ENGAGING PARENTS IN URBAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS: EXAMPLES OF TWO TEACHERS

By

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ABSTRACT

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The extant literature indicates that parental engagement is positively related with student achievement (Celenk, 2003; Epstein, 1995, 2009, 2011; Gul, 2007; Henderson, Daviess, Johnson & Mapp, 2007; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Kotoman, 2008; Jeynes, 2012; Sad, 2012; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). Despite its promise for improving student achievement, parental engagement has been poorly understood and implemented in urban public schools. This study examines two exemplary teachers who were recognized school and district-wide for increasing parental engagement in their classrooms. The study further delves into their beliefs, experiences and practices within their specific contexts. Particularly, it focuses on exploring and capturing the existing teacher attitudes, perceptions and practices that have helped these two teachers improve parental engagement in their cases.

This study utilized three qualitative data collection methods: interviews with twenty-one participants, observations of the field settings, and the analysis of the related documents. While interviews serve as the main data source, observations and document analysis were used in supporting, triangulating and complementing their findings. Data collection took place during the Spring of 2016 and concentrated on the two teachers selected for the study. The total of twenty-one participants consisted of the two teachers, fifteen parents, and four other school personnel (assistant principals and school counselors).

The findings of the study document that both teachers were able to organize parents of their students around two different student-centered goals: preparing students for national exam

and solving students' problems. The findings also indicate that both teachers spend a lot of extra time to communicate and collaborate with the parents of their students, and to engage parents with their children's education. The findings further suggest that the parents in in both cases were willing to collaborate with these teachers since parents believed that their engagement directly focused on and supported their children, instead of some school or teacher agenda. Also, the parents trusted both teachers, and were committed to collaborating with them thanks to these teachers' commitment to improving individual children's situations and create opportunities for the parents to do so.

This dissertation is dedicated to my always encouraging parents, Fatma and Refaaddin (Gedik), who have always believed in me and supported me with all their hearts. I thank them both for their love, wisdom and support.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Research suggests that growing up in a working-class family significantly reduces one's chance for academic success and level of school attainment (Aydın, Sarıer, & Uysal, 2012; Basol & Zabun, 2014; Dincer & Uysal, 2010; Polat, 2009; Sirin, 2005; Yayan & Berberoglu, 2004; Yildirim, 2009). However, regardless of class, students whose parents are actively engaged with their children's education have a higher chance of being academically successful (Celenk, 2003; Epstein, 1995, 2009, 2011; Gul, 2007; Henderson, Daviess, Johnson & Mapp, 2007; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Kotoman, 2008; Jeynes, 2012; Sad, 2012; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996)[1]. In fact, the previous research indicates that parental engagement explains an important portion of class-related achievement differences (Coleman et al., 1966; Dinçer & Uysal, 2009; Lee, 2011), and improving engagement of working-class parents with their children's education is a promising way of helping working-class students (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Hampton, Mumford, & Bond, 1998; Khalifa, 2012; Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001).

Despite the problems, an increasing number of studies investigate parental engagement beyond restricted roles and shares counter examples where parents and schools are able to initiate partnerships and collaborations (i.e. Khalifa, 2012; López, 2001; López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Maima, 2012; Starkey & Klein, 2000). When schools pay attention to the voices of their communities and parents, and try to prioritize parents' needs, they are able to effectively encourage their parents' engagement. The key to improving parental engagement in working-class and other minority communities lies in understanding parents' perspectives

[1] Research cited in regard to social class and student achievement depends on Turkish literature only, but the research that includes parental engagement is a mix of Turkish and the U.S. literature. This is due to lack of parental engagement research conducted in the Turkish context.

(Auerbach, 2007; Gaitan, 2012; Khalifa, 2012; López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Maima, 2012; Orozco, 2008); abandoning restrictive, traditional engagement models; and adopting more culturally responsive approaches[2] (Auerbach, 2007; Gaitan, 2012).

Literature suggests that the ways through which parents can support their children and their children's education are countless (Grant & Ray, 2010; Lareau, 2000), and different groups of parents may be inclined to perform different forms of engagement practices (Ingram, Wolfe & Lieberman, 2007; Kim, 2002). Challenging the dominant conceptualizations that define parental engagement based on positivist paradigms[3], this study intended to address the socially and culturally constructed nature[4] of the practice (parental engagement). To this end, this study focused on two Turkish public schools and intended to illustrate how educators can engage working-class parents without discriminating against them based on their socio-economic status.

Problem Statement

Despite the value and potential benefits of increased parental engagement for working-class students and communities (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Gaitan, 2004; Khalifa, 2012; López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001), low socioeconomic status has been associated with low parental engagement (Balkar, 2009; Bellibas & Gumus, 2013; Benson & Martin, 2003; Erdoğan & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010; Henderso & Mapp, 2002; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992; Tekin, 2008)[5]. Literature contends that working-class (and other minority) parents in the U.S. face many barriers that prevent them from engaging with their

[2] See "Culturally Responsive Models"

[3] Positivist paradigms assumes the existence of a "true", "objective" and "identifiable" reality (see Ponterotto, 2005 for a detailed discussion).

[4] "Constructivism adheres to a relativist position that assumes multiple, apprehendable, and equally valid realities" are possible (Schwandt, 1994 as cited in Ponterotto, 2005, p129).

[5] These findings rely on both Turkish and the U.S. literature.

children's education or make it more difficult for them to comply with educators' expectations (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Kim, 2009; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007; Williams & Sanchez, 2013). Similarly in Turkey, teacher attitudes toward working-class parents, busy work schedules, inadequacy of communication channels, lack of transportation, childcare and other resources have often been cited as barriers to parental engagement (Ceylan & Akar, 2010; Erdener, 2013; Erdogan & Demirkasımoglu, 2010; Genc, 2005; Sabanci, 2009; Tekin, 2008). These findings indicate that schools serving working-class parents experience many difficulties and often fail to engage with parents in their children's education.

Essentially, these findings highlight some of the real demographic disadvantages that working-class parents have to deal with in their everyday lives. However, despite their legitimacy, these findings and assumptions are often made based on certain understandings of what constitutes effective parental engagement (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013). Studies like these assume that only certain forms of practices, such as reading to children at home, attending school meetings and supporting teachers, are effective and necessary forms of engagement, and working-class parents often do not have the resources (time, transportation, etc.) to participate as other parents due to certain deficiencies[6]. In fact, most of what we commonly understand as parental engagement today is dominated by these traditional models[7] (Auerbach, 2007; Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Gaitan, 2012), which have been produced and conceptualized within the last couple of decades (Lareau, 2000). These traditional approaches often value cultural and social capital of white, middle-class families (Yosso, 2005), define parental engagement from an individualistic and school-centric perspective (Baquedano-López,

[6] For further discussion, please see chapter 2 "Main Characteristics of Traditional Models".

[7] For a detailed discussion of "traditional models" please see chapter 2 "Traditional Models" and "Main Characteristics of Traditional Models".

Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013) and grant schools the power of deciding what is good practice and what is not, assuming parents to be passive "*recipients of this knowledge*" (Pushor, 2010, p. 6).

For example, aligned with these traditional frameworks, Turkish teachers and school administrators assume that caring and engaged parents regularly attend school events and meetings, volunteer in school activities, help raise funds for the school; and monitor their children's homework (Gurbuzturk & Sad, 2010; Can, 2008; Genc, 2005; Sabanci, 2009). Strictly defining parental engagement in school-centric ways and confining parental engagement practices within tight definitions, traditional models may cause educators to unfairly label working-class parents as irresponsible and uncaring (Auerbach, 2007; Gaitan, 2012; Goodwin & King, 2002; López, 2001; López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Moreno, Lewis-Menchaca, & Rodriguez, 2011).[8] As a result, the implicit language of the schools isolates working-class parents and their voices from the schools which may further impair the latter's relationships with the teachers (Gaitan, 2012; López, 2001; López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001).

Placing responsibility on families, traditional approaches tend to employ a deficit thinking about the engagement of "other" parents who do not fit into the traditional, Eurocentric descriptions (López, 2001; López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Valencia & Black, 2002). Deficit thinking assumes that ethnically and socioeconomically minoritized parents have certain deficiencies, lack certain skills, and do not or cannot fulfill their responsibilities, which in turn leads to their children failing (López, 2001; Valencia & Black, 2002). Research suggests that these deficit models of understanding or describing working-class (and other minority) parents discourage teachers from working with minority parents to improve their engagement (Flessa,

[8] Again, due to lack of literature on parental engagement, I cite research conducted in the U.S. here and through the rest of this section.

2009; López, 2001; López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Taylor & Whittaker, 2003; Valencia & Black, 2002; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999).

Research aiming to improve working-class parents' engagement often fails to see the wide range of possibilities for working-class parental engagement and tends to confine it within the traditional understandings (Auerbach, 2007; Boutte & Johnson, 2014; Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Gaitan, 2012; Goodwin & King, 2002; Lareau, 2000). As a result, parental engagement programs developed based on these restrictive definitions dominate the practice, and hinder teachers and schools from implementing inclusive parental engagement programs for working-class parents and from engaging them with their children's education in meaningful ways (Auerbach, 2007; Boutte & Johnson, 2014; Lareau, 2000; Gaitan, 2012; Jackson, 2010; López, 2001; López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Olivos, Jiménez-Castellanos, & Monroy Ochoa, 2011; Valencia & Black, 2002).

Purpose of the Study

Parental engagement is a well-studied topic in many developed countries, including the U.S., but it is still a fairly new concept for the Turkish education system. Thus, existing understandings of what parental engagement is and how schools can promote it mainly rely on the research conducted outside of Turkey. Using these borrowed models, working-class Turkish parents appear to have weaker engagement with their children's education (Balkar, 2009; Bellibas & Gumus, 2013; Erdoğan & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010; Tekin, 2008). Further, research[9] suggests that enforcing these traditionally defined engagement practices on working-class families are not only ineffective, but also detrimental to inclusive parental engagement programs (López, 2003; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Thus, the purpose of this study is to focus on working-class Turkish

[9] For more detailed discussion, please see the discussion about "Culturally Responsive Models" in the following sections.

parents' engagement from a culturally responsive perspective and to try to understand how teachers implement more inclusive parental engagement programs in their schools. Specifically, this piece examines teachers' roles in promoting different forms of parental engagement practices that are valued and can be practiced effectively by working-class Turkish parents.

The existing body of literature that deals with working-class Turkish parents' engagement focuses on what parents and schools perceive as barriers to effective implementation of parental engagement practices. Approaching parental engagement from a broader and indiscriminative perspective, however, this study seeks to provide insights for understanding working-class, Turkish parents' engagements in urban public schools. Specifically focusing on the experiences of two exemplary teachers, the findings of this study will contribute to public school educators' understandings of parents and clue them in establishing meaningful connections and working collaborations with them.

Research Questions

There are two main research questions focusing on two main themes. The first question focuses on parental engagement definitions, and intends to introduce how the concept is understood in the respective cases. As discussed earlier, parents' and especially working-class parents' perspectives are substantially marginalized in the mainstream parental engagement models and in the schools. Therefore, this question intends to help me better understand the type of parental engagement promoted and practiced in these cases. In fact, this question helped me to look into where these definitions fit in regards to traditional and culturally responsive parental engagement models. The second question focuses on how the selected teachers promoted parental engagement, implemented parental engagement programs, and what strategies they used to encourage parental engagement.

1. How is parental engagement defined in these cases? What forms of parental engagement practices are valued and promoted?
2. How do teachers promote parental engagement? What strategies do they use?

Definition of Terms and Concepts

Parent is a concept used to describe whoever is responsible for a student. It could be mother, father, or both (mother and father), or any other caregiver who serves as a child's guardian.

Parental engagement[10] is a complex construct. Different researchers attend to different characteristics while defining and conceptualizing parental engagement. In this study, parental engagement is seen as a flexible concept that may include any parental effort that directly or indirectly contributes to the child's schooling.

Without much attention, **social class**[11] has been excessively used in relation to parental engagement. However, it is a highly complex concept that might bring bias to our findings if not considered carefully. In the broadest sense, socioeconomic status (SES) refers to one's economic power, educational level, and occupational position. According to Diemer, Mistry, Wadsworth, López and Reimers (2013), social class assumes one's place in the power hierarchy. Power, prestige, and control that one possesses over resources determines his/her social class, the position he/she belongs to on the social stratum (Diemer et al., 2013). They further examine two ways through which we can measure one's place in this hierarchies of power: SES and SSS. The first approach, SES, relies on more tangible signals of one's relative place in the hierarchy while the second, SSS, relies on more subjective signals of one's own perception. Since both of these terms

[10] See "APPENDIX G" and "Defining Parental Engagement" for a comparison of traditional and culturally responsive parental engagement

[11] See APPENDIX F for a more detailed discussion of this concept

are equally important (Diemer et. al., 2013), I used two approaches together to understand the existing social status of parents in the two schools that I studied. Thus, any concept used in this regard such as social class, socioeconomic status, low-, middle-, or high-income refers to one's position in the societal power hierarchy determined based on his/her level of education, income, and occupational prestige (Diemer et. al., 2013).

Student achievement is not being directly measured or used in this study, but referred to on occasions where it is cited in various studies in relation to parental engagement and social class. I do not limit these studies as they refer to different forms of student achievement, such as students' scores on standardized tests (e.g. PISA math and literacy scores) or students' school grades in various classes.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This section intends to examine the extant literature, and search for definitions and theoretical conceptualizations of parental engagement that are suited to understanding engagement behaviors of working-class parents in urban Turkish schools. In general, I examine two main approaches to parental engagement: traditional and culturally responsive models (Boutte & Johnson, 2014). Within the scope of this section, first, I focus on parental engagement definitions, and try to distinguish parental involvement from parental engagement. Second, I examine the extant parental engagement models and their main characteristics. Third, I focus on social class and its relation to student achievement and parental engagement. In the final section, I provide a short introduction to the Turkish education system, focus on Turkish literature concerning parental engagement and discuss the applicability of the existing models in the Turkish context.

Defining Parental Engagement

Defining what parental engagement is and understanding models used to conceptualize this construct is arguably the most crucial part of this chapter. Parental engagement (PE) is an extensively broad and catch-all concept. It is used to comprehend many distinct parental practices in schools and at home, as well as school personnel's efforts to engage parents in the process of schooling and their children's education. Different researchers have approached the concept from different angles and have produced different definitions. In the broadest sense, PE can be defined as "parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children" (Jeynes, 2007, p. 83).

In fact, different scholars use different terminology in referring to the concept. For instance, Epstein (2011) prefers using (school-family-community) partnership over (parental) involvement and defines that partnership as any parental practice that aims to "support children's learning, guide

them through a complex school system, advocate for them when problems arise, and collaborate with educators and community groups to achieve more equitable and effective learning opportunities" (p. 315). In this work, I use PE and explain my rationale in the following section.

Differentiating Parental Involvement and Parental Engagement

Literature regarding parent' engagement, has employed an array of terms, such as parent(al) involvement, parent(al) engagement, parent(al) participation, home-school-community partnership and so on (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Olivos, Jimenez-Castellanos, & Ochoa, 2011). Although they are often used interchangeably, these terms are sometimes used to distinguish different forms and definitions related to the concept. Watson-Hill (2013) compares parental involvement and parental engagement, and emphasizes the theoretical shifts that have taken place in the field. She states that parental involvement refers to more traditional approaches that purposefully use the word "involvement" to emphasize schools' leading roles in defining how parents should be contributing to or involved in the educational processes of their children. Here in this definition, parents are pictured as obedient actors who supposedly perform specific roles as deemed appropriate for them by schools and teachers. On the other hand, the term "engagement" is also used purposefully to emphasize parents' active engagement in their children's education and schools (Watson-Hill, 2013). Here, the second definition draws from culturally and contextually responsive empowerment models that Gaitan (2012) discusses, and it views parents as proactive participants. Although there is not a clear-cut difference between these two concepts, from now on, I will generally use the term "parental engagement" to refer to both conventional and culturally responsive oriented understandings and perspectives, unless specifically stated otherwise.

Parental Engagement Models

The main purpose of this section is to understand the ways extant models influence the application of parental engagement programs in schools. Parental engagement practices are varied and can take numerous different forms and shapes (Boutte & Johnson, 2014; Gaitan, 2012; Lareau, 2000; Lareau, 2011; López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001). In line with Watson-Hill's (2013) distinction of parental involvement and parental engagement, research is inclined to exercise two different styles of parental engagement modeling that are used to conceptualize a wide range of parental practices: traditional versus culturally responsive models (Boutte & Johnson, 2014). Traditional conceptualizations are usually associated with an effort to identify the most "effective" forms of parental practices that can be associated with various forms of student outcomes including, but not limited to: standardized test scores, school grades, classroom engagement, and attendance. Research using traditional approaches tends to use the term parental involvement, referring to different forms of parental practices such as reading at home, overseeing assignments and attending school meetings.

Culturally and context-responsive models tend to be aligned with Watson-Hill's (2013) parental engagement and view parental engagement as a socially constructed concept that is bound with the culture, time, ethnicity, and other factors affecting the context in which parents are supposed to engage (Gaitan, 2012). The main purpose of this study is to analyze existing parental involvement and parental engagement models with an attempt to find the best fitting model for studying involvement and/or engagement practices of parents in two urban public schools of Turkey, the following sections are devoted to examining both traditional and culturally responsive models in detail.

Traditional Models

Since my definition of the construct is better aligned with the idea of proactive parental engagement practices, I generally use the term parental engagement throughout this proposal. Yet, since the traditional understanding of the construct (as I will discuss in detail here) is better aligned with the definition of Watson-Hill's (2013) parental involvement, using the term parental involvement instead of parental engagement should be a better fit for the discussion of the traditional models.

The conventional use of the term parental involvement (PI) refers to a variety of practices in which parents become involved in order to enhance their children's learning and improve their school achievement (Epstein, 1995, 2009, 2011; Henderson, Davies, Johnson & Mapp, 2007). The traditional models try to unravel the convoluted link between parental involvement and student achievement, and they offer parental involvement as an antidote that can mitigate the effects of social class related achievement problems. This was emphasized especially after the publication of the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966), which argued that the long existing achievement gap between student groups is heavily due to family background variables. Following the publication of the report, a great deal of research was conducted to examine the ties between family characteristics and students' achievement scores, and it was found that parental involvement is a critical mediator variable explaining the link between one's social class and school outcomes (Epstein, 1995, 2009, 2011; Henderson, Davies, Johnson & Mapp, 2007; Sad, 2012). As a result of this line of thinking, some research contended that the low achievement of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds could be explained by their parents' lack of involvement and their inability to support their children's education (Coleman et. al., 1966; Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Gul, 2007). For this reason, many researchers have tried to discover what,

specifically, these parents are missing, by comparing them with their middle- and high-income counterparts who are considered to be effective in their involvement with their children's education. Subsequently, some have tried to understand parents' motivational problems (e.g. Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) and others have focused on what types of parental involvement behaviors parents need to perform, and how we can get them to do these practices (e.g. Epstein, 1995, 2009, 2011).

Parental involvement is a highly complex phenomenon, the defining of which even traditional models show great variation among themselves. Epstein (1995, 2009, 2011), Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), and Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994)'s models are among some of the most highly cited models; each deal with a different portion of the construct. Epstein's model focuses on how educators can promote parental involvement, and how parents are involved. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) model, on the other hand, focuses on understanding parents' motivations for involvement: why parents choose to get involved. Finally, Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) classify the forms of parental involvement practices into three groups based on the nature of the behaviors: *behavioral, cognitive-intellectual,* and *personal*. Among these three, I will specifically focus on Epstein's model, since it is better aligned with the overarching purpose of this study, which eventually examine how classroom teachers are engaging their parents in urban public schools.

