactions with other parents, leading to more collaboration and commitment from them. In other words, our focus on the specific event at hand, instead of the overall feeling that parents were not committed to the school in general, helped Nitiaray to solve her current problem as well as potential future difficulties.

In January of 2006, Koi found herself working with a mother in a violent relationship (the children were not reported to be in immediate physical danger):

Ladies, I talk to one of the parent that I know since I was a child. What I see or saw they are a happy couple but today I learn different things. Her husband beat her up with all kind of excuses. He call her name and tell her to get out of his house when she get lay off from work. She was in tears when we are talking. She said she didn't tell other people about this, but me. (Koi, 9/16/05)

In the initial conversations with the mother, Koi found out that the mother would not consider leaving her husband for various reasons including lack of money, concern for the children, self-esteem and language/education issues. Koi came to the meeting extremely frustrated because she did not know how to begin helping the woman if the woman wanted to continue in her relationship with her husband. Using the principles of focusing on the immediate situation, the group helped Koi to understand the woman better.

Koi's immediate and emotional reaction to the situation was that she believed the mother needed to leave the father to keep her children safe; however, focusing on our beliefs about what the parent should or should not do would not be helpful to the parent and her particular situation. Instead, we focused on the immediate situation, asking Koi to expand on her presentation of the case:

1. How did the mother *understand* her situation? Koi described that the mother wanted to find ways to help her children, find more money for the family, and that she did not have a choice about her abusive situation because the consequences of leaving would be worse than staying. Koi reflected that as a mother one often thinks of her children first, before her own situation.
2. What *resources* did the mother have or need? Koi explained that the mother had asked for help finding a job; she had many skills but did not know how to look for or apply for a job with limited English.
3. What was the *objective* reality or the facts, versus Koi's emotional reaction to the situation? Koi recognized that she was very upset to find out that this woman was being mistreated and, being a long time acquaintance of the woman, wanted to remove her from the situation. When she explained exactly what the parent said, she said the most immediate problem was finding a job because of the need for money. Koi also recognized the many of the mother's fears may be true: how would she survive on her own without resources?
4. How did the mother feel about her ability to solve her problem (her *confidence*)? Koi described that the mother had made many comments regarding her lack of skills and ability to help her family. The mother appeared defeated and depressed. She identified that the mother's lack of confidence was likely a significant barrier in working through the other problems.

We helped Koi draw on her own experiences, shared our knowledge and combined these nuggets of information to construct a more complete picture of what we believed to be this woman's dilemma. This process was one of posing, or brainstorming, possible difficulties in leaving the husband and other issues that might be at hand. As a result of looking at the multiple layers of the issue, Koi focused her own efforts with the mother on more immediate issues: she helped the woman find a job. In the process of finding a job, Koi reflected that she might be able to help the woman build more self-esteem and become more independent, which might help her on the road to being able to leave an abusive relationship.

At the end of our discussion, we concluded that this woman had a lack of *resources* to find a job, though Koi found she did indeed have the *skills*. She lacked an *understanding* of the abuse she was withstanding and the effect it may be having on her children and, even more so, she lacked the *confidence* in her ability to support her family on her own. At the beginning of the meeting, Koi came in looking for advice on how to help the woman leave her partner; by the end of our discussion Koi's new plan focused on supporting the parent to find resources and build confidence, two major foundational building blocks to helping the family as a whole.

The parent employees were also able to use the concept of focusing on the immediate problem and problem posing to work with their 'clients'. In February of 2006, Taina stepped in on a case that all four of us had been working on for the entirety of the school year. A student was struggling severely in his kindergarten class and the mother was also struggling to understand how to support her son. The child was perpetually late for school, was reportedly difficult to manage at home and at school, was constantly tired and not retaining academic information. The situation, as is true for any of our referrals that had to do with parenting skills, was a multi-layered and sensitive issue. The principles of focusing on an immediate problem and maintaining an awareness of all the possible things that could be going on helped us to be a full support to this parent without overwhelming or lecturing her.

By February, it became evident that the child was a candidate for retention and might not be promoted to the next grade. We used this issue as our focus to help start the work with the parent. Taina, coincidentally, also received notice about that time that her own daughter might be retained. Taina used this shared experience to engage the mother in a conversation about retention, her feelings about it, and what she would have to do as a parent to help her child reach his academic goals. The *parent* decided the child needed an early bed time and no television in the bedroom. Though these are small accomplishments, it is important to note that the teachers had been saying these same things to the parent all year as general admonishments, to no avail. When Taina brought the mother to focus on how to solve the immediate problem of retention, the mother was able to come to the conclusion herself that to solve this problem, to help her child pass, she would need to get him to bed earlier and stop his late-night television viewing. In this situation, the parent's lack of *understanding* of the problem formed the largest barrier to solving the problem. Once she identified some possible solutions for herself, Taina was able to help her realize these solutions by working with her on the *skills* of being firm and consistent with something like TV time.

Later in the year, in April, this same parent and her parenting skills were still a topic of conversation. At this point, the parent was still very resistant to the idea of retention. The child was going to bed earlier, but still struggling academically. The parent refused to have him retained; the parent employees were having difficulty trying to work with this parent to be able to listen to the teacher's recommendations. Notes from this meeting reveal our process in trying to help this parent:

We brainstormed some beliefs this parent may have that are getting in the way of her thinking about retention: that only stupid kids get held back, that being labeled "stupid" will effect her son for life, that if her son is stupid she must be doing something wrong. Nitiaray also raised the question about whether or not this parent understands that report card and what that means. (Meeting Notes, 4/7/06)

In this situation, the group took the immediate problem of retention and brainstormed what might be going on in the parent's mind and her understanding of the situation. By posing her possible problems, we were able to see the issue through multiple lenses, or perspectives. This helped to understand the parent's problem better and we were able to approach the parent by directly addressing these concerns about her child's intelligence and labels. While this parent refused to retain her son in Kindergarten, we were able to bring her and the teacher to a place of understanding. The teacher was able to hear the parent's fears and reframed her perspective from seeing a resistant, combative parent to seeing a fearful and caring parent trying to protect her child from what she felt would be the consequences of retention. This reflects our definition of empowerment: an intentional process of building mutual respect. Furthermore, with each conversation, she seemed set more strict boundaries at home: earlier bed time, no television in the room, breakfast every morning and consequences for inappropriate behavior. By focusing on the issue of retention, it appears that the mother began developing her parenting skills and both parent and teacher gained a greater understanding of the problem.

### *Theme Interference*

Theme interference involves the acknowledgement of referencing one's own experiences when listening to the difficulties of others. In other words, it is difficult to help someone with a problem that you, too, are experiencing, or that relates in some way to your experience. We discovered quite quickly that, being parents themselves from the same community, the parent employees had experienced many of the same issues that families were bringing to the FRC. This might affect the parent employees in a number of ways: first, they may be able to connect easily and relate to the parent; second, the parent telling their story may trigger sensitivities in the parent employees that make it difficult for them to concentrate on the problem at hand; third, the parent employees may make assumptions about the problem based on their own experiences, and not the experiences of the person presenting the problem.

In the first situation there is little problem. Often, the parent employees were able to use their own experiences to help the parent open up, reveal sensitive information and be open to taking advice. In other situations, there is potential for the parent employees to be emotionally affected by the situation or that it puts them in a place where they

cannot be effective supports for the families. Using the methods described above of ‘problem posing’ and ‘focusing on the immediate situation’, we often were able to separate out the parent employees’ personal stories from the stories of those seeking support from the FRC. Evidence of the parent employees actively separating the personal from the professional shows up in many places in the journal. In fact, over time, the journal became a place for the parent employees to let everyone know what was going on with them and how it might affect their work. For example, Nitiaray and Marisol, and later Nitiaray, Koi and Taina often reported personal difficulties with a Client and would ask if someone else would work with that Client for a few weeks. This was a decision made based on the fact that if, for example, Nitiaray was bickering with a Client, she would not be able to get through to help them with their problem. Nitiaray might ask Taina to be proactive about approaching the parent so that the parent had another person to talk to with whom there was no conflict.

In the role of supervisor, most of my work seemed to be checking for theme interference and addressing it when I observed it happening. The conversations around theme interference are tricky because they are intensely personal. Often the ‘themes’ that ‘interfere’ most with our work are those we do not wish to think about or confront; yet, in this work we must confront them to maintain objectivity and inhibit ourselves from acting purely on our emotional response to a situation. When a parent employee presented a case, I asked her to describe the situation in detail, including the parent’s reactions, possible feelings, and interpretations of the problem. As the parent employee spoke, I listened (and eventually we all listened) for statements of judgment (“She shouldn’t be...”), personal agendas (“I just want him to understand that...”), or wishes for change that reflected what the parent employee thought should happen (“If she would just...”). I also listened for when the parent employee was having difficulty getting through to a parent, which might imply there was a psychological barrier on the part of the parent employee making it difficult to see where the parent was coming from. While the types of statements detailed above did not necessarily identify theme interference, they were reason push the question and engage in reflection as to how our personal experiences affected our work.

When I did hear one of the above types of comments or statements, my first step was to reflect it back: “You wish the parent would do things differently?” I then asked the parent employee why they believed their statement, what was behind it and where did it come from? Often, by explaining and describing the origin and evolution of the thought, personal connections arose. For example, a conversation probing for theme interference on a case where a parent is looking for help convincing her child to complete homework might develop in the following way:

Consultee: I wish she would just take the television out of the child’s room.

Consultant: You think she should take away his television so he can complete his homework?

Consultee: Yes, the child should not have a television in his room. When it’s in his room he can get away with watching a show and not doing his homework; she’s letting her child walk all over her and losing her ability to lay down rules. I

used to think I was being a good parent giving my child everything but then I could not discipline him when it came time for setting rules – he thought it was his right to have a television.

Consultant: So you are worried about her losing disciplinary control over her child if she doesn't start with strict rules now because of the way you had to struggle with your child?

Consultee: Yes. She doesn't know what's coming.

Consultant: Did she say she has difficulties in all areas of discipline or just around the homework?

Consultee: She only spoke about the homework; I'm not sure if she struggles in other areas. Maybe I should ask the mother if she feels like her children listen to her rules or when they have done something wrong, and if she feels that her discipline practices are successful. If homework time is the only time she struggles to get him to do something, maybe the issue isn't discipline at all but his academic skills or some kind of anxiety about homework.

In this mock conversation the Consultee (parent employee) has an experience with her own children where the fight over the television at homework time made her feel she had lost all control: the Consultee immediately assumes the issue is discipline because this had been her experience. In the end, the Consultee realizes she needs to ask the parent more questions in order to help her solve her problem.

Specifically, in one example of theme interference, Nitiaaray, towards the end of 2006, began making broad statements about the instincts of motherhood and that “we are mamas and we just do it.” In this situation, my position was to help Nitiaaray make her ideas about parenting skills explicit, as it was a false assumption that all parents have the same instincts that she felt she had. This was a case where her own feelings about motherhood were making it difficult to understand how other might not be as successful as she had been. By identifying and naming her personal perception of others' difficulties, we were able to help Nitiaaray become a better support for helping parent develop specific parenting skills, as Taina had done with the parent whose son was up for retention described above.

Another example of acknowledging theme interference came in the form of recording personal events in the journal to help the rest of the FRC team understand what we were experiencing in our own lives. For example, in March of 2006, Taina recorded a number of incidences involving her own daughter's friends who were killed due to gang violence. I spoke with Taina on many occasions about how she could help herself and her daughter heal, and also about how her current grief might affect her work with clients. Being aware of possible interference allowed Taina to name her feelings when issues of child safety arose, and ask for help maintaining her objectivity in these cases.

While theme interference can often stand in the way of helping a parent, when one begins to acknowledge and confront the themes, it can also help one find the strength

to face difficult demons. At one point, there was a concern that one of our parent employees was in an unhealthy relationship. While the person did not agree with this assessment of her relationship with her significant other, each domestic violence case that we faced was an opportunity for the team to help her examine the dynamics of abuse, what it means, what it looks like, and how a person might work through it<sup>5</sup>. Over the course of the two and a half years documented, there are many references to her gaining confidence in our meetings as well as a note that she had opened her own bank account at one point where she put her earnings from her work with the FRC, thereby establishing some newfound independence.

As the parent employees became increasingly aware of how frequently personal themes interfere with our work, they began to talk about them more openly. We all struggled to address these issues and remain objective in the face of emotional situations. Koi specifically came to me during the 2004-2005 school year, to ask how one might advise other parents when she has difficulties herself. While the details will not be relayed here due to privacy concerns, it is important to note that in this instance these conversations about the relationship between the personal and professional were vital to her ability to continue to be effective support to families even when she, too, experienced these difficulties.

#### *Power to Act*

The concept of ‘action’ is approached differently in the CCC and Popular Education theories. In CCC, the power to act remains with the Consultee: the end goal is increased understanding of the problem, not necessarily action. In Popular Education, the goal is action. Creating the FRC involved both of these concepts. In our work, our meetings were set up to encourage the parent employee to make decisions about their next steps with the Client, and the parent employees were also trained to allow their client to decide when and how they would take action to solve their problem.