Epstein's School-Family-Community Partnership Model

Epstein's (1995, 2009, 2011) model is probably one of the most highly cited and utilized of the frameworks for studying parental involvement and implementing parental involvement programs in elementary through high school levels. For Epstein (1995, 2009, 2011), the main purpose of parent involvement is to improve conditions that are necessary for student achievement.

Thus, the central purpose is always student achievement and all other goals are on the periphery. Overall, Epstein (2011) describes two main guiding structures for her model:

External Structure (Overlapping spheres of influence). Deriving from Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological system theory, the external structure of Epstein's model is guided by "overlapping spheres of influence of family, school and community". This model focuses on three venues (family, school and community) "in which students learn, and grow" (Epstein, 2011, p.390), and argues that to achieve the most efficient growth for each child, we must aim for these three spaces all at once. In fact, in these spaces, families, schools and communities have their own share of responsibilities; and in theory, they can fulfill these responsibilities in three different ways: *separately*, *collaboratively*, or *sequentially*. Yet, they could be much more effective if they were to work collaboratively, creating the overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 2011). When this happens, schools become "*family-like*" places where students are recognized and supported as unique individuals; and families become "*school-like*" places where children are also recognized and supported as students (p.391).

This model suggests that instead of working separately or competing with one another, families, schools, and communities should work collaboratively toward improving the quality of education that each child receives. Of course, this collaboration depends on establishing effective communication channels that are built on trust and respect between the parties (Epstein, 2011).

Internal Structure (Six Types of Parental Involvement). The internal structure of Epstein's model identifies six categories for effective parental involvement practices: *parenting*, *communicating*, *volunteering*, *learning at home*, d*ecision-making*, (and) *collaborating with community* (Epstein, 2011, p.395).

***Type 1 - Parenting*:** Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.

***Type 2 - Communicating*:** Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress.

***Type 3 - Volunteering*:** Recruit and organize parent help and support.

***Type 4 - Learning at Home*:** Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.

***Type 5- Decision Making*:** Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.

***Type 6 - Collaborating with the Community*:** Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

Epstein's (2011) uses the term "partnership" instead of involvement to emphasize the bi-directionality of the process, which also includes teachers' influences over families as well as families' influences over students and schools. In this regard, partnership can be defined as families' and schools' collaborative efforts to improve students/children's school achievement.

Traditional models have been extensively employed both by researchers and practitioners to address parental involvement in research and in practice. One of the main advantages of using traditional models is that they provide very detailed conceptual frameworks both for studying and implementing parental involvement programs in schools. Especially models that derive from ecological theories provide opportunities to consider and understand wide ranges of activities. Also, these models focus more on the teacher's roles, and their responsibilities in regard to promoting effective parental involvement in their schools. For instance, the first category "*parenting"* is about whether teachers help parents to master effective parenting and child rearing skills. Thus, these models have been widely used as a manual for implementing parental

involvement programs in schools, and also for studying teachers' roles in improving parental involvement.

However, forms of parental involvement activities that different parents can engage in vary based on families' social class, gender (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003), as well as ethnic and racial identity of parents (e.g. Auerbach, 2007; Kim, 2002; Lareau, 2011; López, 2001; López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001). Yet, the forms of parental involvement that traditional models suggest, and schools expect parents to be involved in are usually school-centric, formal practices, and they require certain types of cultural, social and economic capital that low-income parents simply do not have. At this point, culturally responsive models offer an alternative perspective to capture and value the practices that low-income parents can employ by prioritizing families, their needs, and their differences.

Main Characteristics of Traditional Models

At this point, I would like to offer an important caveat. Although I took Epstein's model and examined it as a traditional model, there is not necessarily any model that is purely traditional or culturally responsive. Therefore, it is important that we know the general characteristics that we can associate with traditional models or what distinguishes traditional models from culturally responsive ones.

Traditional models of parental involvement almost always focus on student achievement, and they rely on the premise that parents' involvement with their children's education (in ways that have been found to be effective) increase student achievement. Studies using traditional models found positive relationships between certain types of parental involvement practices and various positive student outcomes (e.g. Celenk, 2003; Gul, 2007; Henderson, & Mapp, 2002; Kotoman, 2008; Sad, 2012; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996);

and negative relationships between parental involvement and parents' socioeconomic status (Balkar, 2009; Bellibas & Gumus, 2013; Benson & Martin, 2003; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, Brissie, 1987; Tekin, 2008).

Even more importantly, traditional models offer a school-centric approach (Lawson, 2003), and seek to define and capture the most effective forms of parental involvement practices that have been correlated with increased student outcomes. Viewing parental involvement from a school-centric perspective locates schools and teachers at the very center of the parental involvement processes, and empowers them to define and determine the forms of parental practices necessary for improving student achievement. Although many ecologically oriented traditional models, such as Epstein's (1995, 2009, 2011) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997), include home-based parental involvement practices, even those practices are viewed and defined from school-centric angles (Auerbach, 2007; Lawson, 2003).

Also, traditional models tend to use deficit thinking about low-income parents and their engagement practices. Deficit thinking is a long-standing paradigm that has been used to explain low-income students' poor school achievement by assuming that those who fail, do so because they lack the skills that are necessary to fulfill their responsibilities (Valencia, 2012). Deficit thinking is a basic form of marginalization and oppression which can be directed toward race, culture, or social class one may possess or belong to (Valencia, 2012). Ryan (1971) states that this type of thinking "blames the victim" (as cited in Valencia, 2012, p.3), as these parents are called deficient by the system that renders them deficient. Adopting a deficit perspective toward low-income parents' engagement, traditional models place the responsibility on families and cause low-income parents to be viewed as uncaring for their children and uninvolved in their education. Also, parents whose involvement does not fit in the strict definitions of traditional models are

considered to be irresponsible parents, and thus their relationships with the schools are further impaired (López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001).

Culturally-Responsive Models (CRM)

"It's not the culture of poverty, it's the poverty of culture" (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p.104).

Examining teacher preparation programs, Ladson-Billings (2006) stated that teacher preparation programs have been dominated by psychological paradigms which have left very little space for anthropology as way to make sense of what is happening in schools. Thus, culture has been used rarely and only to explain what is wrong with low-income students. Yet, as Ladson-Billings (2006) precisely diagnosed, the problem is "not the culture of poverty, (but) it's the poverty of culture" that prevents teachers from indulging in diversity, and employing strategies to work in diverse populations. In regard to parental engagement (PE), culturally responsive parental engagement models advocate for the idea of "the poverty of culture," and support the idea that parental engagement is a valuable and necessary asset regardless of parents' social class.

Culturally responsive approaches seek to understand and incorporate different cultural values and perspectives in the engagement process (Auerbach, 2007; Gaitan, 2012; Grant & Ray, 2010; Hernandez, Zubov, Goddard & Vargas, 2010). Schools implementing culturally responsive parental engagement strategies should try to learn about parents, incorporate their cultures into the school programs, and view diversity as source of strength. Teachers who use culturally responsive parental engagement do not limit their understanding of parental engagement to certain activities, and employ various strategies to encourage various forms of parental engagement practices; try to learn about parents' different cultures; welcome the different views of all parents; promote not only school-based, but also other forms of engagement practices; and make an effort to be present in the community and attend important community events (Grant & Ray, 2010; Hernandez, Zubov,

Goddard & Vargas, 2010). Pushor's (2010) gives two different "*Meet the teachers night*" examples. Although school meetings are often considered as a traditional form of parent involvement, Pushor (2010) resolved that the "*meet the teachers nights*" can be designed in both traditional or culturally responsive ways (p.5). From traditional perspectives, meetings can be designed to inform parents about school rules, policies, programs, curriculum, and teachers' expectation from parents, and traditionally, parents would be expected to come to schools as only passive participants and expected to listen carefully teachers and school administrators. On the other hand, a culturally responsive "*meet the teachers night*" would have to be named differently such as "*meet the parents night*" and designed in ways that are considerate of low-income parents (Pushor, 2010, p.5). Just like Gaitan (2012), Pushor (2010) also emphasized the importance of teachers' and school administrators' knowledge of the families they serve, their culture and lives. In culturally responsive meetings, teachers would know and seek to know more about the families, and not expect them to be passive receivers.

Goodwin and King (2002) summarized some of the basic assumptions of CRMs as follows: instead of using deficit definitions of low-income parents, culturally responsive parental engagement approaches assume that all parents deeply care about their children's education and want them to be successful in school. As a reaction to traditional models, CRMs recognize and fight back against the common stereotypical beliefs and perceptions that are directed toward certain groups (low-income, immigrants, and other minority groups). Finally, CRMs focus on nontraditional practices and try to find what is working for different families. The reason is that traditional, simplistic and restrictive perspectives prevent diverse forms of parental engagement practices from which low social-income students may benefit from. In fact, research suggests that different forms of parental engagement practices yield different results for different groups of

students. For instance, Desimone (1999) found that race and family income mediate the effects of certain types of parental engagement practices. Engagement behaviors developed based on certain groups cannot yield the intended results for others (Desimone, 1999; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). Thus, students from a low social class may benefit more from different kinds of parental engagement practices than those suggested in traditional models.

In conclusion, it can be argued that CRMs in the form of non-traditional parental engagement arose as a reaction to traditional models. Although they are much vaguer than traditional models, lacking the specific structures and conceptual frameworks, this vagueness can also help researchers and practitioners to recognize the nontraditional parental engagement practices.

Culturally-Responsive Models (CRM) as a Reaction to Traditional Models

The real divergence between traditional and culturally responsive models are not really about the mere practices, but in the understanding of the concept. In fact, based on certain perspectives, traditional models prioritize some practices as more effective than others and expects parents to follow their lead. For instance, helping students with their school assignments and overseeing their homework appears to be an effective parental engagement practice both in the U.S. (Epstein, 2011) and Turkey (Gurbuzturk & Sad, 2010). However, CRMs acknowledge that the form of the practice does not matter, and it can be various (Grant & Ray, 2010; Hernandez, Zubov, Goddard & Vargas, 2010). For example, López's (2001) study shows that parents can engage with their children's education by teaching them the value of hard work and showing them the value of education in real life.

Also, the focus of CRM diverges from the traditional models as they mainly focus on student achievement, and define parental engagement as parental practices that support student

achievement (Epstein, 1995, 2009, 2011; Jeynes, 2007). Here in this conceptualization, parental engagement models focus on parent practices that do or can support teachers' efforts in teaching students. Yet, Gaitan (2012) defines (culturally responsive) parental engagement as a matter of knowledge sharing. He sees knowledge as "power", and power as a negotiable asset.

> The knowledge of what and how parents need to negotiate with the school to advocate for their children is often culturally bound. How schools operate comprises a type of literacy that parents need to understand to successfully participate in their children's schooling. How power is distributed between the school and family unit affects students' adjustment and academic achievement. (Gaitan, 2012, p. 3006)

In fact, this approach is more concerned about the families and betterment of families rather than raw achievement scores. Gaitan (2012) emphasized the knowledge that parents possess about the school systems and knowledge that teachers acquired about parents. Comparing to traditional models, the focus of the concept shifts dramatically from student scores to families and how schools and families negotiate knowledge (Gaitan, 2012), and serving the needs of families becomes an end in itself (López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001).

Further, in her research, Lareau (1987) examined and compared working and middle class white American parents' engagement, and found that the prevailing school culture prioritizes certain types of capital (social, cultural and economic) that the middle class possess. In other words, teachers in schools expect parents to communicate, behave, and contribute in certain ways that middle class parents are familiar with. On the other hand, since low SES parents are not acquainted with these forms of practices, when they try to get involved, their engagement efforts are not recognized at best, or not appreciated in the schools. An increasing amount of research supports the idea that there is no one-fits-all parental engagement model, and different people become involved differently in their children's education (Delgado-Gaitán, 1991; Hill & Torres, 2010; McWayne, Manz, & Ginsburg-Block, 2007; Niemeyer, Wong, & Westerhaus, 2009;

Okagaki & Bingham, 2010). Established based on middle class, white American norms, these mainstream models prioritize and privilege the forms of engagement these groups value and employ, and fails to embrace the engagement practices of low SES parents and other minority groups (Auerbach, 2001; 2007; Boutte & Johnson, 2014; Gaitan, 2012; Jordan, Lareau, 1987; 2000; López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; López, 2001; Olivos, Jimenez-Castellanos, & Ochoa, 2011).

Most of traditional models including Epstein (1995, 2009, 2011), Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), and Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) derive from ecological paradigms which usually separate parental engagement activities in two main categories: home-based and school-based activities. Further, it turns out that schools and teachers usually value school-based engagement practices more than home-based practices (Lawson, 2001). The problem is that low-income parents face a lot of barriers in attending school-based activities, such as overwhelming work schedules, lack of transportation and other resources (Ceylan & Akar, 2010; Christenson, 2004; Erdener, 2013; Erdogan & Demirkasımoglu, 2010; Genc, 2005; Sabanci, 2009; Starkey & Klein, 2000; Tekin, 2008; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007; Williams & Sanchez, 2013). Yet, showing reluctance to join school-based activities does not indicate low SES parents pay less attention to their children's education. Research suggests that low SES parents tend to favor home-based engagement more than school-based practices (Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007). At this point, it is up to educators to find appropriate ways to engage these parents (López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001).

Social Class, Parental Engagement and School Achievement

Belonging to a certain social class significantly affects students' chances for school success and attainment (Aydın, Sarıer, & Uysal, 2012; Basol & Zabun, 2014; Coleman et al., 1966; Dincer

& Kolasin, 2009; Muller, 1993; Reardon, 2011; Lareau, 2011; Polat, 2009; Yayan, & Berberoglu, 2004; Yildirim, 2009), and consequently the future socio-economic class they fit in. Considering this relationship, family social class has always been a serious concern in the Turkish education system. Examining the Turkish students' class-related achievement discrepancies on the PISA test result, Alacacı and Erbaş (2010) classified Turkish students as "the lowest levels of socio-economic background compared to their peers in other countries: about 63% of Turkish students fall within the lowest 15% of the international distribution of ESCS in OECD countries" (p.187). The highly stratified nature of the Turkish education system, which relies on test-based high accountability, greatly jeopardizes equity and disadvantages students from low social classes (OECD, 2015). Despite the improvements, Turkey's social class related achievement gap is still one of the widest among all other OECD countries (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) (Köseleci-Blanchy, & Şaşmaz, 2011; OECD, 2010; OECD, 2015). According to 2013/4 EFA report, the gap exists even at the primary level and widens through the upper grades. Also some students cannot even achieve the minimum learning benchmarks (UNESCO, 2014). Especially in mathematics, 17% of children in Turkey do not reach the minimum learning levels, but according to the report, high-income eighth graders have much higher chance of achieving above the minimum level than their low-income peers.

The relationship between students' social class and their achievement is a complex one, which includes multiple other factors contributing to it. While some of these factors are directly related to schools and resources available to students in these schools, other factors can be attributed directly to family-related variables. Research has found parental engagement to be a very strong moderating variable that explains most of class related achievement problems (Coleman rt al., 1966; Davis-Kean, 2005; Dinçer, & Uysal, 2009; Lee, 2011), and others found

strong relationships between various forms of parental engagement practices and student achievement (Celenk, 2003; Epstein, 1995, 2009, 2011; Gul, 2007; Henderson, Daviess, Johnson & Mapp, 2007;Henderson, & Mapp, 2002; Kotoman, 2008; Jeynes, 2012; Sad, 2012; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). Especially following the publication of "*Equality of educational opportunity*" (1966) in the U.S., an enormous amount of attention has been paid to parental engagement as a way to address class related achievement problems and mitigate the achievement gap. Many studies found that parental engagement is correlated with students' school achievement and classroom engagement (Epstein, 1995, 2009, 2011; Henderson, Daviess, Johnson & Mapp, 2007). Despite several conflicting results, the majority of "the evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life" (Henderson, & Mapp, 2002, p.7). Also, studies conducted in Turkey found similar results indicating that parental engagement is related to student achievement (Celenk, 2003; Gul, 2007; Kotoman, 2008; Sad, 2012).

Social Class and Parental Engagement

Social class and parental engagement has been positively associated with one another (Erdoğan & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010; Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Koonce & Harper, 2005; Williams & Sanchez, 2010; Velsor, & Orozco, 2007). Literature cited above suggests that social class in the form of parental engagement affects students' achievement, and therefore, we can increase students' achievement if we can effectively engage parents from low socioeconomic classes (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Gul, 2007; Smith, 2006; Henderson, & Mapp, 2002).

Although they specifically focus on Mexican-American parents' experiences, Moreno, Lewis-Menchaca and Rodriguez's (2011) categorization of parental engagement literature can be helpful for understanding how social class has been addressed in the parental engagement

literature. They propose two categories: advocacy orientated studies and parent education perspectives. Studies that correspond to the first type use culturally responsive parental engagement models. Without denying structural problems, these studies do not see low-income parents through deficit lenses, but view every parent as a valuable partner and potential decision maker (Hernandez, Zubov, Goddard & Vargas, 2010). Advocacy oriented practices aim to challenge the social structures that produce inequality by creating a more inclusive and democratic environment for low-income and other marginalized parents. Schools implementing advocacy oriented parental engagement programs believe in every parents' potential and seek to reveal this potential by learning about them.

Studies that embrace parent education perspective use (what I will later explain in the following sections) traditional parental engagement models, and assume that low-income parents lack the necessary skills to effectively engage in their children's education, and therefore seek to educate parents to become "effective" supporters of the schools. Using deficit perspectives, these types of studies view low-income parents as uncaring and uninvolved (Auerbach, 2007; Goodwin & King, 2002; Lopez, 2001; Pena, 2000). From this point of view, poor and less educated parents need to be "fixed", so that they can implement the "effective parental roles" as their richer and more educated counterparts do. Therefore, literature concerning low-income parents' engagement has profoundly focused on fixing these parents and their culture, and finding effective parental engagement practices that promote student achievement (e.g. Gurbuzturk & Sad 2010; Epstein, 1995, 2009, 2011).

In general, social class can negatively affect parental engagement, which in turn affects students' achievement, and therefore we can increase student achievement if we can effectively engage parents from low socioeconomic classes. Yet, literature suggests that we must be very

careful if we are to work with low-income parents since what schools understand and promote as parental engagement may further jeopardize parents' relationships with the schools (López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Moreno, Lewis-Menchaca, & Rodriguez, 2011; Williams & Sanchez, 2010).

On Turkey and Turkish Education System: Toward a Modern State through Education

This study was conducted in Istanbul, Turkey. Turkey is a transcontinental country, serving as a bridge between the continents of Europe and Asia. Divided by a natural waterway (the Bosporus), most of Turkey's lands lay in the Asian side in the east and a small portion reaming in the continent of Europe in the west[12]. Turkey is like a tree rooted in Asia whose branches are stretching or trying to stretch toward the west, Europe. Since its establishment, Turkey has taken "the west" as its role model in its modernization efforts. As a developing country, Turkey submitted the first formal request concerning its full membership to the EU in 1987, but Turkey's endless efforts to enter the European Union can be tracked back to the creation of EU (Tocci, 2014). As a result of Turkey's goal of becoming a developed nation coupled with its relentless pursuit for full membership in the European Union (the EU), Turkey has initiated numerous reforms in every field from agriculture to economy. Since education has been viewed as an effective tool for achieving its goals, the Turkish educational system has experienced numerous reform initiatives as well. In this section, I will provide some background about Turkish education system and the parental engagement literature in Turkey.