The idea that the Consultee maintains the power to act was important to the FRC on two levels. First, the parent employees were able to learn to give a family in crisis ample time to develop their own skills to solve their problem instead of doing the task for them prematurely. According to the principles of Consultation, the person is only truly ready to take the next step when they take the initiative to do so. Often, when the Consultant suggests a course of action, the Consultee will find a way to sabotage this course of action because they are already convinced that they have tried every possible solution: admitting that someone else’s solution will work is equivalent to admitting they were not capable enough to deal with the issue themselves (Caplan, 1963). Thus, bringing the Consultee through a process that helps them identify a new solution, instead

---

<sup>5</sup> The experiences documented in this dissertation highlight many incidents of domestic violence as it is a pervasive issue within our community. It has come to the attention of this author that men of color in this case study are often painted negatively, appearing as perpetrators of abuse or altogether absent. Just as many parents do not feel welcome in the school because, as discussed, the "face" of the school is different than their own, fathers often see the school as a mother's space and therefore often feel left out or pushed out of the positive aspects of parent involvement lauded in this study. With respect to the pervasiveness of domestic violence within our community, the cycle of abuse is complex and the racism, machismo, and conditions of poverty within our society feed this cycle every day. As we move towards ending domestic and any type of violence, it is important to remember that our efforts must also support the men who grow up in this culture to relearn relationships and solving problems without violence.

of simply giving them an answer, allows them to maintain or develop their confidence in their own abilities to face their own difficulties. Second, encouraging a Consultee to act on their own will, complete a task by themselves instead of doing it for them, is a form of empowerment. Every action that a parent takes to help solve their own problem is one more step to being empowered to face difficulties in general.

Throughout the notes, our team conversations revolved around finding ways to connect parents to resources where they would be able to get their questions answered. By using the problem-posing techniques that focused on the immediate problem, the parent employees were able to help a parent identify their need or questions. At that point, our process was to connect the parent with an organization or community resource that could help them answer their question or obtain the necessary resources.

For example, in March of 2006, Koi was approached by a parent who was having difficulty with a teacher. (This is actually a quite common issue that came up multiple times since.) Koi came to the meeting wondering what she should say to the teacher to help resolve the conflict. Through our team process, we asked Koi about what the actual conflict involved, what she believed the teacher was trying to do and what she believed the parent needed. Through our conversations we realized that this parent was in need of support and understanding. She did not understand the teacher's methods and was feeling insecure about her own education. In order to build the parent's confidence, we needed to find a way to help her speak to the teacher on her own. If we spoke to the teacher for her, her lack of confidence would persist. While the immediate issue may be resolved, the underlying issues would still be there.

Koi decided to use the school resource of Parent Leaders. She connected the parent to a Parent Leader from the classroom and helped her to explain her story. The Parent Leader was aware of other parents with a similar issue and arranged a meeting for the group to talk. Through this process, the parents were able to approach the teacher with a unified message. The parent was able to have her voice heard from her own mouth, while simultaneously feeling the support of a group who would be there throughout her child's schooling (other parents in the class). The parent, acting on her own, came out of the experience not only feeling she had solved the problem, but with a feeling of empowerment for the next issue that arose.

The example given above also demonstrates the ways in which our problem-posing process led to the 'power to act'. In the literature on Popular Education, Gaventa (1980) and Freire (1970) describe the problem-posing process as a manner of education that empowers one to act. In the situation above, the FRC team helped Koi to understand the "lacks" of this parent (*confidence* and *skills*). The better Koi understood the problem, the better she could see her options for helping the parent. At no time did we *tell* Koi how to respond, or how to act: the power to act remained with Koi and she, therefore, owned her actions. In the same vein, Koi worked with the parent to help her understand her problem, identify her resources, and activate her own knowledge. She did not *advise* or *tell* the parent what to do, what action to take; however, the process helped the parent find the power to act, it empowered her to take action on her own. The fact that the Consultee *owns* the action, that the power to act remains with the Consultee, is a critical component to CCC: when an action is our decision we are much less likely to sabotage the situation and much more likely to do everything we can to make it work. In CCC, if the Consultee does not choose to act, we step back. In Popular Education, since the goal



is *action* and positive change for the community, we do not step back but rather persist in our work with the community until we can find a solution. By combining CCC and Popular Education, one can see a model where the FRC employees take the time to build up the skills, knowledge, objectivity and confidence of the parent while keeping an eye on the larger goal of empowering parents to make positive changes in their lives and the community.

*Objectivity and Conscienziation (consciousness-raising)*

Maintaining an objective, non-emotional, widely aware view of the issue at hand continues to be a constant struggle among the parent employees and myself. Above, I described many instances where we engaged in a process which helped us to separate ourselves from the problem presented by identifying when the family's difficulty was personal for us. However, this was not the only place where this struggle existed. In order to work within the school, we had to be in a constant state of identifying potential areas of struggle, observing power imbalances and seeing the nuances of various interpersonal dynamics.

As within any small community, the school community was a difficult place to navigate when the objective was remaining neutral in all situations. In order to be successful, the parent employees had to constantly refer to a global view of any specific issue that came up instead of being dragged in with the chatter of daily complaints. They needed to listen to the parents' complaints, consider the possible sources for the problem for that specific parent, and help the parent come up with possible solutions while simultaneously keeping their own emotions in check, thinking about how this particular issue might affect the greater community, and what bias this parent might bring of their representation of reality.

One significant example of this need for *objectivity* and *conscienziation* involved two parents who were notorious at the school for complaining and finding fault in anything that was done. These two parents had approached me early on with some difficulties at home. My first impression was that these were alienated parents who could use an alternate entry point into the school. Over time, their stories began to involve more names of people at the school and, after we hired the parent employees, the complaints began about Nitiaray, Marisol and Koi (the parents left the school soon after Taina came on board).

The first step, as with any problem, was to bring the complaints to the team. Marisol came to the team meeting one day in the fall of 2004, saying that "parents" were saying that they never saw Nitiaray or Koi in the family center and that the FRC was not doing any good for the community. Seeing the immediate reactions of hurt and discomfort from Koi and Nitiaray, I took them through our process of asking questions and gathering information: the initial story is never the actual story. We quickly found out the "parents" meant the two parents who were known gossipers. At first, this seemed to be the end of the story: why not simply disregard the statements altogether since we knew these parents liked to cause trouble? Here I posed the bigger problem: gossip can affect not only an immediate situation but our future ability to help the school community. We needed to find a way to work through this problem, not around it.

Our second step was to look at the surrounding issues: gossip is a large issue in schools in general. If we were to be functional as a Family Resource Center, we would

need to be equipped to address gossip in a larger context. We made a list of the complaints that they were making, brainstormed responses for the specific parents but also made a proactive plan to address the rumors directly while talking to other parents: we would make a point of talking to parents about the FRC schedules and our plans. This awareness of the larger issues made us able to address not only the immediate problem but prepared us for the future *and* helped us develop a plan to address the complete problem: not only did we talk to the two parents to straighten out their concerns, but we spoke to many parents about the FRC hours and how we might be more available (without mentioning the two parents' complaints).

There are many other accounts of this sort of global thinking that emerged from single problems. Another example came about when we began to have multiple referrals about domestic violence. Our immediate and family-centered response was described above; however, we also took a more global response. Many of our discussions focused on the patterns of domestic violence and how people became trapped in these types of relationships. We invited in two guest speakers at different times to give us workshops on how to work with people in violent relationships and the community issues that contributed to this type of family problem. Again, we did not want to only address the issue of one family, but create a framework for working with the whole community in both a proactive and preventative way. All of the situations we encounter are inherently emotional. We use these emotions to help us respond in empathetic and respectful ways; however, by creating a framework of action, we are able to intentionally use our emotional reactions to help us understand the family, instead of letting our actions be directed solely by the sway of our feelings.

### *Limit Situations*

We were quite thankful as a school that the parent employees were dedicated and tenacious people who wanted to help all families in any way they could. Therefore, learning to recognize that there were barriers that we could not change was a significant challenge for all of us (including this author). Many of the barriers, or limits, we encountered were difficulties we were able to surmount: gossip, schedules, even fears of the principal's office. However, there were many battles we chose not to fight. These were the givens to our jobs as FRC coordinators.

First, a significant component of our initial trainings was identifying which of us could best help which families. We hired a diverse group of people for this very reason: due to no fault of our own, none of us would be able to help every family alone. Some families did not speak our language; some families did not trust us simply for the color of our skin; some families wanted someone with a degree; some families wanted someone with shared experience; and so forth. These were limits we addressed early and accepted. As it turned out, there is evidence that our acceptance of these limits was actually comforting: there is not one point in time where one of the parent employees gave up on a parent. When a parent employee was unable to help the parent, they problem-solved with the group, tried a different tactic, asked for assistance from someone else (parent leader, other FRC coordinator, etc.), or waited for the parent to become more comfortable with them. Instead of "I give up," the parent employees would report that they did not feel they were a "good match" for that parent, or that they needed more time to develop a relationship. Knowing that certain limit situations existed allowed us the confidence to

let our ego go when working with parents and focus on how a particular parent could get the support they needed, even if it did not come from us.

In a previous chapter, I described the role that politics played in the development of the FRC and our job descriptions. The limit situation in this case was the fact that there was already a parent leadership group who was extremely active in the school. In our second year having parent employees in the FRC, we acknowledged that CAS (as much as it was also a partner and support) was a limit, something we could not change. We made a conscious decision to not fight them for recognition in the school, but to work with them to fill in the gaps of parent support they were unable to meet for their own limitations. For this reason, we decided we would work with parents who were less likely to come to the school, to be advocates for those who did not want to be part of CAS, and we would step back when CAS wanted to put on an event or work with a family. We defined ourselves as a ‘backdoor entrance’ to the school where parents could get the support they needed without becoming very involved in the greater causes purported by CAS and the school. Our limit, then, was we often needed to step down and let CAS take over when there was a conflict. Again, once we recognized this as a limit, we were able to be successful in what we did do, instead of feeling defeated.

Finally, our major limit situation was lack of funding. I was involved in writing many grants in the first few years of the FRC and the grants continued to be written for many years until the FRC was able to secure funding. We were not able to get funding during the course of the project because our mission did not involve direct service to students and did not involve a large movement to empower groups of parents (CAS was already doing that). We held fast in our mission and money continued to come slowly in small grants. Recognizing this limit, we became experts in finding free or cheap materials, events and workshops. We designed our services to involve little cost past salary and partnered with the after school program to support this cost. Approximately two years after this project officially ended, ALCANCE was able to secure funding through partnerships with eight other FRCs in the district: a local foundation, building ALCANCE’s model and the language we used in our grants, was able to increase the scale of the project and align many of the independent efforts around FRC development throughout the district. At this point in time, funding is no longer a limit situation.

### *Conceptual Change and Praxis*

Beginning with our first training, the parent employees were instructed to keep a journal of their daily activities in the FRC and interactions with parents. The purpose of this journal was two-fold: to document the development of the FRC and to encourage reflection and growth among the parent employees. By writing in the journal, the parent employees were encouraged to actively think about their daily activities and the ways in which they approached the various challenges of our work. At every staff meeting, I used the journal as a starting point for discussion topics. At the end of each year, I used the journal to document the important issues of the year and, most importantly, the individual professional and personal growth of the parent employees and our FRC. This reflection process helped to motivate us to do better, kept us aware of the different issues that formed our practice, and served as a source of confidence as we documented our learning process. It is also important to note that the very creation of this manuscript is a demonstration of praxis on the writer’s part as well as an exercise in conceptual change

as I examine the assumptions and theories we used in developing this Family Resource Center.

There are many examples of conceptual change and praxis in the daily work of the parent employees, such as their comments during conversations and in their journal writing. The active reflection process implicit in the work of CCC and Popular Education is the most critical component to the training process. One can see the professional development of each staff member through the changes in their reflections over time. To demonstrate this method of training by encouraging the act of reflection to inspire professional and personal development, I have chosen examples from the parent employee journal which show a reflection-action process and the changes that began in these notes. It is important to keep in mind that every time there was evidence of this level of reflection in the journal, our meetings often took this reflection to a deeper level. In addition, there are often comments from one parent employee to another. Not only were the parents reflecting on their own practice, but on the actions of the FRC as a whole.

### *Koi*

In the initial interview for the position of FRC coordinator, Koi was extremely quiet and spoke with very few words. Her English was still a little broken and her grammar was often incorrect. Her native language, Mien, is not a written language. Logically, writing was very difficult for her as she learned it later in life. Naturally a shy, introverted person, Koi worked hard at trying to be a leader in the school because of her strong relationship with Eva, the CAS representative at the school. Within the FRC, she initially sat back and watched. Over time she became more opinionated, outspoken, and her journal entries became progressively longer.

Below is one example of her ability to articulate some of the inner processes that were preventing her from taking a more outspoken stance in many instances, including helping parents. All three parent employees and I participated in a training about conducting a relationship-building type of interview with parents. After the training, we reflected on how to incorporate one-to-ones into our practice and gain confidence in conducting them. In a one-to-one interview, the parent employee would ask a parent, whom they did not know well, some potentially very personal questions.