Modernization and Education System in Turkey

Modernization is a word used as an equivalent for westernization in Turkey and more specifically in the Turkish education system. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the

[12] Divided by the famous Bosporus, Istanbul is where the two continents were separated.

founders of the Turkish republic wanted to establish a (Turkish) nation-state based on modern, western ideals. Abandoning the Arabic letters first, Turks adopted the Latin alphabet (in 1928) which was commonly used in the Europe, and invited prominent western educators and scholars, especially from the U.S., to reform the Turkish education system.[13]

Turkey has a highly centralized education system which has been criticized for its lack of autonomy and flexibility for local voices (Akkok & Watts, 2003; OECD, 2015). The school system is run by the central education office (the Ministry of National Education) that is directly connected with the government. All schools and school related issues, policies, and the content are monopolized by the central office by proxy. Thus, all the schools are run in an identical way and teach an identical curriculum across the State.

The compulsory education has been dramatically increased within the last couple decades, from five years to eight years in 1997 (World Bank, 2005) and to twelve years in 2012 (OECD, 2015). Compulsory education is free and includes four years of elementary, four years of middle and four years of high school education (OECD, 2015).

Definition of Parental Engagement[14] in Turkey

This section focuses on how parental engagement is generally defined and understood in the Turkish literature. Parental engagement is a relatively new concept for Turkish researchers, and the number of quality studies very are limited (Tekin, 2008). In the most traditional forms, parental engagement can be referred to parents' supportive behaviors for their children's education (Celenk, 2003; Satir, 1996; Gurbuzturk & Sad, 2010), attendance at school events (Genc, 2005;

[13] Please see Keskin, (2014) for a discussion of how the U.S. scholars influenced Turkish Education system

[14] As discussed above, using the term "involvement" instead of "engagement" attributes to passiveness of parents and school-centric nature of the processes (Watson-Hill, 2013). Although, the use of the term is very similar to "parental involvement", I still choose to use "parental engagement" in this section. And this is simply for the sake of the consistency, and also because parental engagement is the form of the practice I seek to observe in this study.

Gurbuzturk & Sad, 2010; Kotoman, 2008), monitoring children's studies at home (Gurbuzturk & Sad, 2010; Kotoman, 2008), financially supporting schools (Aslanargun, 2007; Celenk, 2003; Genc, 2005), constantly acquiring information about children's progress in schools, keeping contact with teachers (Aslanargun, 2007; Celenk, 2003; Gurbuzturk & Sad, 2010; Kotoman, 2008) and disciplining children (Aslanargun, 2007). The majority of Turkish literature on PI is concerned with how PI pertains to student achievement (e.g. Celenk, 2003; Dam, 2008; Gurbuzturk & Sad, 2010; Sad, 2012; Kotoman, 2008; Satir, 1996) and PI is often defined as parents' active efforts to promote their children's school achievement (Gurbuzturk & Sad, 2010). The concept of PI, alone, serves as an "*umbrella*" term to indicate any "parent efforts to take active roles in their children's education" (Sad, 2012, p.175).

The number of parental engagement studies are limited, and in fact, there is no established parental engagement model that is used in more than a couple of studies. It appears that Turkish literature on parental engagement heavily depends on the studies conducted outside of the country, and researchers often developed their own parental engagement scales based on the borrowed models (e.g. Gurbuzturk & Sad, 2010; Can, 2008; Genc, 2005; Sabanci, 2009). In that regard, models developed in the U.S. seem to be very influential. Especially Epstein's parental engagement model with the Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological systems theory guiding it considerably affected the understanding of parental engagement in Turkey (e.g. see Can, 2008; Erdener, 2001; Erdogan & Demirkasımoglu, 2010; Gurbuzturk & Sad, 2010; Ipek, 2011; Keceli-Kaysılı, 2008; Tekin, 2008). Within the scope of this limited research, Gurbuzturk and Sad's (2010) conceptualization appears to be the most comprehensive model for conceptualizing and operationalizing parental engagement. Their operational model offers eight categories for different forms of parental activities that support student achievement:

1. The first form of parental engagement is "*communication with teacher/school*", which is mostly concerned with the frequency of parents' contact with teachers and schools
2. The second form of parental engagement is "*helping with homework*", which mainly focuses on how often parents offer help to their children while they working on their school assignments
3. The third form of parental engagement is "*personal development*". Similar to Epstein's *parenting*, this type focuses on parents' efforts to improve their parenting skills
4. The fourth form "*volunteering*" is about how often parents volunteer in schools, helping teachers
5. The fifth form "*communication with child*" is about parents' communication with their children and to the extent that they establish democratic and encouraging communication
6. The sixth form "*enabling home-setting*" is about establishing physically and emotionally healthy and nurturing home environment
7. The seventh form "*parental support for child's personality development*" is about parents' efforts for their children's personality development
8. The eighth form "*parental support for child's socio-cultural development*" is about whether parents enable their children to attend socio-cultural activities such as museum visits, various art and sport activities

Under these categories, Gurbuzturk and Sad (2010) developed 39 items with a likert type scale to measure parents' level of engagement in elementary schools. Using this scale, Sad (2012) examined which PI practices have stronger correlation with student's math, science and Turkish achievement scores in schools, and found that overall, *parental support for child's personality*

development, and *parental support for child's socio-cultural development, volunteering, communicating with child and helping with homework* have stronger relationships.

Despite the problems and confusion, all stakeholders, teachers, parents (Ceylan & Akar, 2010; Cayırlı, 1998; Sabanci, 2009), and school administrators (Sabanci, 2009) highly value parental engagement in Turkey. All parents, regardless of their social class, gender, education, or the grade level of their children, think that their engagement is important and necessary for their children (Sabanci, 2009). This finding was true for all five forms of parental engagement practices that Sabanci (2009) focused upon in his study. These were communication, volunteering, monitoring learning at home, providing a supportive home environment, and cooperation and (involving in) decision-making. Yet, despite the agreement upon its importance, the current state of low-income parents' engagement does not satisfy teachers and parents in Turkish schools (Ceylan & Akar, 2010).

Main Characteristic of Parental Engagement Models in Turkey

Apparently, parental engagement research is dominated by traditional models in Turkey, and especially models developed in the U.S. seem to be very influential on the Turkish literature. Indeed, Epstein' partnership model and the ecological theory guiding this model have greatly affected understanding of PI in Turkey (e.g. see Can, 2008; Erdener, 2001; Erdogan & Demirkasımoglu, 2010; Gurbuzturk & Sad, 2010; Ipek, 2011; Keceli-Kaysılı, 2008; Tekin, 2008). Having said that, Turkish parental engagement models carry similar characteristic as traditional models. First of all, student achievement appears to be the only principle guiding parental engagement models in Turkey (e.g. Celenk, 2003; Kotoman, 2008; Sad, 2012). From this perspective, researchers try to prove the importance of parental engagement (Celenk, 2003; Kotoman, 2008; Sad, 2012) and identify effective parental engagement practices in their relation

to students' achievement scores (Gurbuzturk & Sad, 2010; Sad, 2012). Also similar to traditional models, parental engagement in Turkish literature is perceived as a school-centric activity through which parents are supposed to support teachers without intervening and criticizing them. Third, they all employ a deficit thinking toward low-income parents and try to understand what these parents are missing in comparison to middle- and high-income parents. Finally, most of the studies have been conducted within the last decade and tried to understand parents' and teachers' perceptions about the existing parental engagement practices and their perceptions about the barriers to parental engagement (Ceylan & Akar, 2010; Erdener, 2013; Erdogan & Demirkasımoglu, 2010; Genc, 2005; Sabanci, 2009; Tekin, 2008).

Conclusion

Theoretical origins of parental engagement models can be examined in three different paradigms: positivistic, ecological and critical (Boutte & Johnson, 2014). Traditional models of parental engagement that we have discussed so far heavily rely on the positivistic and ecological paradigms. Culturally responsive models (CRM), on the other hand, have been developed under the influences of critical theories as reaction to the traditional models that ignore the voices of certain families (including low-income), and disenfranchise many underrepresented groups of parents (Boutte & Johnson, 2014). Parental engagement models relying on positivistic and ecological models have offered school-centric roles for parents; and disregarded social, cultural and economic realities of parents. Also, because of the school-centric nature of the traditional models, they often failed to attend the strength of parents living in low socioeconomic conditions (Gaitan, 1991; Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001). Admittedly, CRM perspectives see the socially constructed nature of parental involvement and engagement which in its traditional designs marginalizes low-income parents' potential contributions (Auerbach, 2007; Gaitan, 2012).

In regard to low-income parent' engagement, Turkish literature approaches to the issue from a strictly traditional perspective and promote school centric approaches that merely focus on student achievement. As a result, parents are expected to abide with school policies and decisions, and cooperate with instructors without intervening or criticizing their decisions (Aslanargun, 2007). Especially parents' intervening with instructional matters are found as the most displeasing parental behavior in schools (Aslanargun, 2007).

This study is mainly framed by culturally responsive perspectives of parental engagement, but also traditional models are tapped into to capture traditional forms of parental involvement practices emphasized by the participants. Thus, it can be said that a composite of traditional and culturally responsive parental involvement and engagement models are considered while analyzing teachers' values, beliefs, and behaviors that emphasize traditional forms of parental engagement practices, as well as culturally responsive forms of parental engagement practices.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study includes two single case studies and it examines two exemplary classroom teachers who were able to improve parental engagement in two urban public schools. The purposes in conducting such a study are to examine these teachers in their respective contexts and try to understand how they promoted and sustained high parental engagement in their respective classrooms. Relying on multiple data sources, case studies provide researchers with deep and detailed information about a phenomenon[15] (Yin, 2009) and bounded case(s)[16] (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2014). The purpose of the methodology section is to clarify the methods that are used in this study. To this end, this section is devoted to discussion of the following: researchers personality, epistemological orientations, research design, participants, data sources, data analysis, and the study context.

Researcher's Role and Positionality

"Interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher" (Denzin, 1986, p. 12).

Researchers working in a qualitative, interpretive tradition stand on and speak from their background and personal biography, and it is not possible to prevent subjective perspectives from intervening. In fact, two different researchers can ask the same question differently and research the same issue with completely different theoretical, epistemological and methodological orientations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The purpose of the qualitative research is not to avoid subjectivity and obtain objectivity. In this situation, one does not try to avoid one's own background and personality, but must constantly reflect upon how one's own personal biography

[15] The phenomenon focused in this study is parental engagement.

[16] This study specifically focuses on two exemplary teachers. Their individual experiences are the limits of this study. For more details about bounded cases, please see section "Case study".

impacts understanding and sense making (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher's role is to acknowledge personal biases and position the self with recognition of this awareness.

Khalifa (2014) suggests that blindly accepting the notion of the existence of objective knowledge can even cause progressive practitioners to contribute to the structural problems that promote inequality. The role I have chosen as a researcher in this study is to interpret the experiences of the teachers and the parents in these exemplary cases with an attempt to construct new knowledge for guiding teachers who want to support parents' engagement in urban public schools. While doing this, there is no doubt that who I am as a person and as a researcher, and what sort of worldviews I brought into my study, significantly impact my understanding and interpretation of the phenomena I studied.

Born into and raised by a low-income farming family myself, I have personally suffered through numerous hardships during my journey to university, and learned that without the full support and encouragement of my family, as a child, I had no chance of advancing to one of the quality universities in Turkey. First, I deeply believe that my parents, despite their own lack of education and economic resources, have had the greatest impact on the success that I have displayed as a student. It is thanks to their unconditional support, even when my teachers did not believe in me, that I was able to attend one of the finest high schools in our city (Samsun)[17]. Thus, I deeply believe that parents' support and engagement is a valuable asset for the very lives and futures of their children.

My upbringing greatly impacted my interest and decision to focus on this topic, and the successful support of my educational journey by my parents makes me feel responsible toward those who share the same background as me. Having similar experiences not only enables me to

[17] In Turkey, all public schools are free, but high school placements are made based on students' performances on a national standardized test.

understand these families and their children, but also positions my perspective in empathic ways toward them. My own positioning, alongside those within my study, led to me choosing a critical approach toward traditional models, which employ deficit models toward working class parents. As I continued this journey, collecting data and analyzing it, these personal biographies were continuously at play and contributed to my communications with the teachers and families with whom I interacted. Therefore, I tried to systematically reflect on my personal feelings and perceptions as I continued this work, in order to reach better informed understandings. For instance, these reflections helped me to realize that I was looking for particular efforts from Mr. Kara and Mrs. Kibar that would empower and give access to the parents who were previously denied in school spaces. I tended to focus on how Mr. Kara and Mrs. Kibar addressed or failed to address, the needs of parents similar to mine and overlooked how they were dealing with the other parents.

After completing an undergraduate degree at Istanbul University in Turkey, I spent five and a half successive years in the U.S. prior to this study[18]. After studying in a western country (the U.S.) and majoring in the field of Educational Administration, I conducted this research in my home country. I was aware that other than my internship experiences as a college student, I lacked work experience in any Turkish schools. Therefore, this was an effort of an outsider, trying to interpret and understand insiders' (teachers and parents) experiences and trying to help them improve their practice.

Another point worth raising here is that this research occurred in two different languages, Turkish and English. The study was conducted in Turkey where all participants speak Turkish, and the findings are reported in English. As the researcher on this project, I can state that Turkish

[18] I spent one year studying English, two years for acquiring a masters, and two and a half toward my PhD degree (as of the start of the data collection).

is not only my first language, but I also completed my education in Turkish until graduating from the college. Although I learned English as a second language, I have spent four years in graduate schools in the U.S., working on my Master's and doctorate degrees.

Qualitative Study: Epistemological Orientations

As the philosophy of knowledge, epistemology investigates "the nature of the knowledge" (Merriam, 2014, p. 8), inquires "what it means to know" and provides explanations for "deciding what kinds of knowledge are legitimate and adequate" (Gray, 2013, p. 20). Designed as a qualitative, case study, this inquiry relies on constructivist assumptions of legitimate knowledge. For Denzin and Lincoln (2005),

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

Disregarding only a few exceptions, the majority of the methods used in qualitative research are (constructivist, and) inductive in their nature (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2012). For many (i.e. Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 1998, 2014), the appropriate epistemological orientation for qualitative research is constructivism, which emphasizes the socially constructed nature of reality as it is represented in the minds of people. As Merriam (1998) further explains, "it is assumed that the meaning [is] embedded in people's experiences and that [it] is mediated through the investigator's own perceptions"; and therefore, the work of a qualitative researcher is to "understand the meaning that people have constructed" in relation to their environments (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Thus, from a constructivist perspective, reality is constructed based on the observers' interpretations, and reality may change based on the interpretations of the observers.

The literature review conducted within the scope of this study suggests that traditional parental involvement models assume a positivistic stance and suggests that there are certain practices that are more effective than others. Yet, relying on constructivist paradigms, this study recognizes that the realities these models suggest are constructed based on certain sociocultural and socioeconomic norms and values. In defining effective parental roles for working-class parents, existing traditional theories fail to account for a wide range of parental practices that low-income parents can employ. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate two teachers as they define and promote parental engagement in their mostly working-class communities. Since these teachers are recognized for their commitment to working with the low-income parents, I am keenly interested in examining the ways in which these teachers discover a variety of practices to engage parents, as well as the ways in which these teachers build on the strengths of these families.

Research Design and Questions

In comparison to quantitative research where design is a more straightforward process, researchers in qualitative paradigms follow more flexible designs, which makes the designing much more flexible and complicated in qualitative inquiries (Maxwell, 2008). Yet, regardless of the methodological orientations, design is still a necessary and enlightening process that every researcher must tackle (Merriam, 2014; Yin, 2009). Therefore, qualitative researchers must also choose a suitable research design that is appropriate for studying the specific research questions, and that matches the skills that the researchers have (Merriam, 2014). At this point, this study utilizes a case study methodology to inquire into the following research questions.

1. How is parental engagement defined in Mr. Kara and Mrs. Kibar's cases? What forms of parental engagement practices are valued, promoted and practiced?

2. How do Mr. Kara and Mrs. Kibar promote parental engagement? What strategies do they use?

Case study

Studying a case bounded in its system (Merriam, 1998), researchers use multiple data collection methods to comprehend how a phenomenon occurs, and how it is affected by its context and the culture within which it exists (Stake, 1995). I selected case study as a preferred method for the purpose of this study, as it enables researchers to reach a comprehensive understanding of phenomenon, in this case: improving parental engagement. Data garnered from multiple cases and multiple sources equipped me with the opportunity to analyze who were involved, what they did, what the obstacles were that they dealt with, and how they solved them.

Different experts have taken different approaches toward case study. Defining case study, Yin (2002, 2008) emphasizes the research process, and devotes his book to developing a comprehensive manual for designing case study (Yazan, 2015). For Merriam (2014), case study requires studying a unit bounded within a system. Unlike Yin, Merriam (2014) and Stake (2005) suggest that the defining characteristic of a case study is the unit of the study, the case. Thus, regardless of the methods and procedures that are used, a case study is distinguished by its focus on a single case, "*what is to be studied*" (Merriam, 2014, p.40). The critical point here is establishing the boundaries of the case(s) within a system (Flyvbjerg, 2011). For instance, the purpose of this study is to acquire as much information as possible about two selected classroom teachers and how they dealt with the phenomena (parental engagement) in their respective classrooms/schools. In other words, the purpose was not to study parental engagement in a context, but rather studying these cases in relation to the phenomenon (parental engagement).

This is an instrumental case study in the sense that the primary reason for undertaking the study is not to solely learn about the cases studied, but to understand a phenomenon (parental engagement). This might seem to contradict the previous paragraph, but it actually does not. The case study still primarily focuses on the selected cases and seeks to acquire in-depth information about these specific cases, but this is only because understanding these cases enable us to gain a better understanding of the phenomena studied (Stake, 2005). "With these cases we find opportunities to examine functioning [how teachers promote parental engagement], but the functioning is not the case" (Stake, 2006, p.2). In short, I specifically studied two cases, while these cases were serving as instruments for understanding a broader issue: how teachers can improve and sustain parents' engagement, particularly for working-class families.

Participants: Access and Justification

Quantitative researchers' concern for generalizability leads them to use a random sampling procedure. The work of qualitative researchers, on the other hand, is not to make generalizations, but to uncover deep meanings of lived experiences, and illuminate complex social phenomena (Merriam, 2014). Therefore, the justifiable method that qualitative researchers often utilize to draw their participants is non-random sampling (Merriam, 2014). Instead of being concerned with generalizability, case study researchers often use purposeful sampling to draw information-rich cases to obtain the maximum information possible (Patton, 2002). This study also utilized from purposeful sampling, selecting participants from two urban school districts in Istanbul[19].

The participants of this study consist of two teachers, fifteen parents, and four other school personnel (two assistant principals and two school counselors). Initially for this project, I intended to select two schools renowned for their successful parental engagement programs and high level

[19] Istanbul is the most populated city in Turkey and because of its extensive population, the city is entirely urbanized. Overall, the city consists of 39 counties and each of these counties has their own school districts.

of parental participation. However, after a semester-long search in Istanbul, many educators who I spoke with advised me to change my pursuit of schools with a pursuit of teachers instead. I was convinced that it was difficult if not impossible to find a good example of a school-wide practice and effort for engaging parents.