I was really really uncomfortable and especial know that there are someone listening to me. I to do a lot better than that when I am doing 1-1 with other parents. (Koi, 9/30/04)

For Koi, this reflection process was about naming her nervousness. From a psychological perspective, the process of naming fears, talking about them in a safe place and dissecting their origins is often helpful in overcoming the situations that feel threatening. Koi's ability to name her feelings around this process was a first step to a significant shift in her self confidence over time.

In the fall of 2004, Nitiaray and Koi attended a domestic violence training that was not what we had expected. The focus was mostly on immigrants and their rights. However, Koi was able to find pieces of the training that were useful to her through this reflection.

Nitiaray and I went to Domestic Violence training today from 1-4pm. It was about immigrant. Their topic was Immigration Relief Immigrant Domestic Violence Survivors. It's not what I thought it was but it was very good because what I had learned today was new to me. I didn't know about a lot of immigrants or illegal alien cannot get the service that they need. For example, calling the police or get restraining order without worry about they'll be send back where then came from some thing like this. I thought I was really really sad for we all are only human and wanted a better future. (Koi, 10/13/04)

As the training progressed, Koi was able to help a number of women in violent relationships. She is our model in giving families the support when necessary and space when needed to help them through the process of gaining confidence and agency. Ironically, Koi came to the FRC as a person who seemed to have little confidence, as discussed above. I mentioned in the previous chapter that Koi was able to help one woman in a violent relationship by focusing on helping her obtain employment first. Koi also began to show her own signs of empowerment throughout the year through longer journal entries, increased initiation of FRC activities, as well as organizing and managing school-wide events. Below is an example of her reflections on her own professional development:

Today something like Women's Support Group pop in my mind, but I don't know what's really mean in the school and how to get start. But I talked about it with two women if we have if they like to join. They said yes. I feel today meeting is good. We are very open with our feel and share about it. I feel bad because I feel I haven't done anything good for the FRC yet. Like Nitiaray and Marisol did. But I am trying and hoping for better as time go by. (Koi, 10/28/04)

Over time, through reflection on her practice and with the support of her coworkers, the shyness turned into confidence, innovation and personal power. Over time she helped many parents through domestic violence, created a food and clothing exchange, brought parenting classes on nutrition and child development to the school, and pursued professional development opportunities for all of us. Today, Koi is the main face of the FRC and maintains the program as others come and go.

### *Nitiaray*

Much the opposite of Koi, Nitiaray came to the FRC with confidence to spare. She walks with swagger, speaks with authority, and acts decisively. A typifying "Nitiaray moment" was when she sat me down (her supervisor) and told me that I needed to reprimand her for being late and give her a consequence: she felt I was being too nice and too accommodating, that I needed to assert my authority so that my employees would fall into line. She told me the next time she was late, she expected to be yelled at and put in her place!

Nitiaray's change over time was not a gaining of confidence as in Koi's situation, but a reflective humbling and developing explicit explanations for the reasons why she did what she did and felt what she felt. Nitiaray appears to have learned over time that

the act of questioning one's practice is not a sign of weakness, but can actually lead to improved practice. Over time her interactions within the group as well as her journal entries contain more questions than answers.

In reaction to the same one-to-one training mentioned above, Nitiaray had the following reflection in the journal:

Today's meeting with Eva went very well. It's good for us to know the names of the things we were doing 1-1 conversation with parents are very important. Also Koi I think you did very well. (Nitiaray, 9/30/04)

For Nitiaray, this meeting involved giving a name and a structure to a process (the one-to-one) that she believed she had been doing all along. Nitiaray's focus is much more on giving Koi a compliment than expressing any difficulty she felt in completing the training or worries about interacting with parents. Nitiaray's initial reflective process was evident in her observations of the other parent employees' actions or feelings: she acted as a critical support for the rest of us, encouraging us and doling out advice for approaching difficult situations. In a short time, the nature of Nitiaray's reflections shifted to her own practice.

The first shift in Nitiaray's reflection involved writing an idea in the journal and asking the rest of us what we thought about it. In this first shift, she examines the practice of the whole group and makes suggestions of how the group's practice or actions could be improved:

Wow yesterday was great but I think we should better organize it parents should go first and then two or three kid at a time. What do you think? (Nitiaray, 11/18/04)

Nitiaray's most significant shift in reflection came when we began to delve into the topics of 'transference' and 'objectivity'. During these consultation sessions, Nitiaray began to understand some of her actions and reactions as influenced by her prior experiences and very specific view of the world. For example, Nitiaray discovered, as described above, that she felt nervous walking into the "principal's office" due to her prior experiences in school. Slowly, she begins to recognize that while she is skilled at talking to other parents, there are aspects of her position that present challenges:

Challenges that I've never thought would come of this job are my positions, as a parent and also a coordinator it seems to be a very thin line. I'm doing my best to keep them separate. I'm sorry that I haven't had time to write I will try harder to write every day. (Nitiaray, 12/2/04)

During our consultation meetings, we spoke extensively about how our personal experiences, emotional reactions, and identification with the parents who came to the FRC could affect our ability to help them, regardless of how talented or skilled we became at helping parents. In essence, Nitiaray appears to begin to understand that questioning her practice does not imply fault in her skills but rather helps her to more effectively utilize the skills she has.

About a year and a half after her first day on the job, Nitiaray begins to demonstrate critical reflection of her practice. Significantly different from the Nitiaray who sat me down to tell me what I should be doing as her supervisor, this Nitiaray openly questions the project she is working on:

Today was somewhat of an emotional day for me. I'm confused about some of the feedback that I've been getting about Black History month. Some parents have said the school has not recognized it or done anything. (Nitiaray, 3/1/05)

It is important to note that this comment did not come from a sense of defeat: Nitiaray remained a force to be reckoned with and persisted in creating a Black History Month in the years to come. In conversation, Nitiaray elaborated to detail the actions she had taken and reflect on why some had been more successful than others, creating a plan for the next year along the way. At this point, Nitiaray demonstrated praxis in action: she truly shifts from seeing reflection as a sign of fault to seeing it as a way of improving practice.

At about the same time, Nitiaray begins to overtly ask for help from Koi and Taina instead of always being the person to give support or advice. In fact, we began to see this as a great strength in our practice of supporting parents: through CCC we were able to identify when one of us was unsuccessful in helping a parent due to a personality clash, transference, or any other reason. The parent employees saw this as a way of being *better* able to support parents, not as a weakness. Here is an example of Nitiaray asking for help with a parent who is triggering an emotional reaction in her:

What happens when a parent (non-stable) attaches themselves to one of our staff?  
(me) She makes me feel uncomfortable. (Nitiaray, 3/10/05)

Nitiaray's transformation in her reflective process over time is a powerful demonstration of the effect of the CCC and Popular Education model on training the FRC employees. While Nitiaray came in with confidence, she gained an ability to guide that confidence into an intentional practice that truly impacted the parents with whom she worked.

### *Taina*

While Taina is also a parent and resident of the community, her children attended different schools. In the beginning Taina was a quite observer. She was not shy, as Koi had been, but also did not often express her opinions, as Nitiaray had done. Taina made a striking first impression on Nitiaray, Koi and me: her resume included an extensive list of her experience in childcare, finance, management, personal shopping, design, problem solving, nursing, secretarial skills, home organization and so forth, all under the job title of "housewife and mother." From the beginning, she recognized her life experience as a true skill base and helped Nitiaray and Koi also understand the power of their life experiences. It is important to note that Taina did not come to work for the FRC, until March 2005. While she still works there today, documentation of her role is more limited.

Taina also came with a unique gift of approaching her work as a learner as well as an expert. On her first day with us she wrote, “Hello ladies finally I started working. I feel like I’m a student too” (3/23/05). She was talented in many areas, but above all else she listened.

Taina’s practice of listening taught us all about the ways we could use the information we gathered from living in the community to help parents who may not otherwise solicit our help. Below is an example of Taina’s process in helping a specific parent:

While I was in the family center I overheard [parent] talking on the phone. She was pretty mad about the fact that her son R\_\_\_ got in trouble at school. I heard her telling the principal that she may not be able to make to school before the police arrived because she had to take the bus. I offered myself to take her of course. I ended up spending all morning with her. I feel like this was one of the best things I have done for the family center. I gave her all the support she needed at that time. She expressed to me that she was very happy with my support. Hey I’m glad! (Taina 12/14/05)

Once Taina became oriented to her position in the FRC, she became an avid writer. She often used this space to let the rest of the team know what was going on in each of her referrals and how she felt about it. At first, Taina simply reported that she had helped a parent, often by giving straightforward advice on what she thought the parent should do:

I made my first contact with a parent that is having issues with her daughter. It was nice talking to her. She to FRC worrying about her daughter’s behavior and when she left she had a smile on her face. (Taina, 3/24/05)

Over time, Taina begins to write more about her process in working with parents and to ask questions both in her writing and in meetings. In this respect, it appears that Taina became less concerned about finding an exact answer and more concerned about understanding the problem. According to CCC theory, one helps the client to find answers through developing a greater understanding of the problem. Below are some examples of later journal entries that demonstrate Taina’s changing focus on developing a broader understanding of the problem at hand:

Yesterday I spoke to a parent who is having issues with his son. I felt sad because I couldn’t help her that much. We spoke about her problems at home and she feels like something happened to her son and he is not talking about it. Liz [this author] she wants to meet with you and the Principal. (Taina, 5/4/05)

Today I spoke with a parent and try to find a solution for her teenager behavior. She told me that her daughter is hard to talk to and she doesn’t respect her as a parent. Hopefully after all we talked she will have a better understanding in how to talk to her. (Taina, 2/24/05)



In the above quotes, Taina begins to explain the parent's difficulties more. As a consequence, in meetings we were able to dissect the situations more extensively and use them not only to brainstorm ways to support the parent in question but also as training opportunities to help us figure out the best ways to help parents in similar situations.

As the year progressed, Taina developed a habit of referring to previous cases in deciding how to proceed with a current case. Taina's explicit modeling of praxis by identifying previous experiences and applying them directly to current circumstances to inform our decisions was a rich natural training opportunity for all of us. I believe that her habit of providing detailed descriptions of her actions helped all of us to develop mental protocols in working with families which later became explicit in our practice. Once there was an informal protocol established, we were able to use these reflections to alter our actions in such a way that would better serve a family.

Throughout the journals, all three of the parent employees frequently write notes of appreciation and praise to each other. Taina picked up on this habit almost immediately:

Nitiaray – Thank you very much for talking to my daughter. I think you have a big impact on her. I don't have words to express my gratitude. Just have to thank you a million...Koi – You are such a nice person and want to thank you also. You are a great listener. (Taina, 5/12/10)

The culture of appreciation that had developed among the parent employees fed directly into the concept of looking to others for perspective and guidance, especially when a particular case triggered our own emotional baggage. I believe that our practice of recognizing that another parent may be better able to handle a case was possible because of the trust that had developed among the staff. It is much easier to recognize one's own limitations when s/he is certain that others see his/her strengths.

Taina came to the FRC with a quiet confidence and a strong listening ear. Through the CCC and Popular Education training, Taina learned to hone her skills by being more and more specific about the difficulties parents were facing, by drawing on previous experience to help current problems and by developing explicit language for her intuitive actions. Taina arrived late but was none the less critical in the development of our theory of practice within the FRC.

### *Reflections on Consultee-Centered Consultation as a Parent Training Model*

The training method used for the professional development of the FRC parent employees utilized a combination of theoretical frameworks from Consultee-Centered Consultation and Popular Education. The purpose of this section was to demonstrate the ways in which using these methods with parents resulted in the professional development necessary to create and manage a Family Resource Center. Use of CCC with professionals is documented in the literature as an effective training method, but there is no evidence of the CCC process being used with parents or community members for training purposes. The analysis of the parent employees' journals, meeting notes and this researcher's journals demonstrates that each critical aspect of CCC and many aspects of Popular Education were represented in this training model. Furthermore, the training prepared the parent employees to work with a variety of families, change their practice as

needed, and work through their own emotional reactions to the difficult situations we faced working with families in crisis. The parent employees all showed evidence of shifts in perspective, evolving praxis and increased empowerment in light of their ability to not only reflect but propose and act on ideas to change any negative situation.

Finally, the model used offered a reciprocal educational process where I, as supervisor, was able to learn and apply critical information about the subtleties of working with this community: building relationships with parents, practicing patience, and above all, listening fully to the depth and complexity of their stories. The results of this reciprocal education process are represented in this manuscript in the training model and theory of action for working with parents at ALCANCE.

Another important component to consider when examining this method of training is the subtly with which the professional and personal changes occurred. I observed remarkable growth in the parent employees' conceptualization of problems and ability to support parents in crisis through the journals or various comments made during meetings. I believe that my professional training as a psychologist in the methods of CCC were critical to the successful training of the parent employees. I also believe that ongoing consultation with a trained professional to continue this training process over many years is beneficial to the successful implementation of an FRC. While we may become more skilled at working with parents in various situations, families in crisis will still pull at our emotions and personal experiences. While this work is rewarding, it breaks our hearts every day. It is crucial for every provider to have support, as well.