After this point, I decided to center my focus on individual teachers. During the selection process, I first chose two teachers who were acknowledged in their schools and districts for the high engagement of parents they serve. Then a total of fifteen parents and four school personnel (two for each teacher) were selected for the study (please see table 1). Below, I discuss the details of the sampling procedure: how each participant was selected.

	Teacher	Parent	Other Staff	Total
Kara's Case	1	7	2	10
Kibar's Case	1	8	2	11
Total	2	15	4	21

Table 1: Number of participants by case.

Teacher Selection

Purposeful sampling was utilized to choose two exceptional teachers who in fact have been able to accomplish high parental engagement in their schools. I used two main criteria to select the teachers: serving working-class families and children, as well as successfully improving and sustaining parental engagement for these working-class parents (Patton, 2002). I first chose two school districts (out of 39) serving a majority of working-class families and their children, and located nine promising teacher candidates. For selecting teachers, I used counselor meetings that

each district holds with all of its school counselors. These meetings are held in district Rehabilitation and Research Centers at the beginning of each school semester, and focus on school counselors' plans for the semester. Thanks to these meetings, I was able to locate all possible candidates based on school counselors' suggestions. Through school counselors, I tried to arrange meetings with each of the nine candidates. After this initial step, I visited each volunteer candidate in their schools and conducted preliminary interviews to select two of them as participants for the study. With these interviews, I tried to choose those teachers who not only addressed parental involvement, but also parental engagement as a form of parental participation, as well as those who appreciate active parental engagement in addition to more passive parental involvement practices.

Parent and Other Support Staff Selection

After selecting two teachers, selecting parents and other school staff was a comparatively straightforward process. Since I had access to the sites, I had various occasions to observe and interact with other school staff in these cases. In both cases, it appeared that the school counselors were assigned many roles with parents and they actively interacted with them. Therefore, I decided to include their perspective into the study. Then, in both schools, I asked the principals to participate, but they simply referred me to their assistant principals (AP), stating that APs would be more resourceful for the purpose of the present study.

For selecting parents, I mostly depended on the case teachers (Mr. Kara and Mrs. Kibar) and the school counselors. While I did not contact parents directly in either case, the teachers (Mr. Kara and Mrs. Kibar) and the school counselors set up the appointments on my behalf. In Mr. Kara's case, was only able to interview parents who visited the school. Yet, in Mrs. Kibar's case,

I interviewed four parents in the school and three parents at parents' homes by simply joining Kibar's home visit tours.

Data Sources

Three qualitative data collection methods were utilized in this study. Interviews with (21) participants, observations of the field settings, and the analysis of the related documents consisted of the main data sources for this study. Data collection took place during the Spring 2016 semester and concentrated on the two teachers who were be selected for the study. Merriam (2014) does not put any limit to methods of data collection and data analysis that can be used with case studies, but suggests three main sources: interviews, observations, and documents. She argues that any method for data collection and analysis can be employed. The key to data collection that many experts (e.g. Merriam, 2014, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009, 2003) emphasize for case studies is detailed data collection through multiple data sources. Interviews, observations, and document analysis are some of the most highly suggested data collection methods used in case studies (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995).

The loose nature of case studies that arises from investigating phenomena in their real-life contexts without controlling any contextual factors, makes it inevitably necessary to rely upon multiple data sources so that researchers can cover as much complexity as possible. Using data collected through multiple methods enables triangulation and provides rich and detailed information. Relying on this premise, I used semi-structured interviews, semi-structured non-participant observations, and document analysis as the main data sources for this study. The following sections provides a more detailed discussion of these data collection methods in regard to the purposes of this study.

Interview

Semi-structured interviews with twenty-one participants (two teachers, fifteen parents, two administrators and two school counselors) consist of the main data source for this study. The purpose of the interviews were to understand how parents' roles were defined, and how parents were lead into the conversation in regard to their children's education. With the comparison of traditional and culturally responsive models in mind, I intended to understand where parental roles fell in these two cases. Semi-structured quality of the interviews provided flexibility to follow up any emerging themes, and also provided structure to guide conversation while preventing or diminishing any off-topic dialogue. In this study, I interviewed teachers who, despite challenges, have successfully managed to improve parental engagement.

Teacher-Interview. I conducted a total of six interviews with the two participant teachers, three interviews with each teacher. However, for the first preliminary interviews, I met with more than two teachers. As discussed in the previous sections, I first looked into two school districts and determine all the candidate teachers who were known for their effective practices in regard to improving parental engagement in their working-class communities. Then, the purpose of the preliminary interviews was to choose two final participants. These interviews were conducted in February and took approximately 20-30 minutes each. The second teacher-interviews were conducted in April, and each took approximately 40 minutes. Finally, the last teacher-interviews were conducted in late May and early June, and each took approximately 25 minutes. All teacher-interviews were conducted in an allocated room at the participants' schools.

Parent-Interviews. I conducted interviewed a total of fifteen parents. Each interview took approximately 20 minutes. The parent-interviews began in late March, and continued through late May. Parent-interviews were conducted in different spaces in each school. For Mr.

Kara's case, it was always an allocated room at the school. In Mrs. Kibar's case, I conducted three home visits with Mrs. Kibar and interviewed these parents at their homes. The remaining five parents were interviewed at the school.

Staff-Interviews. I also interviewed two assistant principals and two school counselors. These school staff were determined as a result of the first teacher- and parent-interviews. The staff-interviews took approximately 25 minutes. All staff-interviews were conducted in their rooms in their schools.

Observation

Observation is another effective qualitative data collection method in the hand of a quality researcher. It provides opportunities for recording events, behaviors, and interactions as they occur in their natural contexts; and requires observing as much detail as possible and recording them effectively (Merriam, 2014). In this study, I used nonparticipant observations as another data collection method in support of the interview data. Just like the interview process, observations were also followed a semi-structured format, and rotated around the two selected teachers and their interactions with the parents they served. After negotiating with the teachers, I conducted two types of observations. The first type of observations focused on special events and programs concerning the parents. In this regard, I participated in parent meetings, home visits, office hours and observed any other parent-teacher interactions in the schools.

For the second type, I conducted observations in each school site. For these observations, I focused more generally on the culture of these schools, how parents were met in these schools, and more specifically, how participant teachers navigate their parents in these schools. I observed students' entry and times as parents dropped off and picked up their children. Also, I continued observations during the school time to explore parents' experiences when they visited the schools.

I spent most of my time in venues where parents appeared and spent their times the most. In general, observations focused on a couple of things (Merriam, 2014). First, I was paying attention to "the physical settings" of the schools, and at the parent events, how they were designed for working class parents. Even more importantly, the interactions between school personnel and parents were observed and recorded as much as possible. It was important for me to take notes whenever it was possible, paying extra attention to not disturb the flow of interactions. As well as verbal messages and interactions, I was paying attention to nonverbal messages and body language that parents and teachers were displaying.

Document Analysis

The final data source that was used in this study is documents. Creswell (2002) argued that document and archival data can serve as a valuable source of information that can help researchers to better understand the phenomenon in question. I tried to collect as much documents and archival data as possible; and these included school records in regard to parent visits, events reports, and any archival data in this regard. Creswell (2002) warns researchers to pay attention to collecting both public and private documents since both can yield different but equally important information. Public documents, in this regard, may refer to "minutes from meetings, official memos, records in the public domain (p.223);" and private documents may include "personal journals and diaries, letters, personal notes, and jottings individuals write to themselves (p.223)."

Data Analysis

The analysis phase in qualitative research is rather equivocal and exhausting (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). As Thorne (2000) expresses, "unquestionably, data analysis is the most complex and mysterious of all the phases of a qualitative project." Merriam (2014) broadly defines analysis as "making sense out of the data," a process that "involves consolidating, reducing, and

interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning" (p. 176). Similarly, Marshall and Rossman (2011) explain the process as "bringing order, structure, and interpretation to a mass of collected data" (p. 207).

Especially for case studies, qualitative research literature does not offer clearly defined rules and principles for researchers to follow while engaging in data analysis (Yin, 2009). Yet, many experts offer some general guidelines and directions that researchers can/should follow. For instance, Marshall and Rossman (2011) offer seven analytic phases to follow during data analysis: organizing data, immersion in the data, coding, generating categories and themes, offering interpretations through analytic memoing, searching for alternative understandings, and writing the findings and discussion.

In qualitative research, data collection, analysis, and reporting are seen as "interactive processes" in which each informs and shapes the other (Merriam, 2014, p. 166). Therefore, data analysis is often considered to be a continuous process, often beginning with the first unit of data collected (Glesne, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 1998, 2014; Stake, 1995). During data collection stage, I immediately started organizing data, transcribing interviews, reading them, and writing reflective memos to record my rudimentary thoughts. This early reading stage helped me to not only familiarize myself with my data, but also to refine my interview questions and focusing my observations on the issues being discussed during the interviews (Merriam, 1998). As data collection continued, I also began coding the first interviews by employing an open coding procedure. In this early stage, I created a lot of initial codes and produced many comments about these codes and my early thinking processes (i.e. Mr. Kara's case alone produced 323 rudimentary codes).

After the field work, Merriam (1998) suggests a more "intensive analysis process". Following the end of the school semester (2016 Spring), I ceased data collection and took a (rather mandatory) two-month break which is actually suggested by Merriam (1998). Then, I commenced a more intense analysis process, which included a line-by-line reading (or re-reading) of interviews and field notes, modifying the initial codes and also coding the remaining data through open coding. While doing so, I also continued commenting on the emerging codes, asking questions about specific occurrences and taking analytic notes.

In the third stage, following the coding process, I continued reading the coded segments and tried to refine my codes and reduce their numbers. The more I read the more I started connecting these bits of data and started organizing the codes under categories. At this stage, I immersed myself into a more abstract and conceptual thinking process, exploring links between codes and devising conceptual themes (Merriam, 1998; Rossman, 2011).

Later, I continued taking analytic memos and reflecting critically on the categories that emerged from the study (Rossman, 2011). I tried to make sense of and interpret them. This process also pushed me to think about different explanations and ways of understanding these blocks of data. In fact, as a result of this process, my initial understandings of the findings changed. Finally, I wrote the findings, tried to explain what these cases were telling me, and discussed these findings with regard to the related literature.

Limitations and Future Directions

The findings of this study delineate two teachers' strategies for engaging parents in their children's education and establishing teacher-parent collaborations. The thick description provided in this study informs the reader about the details of their specific cases as Mr. Kara and Mrs. Kibar

tried to engage parents in urban public schools in Istanbul, Turkey. That being said, there are a couple of limitations that need to be acknowledged for this study.

One of the main limitations that can be associated with this study is that I was only able to interview parents who were within the selected teachers' collaboration/partnership radius. Therefore in Mr. Kara's case, I was only able to interview parents who actively collaborated with Kara by coming to the school. Unfortunately, the voices of the parents who Kara himself described as "the poorest of the poor" are not heard in this case. However, in Mrs. Kibar's case, there was not a particular group left out since she touched base with every single family by visiting them at their places. Thanks to Kibar's home visits, I conducted three home visits and interviewed parents in their apartments and was able incorporate the voices of the parents who did not come to the school even once.

Another limitation that can be associated with this study is that its lack of ability to shed light for school-wide implementations. Originally, I intended to focus on parental engagement on the school level, but I could not locate any school known for its successful school-parent collaboration. Although I tried to provide some insights for school leaders to create a school-wide effort toward parents' active engagement, these insights merely rely on my participants' perspectives of what might work.

The Context of the Study

In case study research, a full comprehension of the findings cannot be achieved before appreciating the context of the case. Therefore, I will first elaborate on the context in which our phenomenon (parental engagement) is being studied.

Mr. Kara and Mrs. Kibar's cases, which are being examined in this study, were selected from two schools, each located in a different district in Istanbul. In this section, I will first give a brief introduction to the city of Istanbul as it pertains to this study. Then I will move on to the specific contexts for the respective cases, briefly introducing the districts and schools. Later in this section, I will conclude with a discussion of the participants.

The City of Istanbul. Istanbul is not only the most crowded, but also the most developed and industrialized city in Turkey (Öztürk, 2007). Not surprisingly, it has been attracting hundreds of thousands of domestic migrants to its shelters, especially since the 1950s (Öztürk, 2007). Most of these migrants come from the (underdeveloped) rural and eastern parts of Turkey, looking for jobs and better living conditions in this mega city. Thanks to this constant inflow of migrants, the city population has increased from 983,000 in 1950 to 14.8 million people in 2017. In order to contain its rapidly increasing population, the city borders have widely expanded, and today it is divided into 39 provincial districts, all of which are heavily populated and urbanized. Below, I will respectively examine the contexts for each of the study cases (Mr. Kara and Mrs. Kibar's).

Mr. Kara's Case

District. Atatürk Middle School (AMS) is located in the most heavily populated district in the most heavily populated city of the entire country of Turkey. The district population was calculated to be 757,162 in the latest census of 2015 ("Bagcilar Belediyesi." 2013), but due to unregistered immigrants and the incessant immigration, both domestic and international, it is estimated that there are over 800,000 people living within the district. In the 2013-2014 school year, one fifth of this population (145,000)[20] was enrolled in some form of educational institution in the district (2016, December 10). There were 188 K-12 schools (104 public, 84 private)

[20] 145,000 is the number of all the students: all grades, all types (formal, informal).

serving this population ("Bagcılar İlce Milli Egitim." 2016). AMS is one of the 38 middle schools serving the district: 25 public and 13 private schools in 2016.

Neighborhood. The school is located in the Istiklal neighborhood. The school counselor stated that most of their parents were newcomers who moved to Istanbul in search of better jobs. School statistics indicated that only 10% of parents had four years college degrees, 12-13% had a two-year college degree, and 30-35% of parents had either high school or middle school degrees. The remaining parents either had elementary school degrees or did not have any formal schooling experience at all. School administrators also highlighted that most of their parents suffered economic problems, which made it difficult for them to collect donations for the school.

The whole neighborhood was established on two faces of a very long and gradually ascending hill. In general, it had a ghetto appearance, crowded by buildings of five to eight stories with uncared-for apartments that were divided by narrow and convoluted streets. The school counselor stated that the crime rate was very high in the neighborhood, even for Istanbul. The school especially struggled with drug dealers who tried to sell drugs to their students. A couple of shopkeepers in the neighborhood confirmed this and also stated that due to the crime rate, the rents they paid for their shops were very low compared to other places in Istanbul.

The School. For the last thirteen years, Mr. Kara had been teaching in the same school, Atatürk Middle School (AMS)[21]. Since the school was first opened in 1999, AMS had been hosting 1st through 8th graders, both elementary and middle school students. After the authorization of the "4+4+4" Education Reform bill in 2012, the school transformed into a middle school, which left it only serving to 5th through 8th graders.

[21] Pseudonym are used for all place and people names.

The approximately 18,300 square foot school yard is surrounded with a barred concrete fence/wall to make sure that students cannot leave the school without permission.[22] The school is entered through two iron doors. The first door is approximately seven feet high and is open only during the school opening and closing times. The second smaller door is about one and a half meters wide and is used during the remaining hours of the day. To control ingress and egress, the gate is also guarded by security personnel at all times. The security guard interrogates all visitors, including parents, before granting them a permit to enter the school. He asks visitors who they are, the purpose of their visit, who they want to see, and sometimes checks their ID cards.

After passing the security guard, visitors walk about ten meters of the front yard to reach the school building. The building is also entered by a big iron door. At the entrance, two students welcome visitors for check-ins. Visitors have to write down their names, who they are visiting, the reason for their visit, entrance times, signature, and leaving times. There are also two more students waiting on the second (administrative) floor to help visitors in the school.

The school building is constructed like a giant "E" letter on the ground. Including the basement, it has four floors and four hallways in each of these floors. During the recess periods, one teacher is assigned as watch-teacher to each floor to control students and ensure safety. Teachers and administrators often complained about the school's structure, because having four hall ways on each floor made it difficult for teachers to watch each hallway constantly.

The school is composed of a total of 53 classrooms, 5 administrative rooms, 2 science laboratories, 1 seminar hall, and 1 cafeteria, all in 4 floors (including the basement). However, the school didn't have any space spared for parents or other visitors. Parents who visited the school usually stood in front of teachers' room on the second floor.

[22] This is a very common practice for schools in Istanbul. For safety reasons, most schools are surrounded by high walls so that entrances and exits are kept in check.

There were 73 teachers serving 13 different subjects, such as Math, Turkish literacy, and science subjects. The school had two different classrooms in terms of their dimensions and size. The smaller classrooms received around 25 students, and larger classrooms received around 45 students. In total, the school served 1,860 students between 8am and 3pm. The vast majority of these students lived in the neighborhood and were walking to school.

Parent Demographics. When asked about parents' socioeconomic standings in his classroom, Kara stated that 25% of his parents were middle-class families in good financial condition and 50% were lower middle class, or upper low-income families. The remaining 25% of them were the poorest of the poor families, facing serious socioeconomic problems in their day-to-day lives. Kara further explained that "*good condition*" families usually had a working mother and father and enjoyed economic stability. They often lived a house in which members did not experience any heating problems. These families were able to meet their children's basic economic and sociocultural needs, particularly educational needs. For 50% of the families (middle and lower middle-class), Kara stated that they did not experience any major economic problems and he did not have difficulty engaging these parents.

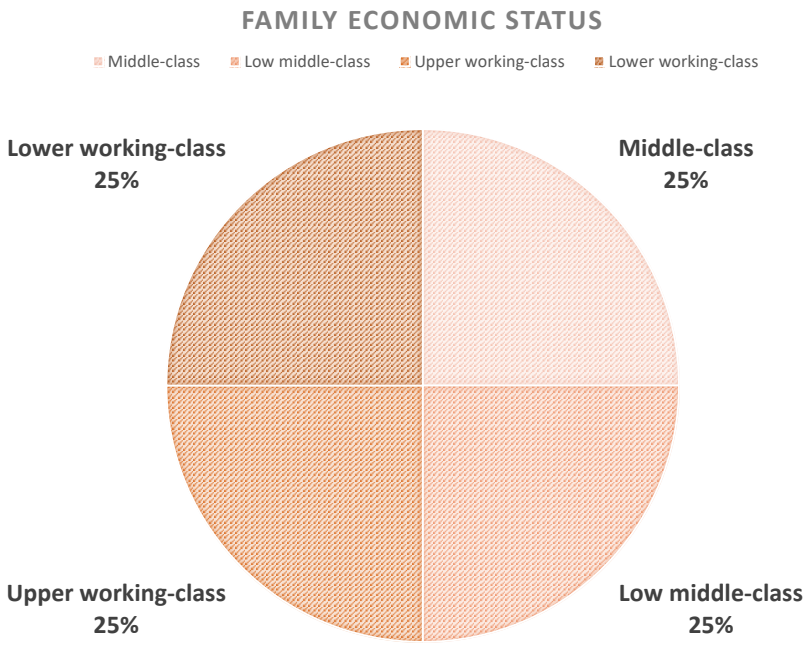

Figure 1: Distribution of family economic status.

The remaining 50% of the families (working-class) were struggling in poor conditions, and Kara especially called the poorest group as "difficult-to-reach parents". He did not call them difficult-to-engage, but rather difficult-to-reach parents, because as he further explained these parents were highly skeptical of schools, and they avoided paying any visits to the school. Most of the parents that Kara failed to engage were in this group. As Kara stated, "I can't win them over, because they don't give me this chance and come to the school." After this general look into Kara's classroom, now I will shift the focus on the parents who participated in this study. and I will try to briefly introduce these participants and discuss some of their SES indicators.

I interviewed seven of Kara's parents with varying economic standings. As shown in Table ?, only one of them was a college graduate[23] and one was an illiterate mother. Remaining parents hold elementary school (two parent), middle school (one parent) and high school degrees (two parents).

[23] Indeed, she was the only college graduate parent in Kara's classroom.

Most of these parents and/or their spouses worked in semi-skilled (e.g. bus driver, salesperson) or skilled (e.g. office clerk) positions and earned around 2,500TL[24] (around $800 in 2016) a month.

Interviewee	Relation to the child	Age	Education Level	Employment	Marital Status	Family income	No of child.	ES
Mother	Mother	45	College	Self-employed	Married Couple	5,000 TL	2	Middle
	Step Father	47	College	Self-employed				
Father	Mother	?	High school	Unemployed	Married Couple	3,500 TL	3	Low-middle
	Father	?	High school	Self-employed				
Father	Mother	39	High school	Salesman	Married Couple	3,500 TL	2	Low-middle
	Father	40	High school	Bus driver				
Mother	Mother	37	Elementary	Unemployed	Married Couple	3,000 TL	3	Low-middle
	Farther	40	High school	Self-employed				
Mother	Mother	32	Elementary	Unemployed	Married Couple	2,000 TL	2	Working-class
	Father	32	Elementary	Freelancer				
Mother	Mother	34	Illiterate	Unemployed	Married Couple	2,150 TL	6	Working-class
	Father	35	High school	Office clerk				
Aunt	Aunt	33	Middle school	Unemployed	Single	2,000 TL	3	Working-class

Table 2: Family socioeconomic indicators.[25]

Administrator. Mr. Okan Tan was interviewed as the school's assistant principal in this study. Mr. Tan was an experienced educator and a new administrator with an administrative experience of one and a half years. For the first three years of his teaching career, he taught in a school of his hometown in central Turkey. Then he moved to Istanbul and started teaching in his current school, where he became an assistant principal after an eight and half years of teaching English as a second language.

Mr. Tan was married to a doctor, and they had one child, a son. Based on my experiences, he had an easy-going personality, not deeply depressing himself with the problems of the school.

[24] On average, $1 was equal to 3TL in 2016 when this study was conducted.
[25] Note: On March 2018, $1 is equal to 3.96 TL. This mean 2,000TL is around $500 worth.

When parents came to visit him, he usually tried to avoid them and guided them to the teachers, the school counselor, or the school principal. Even during our interview, he advised me to talk to other people in the school concerning some of my questions.

School Counselor. Mr. Tarik Boz was 32-years-old, married to a teacher, and father to one baby boy. He was the school's counselor for six years. For one year, he also served in a different school in Eastern Turkey as fulfillment of his mandatory military service.[26] At AMS, he worked in a room on the second floor where teachers' and administrative rooms were also located.

Mr. Kara's Background. Unlike a quantitative study, a qualitative case study is about specifics. Instead of focusing upon what is generalizable, case studies usually focus on what is specific about the cases studied. In this case, I specifically focused upon one exemplary middle school Turkish literacy teacher who had been acknowledged for successfully improving PE practices in his counseling classroom. Strategies that I will discuss below are closely linked to his personality and background. Therefore, it is worth providing a detailed discussion about him before delving into the strategies he utilized in his classroom. Thus, the first part of this section is devoted to introducing Mr. Can Kara.

Upbringing. Kara was born in a very poor family of farmers in southern Turkey. Neither of his parents received a formal education, but his father, a self-educated man, taught himself how to read and write. Kara was the last born of nine siblings, and the first one to go to college in his family. Unfortunately, his siblings could not make it further than middle school, and their farm was so small that it was not capable of feeding the entire family, so his brothers had no choice but to move to city centers where they could find various blue collar jobs. The unfortunate fate of

[26] This is a common practice in Turkey. Teachers who have not completed their mandatory military service are sometimes assigned to fulfill their military service in eastern parts of Turkey, where other teachers do not want to work.

Kara's siblings opened a new door for him, the ability to move to an urban area where he could attend secondary level schools and actually receive a relatively decent education.[27] After graduating from elementary school, Kara moved to his brothers' apartment in an urban area and continued his secondary education there.

Apparently, Kara had a difficult childhood, but he was lucky enough to change his fate by acquiring a decent education. Examining his background from a PE perspective, it seems that he was brought up in a family that could help him sympathize with his low SES parents, most of whom moved to the city (Istanbul) from rural areas.

Family. Kara's apartment is located within a mile of the school, where he lives with his wife and two girls. He described his wife as "a professional housewife,"[28] but also added that she completed a Master of Arts degree and was currently working toward her PhD. His first daughter was a 7th grader in the AMS, the same school where her father teaches, and the other was a 1st grader in another school. For Kara, being a parent himself had affected his understanding of the concept of PE and his relationships with his parents. In our second interview, Kara defined himself as "both a parent and a teacher", someone "who knows both sides of the same coin".

Personal Traits. He is a charismatic person with exceptional interpersonal skills. He is always cheerful and energetic, making people around him smile. As a literacy teacher, he is able to speak with an impressive, fluent Turkish and is known to often share stories and news with people around him. When having a conversation with teachers, students, or parents, he often laughs loudly. He always seems excited as if something great is about to happen, and he flatters his

[27] In Turkey, rural areas suffer from lack of resources. Distribution of schools in Turkey is heavily concentrated in urban areas. Research in Turkey shows that living close to city centers is positively related with school attainments (Ekinci, 2011; Tansel, 2002). According to Tansel, the rural and underdeveloped areas are economically disadvantaged and suffer from lack of schools, especially high schools. Therefore, 92% of all higher education students in Turkey come from urban areas (Ekinci, 2011).

[28] He stated it laughing, probably meant it to be a joke.

addressee, especially students, when talking to them. One can see and feel that he values all people when they come to speak to him. In my interviews with parents, they often said that "Kara is different from other teachers." One of his parents said, "People will like you, when you like people," further claiming that he feels Kara likes him and his other parents. Another parent similarly reported that Kara never insulted them, but listened and valued what they needed to say. They received respect from him and reflected it back to him. On various occasions, parents reflected on how Kara felt toward parents and their children, as well as how he treated them. This shows how Kara's cheerful and charming personality was effective in, especially, breaking down parents' previous negative images[29] toward teachers and developing trust toward Kara.

During my observations in his school, Kara appeared to be a very active and social person. He usually spent his spare time in the school counselor's room, the teachers' room, or in one of the administrator rooms. When he was in the teachers' room, there were generally a couple of other teachers around him, and they often discussed politics, books, students, parents, or events that they were planning to organize. He always looked confident and people saw him as a useful resource. Other teachers usually asked him about issues of classroom management, teaching difficult children, organizing classroom events, and so on. Even administrators came to consult with him on certain administrative issues. In fact, in terms of his experience and educational level,[30] there was no one more qualified than him to be school administrator in the school, but he simply did not choose to be one.

Also, he was very organized and specific in everything in which he engaged, including PE activities he organized and conversations he had with his parents. For every meeting, conversation,

[29] A detailed discussion of parents' negative images is provided below.
[30] I will give more information about his experience and education below.

or event he held with his parents, he had well-organized content and specific goals to achieve. Therefore, when he was talking with parents, he did not show any sign of hesitation or doubt and appeared to be someone who knew what he was doing. He said, "I am very confident that I will win them [parents who were not "engaging" at the moment] over, but first, they must give me that chance and come to the school".

Education and experience. Although Kara was the first person in his family to attend college, he did not stop there. First, he obtained a MA in Educational Administration, and then he continued to the PhD in the same major. Kara stated that he really cares about his professional development and follows seminars, workshops and other professional development courses happening in, or sometimes out of, the district. Yet he also added that he did not receive any training in regard to PE, outside of his private school experience and a couple of books that he read during those years.

In college, he first finished a two-year teachers' college[31] and when he was about to graduate, a new law extended teacher colleges to four years. For the remaining two years, he majored in Turkish literacy and at the end, graduated with two certificates: one for teaching as an elementary school teacher, and one for teaching as a Turkish literacy teacher. Graduating in 1992, he started teaching Turkish in a private school where he also worked as an assistant administrator for two years. After five years, he moved to his current (public) school and taught as an elementary school teacher until the enactment of "4+4+4" education bill[32] in 2012. After this point, his school, where he had already been teaching for nine years, was converted to a middle school, and after the

[31] Previously Teacher Colleges in Turkey were two years long, but since 1990 a new bill extended the normal completion time for teacher colleges to 4 years.

[32] The "4+4+4" Education Reform bill, which was passed on March 30, 2012, extended the length of compulsory education from eight years to twelve years in Turkey. Also with the new bill, previously five years of elementary level schooling decreased to four years and the previously three years of middle schooling went up to four years.

bill he continued as a Turkish literacy teacher in the same school. The sum of his experience encompasses elementary and Turkish literacy teaching, teaching in private and public schools, as well as administrative experience in the private sector.

Experience 1: Teaching as an elementary school teacher for fourteen years

Experience 2: Teaching as a Turkish literature teacher for nine years

Experience 3: Teaching in a private school for five years

Experience 4: Teaching in a public school for eighteen years

Experience 5: Serving as an administrator in a private school for two years

Experience 6: Serving in the same school for thirteen years

Among all these, Kara especially emphasized the importance of his private school experience in the creation of his special interest in PE and his commitments in this regard. He stated:

> Without any doubt, the private sector work I did contributed a lot in this regard. As you know, the private sector aims to include parents in the process… they aim to educate children through the parents. Since this technique was very actively used in my school, I attribute my enterprising characteristic (for engaging parents) to my private sector experience. Besides this, the books that I read in this regard, such as *The Real Inspectors Are Parents,*[33] have impacted my understanding and sensitivity to the issues.

This suggests that Kara's experience in this counseling-centered private school culture, where engaging parents was a norm, not only helped him to espouse the practice and hone his related skills, but also to transfer those practices to a public school.

[33] Taktak, N. (2004). Gerçek Müfettiş Velidir.

Mrs. Kibar's Case

The District. The second school[34] was located in the Çiçekli neighborhood of Tuzla: one of Istanbul's eastern districts. As an outskirt district, Tuzla was created as a result of Istanbul's outward expansion, as the domestic migrants built unlicensed buildings around the vacant areas of the central city. Tuzla was a coastal district divided by a highway from east to west through its coastal line. The south of the highway was on the coast of the Marmara Sea and was considered upper class compared to the north part, where our school was located.

The immediate surroundings of the school looked like a classic Istanbul outskirt neighborhood. There were a couple of empty vacant land lots here and there, crowded with tall, wild weeds. Right next to the school, there was an elementary school, and across to the road was a middle school. On the corner, right between the schools and the south neighborhood was a mosque. Around the schools, especially toward the south neighborhood, there were some cafeterias, small and big markets, restaurants, cafes, game salons (i.e. PlayStation, billiard saloons) which were all built under seven to ten-floor apartments. A couple of parents reported that some of these stores were responsible for thugs and vagrants and selling students drugs. Yet, there seemed to be no immediate threat from the neighborhood for the students' security. As the school assistant principal, Veli Tatar, put it:

> In terms of security and students' safety, I mean, I have been here for nine years now. I haven't run into any big issues. Of course, some minor issues happen time to time, but the things threatening students' safety are very rare and when these kinds of things happen, we are careful enough to take the necessary measures.

The School. Mrs. Kibar's school was a vocational and technical high school (Cumhuriyet Vocational and Technical High School). It consisted of three main adjacent buildings with the same entry and a surrounding school yard. The three buildings were closely attached to each other

[34] Case II: Mrs. Kibar's school.

on a straight line, making school look like a one long structure. In the middle was the four-story administrative building. The school was entered through this building and connected to other floors through an interior circular stairway. On every floor to the right, there was the long hallway of the classroom building. On the left, some staff and administrative offices were visible. Every floor had an administrative office: the second floor had the school principal and an assistant principal's rooms, and other floors had only an assistant principal's room. Again, on every floor, there were two attendant students sitting behind a table, helping visitors find their way through the school. On the first floor, visitors were checked in and their names recorded, with entry date and time, purpose of the visit, and who was being visited. On the second floor, there was a waiting area for the visitors with couches and coffee tables. Parents and other visitors were usually seated in this area while they were waiting for their children, or while waiting for teachers who were in class at the time. Yet, I did not witness many parents who came to see a teacher. They usually headed to an administrative office or waited for their children. When they were waiting for their children, they often waited in front of their children's classrooms, or walked back and forth in the hallway.

The school yard basically consisted of the vacant space along the long school structure. Right in front of the building, there was a 10-meter-wide concrete space and another 10 meters of green area with trees and several benches. The school yard was surrounded by a tall, concrete wall which was entered by a sliding, iron door in the south corner of the school building. Right at the entry, there was a small, security booth for two attendant students to wait. At the north end of the concrete space, there was a small basketball field, and close to the building entry, an Atatürk bust/statue.

As with all Turkish schools, Cumhuriyet Vocational and Technical High School (CVTHS) was also governed through the central education ministry in the capital city, Ankara. The mission statement of the ministry for vocational and technical education is:

> To meet the labor demands of economic and social sectors through vocational education, to train manpower who hold vocational qualifications in accordance with international standards, to develop and implement policies, strategies that will make the vocation valuable and provide everyone a profession (Milli Egitim Bakanligi, 2018).

Aligned with this mission, the vision of the CVTHS was to be a "leading institution which is producing individuals with reliable, quality professional and social skills who are ready for social life". As is clear from the vision and the statements of its administrators, teachers and school counselors in the school did not aim to prepare its students for college entrance exams as the regular (non-vocational) high schools, but for the market by improving their labor skills. In doing so, the school offered training in three major areas for students to choose from:

1. Accounting and Finance (Computerized Accounting Department, Foreign Trade Office Services)
2. Marketing and Retail Area (Insurance Branch)
3. Transportation Services Area (Logistics Branch)

Teachers. The school was serving 1042 students with a total of 66 school staff: 5 administrators, 52 teachers, 2 school psychologists and 7 other staff. There were 52 teachers serving in the CVTHS. The school principal described them as a young teacher team. He said that most of the teachers had 1-10 years of teaching experience. He also stated that he loved working with young teachers much better than working with the older, for younger teachers, he said, were more dynamic and progressive. Their training was more up-to-date, and they were better able to understand and befriend the students.

Number of School Personal	
Administrators	5
Teachers	52
School Counselors	2
Other Staff	7
Students	1042

Table 3: Number of school personal.

Administrators. The school had one principal and four assistant principals (AP). All the administrator rooms were located in the four-story main administrative building. The school principal and one of the AP's rooms were on the second floor, and the remaining three APs were dispatched to a different floor. The principal's room, on the second floor, was spacious and well-furnished with leather sofas, coffee tables, and several plants. He had a big, wide table and a black, leather armchair behind it. Next to him was an assistant principal's room and the school clerk's room. Right across from his room was the teachers' room.

Each of the APs was responsible for a different task. On the first floor was the first AP's room, and he was responsible for the financial and some other general administrative issues. The remaining three APs were each responsible for a certain grade level. As the second floor belonged to 9th graders, the AP on this floor was responsible for the 9th graders. He would see their parents during their visits, patrol the hallway during recess, and deal with any issues related to this specific grade level. The same was true for other APs on the third and fourth floors.

School Counselor. The school had two school counselors, one on the second floor and the other on the fourth floor. They were also actively engaged with parents as they visited the school. Teachers often sent disruptive students to school counselors' offices and sought their help in finding ways to accommodate these students. School counselors talked with these students, their parents, and the responsible APs when needed. Especially with serious problems and in disciplinary issues, all of these parties were involved with the school counselor. In fact on every visit I made, I saw at least five cases waiting on the school counselors' table to be reported. It was also the school counselors' responsibility to investigate the case and to prepare two reports: one after the incident, and one after the issue had been settled.

School counselors were also often consulted by the teachers on the matter of parental engagement. For instance, during the time frame that I observed Ms. Kibar, she always invited a school counselor on her home visits. She also often consulted with them when she was about to explain something sensitive, difficult, or very important to a parent.

Demographic. CVTHS did not have any school-wide SES indicator in its files, but based on the administer interviews and school counseling records, I can tell that most of the students came from low working to lower middle class families who migrated to the area from the rural Anatolia. In Ms. Kibar's classroom, the proportion of these families was close to 90% and, in fact, all eight families (ten parents) interviewed in this study identified themselves as low SES (see table X for more information). Most of the school parents were elementary or middle school graduates. There were only few examples where the parents were elementary dropouts, or did not receive any formal schooling, or had high school degrees. Among the eight parents interviewed in this study and their spouses, there were 11 elementary school graduates, one middle school graduate, two middle school dropouts, and one high school dropout. The average monthly income for these

families was 1,900 TL (about $500) hardly above the minimum wage of 1,404 TL determined by the Turkish government. Most of the school's parents were domestic migrants, who moved to the city searching for jobs and a better education for their children.[35] Again, all the participants in this study, including teachers and administrators, were born in Anatolia and moved to Istanbul for similar reasons. The majority of the CVTHS families lived in the surrounding neighborhoods, and most of the students walked to school every morning.

Mrs. Kibar's classroom (11-A). Just like Mr. Kara, Ms. Kibar also often changed her classroom every year, and she was often given the most difficult classrooms that received a lot of complaints from the teachers. "I enjoy the fact that these classrooms are given to me," she said. As she explained, working with "difficult" classrooms fit well with her personality and is more rewarding for her. She also said,

> I am a rough teacher. Students usually fear me at first, but I know how to bond with my students. If you ask students who never took my classes, they will think that I am really tough, and they will probably fear me. That's all. Then, if you talk to students that I have taught before, yes, they will fear me too (laughter), but in the meantime, they will love me.

During the data collection, Ms. Kibar was the counseling teacher for classroom 11-B. In the Fall semester of 2015, 11-B started with 33 students, but dropped to 26 students before reaching the Spring of 2016 when I gathered my data. Ms. Kibar stated that she encouraged 7 of her best students to move to a regular high school, so that they could have a better chance for college.[36] (There were two more students in the Spring who were trying to move to a regular high school.)

[35] In Turkey, resources are unevenly distributed between the rural and urban, east and west in favor of urban and west ().

[36] Vocational high school students set students to vocational tracks so that students can assume a job immediately after their graduation. They can also go to a two-year college in their major without taking the national university entrance exam. Plus, they can also take the national university entry exam, but when they choose a different major than their vocational-track, their scores are unfavorably affected compared to regular high school students.

As mentioned above, 90% of Ms. Kibar's parents were associated with low SES life standards. And all eight families interviewed in this study identified themselves as low SES.

Interviewee	Relation to the child	Age	Edu	Employment	Marital Status	Family income	No of children	ES
Mother & Farther	Mother	40	Elementary	Unemployed	Married Couple	2000 TL	3	Low ES
	Father	40	Elementary	Serbest meslek				
Mother	Mother	38	Elementary dropout	Waitress	Married Couple	2000 TL	2	Low ES
	Father	47	High dropout	Unemployed				
Father	Mother	?	High dropout	Unemployed	Married Couple	1500 TL	3	Low ES
	Father	48	Middle school	Was security				
Mother & Farther	Mother	36	Elementary school	Unemployed	Married Couple	1600 TL	2	Low ES
	Farther	44	Middle dropout	Truck driver				
Mother	Mother	40	Elementary	Unemployed	Married Couple	1750 TL	5	Low ES
	Father	37	Elementary	Worker (Pntr)				
Mother	Mother	38	Elementary	Unemployed	Married Couple	2000 TL	2	Low ES
	Father	41	Elementary	Worker (Shipyard)				
Mother	Mother	34	Elementary	Employed	Married Couple	3000 TL	4	Low ES
	Father	?	Elementary	Serbest meslek				
Mother	Mother	?	Elementary	Working	Married Couple	1500 TL	3	Low ES
	Father	?	Elementary	Unemployed (disabled)				

Table 4: Family socioeconomic indicators.