## CHAPTER 5:

### CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This dissertation examines the multiple layers of development when constructing a Family Resource Center. At the beginning of the project, I aimed to answer the following question:

*How can a program, to be labeled a “Family Resource Center,” developed by drawing from the following applicable theoretical streams and literatures - notably: 1) Family Resource Centers; 2) Parent Involvement; 3) Consultee-Centered Consultation practices in school psychology; 4) Popular Education – successfully (to be defined below) address the lack of effective parental involvement and their access to and use of critical resources in supporting their children’s education in a school in a poor and disenfranchised community?*

The research is currently devoid of comprehensive models for FRCs. By drawing on four related areas of previous research and incorporating the results of the daily reflective practice of the growing FRC, I outlined a proposed multifaceted theory of FRC development. While the project described in this dissertation is not the only way to establish family support within a school, it provides a functional framework that will hopefully lay the foundation for other research-based models to come. In this conclusion, I will bring together the vital findings of the project which together form a comprehensive FRC development model, utilizing the lessons we learned from our integration of research and experience.

The ALCANCE Family Resource Center was created in response to the long-standing and seemingly insurmountable task of providing high quality education in poor, urban neighborhoods where families lack many of the resources necessary for the daily challenges they face. The principal of ALCANCE envisioned a place that would promote empowerment among our parents and eventually the mission of the FRC reflected this very goal: “to empower our diverse community.”

Many individual families within the ALCANCE community struggle on a variety of levels; however, the community as a whole is rich with resources, knowledge and support. The FRC aimed to connect families to these resources by creating a community hub of information, material goods and peer-support to help families through these challenging times. The FRC also aimed to create an environment where parents would find the strength and power to advocate for themselves and their children, and find the agency needed to navigate the challenges of daily life in Oakland.

This project was described as a ‘committed experiment’, where the project and its goals constantly changed in reaction to the growth of the FRC and the continual reflection of the players within. This project is unique in the ways that it applied educational and community involvement theories to the real-time practice of creating an FRC within a school as detailed throughout this manuscript. In the introduction I outlined three major questions to be addressed in the analysis of three and a half years of work creating the ALCANCE FRC:

4. *How did the findings and theories outlined in the research on FRC development, much of which operates within a deficit approach to helping families, both help and hinder the development of the FRC?*
5. *How did the application of the findings and theories regarding parent involvement in schools contribute to building relationships with disenfranchised and alienated parents, often those most in need of resources such as food, health care, parenting classes, employment, housing or legal aide, so that they will be more likely to access the resources provided by the school?*
6. *How did Consultee-Centered Consultation seen through the lens of Popular Education practices and theories contribute to the effective education and empowerment of community parents employed to develop and manage the FRC, and through them help empower other parents who use the center?*

In response to the above questions, we developed a number of components we believed to be essential to the creation of an FRC based on our knowledge of practice and the available literature at that time. In the initial stages of the FRC development, we proposed the following:

1. In creating the FRC itself, the most important areas of focus would be:
  - a. Developing positive, productive relationships with pre-existing parent-involvement efforts in the school, i.e. addressing local politics
  - b. Identifying and addressing the power dynamics between individual parents and individual staff members in the school
  - c. Working through the legal and ethical issues of where responsibility lies for a family's wellbeing
2. Utilizing parents as staff members of the FRC would be a more effective way to connect families to resources than the traditional model of employing education or outreach professionals as FRC staff.
3. Through a combined Consultee-Centered Consultation and Popular Education model, parents would gain the skills and confidence to coordinate the FRC.

While our findings cover more than just the above areas of inquiry, the analysis presented throughout this manuscript was able to address these questions. Throughout the discussion in this chapter, I will address these hypotheses within the context of our overall findings.

### *Building on Previous Research*

In embarking on a complex project such as this, I found it necessary to draw on multiple literatures: Full-Service Schools, Parent Involvement, Consultee-Centered Consultation and Popular Education. The project makes an individual contribution to each area; however, I believe the most significant contribution of this project is in its ability to bring together the multiple areas into a comprehensive theory of action not articulated before in research. Also unique to this project is the application of Consultee-Centered Consultation theory to work with community members as experts and equals to professionals within the field.

As demonstrated throughout this manuscript, all four of these literatures were necessary to create the conceptual basis for the development of the FRC. The literature on Full-Service Schools helped provide the basis for the many different structural

components of an FRC; the literature on Parent Involvement helped guide our practice in approaching parents and conceptualizing the different ways in which parents become involved in their children's education; the literature on Consultee-Centered Consultation and Popular Education combined to create a method of parent employee training that valued and utilized the expertise of both the parent employees and the researcher to develop specific, intentional practices of supporting parents. Overall, this project demonstrated the ways in which the integrated theory was applied to practice, the difficulties that arose, and our approach to working through them.

Much of the literature and practices concerning families in poor, urban communities are often focused on the sharp deficit of resources and capacity. All too often, families are viewed solely as needing, schools work to involve parents in specific ways determined by the school, and the process of empowering parents involves telling them what to do within the established structures of the institution of school. The literature of Popular Education (see chapter 3) challenges this view that families only "lack" and look to harness the power and experience of the community to make change. Throughout this manuscript I have argued and demonstrated the importance of viewing the community simultaneously through a lens of deficit and a lens of potential: if we forget that there are lacks, real barriers to completing everyday tasks, many families will continue to struggle; if we fail to recognize the depth of knowledge and expertise that comes from being part of the community, attempts by researchers and educators to make change will fall flat because there is a level of understanding we cannot reach without direct experience. For the ALCANCE FRC, it was the interplay of need and knowledge that allowed us to create a significant impact on parent involvement culture within the school.

### *Creating a Theory of Family Center Development*

Each chapter in this dissertation presented key lessons for the practice of developing an FRC within a school community. In this section, I will articulate the contributions of each area and how they relate back to the initial questions proposed in the introduction.

### *Developing the Family Resource Center*

In chapter 2: "Developing the Family Resource Center," I aimed to address the first question: *How did the findings and theories outlined in the research on FRC development, much of which operates within a deficit approach to helping families, both help and hinder the development of the FRC?* Based on the literature, I interviewed parents, educators and community members in an effort to find out what resources they wanted to see in the FRC. Surprisingly, I found through interviews with parents and educators that there were distinct differences in the ways these two groups viewed the purpose of the FRC. Educators viewed the FRC as a place that would bring parents to the school and give things to those in need, consistent with the deficit-focused literature. Parents reported that the most important aspect of the FRC would be to create a *space* for parents within the school. The concept of *space* emerged as critical to the parents interviewed, yet it did not appear in the literature. As we progressed in our own work, we paid close attention to the space we were creating, who was in it and who did not come by, if our décor was inviting or off-putting, and whose faces were seen to represent the

FRC: white educators, Latina mothers, or a variety of backgrounds, colors and child-rearing roles. Most importantly, the FRC came to represent a different sort of space within the school, a ‘backdoor’ entrance, absent many of the typical pressures and intimidating nature of the front office.

One of our initial hypotheses involved the importance of local politics in creating the FRC. The concept of the ‘backdoor’ became critical in defining our work as different but complimentary to the other parent involvement efforts within the school. In this manner we were able to manage the local politics by building on what was already there, working with Eva and CAS to create an even stronger parent involvement (and partnership) model at ALCANCE.

A second hypothesis regarding legal and ethical issues did not come into play during the project. We were not questioned by parents or staff on the ethics of having an FRC or being involved at that level in the lives of families. Whole family support was very much part of the culture of ALCANCE, and therefore, the FRC appeared a natural extension.

In response to the first sub-question articulated above, the theories of FRC development presented in the literature helped us by directing our attention to local politics as an area of significance; however, it did not address the issue of *space* that emerged as vital to the success of our FRC. As we look to articulate a budding theory of FRC creation, part one involves addressing the issue of the *space* the FRC occupies. It is just as important, if not more so, as any other aspect including resources and staffing. The first step in creating an FRC at a school site, then, involves careful choice of the physical space the FRC will occupy and its ambience, not creating a list of needed resources within the community: we learned through this project that it is not as much the richness of resources but the warmth and welcoming of the space itself that bring parents to the FRC. Parents will not come unless we pay ample attention to the quality of the space these resources occupy.

In addition, the FRC development literature tends to view communities solely as *lacking* resources. For this reason, the focus of this area of literature is *what* resources to connect with and *how* to navigate the obstacles to creating a full-service model. If we were to view the ALCANCE community only as lacking, we might have a room full of resources but empty of parents. In the sections below, I will demonstrate how identifying the community’s expertise and knowledge was critical to creating a functioning FRC. Furthermore, engaging the parents themselves to identify the community’s needs was essential for truly understanding how we, both educators and community members, could best support our families.

### *Parent Involvement*

In chapter 3: “Parent Involvement,” I aimed to answer the second question: *How did the application of the findings and theories regarding parent involvement in schools contribute to building relationships with disenfranchised and alienated parents so that they will be more likely to access the resources provided by the school?*

The parent involvement literature presented above was divided into three areas or ways of seeing parent involvement in schools. The first area demonstrated the positive educational power of parents being involved in their child’s schooling. This most often is measured by the number of parents present at certain involvement activities, as

determined by the school. In a second area, other researchers have articulated very real and thick boundaries to parents and educators interacting in ways that help students: cultural barriers, time limitations, and differences in the ways different aspects of education are valued all contribute to difficulties or low levels of parent involvement. Parent involvement is most often presented in ways that families can “become more like schools” instead of schools “becoming more like families” (Fine, 1993). While ALCANCE had high levels of parent involvement, many parents remained alienated for a variety of reasons. Luckily, a third area of Parent Involvement literature led to ways of bridging this gap. It was this third area of literature that truly helped us to *build relationships with disenfranchised and alienated parents so that they would be more likely to access resources at the school*. These theories pointed us in the direction of having parents in the FRC, managing the FRC, to help bridge the cultural and value differences that seemed to prevent many parents and teachers from interacting in positive, productive ways.

Consistent with the hypothesis that parents from the community would be best able to connect families with the resources from the FRC, the practice of having parents manage the FRC changed the environment significantly: the parent employees of the FRC developed a relationship-based practice of parent involvement that involved baby-steps toward building connections with parents over time before attempting to engage the parent in any interaction remotely reminiscent of traditional ‘parent involvement’. For example, Nitiaray’s practice of the ‘drive-by’ where she would say hello, compliment the parent’s clothing, and then “keep on pushin’” became an intentional practice that effectively engaged a number of parents who would not step foot on the campus previously. Engaging the parents themselves, as employees of the FRC, to bridge the known cultural gaps between families and schools was critical to changing the ways in which parents and teachers relate at ALCANCE. Through the methods the parent employees developed, we were able to start *involving different parents* and *involving parents differently*.

Involving disenfranchised parents in the school, therefore, is not a one-dimensional question of changing what we do or say as educators, but a multidimensional shift in practice. First, we must put time into initial relationship building. Many parents avoid the school with good reason, whether due to past experiences from their own schooling experience or more current experiences with their child’s teachers or administration. Relationship building is a slow process and often does not begin with the child’s problem but, as Nitiaray taught us, with recognizing the parent as a person: “I love those earrings!”

Second, there are many different ways to be ‘involved’ in a child’s education. Understanding that parents are already involved, though perhaps not in ways that are immediately recognizable to the school, is the difference between validating a parent for the incredible work it takes to be a parent and reprimanding or criticizing them for not being good enough. Parents are hardly ever *not* involved; it is up to us to figure out how to acknowledge that involvement and build on it so we can work together to further help the child.

Third, the main work of involving disenfranchised and disempowered parents is to develop a greater understanding of where they are coming from and to help them develop a better understanding of where we are coming from. Taina taught us the power

of this practice as she helped a parent work through a conflict with a teacher who wanted to retain the student for another year. *Telling* the parent what to do so the child could do better in school did not work and only caused conflict; however, as the teacher and parent began to understand each other better, the parent began to make changes on her own that were supportive to her child's education.

Finally, though the idea that "relationships are important" may be intuitive, our experiences showed us that there are a variety of ways to build that relationship with a parent, many of which may *not* be intuitive to educators: often, as stated above, it is about first recognizing the parent as a person, and knowing that relationships are not always built at meeting tables and can be built on the fly with 'drive by' waves and smiles. It cannot be ignored that the relationships I am referring to are built between *parents*: one parent employee and one parent-community member. The difference in our theory of practice lies in presenting parents with an ally among the mass of staff members who have historically shut them out, laying a bridge between home and school.

Thus, in line with one of our initial hypotheses, one of the most important issues in creating the FRC was indeed the power dynamics between parents and staff. The methods developed by the parent employees to build relationships with parents and communicate respective needs between parents and staff were critical in addressing these power differences.

In summary, part two of our FRC development theory tells us to focus on *involving different parents* and *involving parents differently*. Many traditional parent involvement activities work very well to engage parents and help students. We were not worried about parents who are currently able to navigate the school and their community, parents who felt empowered to advocate for their children. The FRC is concerned with parents who may need a 'backdoor' entrance to the school. The second step in creating the FRC was to take the time with our disenfranchised and alienated parents to build relationships slowly, socially, and focused on the parent as an individual independent of their child. We began from the assumption that all parents are *involved*; it was our job to figure out how and to expand on that involvement. We learned to listen to parents *and* teachers to try to understand both perspectives and develop a mutual understanding and respect that, for us, constituted the basis of true empowerment. Perhaps most importantly, we learned that *parents* are best at helping *parents* because the divide between school and home is so deep and wide that it cannot be crossed without community members who intimately know the landscape and can bridge that gap.

### *Consultee-Centered Consultation and Popular Education*

Chapter 4: "Parent-Employee Training" examined the third sub-question: *How did Consultee-Centered Consultation seen through the lens of Popular Education practices and theories contribute to the effective education and empowerment of community parents employed to develop and manage the FRC, and through them help empower other parents who use the center?* Many researchers and practitioners have focused on parent involvement and have suggested that parents take leadership roles within the school; however, the training process I used to develop the capacity of parent employees and myself is not documented anywhere in the literature. When we began exploring the possibility of employing parents, many potential difficulties and admonishments from others who had attempted the same arose: the parents in our



community were not necessarily trained to work in schools, there were intense gossip networks that could undermine confidentiality and trust, and from the literature we saw that involving only parents who were “like schools” was not going to help us better understand our community. We aimed to have parents who would be able to reach parents that we, as educators, could not, and who could support parents on an emotional as well as instrumental level.

While one might logically conclude to hire parents to help bridge cultural gaps, issues of work experience, training, gossip, and personal issues come into play: it is very difficult to work within a community with whom you are emotionally and instrumentally intertwined. The training process we utilized combined a mental health training process (Consultee-Centered Consultation) with community empowerment process (Popular Education). The unique training process of the parent employees is designed to utilize a mental health professional as a consultant for the case management work of the parent employees, thereby both addressing the personal, emotional challenges of working with people in crisis as well as creating an empowering environment for our parents working in the FRC. Though I was still in training for much of this project, I continued in the role of Consultant within the CCC model when I began working at the school as a school psychologist, in the fall of 2006. Through CCC, we were able to combine the expertise of my training within the expertise of the parent employees’ experience.

By combining CCC methods with the tenants of Popular Education, I developed a method of training that not only recognized the expertise of both community members and professionals, but utilized this knowledge to build the capacity of the parent employees to truly help the disenfranchised parents of our community. The principles and philosophy behind Popular Education also supported this role and provided the groundwork for understanding how CCC could be applied to a situation that did not involve two professionals, but a professional and a community member. It is the theory and practice of Popular Education that brings to light the true value of community members’ expertise.

When looking at the CCC-Popular Education training methods, it is important to remember that the facilitator plays a critical role. I believe my training as a mental health professional was key in implementing this method. Our work as FRC coordinators was as much about supporting each other through personal emotional growth as it was about developing our professional capacity. First, helping people in crisis is an emotionally taxing endeavor. Any person in a position to provide support during a crisis also needs support themselves to process what they have witnessed, the issues it brings up for them (transference), and how to proceed objectively. Second, it can be extremely discouraging to try to learn new skills and operate outside of one’s comfort zone, especially as a person who has been disempowered by many of life’s circumstances. The parent employees naturally addressed this by developing a practice of explicitly and publicly supporting each other through notes in the journal and specific acknowledgements during our meetings. Third, since working in an FRC often constitutes a type of case-management, it is important for parent employees to have explicit instruction on issues such as confidentiality, mandated reporting (reporting abuse), and record keeping.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I believe it was important that I was trained to constantly check my own practice for issue of transference and being overly subjective in my responses to cases. For example, in CCC, one is trained to give power

over to the Consultee to make decisions, allowing them to take credit for their actions, even when they have originated with the Consultant. For me, it was a conscious process of detaching myself from *my* ideas of the end goal, supporting the parent employees in the development of their solutions, and allowing them to take full control and credit for what was done. The ego is a powerful force in our lives, especially for a young and ambitious researcher who aims to make change. I believe that my training and background made it possible for me to step back a little and allow the development of the parent employees and their ideas for creating the FRC.

In chapter 4 of this manuscript, I demonstrated the changes in the approach and perspectives, as well as the personal growth, shown by each of the parent employees through their journal entries. The practice we developed as a group for approaching and involving disenfranchised and alienated parents, as well as the advocacy role taken on by the parent employees in communicating between parents and teachers, were the result of bringing to surface the expertise of the parent employees, combining it with my expertise and putting it into daily practice. In this respect, the CCC-Popular Education model did help the parent employees gain the skills and confidence to run the FRC, as was stated in our initial hypothesis.

Part three of the theory of FRC development, therefore, is that parents are best equipped to lead the FRC when trained using a reciprocal teaching method that recognizes their expertise of working with the community while drawing on the expertise of a mental health professional for both support and training in specific case management practices. Consultee-Centered Consultation combined with Popular Education theory and practice creates a comprehensive framework for the type of training needed. The training method I created appears to have addressed both the *need* and *knowledge* of our parent employees as we created the FRC together.

#### *A Multifaceted Theory of Parent Empowerment through Education and Action Articulated*

The multiple theoretical frameworks presented in this paper all combine to form a *multifaceted theory of parent empowerment through education and action*. When we put the above pieces together, we see that in order to create a Family Resource Center that addresses the problem of providing quality education to children in poor, urban communities we need the combined expertise of community members and educators to meet the multi-layered needs of our families. Both educators and families have critical expertise to contribute in these efforts.

The aspects of the theory are as follows:

1. A Family Resource Center is first and foremost a *space* where parents feel welcome. The first step to creating an FRC is creating the physical space.
2. The FRC's task is to involve different parents and involve parents differently. We begin from the premise that all parents are involved in some way. We listen, learn and build on what is already there, addressing "local politics" as an asset, not an obstacle.

3. Parents are individuals independent of their children, and this is a necessary starting point for building relationships with parents who have historically been alienated or disenfranchised.
4. Parents are best at connecting with parents. The cultural and historical divide between parents and school is generally very real, but can be crossed when multiple hands are at work building the bridge.
5. Training parents as FRC employees can be accomplished through a reciprocal education process that at once recognizes the knowledge and need of both the parent employees and the educator-supervisor. The combined theories of CCC and Popular Education create a framework for the needed training.

The multifaceted theory drawn from this committed experiment demonstrates the need for physical space, a deep understanding of the complex nature of parent-school relationships, and a reciprocal teaching/training process as the major components for building a Family Resource Center. While many practitioners have developed protocols for FRCs, this is, to the best of my knowledge, the first research project dedicated to the comprehensive development of an FRC. Through this project we have learned that to build an inclusive, truly supportive space for families, we cannot pretend as educators that we have all the knowledge, skills or experiences necessary to understand the complexities of each family's needs. We must see community members as having valuable knowledge and expertise, learn how to bring it to the forefront and put it into motion. Neither the parents nor I would have been able to create the FRC on our own: we needed each other's expertise and guidance. In the end, the place we created had a momentum of its own and continues to operate as a strong part of the school five years later.

#### *The Power of the Organization*

Throughout this project, we aimed to *address the lack of effective parental involvement and their access to and use of critical resources in supporting their children's education in a school in a poor and disenfranchised community*, as was stated in the main question of this dissertation, by creating a Family Resource Center that would *empower our diverse community* (FRC Mission Statement). The theory and practice outlined above specifically references "empowerment through education and action." 'Empowerment' has been referred to throughout this project as the development of mutual respect, agency in one's actions, and the ability to advocate for one's children. In this section, I bring in a structure to examine the empowering properties of the FRC as an entity. Were we able to *address the lack of parental involvement and empower our community?*

Looking back on the project as a whole, the combination of CCC with Popular Education theory had additional unintended but exciting consequences. The original purpose and mission statement of ALCANCE's FRC included the phrase "to empower our diverse community." "Empowerment," as defined by Cochran and Dean (1991) as the development of "mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation" as well as "greater control over resources," became a significant focus of our work. Today, in 2010, the Family Resource Center still functions with this purpose in mind. While this

manuscript has broken it down into its various working parts, the FRC as a whole is, of course, much greater than the sum of its carefully constructed components. As a whole, the FRC has become an empowered entity in and of itself, working to make changes within the community that were not possible before. At the same time, the FRC appears to be a place where parents, employees and those we help, become empowered.

During the development of the FRC, I had not distinguished the two paths which in retrospect become apparent: one path involves the empowerment of the individual parents who were being trained as coordinators, that they may have the confidence, knowledge, objectivity and skills to understand the complex issues within the community; the second path involves the empowerment of the organization as a whole, the FRC, to create change in the ways in which parents and schools interact with each other.

In this respect, the empowerment framework used by Minkler et al. (2001) appropriately frames the duality of fostering both individual empowerment and an empowering environment. Minkler et al. explains the difference between “empowering organizations” and “empowered organizations.” An “*empowering* organization” focuses on the process of facilitating ownership and agency among its members, while an “*empowered* organization” focuses on the outcomes of change. In Chapter 4: “Parent-Employee Training,” I observed that one of the key differences between CCC and Popular Education is that CCC aims to increase understanding but not necessarily to take action, while Popular Education’s goal is action. In light of Minkler et al.’s theory, the use of CCC helped to provide an environment where *individuals* became empowered, while Popular Education practice helped develop an empowered *organization*. Just as for us, the concepts of CCC and Popular Education logically combined, the ideas of being both *empowered* and *empowering* are fully intertwined: for an organization to truly make change, the individuals within the group charged with making that change must first develop the confidence and capacity to do so.

This project began as a mission from the principal to empower our community. The framework presented by Minkler et al. captures some of the ways in which the FRC is both *empowering* and *empowered*.

First, Minkler et al. explains the qualities of an *empowering* organization:

- A culture of growth and community building
- Opportunities for members to take on meaningful and multiple roles
- Peer-based support system that helps members develop a social identity
- Shared leadership with a commitment to both members and the organization

The combined training practice of CCC with Popular Education clearly targeted these areas. As demonstrated in chapter 4, all three of the parent employees not only demonstrated growth, but their frequent comments to each other including appreciations and encouragement clearly demonstrate a culture of community building. Each of the parent employees and I were able to take on multiple, evolving roles over time, including case manager, project leader, and peer support. In chapters 2 and 3, I discussed how as a group we developed our identity within the school as the ‘backdoor’. This identity was important to our work as well as the feelings the parent employees had about being part

of the school but still wanting to represent something different than had been traditionally offered. Finally, the structure of our FRC team demonstrated shared leadership in the way that each parent employee was able to take charge of their own projects and began to demonstrate true ownership over their role within the FRC.

While never stated in these terms by the principal, one of the implied goals of the FRC was that its existence would have the power to change the culture at the school from one that unintentionally shut out some parents, to one that included all parents. The idea that the FRC would be able to create change implies that we would also be creating an *empowered* entity. Minkler et al. describes empowered organizations as having the following characteristics:

- Successful growth and development
- Effectively competing for resources
- Networking with other organizations
- Influencing policy

The ALCANCE FRC demonstrated some but not all of these characteristics. Over the years of this project we grew and developed, creating more programs, involving more parents, responding to more crises. We were also able to network well with other organizations as we brought in everything from workshops for parents to donuts for coffee hour. In addition, other FRCs began to sprout up around the district and we often met with these groups to share ideas and resources.

On the other hand, we continued to have great difficulty finding sustainable funding. In this respect we were not able to effectively compete for resources during my time there. During the years that followed, however, various FRCs throughout the district began to receive funding using what they had learned from our model. More recently, within the last three years, a local foundation supporting district schools built on our work by forming a collaborative supporting nine schools and their FRCs, ALCANCE included. Their website explains that their model includes *paid* coordinators (as opposed to parent volunteers) and specific attention to the training of these individuals through quarterly meetings with both coordinators and principals: “The objective is to ensure there is infrastructure at the site that helps parents and guardians be fully engaged in the educational process” (Family Engagement, 2010). Their data demonstrates increased parent participation and family engagement based on survey information from these nine sites in comparison to other schools within the district.

Perhaps in this way, we began to influence policy by creating a space for conversations about the need for a parent-run FRC within the school and the importance of hiring community members as well as providing long-term support and training for these coordinators. It would be an important next step in the research to follow these FRCs, to determine the patterns of success and obstacles in their development to augment the beginning theory expressed in this dissertation.

Overall, using Minkler et al. as a structure for examining the empowering and empowered properties of the ALCANCE FRC, we can infer that we were successful in creating an *empowering* organization that had a positive effect on the employees and parents involved. As an *empowered* organization, the FRC demonstrated both strengths and weaknesses: within the school itself the FRC became a powerful force of including

more and more parents and networking with community resources; however we did not have the wider influence we might have hoped for in our ability to compete for resources and influence policy around our work, at least in these initial years of the project.

### *Areas for Future Research*

This project was a small case study that explored a new area of formal research on Family Resource Centers. While there is vast literature on the importance of involving community members and understanding their history and perspective when looking to build parent-school partnerships, there is little explored on *how* one might pursue this task.