Mrs. Kibar. Raised by a single mother, Ms. Kibar and her three siblings had a difficult childhood. Yet, despite all of these problems, she and two of her siblings were able to finish college: two teachers and one medical doctor. Only one of the siblings had to drop out of high school due to mental problems.

Just like Mr. Kara, Mrs. Kibar also lived close to her school, but unlike Kara, she had quite a large family. Besides her husband and their son, her mother, her father, her sick brother, and one of her cousins also lived with them. Her husband was also a high school teacher. She described him as a heavenly good man, and a great father.

As a 39-year-old teacher, Mrs. Kibar was teaching "Foreign Trade, Export, and Import" classes, with seventeen years' experience teaching in the same school. In regard to engaging

parents, she stated that she did not have any previous training. During my observations, I saw other teachers coming to Mrs. Kibar, asking her questions about teaching, and especially about teaching "difficult" students that often disturbed their class.

Besides professional issues, she attracted a lot of attention for other reasons as well. She was a person who took even difficult problems very lightly. When I asked her during one of our informal conversations, she said something like, "I have seen a lot. Countless troubles. And sulking never helps. Thank God. Life keeps going. You will always have some trouble and some blessings in life. I have some problems in my family, but I have the best son and the best husband." Thanks to her philosophy, she was able to see the positive side of things and developed an ever-smiling personality, which made people around her smile. It seemed to me that paying attention to the problems of her students was an extension of her personality. She was very sensitive and willingly shared other people's problems around her. Apparently, she was bearing her family's burden by taking care of her old mother and father, sick sibling, and in fact one of her cousins who came to Istanbul for college.

CHAPTER 4: CASE of MR. KARA

Although family background appears to be a powerful determinant of parental involvement, most parents, if duly encouraged, are able to devote extra time and effort to assisting with their children's education, both in the home and school settings (as cited in Ho, 2009, p.102).

This study consists of two cases: case of Mr. Kara and case of Mrs. Kibar. This chapter begins with a presentation of the findings from case of Mr. Kara and concludes with a discussion of its findings. These findings are based on an analysis of interviews, observations and documents. The main purpose of the analysis was to discover practices that helped Kara in engaging 8-E parents. The overall structure of this chapter is mainly guided by the following research questions:

1. How does parental engagement look in Mr. Kara's case? What is understood, valued, and promoted as good parental engagement practice?
2. What strategies are used to foster 8-E[37] parents' engagement?

The analysis of the data in response to these questions yielded two main themes and several sub-themes as discussed below. In this chapter, I will provide a discussion delving into these findings.

Theme I: Teacher-Parent Collaboration
1. Common goal
2. Communication with
    a. Children
    b. Teacher(s)
3. Support
    a. Basic, moral, academic
4. Participation (in school-based events)
5. Collaboration

Theme II: Strategies for Teacher-Parent Partnership

[37] "8-E" is a pseudonym that is used to represent Mr. Kara's advisory/counseling classroom. It stands for 8th grade section E. In AMS, there were five 8th grade sections named: 8-A, 8-B, 8-C, 8-D, 8-E. (Note: In Turkey, all students in the same grade are divided into groups, and each group is assigned to a specific classroom. This way, students do not have to go to a different classroom for different classes, but teachers take turns coming to teach their subjects in these classrooms. To differentiate each classroom and the group of students assigned to this classroom, each division is named with the grade level and a letter as in AMS.)

1. Breaking down negative images
2. Increasing awareness
3. Building capacity
4. Communication and inclusion
5. Other issues that matter

Kara's Beliefs about the Parents and Parental Engagement

Before delving into the findings, it is worth providing a little more detail about the context of the study. As I mentioned in chapter three, Kara was a teacher who deeply valued parents' engagement and tried hard to engage parents with their children's education. In fact, he compared education to a structure that sits on a "trivet whose legs consist of students, teachers, and parents". He further explained: "Whether you have training [about parental engagement] or not, you have to accept this reality. If you don't have parents in the game, one leg will be missing."

As he valued parents' engagement, Kara also believed that all parents value their children's education. In fact, he based all of his efforts on the belief that all parents genuinely care about and love their children, and consequently they all value their education. He believed that "their children are the most valuable things in their parents' lives, and there is nothing that teachers cannot convince parents to do for their children's sake". Based on this point, he believed that it was necessary for teachers to engage parents toward goals that benefit their own children.

For Kara, engaging parents was an imperative responsibility for teachers. He valued parents as potential partners, but he also believed that most of the parents in his school were not aware of the importance of their roles, and they were not capable of demonstrating "effective" parental engagement practices at the beginning. He thought that parents, especially those who are less-educated, lack the awareness about their engagement roles and the importance of these roles in their children's education. He was convinced that teachers need to educate parents about the importance of their own engagement and the impacts that parents can have on their children's

education. Furthermore, he believed that some parents, without receiving proper training from teachers, produce more harm than benefit. He compared those parents to "elephants in a glass store". Despite their good intentions, when those parents make a move to engage, they cause damage to the very children they intend to support. Therefore, even it is necessary to have parents on board, Kara did not want parents to engage on their own without collaborating with him (teachers). According to Kara, it is up to teachers to build parents' capacities so that they can be helpful partners in supporting their children's education.

Theme I: Defining Parental Engagement as a Teacher-Parent Collaboration

Between Kara and the parents of his counseling classroom (8-E),[38] parental engagement was defined as a teacher-parent collaboration.[39] In Ataturk Middle school, instructional and administrative responsibilities were distinctly separated from one another, and parental engagement was assumed to primarily be a teacher responsibility. During my observations on the administrative floor, where all four administrative rooms[40]—along with the teachers' and school counselor's room— were located, parents rarely stopped by any of the administrative rooms, although they often visited the teachers' room. Mr. Tan, one of the three assistant principals in the school, explained that parental engagement was an issue that teachers should be concerned with. As he made clear:

> This is the teachers' responsibility. I mean, at least from my perspective. Hmm, because they [teachers] are in charge when it comes to instruction. As administrators, we are outside of the box. I mean we are not in the picture. We can just direct them [parents] to the teachers, [but] teachers are the ones who dialogue with the parents…

[38] This is roughly analogous to an "advisory" or "homeroom" in U.S. schools.

[39] Here, I purposefully use the term "teacher-parent collaboration" instead of "parent-teacher collaboration," as it was a very teacher-initiated effort.

[40] One school principal and three assistant principal rooms.

It also seemed that Kara and the parents embraced the same assumption, believing that it is teachers' responsibility to meet parents and engage them with their children' education. For Kara, letting teachers do what they wanted to do was the best teamwork that administrators could offer to help improve parental engagement.

Not surprisingly, most of what was referred to as parental engagement occurred between parents and teachers, and as a result, the main theme that emerged in defining parental engagement was a teacher-parent collaboration, which was accompanied by five sub-themes. In this case, parents collaborated with Kara to support their children's test preparation by communicating with their children and the teacher; supporting their children; and actively participating in school events (often organized by Kara). Below, Figure X displays how the subthemes of parental engagement were organized in Kara's case. Through this section, I will try to elaborate on each of these sub-themes and their consecutive sub-themes as they were used to define parental engagement in this case.

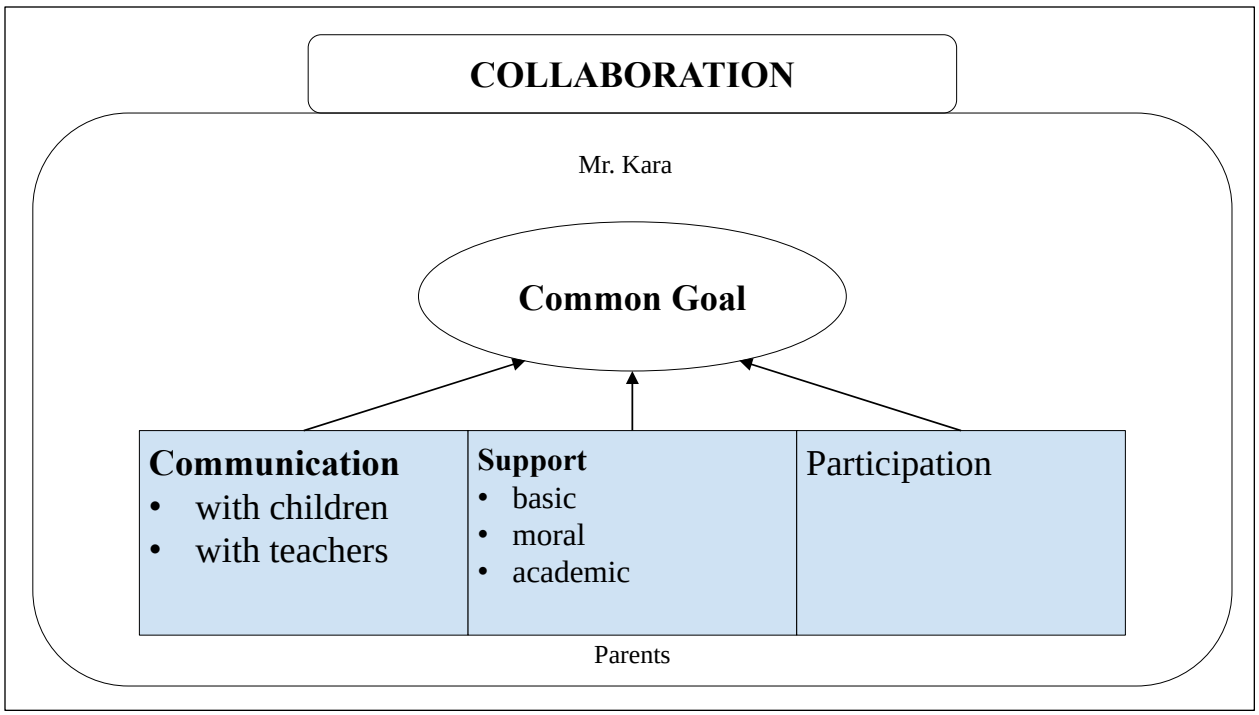

Figure 2: Parental engagement as a teacher-parent collaboration.

Common Goal: Preparing Students for the National Placement Test

The "common goal" evolved as one of the five sub-themes under "teacher-parent collaboration" and represents the focus of teacher-parent collaboration activities in this case. Without knowing what Kara tried to achieve by cultivating parents' support, it would be difficult to understand the meaning of the mere practices that the parents engaged with.

Kara was a 44-year-old, well-experienced Turkish literacy teacher who taught all grades 5-8. Usually teachers are assigned to a freshman class (fifth grade) and continue to counsel/advise the same class until it graduates. Yet due to the national test that eighth grade students had to take at the culmination of the school year[41], Kara chose to counsel an eighth-grade classroom every year. He stated that:

> I change it [the counseling classroom] every year because they [eighth graders] give me a sense of positive energy, and I feel that I can be more productive with them. By the conventional logic, you would take a classroom at grade five [when they

[41] Middle schools in Turkey serve grades five through eight. At the end of eighth grade, students take a national placement test (TEOG) based on which they can choose their high schools.

> begin at the school] and keep working with the same group until they graduate. This is good for parental engagement, because the longer you work with the same group of parents, the better. Yet, instead of working with intermediary classes [he means grades 5-7], I choose to work with a classroom that has a testing motivation.

Therefore, at the beginning of every year, he begins with a brand-new group of eighth grade students and starts motivating them for the test that they are going to take at the end of the school-year. He first informs them about the testing system, what is awaiting them, and what they need to do to be able to go to a competitive high school. He informs students about the testing process, scoring, and so on. Then, he conducts a pilot test in the classroom to evaluate students' standings at the beginning of the year. Afterwards, he sits down with individual students to agree upon an adequate score for acceptance to a competitive high school, and a personal study plan to achieve it. While deciding test and study goals, he does not enforce them per se, but allows students to set their own goals. Once students choose their own goals, he sets this as the final goal for his students, makes a pact with them, and asks them to promise to comply with the program.

Parental engagement in Kara's classroom was intended to cultivate parents' support in administering these pacts and study plans. As pointed out above, Kara's work in the counseling classroom was organized around preparing students for the national exam, a standardized test that students had to take at the end of the spring semester. He wanted to ensure that his students performed well on the test so that they could go to a competitive high school, which in turn would help them gain access to a four-year college. Along with this ideal, almost all parental engagement activities were centered upon preparing students for the national exam, while all other things were only intended to support that final goal and always seemed at the periphery. When parents came to see Kara, they usually talked about their children's study programs and how students had complied or could not comply with these programs. If it was a regularly visiting parent, Kara and the parent(s) usually started analyzing how students had complied with their study programs and

how the last goal/strategy worked out, then continued to think about the next step, which usually involved increasing the number of questions students solved or the time they spent studying.

As a result, Kara spent most of his parent meetings informing the parents about the testing process, students' standings and progress in regard to their scores, and talking to parents about how they could better help their children study at their homes. Kara also tried to build the parents' capacities in such a way that parents could be better equipped to support their children in this difficult testing journey. For instance, toward the end of the spring semester, he devoted a lot of time trying to inform the parents about the high school selection process and support them so that they could help their children to make informed decisions about their high school selections.

Across observations and interviews, the "common goal" was found to have its most prominent focus on parental engagement activities, and this was well accepted and highly valued by parents as well. When parents talked about their roles, they often mentioned how they met with Kara to communicate about their children's progress and how they supported their children at home so that they could live up to their pact with Kara. One mother, for instance, shared how she supported her son at home so that he could better prepare for the national test:

> … we laid down a lot of rules for his study. Actually, he is really motivated right now. [He says] "*I am going to study very hard. This is my last year, and I don't want my sister's friends coming home.*" Well, we accepted all of his conditions. We only want him to study. I thank Mr. Kara. We designed a study space as he [Mr. Kara] asked. The computer is removed [and] I am also trying to support him.

In summary, test preparation was the main goal for parents' engagement both from Kara's and parents' sides, but there were still other interests at play fueling parents' engagement. For example, one mother did not believe that her son could go to a "good" high school, but she tried hard, visiting Kara, attending parent-meetings, and constantly communicating with her son to support his well-being and individual development. She simply wanted him to graduate and stay

out of trouble. Yet even for these parents, Kara's focus on test preparation rendered Kara as a valuable ally in the eyes of the parents, as this showed them that Kara cared about their children. Pointing out the extra time that Kara spent with parents to help children's test preparations, one parent explained, "If he [Kara] can sacrifice his free time and spend it for us, this is about caring, this is about compassion. We just need these kinds of teachers and these kinds of people."

Communication

Parents' communication with their children and Kara evolved as the second sub-theme under teacher-parent collaboration. Indeed, most of what parents communicated (both with their children and Kara) was guided by Kara himself. He set the tone for parents' communication and organized it around the common goal of preparing children for the national test. Below, I will try to explain separately how the parents communicated with their children and Kara as a process of exchanging information, sharing feelings, and transferring wisdom.

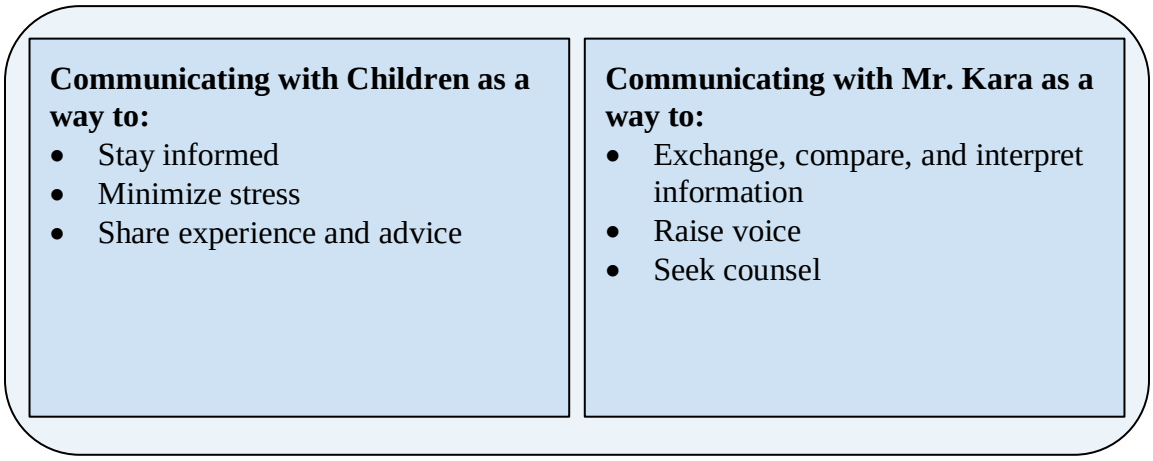

Figure 3: Communication.

Communicating with Children

Different parents might use different tones and focus on different topics in their communications, and some parents might communicate more often than others, but at the end of the day, in one way or another, every parent communicates with her/his children. Nevertheless,

Kara believed that parents were not prepared to "properly" communicate with their children about education, so it was the responsibility of teachers to build parents' capacities. In fact, Kara's parents also did not feel confident in their own skills and often turned to Kara for guidance. To sharpen parents' communication skills, Kara organized seminars about communication, especially in regard to communicating with teenagers and helping them to cope with teenage problems exacerbated by exam anxiety. He stated that it might be "very difficult to communicate with teenagers and understand them." Thus, "[parents] need to know what their children are going through and how they can help them." As a result, the parents of Kara's students communicated with their children to stay informed about them, help them mitigate stress, and share wisdom and experiences with them.

Communication to stay informed about children and their problems. This type of communication required a lot of listening on parents' parts. Despite the problems they face (lack of time, exhaustion, etc.), parents emphasized the necessity of regularly listening to their children. For example, one mother stated:

> I feel really lucky about it, because she tells me everything that happens in her school, in fact, everything in her life. I listen to her. For example, when she has a problem with her friends, I always give her a couple of pieces of advice. Although she sees these times as lecturing/preaching, she also knows that I always want the best for her. Thus, she always picks up at least a piece from each one of these [lectures/advice].

Another father stated that, "What I can do is, as a father, first and foremost, I listen to her when I go home. Well, [I say] "Oh my son!", or "Oh my daughter!" [and ask him/her] "How was your day?" This way, I know when they have an exam and how they perform on these exams."

It was important for Kara as well to have parents communicate with their children to stay informed about them. Kara asked the parents to talk to their children and share what they had learned with him as they felt necessary. He especially highlighted the importance of parents asking

their children about their studies in order to find out if children face any problems, or if there were any difficulties in regard to their studies. Thus, when they met, he always asked parents how their children were doing at home, if parents detected a problem or an issue. When parents brought up an issue, especially during one-on-one meetings, they discussed possible solutions together.

Communication to comfort children, and to minimize stress and exam anxiety. Kara and the parents were aware of the fact that eighth grade students simultaneously go through two difficult stages in their lives: test preparation and developmental adolescence. Therefore, Kara purposefully promoted this type of communication among the parents so that they would constantly listen to their children and help them through these critical stages. To achieve this goal, Kara organized seminars intending to train parents about strategies for communicating with teenagers and helping their children cope with anxiety. Attending these seminars, parents believed that it was their duty to talk to their children, listen to their problems, and help them relieve anxiety and stress. As one mother shared,

> When she [her daughter] has a problem, she shares it with me. This is how she can loosen up her stress, because this is how we all do it. This is really important… Of course, I want to be able to listen to her more, but I can do it only when it is possible [when I have the time].