In this study, we created a strong, multidimensional model that has proven its strength by standing the test of time as well as successfully fulfilling its mission. However, as a case study, this model is potentially highly dependent on the individuals involved. While the model itself is designed to be responsive to the specific situations and the individuals involved and cannot, therefore, be a cookie-cutter process, it will be necessary in future research to operationalize the training process for parent employees for replication purposes. The combination of CCC with Popular Education is not currently a documented process beyond this dissertation. Popular Education has been documented in some studies as a vehicle for parent empowerment; however, the CCC component was critical to this study due to the case management element of being a Family Resource Center coordinator. Professionals who work with others in distress or crisis, such as psychologists, social workers, or even law enforcement, all draw on mental health professionals to support them in processing the difficult situations they encounter. When engaging community members with limited formal training in the work of helping others through crises, it appears even more critical to support them on multiple levels: professionally and personally. A further study in this area would have to standardize the CCC/Popular Education training model and look at its implementation over multiple sites.

Overall, the literature addressing the day-to-day practice of engaging and partnering with historically disenfranchised groups in the school setting is critical to changing the way schools develop their parent-involvement practices. Research has shown over and over again the importance of parent involvement in a child's school success. It is essential that schools do all within their power to engage all parents, not just those who are "like schools."

### *Further Educational and Policy Implications*

This study carries implications for the current practices of teachers, administrators and school-based mental health professionals. First, while the idea of engaging parents as equal partners is not new, the *practice* of doing so is still not common and is often ineffective. Current school structures and practices are not designed to give educators the time, nor parents the access, to truly understand each other. In this study, we used community members to bridge the school-parent divide. If we assume that the institution itself is a *limit situation* or something that cannot be changed (i.e. it is unlikely that teachers will be given more time in their day specifically to contact parents, or that there will consistently be money for extended contract time to do home-visits), there are still many small actions we can take to ensure parents have a strong voice in their child's

future. By bringing parent employees into the picture, we created a person who could forge those conversations, advocate for a parent, research multiple solutions, and speak the language (literally and metaphorically) of both the parent and the school. One implication of this study then, is that by hiring parents to work at the school, we are not only providing opportunities for empowerment for the parent employees themselves, but we are specifically and actively targeting the parent-school divide.

The additionally possible implication for making community parents part of the school staff is the establishment of a strategic problem-solving structure for the inevitable conflicts between parents and school staff. We are most protective and most emotional about our children. Any time emotions run high, conflict is inevitable. More often than not, this conflict is based on a misunderstanding or lack of knowledge. The model we explored in this project creates an opportunity for a specific problem solving plan within the structure of the school: for us, when there was a conflict with a parent, one the parent employees would work to establish a relationship with the parent, understand their perspective and work with them and the teacher to develop a solution. The goal is not to try to avoid all conflict, but rather to have a plan in place for when conflict occurs. These are our children; we will all fight for what we believe is right and we all want what is best for them.

Finally, the results of this study imply an expanded role for school-based psychologists and counselors who have the expertise in crisis response to comprehensively support parent employees as they work with community members in daunting situations. I believe this is not very far outside of our current practice. Many school-based mental health professionals support teachers working with students in crisis as part of their regular practice: we talk them through difficult situations, help them to problem solve, connect them with resources, and ask question after question until we understand exactly what must be done to support the child. Working with parent employees within the FRC structure would be similar: talking them through crisis situations, helping them to problem solve, and asking questions to fully understand their “client’s” situation. At the same time, the process of working with parents from an under-resourced urban community is significantly different in some important ways than working with other education professionals. Expanding the role of school-based mental health professionals to work with FRCs is possible; however, it would require careful education and training in Popular Education philosophy and methods to ensure respect for the parents’ expertise as well as the explicit power differences that are bound to affect the development of parent employees into FRC professionals.

### *The Whole is Greater than the Sum of its Parts*

This committed experiment aimed to demonstrate the process of creating a Family Resource Center that would involve, support and empower the parents of the ALCANCE community. I found the literature had extensive gaps in its ability to inform practice in this area. While many organizations have locally published guides to building Family Resource Centers, and some scattered research suggests the various working parts that must be included, there has been little said about how to create an environment that will be truly empowering to all those involved, as well as to create an entity that is capable of making change within a struggling community.

This manuscript does not pretend to provide definitive answers; rather, I have presented one model of incorporating what we know about community needs and community assets into a practice of supporting its members. I recognize that while CCC and Popular Education are substantial practices, the combination of these theories is new territory that was mostly dependent on my own unique experience. More research would be needed to develop a systematic process and full training methodology. I believe more documentation of ways in which mental health and other school professionals can use consultative and Popular Education methods to support community-lead initiatives would serve the development of school-based community centers that effectively involve a wide variety of community members. Our community has struggled and will continue to face infinite challenges. Our project offers hope that by truly valuing the depth and weight of our combined expertise, we can transform the school into a place that truly meets the original mission of the FRC: to empower our diverse community by providing an open, caring space where families can share information and access the resources they need to have an equitable experience at ALCANCE.



## EPILOGUE

### THE ALCANCE FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER IN 2010-2011

The project described in this dissertation took place during 2003-2006; however, the Family Resource Center at ALCANCE continues to exist in the present day, the 2010-2011 school year. To gain a sense of the sustainability of our work during the dissertation project, I interviewed the current FRC director and Koi, who continues to serve as the FRC coordinator. The interview included specific questions about the space, current parent involvement practices, and the training of the parent employees. The director and Koi were also asked to reflect on additional issues that they felt were important, successful or challenging to the FRC over the past few years.

After the research stage of the FRC project ended, I continued as FRC supervisor for the next three years. I was employed as ALCANCE's school psychologist and part of my job description included continued support of the FRC parent employees. While I am still with the district, I was reassigned in August of 2009, to a different site. The current director of the FRC was hired, in January of 2010. She had been working as academic coordinator for the After School Program which is funded and supported through the Leaf Project, the original funder of the FRC. With a deep knowledge of the community and its families, she stepped up as director with a mission to help parents understand how to navigate the education system, understand its differences from some families' countries of origin, empowering them to navigate the resources of their community. The director has a degree in Chicano studies and feels a strong connection to the work of community empowerment for all families.

#### *From the District Lens*

The ALCANCE FRC is no longer an isolated entity within the vast expanse of this 100+ school district. Within the past three years, the FRC joined forces with eight other FRCs across the district with the help of a grant secured by a local foundation dedicated to writing grants for the city's public schools. Many of these FRCs visited us and interviewed our staff over the years as they began to develop their own programs, and I gave a series of trainings to the new FRC coordinators (10/13/06, 12/2/06 and 10/15/07) based on the model we had developed over time. The nine FRCs within the new collaborative now meet monthly to receive training, share resources, and present their work to the principals of their schools. Each school has coordinators who are *parents*: a model that was new when ALCANCE began its journey to building the FRC. This collaborative has not only brought the FRC its long sought-after funding, but allows for opportunities for the parent coordinators to learn from each other, thereby perpetuating the Popular Education model where the community remains the source of the solution and is recognized for its critical knowledge when looking at ways to support families.

Beyond this small collaborative, the school district as a whole is also moving toward a vision of full-service schools. The superintendent proposed a strategic plan at the beginning of this school year including 10 "Strategy Area Initiatives" which will constitute various Task Forces charged with investigating and implementing district

change. The district's new mission and vision is: "All students will graduate. As a result, they are caring, competent and critical thinkers, fully-informed, engaged and contributing citizens, and prepared to succeed in college and career." The district superintendent plans to achieve this mission by creating "a full service community district that serves the whole child, eliminates inequity, and provides each child with an excellent teacher for every day" ([www.ousd.k12.ca.us](http://www.ousd.k12.ca.us)). This year the goal is to create a comprehensive five-year strategic plan that will be implemented beginning in the fall of 2011. There is a Task Force specifically tuned to the logistics of developing Full-Service Community Schools (in which I plan to become involved), though there is no information available at this time on the plans or vision of this group; they have only met once at the present date. It is this author's hope that the work we completed at ALCANCE and the work being done every day at all nine of the FRC collaborative sites will influence the practices developed by the district in implementing its vision.

### *ALCANCE Today*

Overall, the director and Koi gave a very positive report on the FRCs continuing ability to bring parents into the school, provide resources and support families in crisis. There are currently two parent-coordinators: Koi, who is now in her seventh year, and Laura, who was part of the original FRC development team and participated in writing the original mission statement included in chapter 2. While all three staff members are part-time, they maintain daily FRC office hours and programming. Every day, dozens of parents pass through to talk, rest, eat or find support. Many of these parents are also participating in classes offered by the FRC including English, exercise, cooking and nutrition.

### *Space*

The FRC is currently located on the second floor of ALCANCE's new building (completed in February of 2006). One passes through the library to a large office with three small rooms attached. The FRC staff's main work area and desk is on one side, with a couch, a work space with a computer, and a small kitchen on the other side. One of the three small offices is used for daycare and as a toddler play-space while parents are taking classes. The other two offices are used for counseling and testing (one of which was my office when I was still the school psychologist). The space is separated from the school's main office and feels somewhat like a studio apartment with the mix of home-like and work-like areas. One wall in the corner where infants and toddlers often play boasts a nature mural which Koi explained was put up to make it feel more like a "park." Another wall bares carefully organized information about community resources and events and yet another wall contains cans and boxes of food, free to families in need: the "food bank" started by Koi many years ago. There is always coffee brewed and daily bread donated for snacks or for parents to take home to their families.

The director explained that they make an effort to create a space that feels like home and is welcoming to parents. She pointed to a corner behind the staff's desk where they often take parents for more private conversations when needed and noted that the daycare room also often serves to provide that confidential space. On the other hand, she mentioned that the two counselors' offices pose a challenge to maintaining a sense of a "parent-owned" space. She observed that the counselors and school psychologist change

every year and that they often do not understand the significance or role of the FRC within the greater context of the school. The counselors will often pop out of their offices to ask parents to “be quiet.” The director felt that this has a negative effect on the overall feel of the space and takes away from the idea that this is a sacred family space within the building. She mentioned that she had a meeting with the counselors to explain the FRC and request that any issues be brought to her, and not to the parents. This point seems to reflect the persistent issue of local politics and the importance of constantly negotiating the various stakeholders involved with the school and the care of its students, not to mention the ongoing struggle to preserve the FRCs home.

### *Parent Involvement*

The director explained early in the interview that the ongoing goals of the FRC were to empower parents to be able to navigate the community and understand the U.S. education system. In addition to the classes mentioned above, the FRC also publishes a regular newsletter and tries to be present at Back to School Night and other school-wide functions to spread knowledge about the center and its services. Koi explained that the number of parents at various events or workshops can vary due to new teachers who do not know to advertise or encourage their parents to attend, many new parents this year who are not aware of the FRCs existence, and the physical location of the FRC which is removed from the main traffic of the school. The FRC staff has come to realize that part of its work is getting the word out to the many new school staff members as well as the new parents who enter the school’s community every year.

As stated above, the FRC has been increasingly successful at bringing parents to the school for workshops and classes: English, nutrition, exercise, and cooking, among others. The numbers speak for themselves: the director and Koi reported that every day an average of 30 parents pass through the FRC. In addition, the increases in parent involvement noted in daily FRC tallies are also reflected in data collect by the district. A survey of families and students distributed over the past three years collects data on overall feelings of satisfaction, community, learning and safety. Particularly relevant to the FRC, the survey asks parents if they “feel encouraged to participate in school activities or meetings.”<sup>6</sup> Over three years, the number of parents agreeing with this statement at ALCANCE increased steadily: in 2007, 80% of parents agreed; in 2008, 88% of parents agreed; and in 2009, 91% of parents said they felt encouraged to participate.

The FRC still aims to *involve different parents*, and *involve parents differently* within the school. The director stated, unprompted, that the parent-coordinators are key to building trust with disenfranchised and alienated parents: “I always tell them that they are my bridge...if it wasn’t for them, parents wouldn’t come” (11/8/10). The parent employees remain the key element to “laying those bridges.” Koi also brought up the continuing importance of building relationships slowly and deliberately. She feels that parents often come to the school specifically to see her, because of the relationship they have been able to build over time.

### *Training*

---

<sup>6</sup> Use Your Voice Survey, [www.ousd.k12.ca.us](http://www.ousd.k12.ca.us)

As Koi was telling her story, she stated that the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year, the year I was reassigned, was difficult. By that time, Taina was working exclusively for the after school program and Nitiaray had left the school. Koi told me that she “felt lost”: we had not completed an end-of-the-year summary as we had in the past and she was unsure how to begin that year. When there were three coordinators she said she felt they really worked together and she was more organized. Being the only person in the FRC in the beginning of 2009, she felt very confused and stressed.

When the director came on, Koi says it was much easier to get organized: she now is able to meet with the principal monthly for direction and the director helps guide her work as well. During this conversation, Koi insisted she did not have the education to manage the FRC on her own; however, the director stated that Koi actually does a lot, including managing the parent workshops, managing Excel documents and creating fliers, not to mention the daily work she does engaging and supporting parents.