Parents' thoughts about their communications with their children highlighted the stress and anxiety that arises during these stages. When the parents came to the school, they complained about the testing system and the related pressure that it caused on their children (in fact, parents too appeared stressed by this pressure).

While trying to help parents, Kara often asked for the school counselor's help on this matter and collaborated with him to better address the parents' needs. The school counselor, Mr. Tarik Boz, also valued parents in this role of communicating with their children as a way to help reduce testing stress. In fact, with the help of three teachers, including Kara, Boz prepared a presentation

focusing on parents' roles in helping students cope with exam anxiety, and presented this during the general school parent meeting of the Spring semester.

Communication to convey experience and relate advice. Parents' communication with their children was also used to convey parents' experience and wisdom to their children. This type of communication was particularly highlighted by the parents. Parents wanted to make sure that their children did not repeat their mistakes and underestimate the value of education. To this end, parents wanted to motivate their children so that the children deeply valued education and worked hard to go to a quality college. A mother stated,

> I tell them every time when they are leaving for the school. [I tell them] 'If I had studied harder, I could have had a really nice job and taken care of you much better.' I tell them to see me [my example] … I want to see them go to college. Since I couldn't do it, now it is more important for me [to make sure that they do what I couldn't].

The core of most of the messages and advice that parents wanted to relate to their children was that education is a valuable asset, and regardless of all the obstacles children might be facing, they can achieve it through dedication and determination. Parents believed in this message and wanted to motivate their children to work hard. They gave examples to their children so that the children could see how their hard work could bring them success someday.

> My brother in-law's son has become a teacher now. Well, I tell them [her children] 'If you study well and work hard, you can do it.' That's what I believe… Those who are diligent and dedicated in their work will always be successful.

a. Communicating with Teachers

Parents' communication with their children was fortified and completed by their communication with Kara. As a result, communicating with teachers (Kara) emerged as another form of communication parents engaged with in this case. This form was highly prevalent in observations and often emphasized during the interviews. Both Kara and the parents highly valued

it, and the parents often highlighted how much they appreciated communicating with Kara about their children. Similar to parents' communication with their children, this form also revolved around the common goal. Indeed, the parents' communication with their children and with Kara enhanced each other in supporting children's test preparations (please see figure X). The parents' communication with Kara also took three distinct forms: exchanging information, raising one's voice, and seeking counsel/advice.

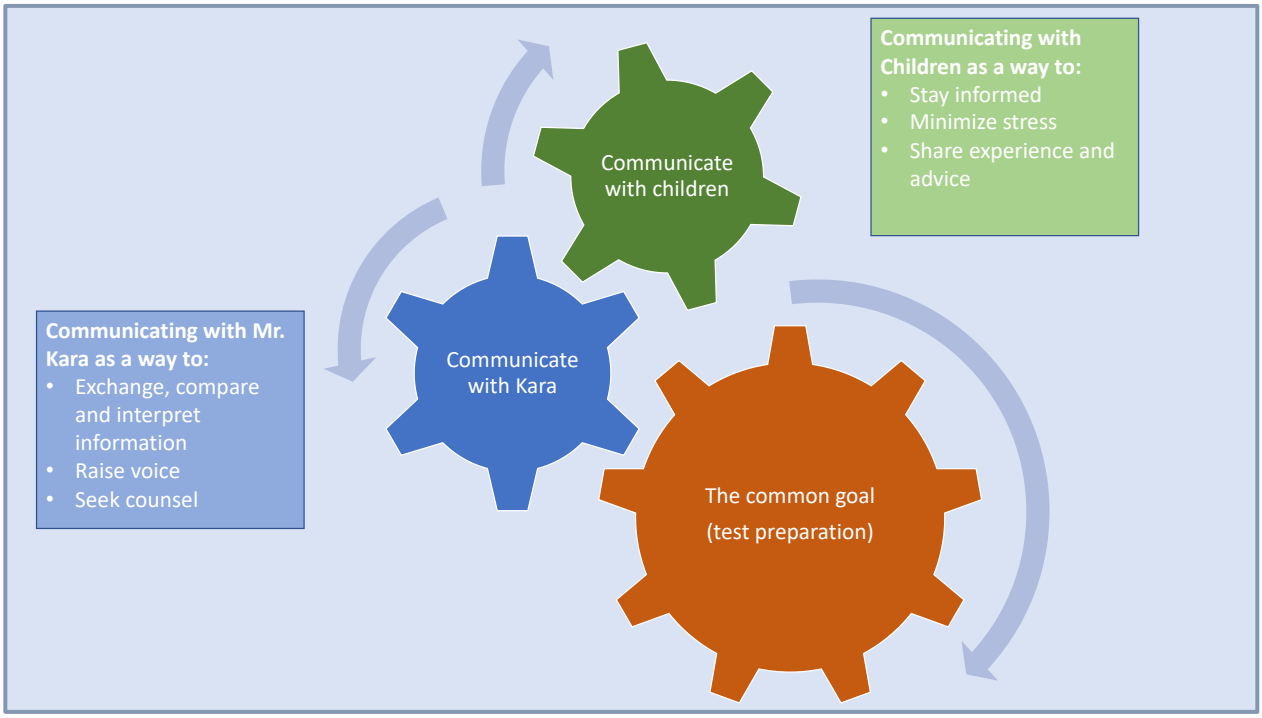

Figure 4: Communication with children and teacher to support common goal.

Communication to Exchange Information. Parents communicated with Kara to exchange, compare, and interpret information about their children. Kara emphasized that parental engagement is initially about this information exchange and handling processes. When he was defining parental engagement, Kara highlighted parents' responsibilities for regularly visiting teachers and sharing their observations about their children, while asking teachers what they have been observing about their children in schools. He stated:

> What do I understand from parental engagement [thinking]? Well! First of all, visiting teachers at least once a month and asking, "Oh teacher! How do you see my child's situation?" In response to this, the teacher would ask, "Oh my dear parent! How do you see my student doing at home?" For me, parental engagement is this consultation process: exchanging data, combining two anecdotes, reaching a synthesis, and making a road map [together]. That's exactly my understanding of what parental engagement is. When we do this, things start improving [for the students].

As with other forms of parental engagement activities, parents' communication with Kara were often test-centered. During their communication, Kara informed parents about students' test scores and asked parents about how their children were keeping up with their weekly study goals. He was really interested in hearing everything that affected students' ability to persevere with their study program. Especially during the three individual teacher-parent meetings that I was able to observe, they started meetings talking about whether the students were following their study program or not. Then, they usually discussed ways to improve students' study habits. In this regard, they often talked about things that prevented students from studying regularly, such as spending too much time on the internet, gaming, or excessively using their cell phones. During most individual meetings (in contrast to the general parent meetings), the students were often present in some part of the meetings. Kara especially wanted his students to make their own decisions and set their own goals: how much they work every day, how much improvement on their test scores they accomplish in a month, and how much time they can spend on other things such as gaming, watching TV, and the playing with their cell phones.

The process of exchanging information was prevalent in parents' communication with Kara, and it appeared to be a natural part of their dialogues. On every given occasion, they exchanged information about the students, and both sides highly valued the opportunity. As Kara informed parents about individual students, he also asked parents about how students were doing

at home, whether they were keeping to their promised programs or not, as well as other things that parents wanted to share.

Communication to Raise Voice and Share Problems. Based on their experiences in AMS and other schools, parents relayed that other teachers did not give any voice to the parents. They further criticized that parents were only supposed to attend general school meetings, conducted once per semester, and listen to standard information recited by school administrators and teachers. In fact, this was obvious throughout my observations. Particularly during the general parent meeting, teachers merely tried to visit all the classrooms they were teaching. Throughout the meeting, they had to rush to one classroom after another and could not engage in any meaningful conversations with the parents and could not give them time to voice their opinions, even if they wanted to. Yet, 8-E parents had all these other venues, which they valued highly, to raise their voices. Communicating with Kara, parents were able to voice their own opinions and share their feelings and problems with him. They emphasized and highly appreciated the reciprocal nature of their communication with Kara. As one parent put it:

> For example, Mr. Kara, when he comes to [school-wide] parent meetings, when he organizes his own parent meetings, he always gives voice to us. However, I don't see this kind of behavior from any other teacher. I mean, when you want to ask something, they say, "I don't have time. I have to hurry to another classroom.", or I don't know… I mean, they just shake us off and evade us…

By giving voice to parents, communication went beyond transferring mere information, and parents were also able to communicate their problems, feelings, frustrations and ideas with Kara. Together, they discussed problems disturbing students, especially regarding their test preparations.

For parents, being able to raise their opinions and communicate their problems and concerns was a constructive approach. In this regard, some parents only complimented Kara and his efforts, while other parents believed that AMS, in general, was an exceptional school in this

regard. As one parent put it, "The language used by teachers in this school is very kind and polite, which is actually how it is supposed to be." On other occasions, the same parent complained about the harsh language used in other schools: "You can find your child, her/his teacher and actually talk to him (a teacher), question him, and collaborate on solutions if there is a problem, but this is not the case in every other school."

Communication to Seek Counsel. Most of Kara's parents were only elementary school graduates who moved from rural areas to Istanbul in search of job opportunities. Without knowing the education system, these parents did not feel confident in their abilities to support their children, especially academically. In fact, Kara argued that most of them did not have any previous exposure to the concept of parental engagement. As he further explained, these parents had neither received any formal training in regard to parental engagement, nor had they observed their own parents engaging in their education. Therefore, for Kara, it was essential for teachers to educate parents and counsel them on matters of parental engagement. In line with this thinking, the parents also emphasized their need for consulting with Kara, and they argued that it is the parents' duty to communicate with teachers and seek their counsel. As one mother stated,

> This is my second one-on-one meeting with Kara, except [monthly] meetings. All parents know that they can do this [meet with Mr. Kara during his weekly office hours]. All parents who are concerned about their children can come and meet. He [Mr. Kara] will meet them as he meets with me. Kara gives that opportunity, he is open, but in the meantime, parents need to be interested.

During my observations, one to three parents came to each of the office hours, seeking Kara's advice and information in regard to their children's education. When I talked them, it appeared that they were really willing to do whatever was necessary to provide their children with better education. Yet, they just did not know how to go about it, which consequently led them to seek advice from Kara who was ready and willing to guide them. As one parent reported:

> As you can see we had a meeting. Mr. Kara has told us what we can do: do this, here is [study] time table, that's what you need to do etc. We are not as experienced as him. It is better when he guides us like this.

An Alternative Approach: Using Kara as a Message Transmitter

Up until now, I have discussed several communication patterns that were promoted and utilized when parents were communicating with their children and with Kara. These patterns often reflected the purpose of parents' communication with their children (to stay informed, minimize stress, and relay wisdom) and with Kara (to exchange information, raise their voice, and seek counsel). As a result of these processes, a new way of communicating arose as a form of indirect communication between parents and their children, enabled by parents' communication with Kara. In light of the points raised above, parents' communication with their children, in this study, can be broadly defined as a process of collecting information, sharing feelings, providing emotional support, and transferring wisdom. To do any of these, parents sometimes came to Kara to ask for advice about how to communicate certain messages to their children, but at other times, they came to ask Kara to carry out this role for them. For this, they came to Kara and explained their problems, the things they wanted to tell their children, and then asked Kara to communicate these messages to their children. Simply put, parents believed that Kara had training to communicate with children, and could better explain many things than the parents themselves could.

In fact, this happened quite often both during Kara's monthly parent meetings and individual meetings. During monthly parent meetings, Kara communicated messages to parents from their children, and asked what messages parents wanted him to communicate to their children. Parents listed quite a few issues that they wanted to tell their children. Conversing with a couple of parents after one of these meetings, I was told that their "children respected Kara more than [them]" (their parents) and that the children knew that they could "disobe*y*" their parents and

still get away with it. Yet, as parents reported, Kara had greater authority over students. Parents reported that Kara liked the students and that they did not want to disappoint him. Therefore, it was convenient for parents to build on Kara's authority and ability to convince students when they wanted to communicate important messages to their children.

Support

Another form of parental engagement that was mentioned in this study was parental support. Support in this case can be defined as the parents' efforts to provide their children with various basic material needs, emotional and academic support. Parents supported their children so that they could continue their schooling and better focus on their test preparations. Below, I will discuss parents' most prevalent efforts in support of their children.

Basic Support. The parents believed that meeting their children's essential needs, such as providing food, shelter, clothing, and other basic material necessities, is a form of parental engagement. When they were asked what they do to support their children's education, most of them stated that everything they do in their lives is for their children. Parents often mentioned the difficulties they shouldered in life so that their children could go to school with their books, notebooks, and other fundamental materials in their backpacks. Some mothers talked about how they labored in their homes (cleaning, cooking, etc.) so that their children could focus on academics. An example would be, for instance, making sure that the children have breakfast before they take off for the school and can find food when they return home. An elementary school dropout mother stated, "I wake up early and try to make sure they [her children] have breakfast. [Usually] One eats well, the other eats little and they all take off [for the school] … I couldn't go to school, but I want to see my children in good places." Several parents, especially fathers, emphasized how hard they work to meet their families' needs in order for the children to continue

their education. Overall, parents in this case attributed all sorts of parenting responsibilities as their engagement and believed that these efforts were all crucial activities through which they supported their children's education.

Emotional Support. Emotionally and psychologically supporting their children and making sure that their children feel loved and accepted appeared as another form of parental engagement activity. When parents were describing parental engagement, they also talked about being a friend to their children and loving their children. One mother, for instance, stated, "She knows how much I love her and [that I] will be there for her… We are like friends more than mother and daughter… She can talk to me and she can tell me her secrets. We are very close." Another mother, who had broken up with her husband and married a different man, explained when she was asked about her engagement, "In fact, her father can't spend much time with her, he can't ask her about her day, but she knows her father loves her and will be with her when needs him." The same mother especially emphasized being a friend to her children, spending time together, and the division of labor she shared with her (new) husband.

> … I, for example, go to my daughter's room and spend time with her. Also, I spend time with my son, but he is a little different. He spends more time with my [new] husband. They share a lot of things together: watch football, talk about cars, and so on. For my daughter and husband, they have an accepting, but more formal relationship. I mean it is not loose. She knows he is there [for her], and he knows she is there [for him]. I believe that's how it supposed to be.

Most of what I discuss here as different parental engagement activities are closely entwined with one another, and it is difficult to differentiate and separate them as distinct practices. Communication in particular was very much integrated in most of the other practices. More specifically, I discussed above how parents communicated with their children to minimize their stress, particularly testing-related stress. Supporting their children morally and emotionally, parents mentioned communication as an important tool to provide this support, but supporting

children emotionally was not limited to communication. Being their friends, trying to understand them and being there when the children needed them was also important. For instance, supporting their children in school activities (for example, attending school events, especially when their children were performing) was another way parents showed their emotional support. Kara mentioned that 8-E parents highly valued these kinds of opportunities, and they eagerly participated to support their children. In fact, Kara believed that organizing these kinds of student-led events is an effective way to attract parents to the school.

> Well, I am going to give you a very tangible example. Parents become very happy when you [as a teacher] organize a social event about their children and contact parents through this event. For example, if you cast a role for their children to perform in a poetry show, and invite parents to this show, that creates a very powerful message.

Through their participation in these events, parents were able to show their children that they were not alone. They assured their children that they deeply valued them, and they were ready to stand by them and support them by any means. The focus of this parental engagement was not necessarily on testing or schooling. Parents often supported their children emotionally only because they cared about their children's well-being.

Academic Support. Academic support emerged as another form of parental engagement, and two forms of practices were attributed as parents' efforts to support with their children's education in this regard. The first type of academic support was about parents' direct involvement with their children's instruction at home by helping them with their assignments, especially when the children felt stuck and had questions about their class materials. Beyond providing their children with basic materials and emotional support, parents also wanted to help their children with their school work and engage academically.

This engagement type was considered an important parental engagement role by the parents, but unfortunately, it still did not occur often. This was because, despite their best intentions, most of the parents felt that they were insufficient or lacking when directly engaging with academic matters and supporting their children with their school work. For instance, one mother expressed her frustration (due to her lack of academic skills) when she stated, "I can be no help to my child with his school work. I can't really support him and do much for him in regard to his classes, because I don't understand his school work." To bridge her academic disadvantage, an illiterate mother of six children, relied on her high school graduate husband and older children to monitor and support younger children's academics. Taking care of six children, she stated, "I can only cope with cooking, cleaning, and other house work." Believing in the value of academically supporting her children, she was able to leverage her resources (in this case her husband and older children) for her lack of education.

For Kara, he actually did not expect parents to provide this kind of academic support, but he asked parents to help with their children's academics in an indirect way. Focusing on students' test preparation, Kara first wanted to make sure that his students had quiet, peaceful study spaces at home with a desk and chair. When he visited the parents at their homes as part of the teacher-parent collaboration, this was one of the issues that Kara highlighted. He often told the parents that turning off the TV and giving their children some quiet time is the least they could offer to support their academics. Parents also highly valued this as an important part of their roles in their children's education. Almost all parents mentioned turning off the TV and having quiet hours in the evenings. During these quiet hours, some parents stated that they would read the Quran,[42] or prayer books while their children studied as a way to motivate them. When emphasizing the importance of her

[42] The central religious book/text in Islam as a religion. It is written in Arabic. Although they do not always understand the meaning, most Turkish people are able to read it, as it is a highly valued practice in Islam.

support, one mother stated: “If I don’t support them, how could they [her children] keep going [studying]. They would just give up [studying] and start doing something else [such as] watching the TV, [spending time on the] Internet, or something else.”

Besides creating protected time and space, parents were also engaged in overseeing their children at home, as they were supposed to communicate this information with Kara. Kara indeed wanted the parents to help him oversee students’ studies at home. “Well” he said,

> ...what I actually expect of parents is… Mm… First [parent] behavior I want to see is this. Observing our student as a pilot camera, [second] contact me when something is going wrong, and [third] act in coordination with me. Neither an unlimited freedom, nor an extreme control. I want a balanced [parent] approach, which can only be possible when parents consult and work with teachers.

Test preparation is a long marathon that lasts almost a whole school year. Along the way, Kara knew that students would get distracted from time to time. When this happened, he wanted to know it immediately, so that he could help these students get back on track. In this scenario, parents were only supposed to oversee how students were following this program without intervening themselves and communicate with Kara regularly, especially when there was a problem, and work in coordination with Kara to address any issues. During the solution process, teacher-parent cooperation and conformity was seen as critical.

Kara asked parents to oversee their children at home without intervening and pressuring children to study. In contrast, he wanted his students to accept this as their own responsibility. He specifically emphasized:

> It is not like parents should ask students why they don’t study. I even want parents to leave the stage on these matters [Don’t warn children!]. I tell them, “Don’t order around your children and keep saying “Study! Focus! Work on your test!” but just share that picture with me. [And tell me,] “Mr. Kara, she/he is following her/his program.” Plus, [ask them] how many questions they solve, how many mistakes they make, and discuss with them why they make these mistakes. That’s all [I want from them].

As can be seen from this excerpt, Kara really underlined parents' roles for observing students at home and sharing these results with him (teachers). After creating individual study programs for each student, parents were expected to act as "Kara's eyes" at home.