In the staffing model of the ALCANCE FRC in this study, the two key elements included parent employees *and* a supervisor to help build a structure for the work. In our model, both the parents and the supervisor are critical to creating a functional FRC that can at once connect with parents and communicate with funders or other institutions. At one point in our interview, the director stated: “I may have the structure, but they’re the ones that hold the knowledge” (11/8/10). Again unprompted, the director clearly expressed a similar standpoint to the approach expressed in this manuscript: the community members themselves have the knowledge and experience necessary to make real, sustainable change and provide the support for families in need.

At the same time, Koi expressed a need for a person who had a handle on the structure and organizational piece of the FRC. She recognized that she had a lot of experience, but felt confused and stressed, unsure where to begin when she did not have a person to consult with, who was able to communicate with the institution. At one point, the director credited Koi with the concept of the Parent Summit, a workshop for the FRC coordinators (all parents) put on by the 9 FRC collaborative. Koi insisted that this was actually the After School Program director’s idea, though when the FRC director insisted, Koi rephrased her claim to say that the After School Program director had helped her communicate and create the idea. Koi had the knowledge of what was needed, and the After School Program director was able to provide the structure for making it happen. Both parts were necessary and originated from the different types of knowledge possessed by Koi and the After School Program director.

While the organizational pieces remain a mystery to Koi, she has a strong sense of the necessary content of the FRC. I asked Koi what she remembered from our training and case-consultation sessions or what she felt she had learned over the years:.

I don’t know what specific. I have learned a lot from other parents. I learned like to bring in a parent you really have to be in a relationship with them to know them like we have talk about: that is still the key to build a relationship with them in order for them to come. (11/8/10)

Koi expressed the importance of building strong relationships with parents not only within the context of the school environment but a relationship as two people, as two parents. Over the years this critical piece stayed with Koi. The director reinforces this with her philosophy that the parent employees are the “bridge” between the community

and the school: the type of relationships that the parent employees are able to develop with parents is unique and cannot be underestimated.

### *Empowerment*

In the conclusive chapter of this manuscript, the FRC was analyzed in reference to its *empowering* and *empowered* qualities. In this interview, evidence of continued empowerment came through. First, the organization continues to pursue its mission to empower both the parents who enter the FRC and the parents who work in the FRC. The director explained that when she came into the FRC, her main goal was to focus the efforts on helping parents to navigate the community and the U.S. education system. They are currently working on rewriting the mission statement to reflect this specific purpose. In addition, the director referred multiple times throughout the interview to the amount of responsibility Koi has taken on, her increasing skill set, and her ability to connect with parents and bring workshops or classes to life.

The most significant change in the power of the FRC appears to surface in its ability to influence practice within the school and secure funding for sustainability. The FRC is now connected with eight similar entities who meet monthly as a collaborative to discuss practice, impart knowledge and share resources. In addition, these FRCs have also secured an audience from their principals on a monthly basis to share their experiences and set goals. This type of experience was described as invaluable by Koi, who stated above that she would be lost without the guidance from her school leader. In October of 2010, the 9 FRC collaborative held its first Parent Summit, where the parent coordinators were trained more formally. As mentioned above, the director shared that the Parent Summit was Koi's brainchild. At this point in time, the ALCANCE FRC has been able to secure funding and support from school leaders. The FRC today is a significantly more 'empowered' entity than it was in 2006, based on its ability to fight for resources and sustain its practice (see Minkler, as referenced in the conclusion chapter of this manuscript).

During the course of the project documented within this manuscript, we did not track data on student achievement over time or formal data on parent involvement in the school. This project was not aimed at showing that having an FRC improves test scores but rather developing a model for the creation of such a place within the school system. However, at this point in time, there is significant data available from the district website demonstrating ALCANCE's growth over time. First, ALCANCE's Academic Performance Index (API) improved 110 points between 2002 and 2009. It is also important to note that ALCANCE's score is consistently higher than the district's overall API. While the FRC cannot be named as the direct cause of this improvement, it is part of a school culture and system that produced these results.

Perhaps most heartening, between 2007 and 2009, ALCANCE saw consistent increases in parents' feelings of being invited into the school, as described above. It may be important to note that almost of all the factors of Climate and Culture on the school's Annual School Scorecard from this survey, the parent involvement item stands out for its consistent improvement. ALCANCE's unyielding commitment to its families continues to shine through.

### *Built to Last*

Nearly five years after the official research project ended, the ALCANCE FRC remains a vibrant, active hub of resources and support for families within the school community. In addition, many other FRCs have been developed throughout the district and are now working collaboratively to pool resources, knowledge and training opportunities. The FRC is now more sustainable than it was in 2006 as it has secured funding and a strong supportive base in the community through its connection with other schools.

While Mark, grant writer for the Leaf Project, and I were not successful in securing funding through our own grant writing efforts, I was fortunate enough to work with the local foundation and share the language and practice we used in creating our FRC model. I also had the opportunity to work directly with some of the other schools that are now part of the district's FRC collaborative. In addition, I was able to conduct a series of trainings mentioned above to work with other FRC coordinators as they developed their centers. Through informal conversations, formal consultations, district-wide trainings, and sharing our writing, language and conceptual framing with others invested in the same mission, we were able to both build and spread our FRC practice. The model we created has been passed on through the district as reflected in the fact that the other FRCs within the collaborative also employ community representatives as coordinators, paired with a director with relevant formal education, and provide ongoing training for all using professionals in the field.

Most importantly for the ongoing sustainability of the ALCANCE FRC, the values we held high and the lessons we learned from our first years are deeply embedded into the daily practice of the FRC staff. Koi clearly expressed that she sees the relationships she builds with parents as the key to bringing them into the school. The director maintains the philosophy that while degreed professionals may talk the talk, it is the parents that hold the knowledge and lay the bridge between the community and the school. After all, "if you ain't got no one laying those bridges, those bridges ain't gonna get crossed" (Nitiaray, 1/15/05).

Thank you to Koi, Taina, Laura, and ALCANCE's incredible principal for the amazing work you continue to do. I am honored to have been a part of this small project that has evolved into a movement of empowerment and a force of change beyond anything I ever imagined.

## REFERENCES

- Adams, F. (1972). Highlander folk school: getting information, going back and teaching it. *Harvard Educational Review*, 42(4); 497-520.
- Adler, L. (1994). Introduction and overview. In L. Adler & S. Gardner (Eds.), *The politics of linking schools and social services: The 1993 yearbook of the Politics of Education Association* (pp. 1- 16). Washington, DC: Falmer Press.
- Ainsworth, J.W. & Wiggin, G. (2006). Reconsidering 'material conditions': how neighborhood context can shape educational outcomes. In McNamara-Horvat, E. & O'Connor, C. (Eds.), *Beyond acting white: reframing the debate on black student achievement*. Laham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Anyon, J. (1997). *Ghetto Schooling: A Political Economy of Urban Educational Reform*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Bell, R. (2001). Primary Prevention of School-Based Violence: A Developmental Risk and Resilience Model for School Psychologists. *The California School Psychologist*, 6, pp 61-68.
- Bouie-Scott, B. (1990). *A Survey of Family Resource Programs*. Springfield, IL: Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs, Office of Urban Assistance. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 338442).
- Bryk, A. & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- California Family Resource Center Learning Circle (2000). *Family Resource Centers: Vehicles for Change*. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Social Services.
- Caplan, G. (1963). Types of Mental Health Consultation. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. (3), 470-481
- Carveth, W. B. & Gottlieb, B. H. (1979) The measurement of social support and its relation to stress. *Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science*, 11(3); 179-188
- Center for Mental Health Services, UCLA, School Mental Health Project (2000). *Addressing Barriers to Student Learning & Promoting Healthy Development: A Usable Research-Base*, 5(4), 1-4.
- Chrispeels, J., Fernandez, B., Preston, J.(1991). *Home and School partners in Student Success: A Handbook for Principals and Staff*. San Diego, CA: San Diego City Schools, Community Relations and Integration Services Division.

- Christenson, S. & Sheridan, S. (2001). *Schools and Families*. New York: The Guilford Press
- Cochran, M. (1987). Empowering families: an alternative to the deficit model. In Hurrelmann, K., Kaufmann, F-X, & Losel, F. (Eds.): *Social Intervention: Potential and Constraints*. Berlin: Walkter de Gruyter & Co.
- Cochran, M. & Dean, C. (1991). Home school relations and the empowerment process. *The Elementary School Journal*, 91(3), 261-269.
- Coleman, J.S. (1987) Families and schools. *Educational Researcher*, 16(6), 32-38.
- Comber, B. & Kalmer, B. (2004). Getting out of deficit: pedagogies of reconnection. *Teaching Education*, 15(3), 293-310
- Crowson, R. & Boyd, W. (1993). Coordinated service for children: designing arks for storms and seas unknown. *American Journal of Education*. 101(2); 140-179.
- De Carvalho, M.E.P. (2001). *Rethinking Family-School Relations: A Critique of Parental Involvement in Schooling*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- DeBaryshe, B., Patterson, G., Capaldi, D. (1993). A Performance Model for Academic Achievement in Early Adolescent Boys. *Developmental Psychology*, 29(5), 705-804
- Delgado-Gaitan, C. (1991) Involving Parents in the school: a process of empowerment. *American Journal of Education*; 100(4), 20-46
- Delpit, L.; Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom; *Education in a Multicultural Society: Our Future's Greatest Challenge* (1995) New York: The New York Press
- Dohrenwend, B. P. (1986). Social stress and psychopathology. In M. Kessler & S. E. Goldston (Eds.) *A Decade of Progress in Primary Prevention*, p. 87-114. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- Doktor, J. & Poertner, J. (1996). Kentucky's family resource centers: a community-based, school-linked services model. *Remedial and Special Education*, 17(5); 293-302.
- Dryfoos, J. (1994). *Full-Service Schools: A Revolution in Health and Social Services for Children, Youth and Families*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers
- Dryfoos, J., Maguire, S. (2002). *Inside Full-Service Community Schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.



- Dyrness, Andrea Elisabeth (2004). Speaking truth to power: Immigrant parents, progressive educators, and the politics of change in an urban school. Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, United States -- California. Retrieved January 3, 2011, from Dissertations & Theses @ University of California.(Publication No. AAT 3165346).
- Epstein, J. (1996) Perspectives and Previews on Research and Policy for School, Family and Community Partnerships. In A. Booth & J. Dunn (Eds.), *Family-School Links* pp.211-258. Lawrence, MA: Erlbaum Associates
- Epstein, J. and Sheldon, S. (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *Journal of Educational Research*, 95(5), 308-318.
- Family engagement and leadership initiative. (2010). Retrieved October 20, 2010, from <http://www.oaklandschoolsfoundation.org/programs/FRC>
- Fan, X. & Chen, M. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: a meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13, 1-22.
- Fine, M. (1993) [Ap]parent involvement: Reflections on parents, power and urban public schools; *Teachers College Record*, 94(4), 682-710.
- Finn-Stevenson, M. (2009). Evaluation of the Connecticut family resource program. Retrieved January 16, 2011 from [www.sde.ct.gov/sde](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde)
- Firestone, W. & Drews, D. (1987). The Coordination of Education and Social Services: Implications from three programs. Research for Better Schools, Inc: Philadelphia, PA ED 291002
- Flores, B., Cousin, P.T. & Diaz, E (1991). Transforming deficit myths about learning, language and culture. *Language Arts*, 68(5); 369-379
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company
- Gaventa, J. (1980). *Power and powerlessness: quiescence and rebellion in an Appalachian valley*. Oxford: Clarendon Press
- Gettinger, M. and Guetschow, K. (1998). Parent Involvement in the Schools; *Journal of Research and Development*, 32(1) 38-52
- Gitlin, A. (1994). *Power and Method*. New York: Routledge.
- Griffith, James (1996). Relation of Parent involvement, empowerment and school traits to

- student academic performance; *Journal of Educational Research*, 90(1), pp31-41
- Hall, B. (1992). From margins to center? Development and purpose of participatory research. *The American Sociologist*, 23(4), 15-28.
- Hoover Dempsey, K.; Walker, J.; Jones, K.; Reed, R. (2002). Teachers Involving Parents (TIP): results of an in-service teacher education program for enhancing parental involvement. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18(7), 843-867
- Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (1997). Why do parents become involved in their children's education? *Review of Educational Research*, 67(1), 3-42.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K., Bassler, O., Brissie, J. (1992). Explorations in Parent School Relations. *Journal of Educational Research*, 8(5).
- Horton, M. & Freire, P. (1990). *We make the road by walking*. Bell, B., Gaventa, J., Peters, J. (Eds.). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Hylander, I. (2001). A grounded theory of the conceptual change process in consultee-centered consultation: successful turnings in representations and blind alleys. In *Exploration in process and practice* (seminar proceedings). San Francisco: Third International Seminar on Consultee-Centered Consultation.
- Ingraham, C.L. (2000). Consultation through a multicultural lens: multicultural and cross-cultural consultation in schools. *School Psychology Review*, 29(3), 320-343.
- Ingraham, C.L. (2003). Multicultural consultee-centered consultation: When novice consultants explore cultural hypotheses with experienced teacher consultees. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 14 (3-4), 329-362.
- James, B.E., Kidder, M.G., Osberg, J.W., & Hunter, W.B. (1986). *Traditional mental health consultation: The Psychodynamic perspective*. In F.V. Mannino, E.J. Trickett, M. F. Shore, M.G. Kidder, & G. Levin (Eds.), *Handbook of Mental Health Consultation* (pp. 31-48). Washington, DC: US Public Health Service.
- Jeynes, W. (2011). *Parental involvement and academic success*. New York: Routledge.
- Kalafat, J. & Illback, R. (1998). A qualitative evaluation of school-based family resource and youth service centers. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 26(4); 573-604.
- Knapp, M. (1995). How shall we study comprehensive, collaborative services for children and families? *Educational Researcher*, 24(5), 5-16.
- Lambert, N., I. Hylander, J. Sandoval (Eds.) (2004). *Consultee-Centered Consultation:*

- Improving the Quality of Schools and Community Organizations. Mahaw, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Lareau, A. & Shumar, W. (1996). The Problem of Individualism in Family-School Policies. *Sociology of Education*, 69, 24-39.
- Lareau, A. (1987). Social class differences in family-school relationships: the importance of cultural capital. *Sociology of Education*, 60(2), 73-85.
- Lareau, A. (1989). Home Advantage. Philadelphia, PA: The Falmer Press.
- Lareau, A. (2002). Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families. *American Sociological Review*, 67, 747-776.
- Lareau, A. (2003). Unequal childhoods: class, race and family life. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Leichter, H. J. (1974). Some perspectives on the family as educator. *Teachers College Record*; 76(2), 175.
- Levy, J.E., & Shepardson, W. (1992). A look at current school-linked service efforts. In R.E. Behrman (Ed.), *The future of children: school-linked service* (pp. 44-55). Los Altos, CA: Center for the Future of Children, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.
- Lewis, O. (1959). Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty. New York: Basic Books, Inc.
- Lopez, G. (2001) The Value of Hard Work: Lessons on PI from as (im)migrant household. *Harvard Educational Review*, 71(3), 416-437
- McNamara-Horvat, E. & O'Connor, C. (2006). Beyond acting white: reframing the debate on black student achievement. Laham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- MacPhee, D., Fritz, J., Miller-Heyl, J. (1996). Ethnic Variations in Personal Social Networks and Parenting. *Child Development*, 67(6); 3278-3295
- Maguire, P. (1987). *Doing participatory research: A feminist approach*. Amherst: Center for International Education.
- McAllister-Swap, S. (1993) *Developing Home-School Relationships: from Concepts to Practice*, New York: Teachers College Press.
- McDaniel, L. (1993). Parent Involvement Training and the Achievement, Attendance, and Attitudes of At-Risk Students. *Community Education Research Digest*, 7(2),

- McMahon, Ward, Pruet, Davidson, & Griffith (2000). Building Full Service Schools: Lessons Learned in the Development of Interagency Collaborations. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 11(1), 65
- McTaggart, R. (1991). Principles for participatory action research. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 41(168), 168-187
- Meier, D. (2002). *The Power of Their Ideas*. Boston, MA: Little Beacon Press.
- Miller, L. (2002). *Integrating School and Family Counseling: Practical Solutions*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association
- Minkler, M., Thompson, M., Bell, J., Rose, K. (2001). Contributions of community involvement to organizational-level empowerment: the federal Healthy Start experience. *Health Education and Behavior*, 28(6): 783-807.
- Moles, O. (1996) New National Directions in Research and Policy, Ch 15 in Family School Links; Editor A. Booth and J. Dunn; Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Moles, O.C. & D'Angelo, D. (1993). *Building School-Family Partnerships for learning: Workshops for Urban Educators*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, OERI.
- Moll, L. C. (1992). Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: Using a Qualitative Approach to Connect Homes and Classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132-141.
- National Commission on Children (1993). *Strengthening and supporting families*. Washington, DC: Author.
- National Resource Center for Family Support Programs (NRCFSP). (1993). *Family support programs and school-linked services*. Chicago, IL: Author.
- Nicoll, W. G. (2002) Working with Families: A Rationale for School Counseling Programs. In Miller, L. - editor (2002). *Integrating School and Family Counseling: Practical Solutions*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association
- Oaks, J. and Lipton, M. (2003). Teaching to Change the World, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor (1965). *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*.  
[www.dol.gov/asp/programs/history/webid-meynihan.htm](http://www.dol.gov/asp/programs/history/webid-meynihan.htm)
- Sandoval, J. (2003). Constructing conceptual change in consultee-centered consultation.

- Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 14 (3-4), 251-261.
- Schugurensky, D. (2000) Adult Education and social transformation: On Gramsci, Freire, and the challenge of comparing comparisons. *Comparative Educational Review*, 44(4), 515-522
- Shatrand, A. (1996). *Supporting Latino families: Lessons from exemplary programs*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 403370).
- Sheldon, S. and Epstein, J. (2002). Improving student behavior and school discipline with family and community involvement. *Education and Urban Society*, 35 (1), 4-26.
- Smrekar, C. (1994). The missing link in school-linked social service programs. *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. 16(4); 422-433.
- Smrekar, C. E., & Mawhinney, H. B. (1999). Integrated services: Challenges in linking schools, families, and communities. In J. Murphy & K. Seashore Louis (Eds.), *Handbook of research on educational administration*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (2001). *Manufacturing Hope and Despair: The school and kin support networks of U.S.-Mexican youth*. New York: Teachers College Press
- Stoecker, R. & Bonacich, E. (1992). Why participatory research? *The American Sociologist*. 23(4), 5-14.
- Taylor, L. & H. Adelman (2003). School-Community Relations: policy and practice. In Fishbaugh, M., Berkeley, T., Schroth, G. (Eds.), *Ensuring Safe School Environments*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Tyack, D. & Cuban, L (1995). *Tinkering toward utopia: a century of public school reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Tyack, D. (1974). *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Tyack, D. (1976). Ways of seeing: an essay on the history of compulsory schooling. *Harvard Educational Review*, 46(3), 355
- UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools (2000). Integrating Mental Health in Schools: Schools, School-Based Centers and Community Programs Working Together; US Department of Health and Human Services; Center for Mental Health Services.

- Vaca, N. C. (2004). *The presumed alliance: the unspoken conflict between Latinos and Blacks and what it means in America*. New York, NY: Harper Collins
- Valentine, C. (1968). *Culture and Poverty*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Vasudeva, A., Darling-Hammond, L., Newton, S., & Montgomery, K. (2009). *Oakland Unified School District new small schools initiative evaluation*. Stanford, CA: School Redesign Network at Stanford University.
- Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling: US-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. Albany, NY: University of New York Press.
- Warren, M. (2005). *Communities and schools: a new view of urban education reform*. *Harvard Educational Review*, 75(2); 133-173.
- Watson, S. & Westheimer, M. (2000). *Financing family resource centers: a guide to sources and strategies*. New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York.
- West, C. (1994). *Race matters*. New York, Vintage Books.

APPENDIX A:  
Codes Used in Analysis of Journals and Meeting Notes

- 1) Family Resource Center Development
  - a) Access to Services
  - b) Administrative Structures
  - c) Collaborative Communication
  - d) Community-School Relationship
  - e) Fiscal Issues
  - f) How to Begin
  - g) Legal and Ethical Issues
  - h) Local Politics
  - i) Space
  - j) What to Build
- 2) Parent Involvement
  - a) Levels of Involvement
    - i) Basic Involvement
    - ii) Engagement
    - iii) Empowerment
  - b) Organizational empowerment
    - i) Empowered organization
    - ii) Empowering organization
  - c) Barriers to Involvement
    - i) Different Values
    - ii) Physical
    - iii) Psychological
- 3) Consultee-Centered Consultation
  - a) Shared expertise
  - b) Maintaining objectivity
  - c) Consultee maintains power to act
  - d) Focus on immediate problem
  - e) Theme interference
  - f) Conceptual change
- 4) Popular Education
  - a) Conscienziation
  - b) Problem posing
  - c) Limit situations
  - d) Praxis
  - e) Equality

**APPENDIX B:**  
**ALCANCE FRC Needs Survey**

1 = not needed

3 = useful to some families

5 = HIGHLY needed/desired

2 = this would be nice, but not necessary

4 = needed/desired

SERVICE	RATING	COMMENTS
Parent Workshops/ Education (in general)	1   2   3   4   5	
Please respond to these specific workshop ideas:		
• Job Placement/Seeking	1   2   3   4   5	
• Resume/Interview Skills	1   2   3   4   5	
• Homework strategies for helping children	1   2   3   4   5	
• Discipline strategies at home	1   2   3   4   5	
• Computer classes	1   2   3   4   5	
• Sewing classes	1   2   3   4   5	
• GED	1   2   3   4   5	
• English as a second language	1   2   3   4   5	
• Reading and writing	1   2   3   4   5	
• Other _____	1   2   3   4   5	
Medical Services <i>For example:</i>	1   2   3   4   5	
• <i>Immunization</i>		
• <i>Check-ups</i>		
• <i>Referrals</i>		
Housing Services	1   2   3   4   5	
Dental Services	1   2   3   4   5	
Vision Services	1   2   3   4   5	
Legal Services <i>For example:</i>	1   2   3   4   5	
• <i>Immigration</i>		
• <i>Renters rights</i>		
• <i>Discrimination</i>		
Translation Services <i>For example:</i>	1   2   3   4   5	
• <i>Translation of documents</i>		
• <i>Translator for conversations with school personnel</i>		
Summer programs for students	1   2   3   4   5	
Teacher-parent get-togethers	1   2   3   4   5	
• <i>Informal opportunities to speak with your child's teacher and get to know other teachers at the school</i>		
Counseling: child and adult	1   2   3   4   5	
• <i>Professional advice on how to navigate through difficult times, for your child or for yourself</i>		
Drug/Sex Education or rehabilitation	1   2   3   4   5	
• <i>Education for children about sex and drugs</i>		
• <i>Help for family members struggling with drug addiction</i>		



Library for teachers and parents containing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Books</i></li> <li>• <i>Movies</i></li> <li>• <i>Lesson plans</i></li> <li>• <i>Games/Activities to help teach your children at home</i></li> </ul>	1 2 3 4 5	
Adult exercise and/or dance classes	1 2 3 4 5	
Community Garden	1 2 3 4 5	
Special events/ community event calendar	1 2 3 4 5	
Laundry machines at the school for family use	1 2 3 4 5	
Discounts and tips for where to find good deals in the community	1 2 3 4 5	
College or future education advice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How to save money for college</i></li> <li>• <i>How to prepare your child for college</i></li> </ul>	1 2 3 4 5	
Loans and Credit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Help finding and receiving loans</i></li> <li>• <i>How to maintain or reestablish credit</i></li> </ul>	1 2 3 4 5	
Toddler/Infant daycare	1 2 3 4 5	
When is the best time for you to come to school?	Morning (8am-12) Early afternoon (12pm-3) Late afternoon (3pm-6) Evening (6pm-8)	
<b>Please list any other services that you feel would benefit the ALCANCE community in the spaces below.</b>		

APPENDIX C  
FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER DESCRIPTIONS

FRC NAME	CENTER DESCRIPTION	REFERENCE
Family Focus Inc. of Chicago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aims to link schools, health care and social services.</li> <li>• Offers drop-in center, parent-child activities, parent ed, child health, d'ment screenings, literacy and job skills</li> </ul>	National Commission on Children, 1993
The Parents Place in San Francisco	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent support groups</li> <li>• Parent education classes</li> <li>• “Warmlines” for support and referrals</li> <li>• Playrooms for families</li> <li>• Counseling for children and families</li> <li>• Library resources</li> </ul>	National Commission on Children, 1993
The Probstfield Elementary School in Moorehead, Minnesota	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aims to consolidate services to a single point of entry – the school</li> <li>• Programs are in elementary schools</li> <li>• Social service agencies have representatives at the school</li> <li>• Teachers provided with manual and training on how to identify needs and facilitate referrals</li> </ul>	Levy & Shepardson, 1992
The School Based Youth Services Program, New Jersey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combination of a school based health center serving student physical and mental health needs and an FRC that has child care, teen parenting services, vocational education and other supports for families</li> <li>• One of the first state initiatives</li> <li>• Helping transition from adolescence to adulthood</li> </ul>	NRCFSP, 1993
The State of Texas – Communities in Schools Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targets students most in need: those at risk of dropping out of school</li> <li>• Counseling, tutoring, enrichment activities, parent involvement programs, referrals to outside agencies and job training/placement</li> </ul>	NRCFSP, 1993
The Wallbridge Caring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration between schools, service agencies, mental health</li> </ul>	Levy & Shepardson, 1992

<p>Communities Program, St. Louis, MO</p>	<p>agencies, and Danforth Foundation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School and home-based services</li> <li>• Home-based programs for families in crisis</li> <li>• Mental health and academic counseling on campus for families</li> <li>• Job placement and training for parents</li> </ul>	
<p>Project Pride – Illinois</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Located in high schools</li> <li>• No eligibility criteria so they could maintain a preventative stance and encourage youth to use center before small things became big problems</li> <li>• Focused on high school students ability to be employed and finish school</li> <li>• Funding ran out and program had to close</li> </ul>	<p>Levy and Shepardsn, 1992</p>