Participation

Another sub-theme that resonated with "teacher-parent collaboration" was parents' presence in the school and participation in the events and programs Kara organized for them. In this case, Kara thought that it was his responsibility as the classroom teacher to create an environment in which his students' parents would feel comfortable participating, could find opportunities to build their capacities, and could contribute to their children's education. On the other hand, it was the parents' duty to come to the school and visit Kara (teachers) and give him the opportunity to support their skill development. To achieve this vision and cultivate the parents' maximum support, Kara organized various events and social activities. These events and activities were also highly valued by the parents and increased their visibility in the school, creating a feeling that the school did not belong to only students and teachers, but also to the parents. Below, I will examine three types of activities in which Kara's parents were engaged, as a part of their teacher-parent collaboration.

Participation in Self-Development Programs. Parents' participation in parent meetings, seminars, conferences and other similar programs was valued as a critical parental engagement activity. Kara believed that all parents deeply cared about their children, but parents were not aware of the fact that their contribution was necessary and important for their children's education. He also believed that his students' parents had never been exposed to proper parental engagement practices in their lives. For these reasons, increasing the parents' awareness and building their capacity was extremely important in boosting their support.

For Kara, parental engagement was a professional activity for which even teachers needed to be trained. Although he wanted parents to be passionate about their children's education, he did not really want parents to act on their own, trying to support their children's education. In fact, he believed that parental engagement without providing parents with necessary training might result in negative consequences for the students. When Kara was describing parents, who did not attend his capacity building programs, he likened them to "elephants in a glass store." As he further explained, those parents intend to help their children, but unfortunately, they often use harsh discipline because that was how they were raised by their own parents.

Therefore, Kara tried to create a parent-friendly environment where parents would feel comfortable, valued, and find opportunities to build their capacities and contribute to the development of their children. Parents who regularly attended these meetings were satisfied after attending to them, and they highly appreciated Kara's efforts in this regard. Parents citing these meetings and events valued them, for they provided parents with opportunities to build their capacities, raise their voices, share their problems and concerns, and ask questions of Kara. However, he provided those opportunities to only those who chose to or were able to come to these events. He stated,

> … I can win over these parents [who are currently showing no sign of parental engagement]. Yet, these parents must give me that opportunity first and say, "Dear Kara. Here I am. I have come to the school. Change me now". I claim that I will change these parents, but I can't do anything to those who won't give me this chance.

On another occasion, Kara also stated, "Although I want to reach all of my parents, this is just not possible, because they don't come". As he uttered these words, he was really confident that he could change parents, increase their awareness, and establish collaborative teacher-parent relationships on this condition: participation.

Participation in Social and Extracurricular Activities. The 8-E parents also participated in and helped organize several extracurricular activities. For example, during the school year in which this study was conducted, parents participated in and helped organize two classroom picnics (one each semester), one school trip (to a touristic place), one parents' social, one fundraising day (for the school), and several student-led events (science fairs and art shows). Unlike other forms of parental engagement practices discussed here, for these kinds of social activities, Kara usually encouraged parents to take the lead. For example, at the end of one of his final parent meetings, he left the floor to the parents so that they could organize a graduation ceremony for their own classroom, since the school abandoned the practice due to an accident that had happened the previous year. An important caveat about parents' roles in organizing these events, though: despite the parents' leading roles, even social events were usually initiated by Kara, then shared with the parents, and gradually roles were assigned to the parents.

Some of these events were organized specifically for the parents, some to improve relations between parents and teachers, and others were organized to cultivate parents' support for the students and the school. The point is, parents found these social events more attractive for their informal nature and stated that they felt more comfortable in these types of activities. Also, Kara found it effective to reach out to parents, especially through student-led events, where their children performed in a theatrical play and poetry recitation or displayed their artwork and science projects in a school exhibit. Inviting parents to student-led events was seen as helpful for both attracting parents and helping them support their children.

Inviting teachers over. As Kara invited the parents of his students to the school, he also asked them to invite him to their homes. As he reported, "For three years, I have been trying to engage parents by visiting them in their homes." On another occasion, he explained: "As I invite

my parents to the school, I also respond to their invitations and go visit them at their homes. There are parents that I was able to win over by just doing so." At the end of monthly parent meetings, Kara encouraged the parents to have him as their guests and expressed his willingness to visit them at their homes upon their invitation.

By inviting Kara to their homes, parents had a whole new way of engaging with their children's education. These meetings created various opportunities for both parents and Kara. First of all, both Kara and the family members were able to familiarize themselves with each other. At this stage, Kara especially focused on the human resources available in the families. For this reason, Kara stated that he would start with introductions and ask questions to family members: their education level, occupations, time they spent working, and so on. For Kara, this was a process of evaluating the potential help he could acquire from family members in regard to children's test preparation. Yet for parents, it was a chance to get to know their child's teacher and establish trust. Kara's compassion for their child helped Kara win parents' trust and establish relationships with the parents. The parents often echoed Kara's appreciation for these visits. As one parent put it:

> He is really great. I mean, [my] children have been going to schools for such a long time, [but] I have never seen a teacher like Mr. Kara. He even came to our place. He even pays attention to where children live, their rooms, and their psychology. He pays attention to everything [related to his students]. It's beautiful and very touching.

Kara observed students' home environments, asked parents how their children were sticking with their study programs, and counseled parents for creating productive study spaces and helping children stay motivated in their school work. As Kara explained:

> I check students' rooms [or where they study], and look if there is a desk, a table, and other resources; how is the rooms' light, heat and so on. I record any missing basic necessity into my system. Then, I talk to parents about these issues and try to come up with plausible solutions to address these problems. I tell them, "This is not a productive environment for your child's studies". I give parents assignments to work on the solutions.

They also discussed what parents were already doing to encourage their children to study and what else could be done to improve situations. At the end, meetings concluded with listening to parents' concerns, answering family members' questions, and receiving their insights.

The school psychologist also brought this issue up and praised Kara and other teachers who conduct home visits. He explained that conducting home visits is a rare practice for teachers, but it is a powerful tool to support students. He stated that: "A student, who has been visited, seen, and spoken to at his/her home feels special and more valuable. Because the teacher gave her the value and went up to her house, wanted to see and learn about her/his life. It means a lot for the students."

Defining Parental Engagement as Teacher-Parent Collaboration

Teacher-parent collaboration, centering on students' test preparations, appeared to be the ultimate parental engagement practice that Kara intended to achieve with the parents of his students. The parents' communication with teachers (Kara), and parents' participation and inclusion with teacher-initiated events that I have discussed above, can only be considered as a functioning part of teacher-parent collaboration. In other words, collaboration was not a separate practice per se, but an umbrella term to define the functioning mechanism. Therefore, collaboration from a parent-centered perspective can be defined as working together with teacher(s) to help students effectively prepare themselves for the national examination. As I have discussed so far, working together included exchanging information, detecting problems (any obstacle or distraction that disturbed students from studying), "mapping solutions," and acting in cohesion and conformity with Kara (please see Figure X) in their implementations. Kara, who initiated the process in the first place and kept it running, appeared to be the leader in the execution of teacher-parent collaboration. He defined the goals for collaboration and set most of the roles parents were

supposed to play. Yet, he also listened to the parents, paid attention to their concerns, provided them with the "necessary training" and motivated them to fulfill these roles.

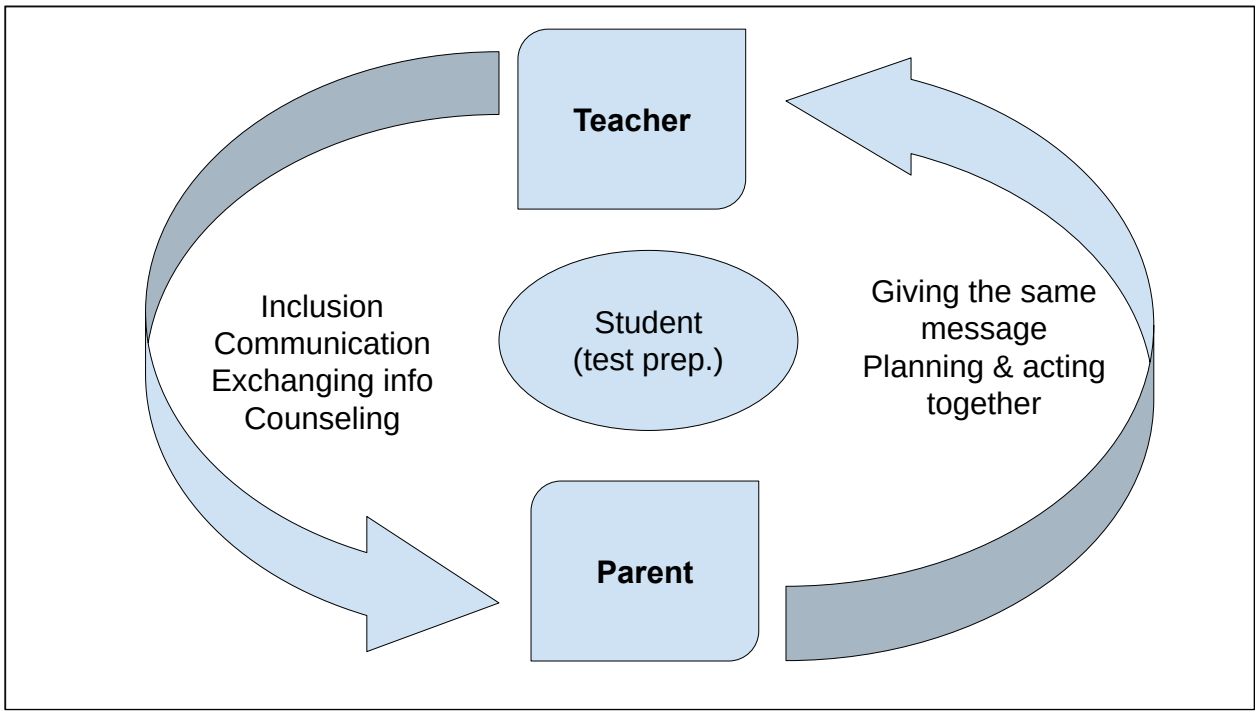

Figure 5: Teacher-Parent Collaboration.

In the next chapter, I will provide a detailed discussion of how collaboration was established in this case, but for now, I will focus on the components of collaboration as a parental engagement activity and try to explain what it looked like in this case. Collaboration, in this context, was the working definition of all the parental engagement activities explained above. Here I will explain three themes, for they emerged as the products of these practices.

Exchanging Information, Detecting Problems. I have already touched upon some of these issues as I was discussing parents' duties toward their children. For instance, these parents defined one of their roles as overseeing their children. After these observations, parents shared this information with Kara and asked him what he had observed. As quoted above, Kara "first, expected the parents to observe their children and take mental notes on how their children spend time at

home, [second] contact him when children get distracted from studying and [third] collaborate with him on developing solutions.

During my observations of teacher-parent interactions, many parents came with problems that were distracting students from studying. For instance, one father came to discuss his son's game addiction that was preventing the student from meeting his weekly study goals. This represents the first stage of their collaboration where the parent informs Kara about an existing obstacle. Although most of these issues were about students' test preparation, there were also times when the discussion was about, or went beyond, mere test preparation talks. For example, a mother came nearly every week to the office hours to talk about her daughter's "problematic friends." The mother was suspicious that her friends had drug addiction issues that her daughter was also starting to adopt.

This first stage of collaboration depended on the communication between parents and Kara. This communication enabled them to detect problems early and take collaborative action. Even when there was no problem and students met their goals, Kara always focused his conversations on encouraging his students to make more competitive goals. He would often ask them what their next goal would be and what they could do to achieve this goal.

Planning Together. Exchanging information and detecting a problem was often followed by planning and setting individual goals for students and parents to improve the situation. Here, parents, student, and Kara were all involved in a contentious negotiation about what needed to be changed, how much change would be enough, and the role distributions. For instance, in the previous example where the parent came complaining about his son's gaming addiction, the student was very upfront about his addiction, he insisted on his need to play, and he specified his reasons for the amount of time needed for his game. At the end, decisions were made, and rules

and goals were set. The student accepted, for that specific semester, to reduce the time he used to spend gaming. The parent also promised to remove the computer from the child's room to the living room, and oversee and observe the student without pressuring him. Another parent (a mother) talked about similar things, explaining that she also went through a similar process:

> … we laid down a lot of rules for him to study. Actually, he is really motivated right now. [He says] "*I am going to study very hard. This is my last year, and I don't want my sister's friends coming home.*" Well, we accepted all of his conditions. We only want him to study. I thank Mr. Kara. We designed his [her son's] room as he [Mr. Kara] asked. The computer is removed [and] I am also trying to support him.

As it can be seen from these examples, students also played a central role in planning and assumed responsibility for their education. Parents and Kara consciously withdrew themselves from the stage and let the students make their own decisions. Instead of dictating to students "appropriate goals," Kara believed that students would be more likely to follow their programs when they set their own goals. Parents believed in Kara and supported him on this as well.

Acting in Conformity and Giving the Same Message. At this stage, parents and Kara constituted a team around each child and put their plans into action. Knowing the plans and the goals, they were better equipped to observe and communicate to students the above discussed objectives: detecting problems, providing moral support, advice, conformity in messages that students received from their parents and Kara. He shared that:

> From students' perspectives, first of all, students experience a dilemma. There is a teacher prototype at the school and a parent prototype at home. These two prototypes talk at cross purposes, contradicting one another. Parents might say "*Your teacher says so, but…*" [When this happens] naturally, students are exposed to two different personalities [at home and school]. When does this duality end? It ends when teacher and parents are on the same page, consistently giving the same messages. Then, students become convinced and they understand that what needs to be done needs to be done. The point at which student-mine melts is the point parent and teachers collaborate.

He also added, "For me, parental engagement is [a] consultation process: exchanging data, combining two anecdotes, reaching a synthesis, and making a road map [together]. That's exactly my understanding of what parental engagement is. When we do this, things start improving [for students]."

Parents observed their children, tried to encourage them, asked them questions about their studies and how many questions they solved daily/weekly. As they were engaging in these processes, children were hearing the same messages, whether they were in the school or at their home, so that they could comprehend the importance of the preparation for the test. To help parents on these tasks, Kara organized seminars to support them in this undertaking, made himself available to them 24/7 by phone, gave them his class schedules, held weekly office hours, organized monthly parent meetings, and even visited them in their homes. All focusing on students' progress toward their testing goals, together, Kara and the parents talked about increasing students' motivation, removing obstacles from students' paths, and creating more productive spaces for them to study. This all being said, now I will shift the focus on Kara's efforts to establish this collaborative process, and try to explain what he did to achieve and sustain this process.

Theme II: Strategies for Building Teacher-Parent Collaboration

The previous section was devoted to the definition of parental engagement as parents' efforts to support their children's education. Throughout the previous chapter, I looked at the case from a parent-centred perspective, and I tried to understand what roles they played and/or encouraged, or were allowed to play, in supporting their children's education. Now in this chapter, I shift the discussion to teachers and focus upon Kara, the leader who orchestrated all that we have discussed so far. Kara, as the counsel/advisory teacher for 8-E, was the person who crafted these practices from scratch. Kara is an integral part, as prior to his work with this classroom and

counseling, parents had different understandings of their roles in terms of their children's education, and they were not engaged in these practices.

Kara did not want parents to try to engage on their own as he believed this could have an adverse effect on the students. He also did not want parents to be overtly strict and controlling, thus taking all responsibility from the student. As he explained: "[For parental engagement,] I want a balanced approach, which can only be possible when parents consult and work with teachers." Therefore, the main objective of Kara's strategies was reaching a state where parents would collaborate with him in trying to prepare his students for the national exam. Throughout this section, I will discuss the key elements of his strategies to reach this state. As it can be seen in Figure X, there were five key elements in Kara's strategies to create effective teacher-parent collaborations: building a positive teacher image, increasing parents' awareness, establishing effective communication, including parents in school events, and building parents' capacities.

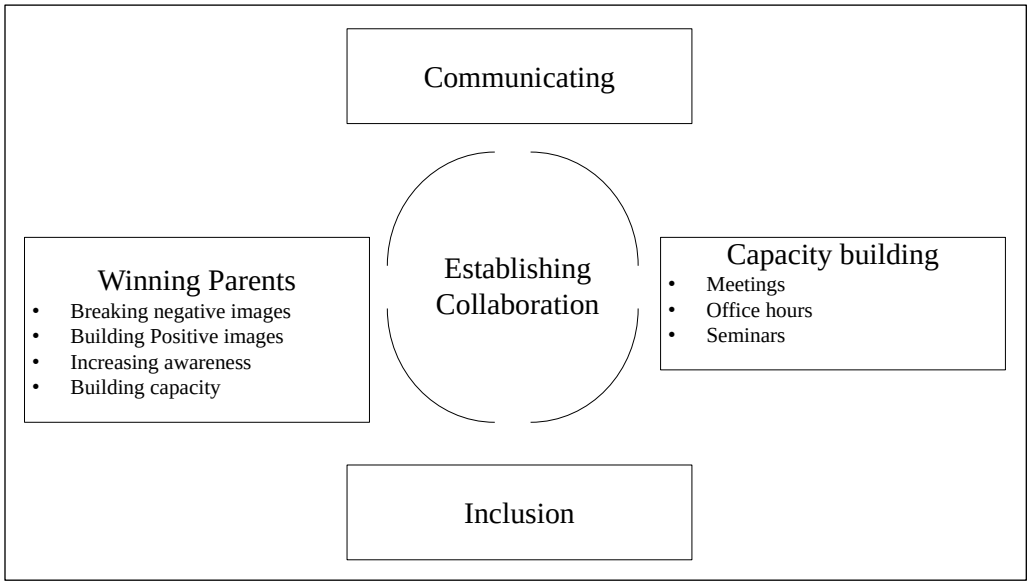

Figure 6: Teacher-Parent Collaboration.

Breaking Down Negative Images of Schools and Teachers and Building Positive Images

The participants' experiences suggest that the mainstream Turkish culture views schools as places for professionals; teachers t instruct students, and administrators to manage schools. As parents suggested, they are often pushed to the periphery, and are usually not permitted to participate in the education system. In this scenario, their roles are limited, as they are generally only invited to the school campus only to take responsibility when their child causes a problem, or to support schools when schools need more donations. The title of the first theme, "Breaking down negative images," refers especially to Kara's comments, as he stated that by the time their children reach middle school, parents in Turkey have already developed a negative conception of teachers and schools. So breaking down these preconceptions must come first if teachers ever want to win parents over and improve their engagement with their child's education. Kara reported, "First of all, I want to break down parents' prejudices. I would like to meet with their actual, authentic personalities. In this sense, I really want to break down the images that pop up in parents' minds [when they think of schools and teachers]." As Kara further explained, these images are negative images of teachers and schools, due to the way schools handle parents. Below, I will discuss both the reasons that are given for these preconceptions, and the strategies that Kara employed to break down these negative perceptions, or "*prejudices,*" as Kara stated.

The Source/Origins/Causes of Negative Preconceptions. Several reasons were pointed out as the cause of parents' negative preconceptions in this case: domination of monetary discussions, focusing parental engagement on problems, consistently exposing parents to harsh treatment in schools, and restricting parents' roles to limited involvement. The parents and Kara highlighted that parents were only called to school to ask for donations and to discuss problems in which their children were involved. And when they came to school, they were not treated

respectfully. As a result of parents' exposure to such experiences, they developed negative images in their minds of schools and educators.

After elaborating on the poor conditions and problems parents face, and sympathizing with them, the school counselor Mr. Boz shared the following excerpt that well summarizes this issue:

> Well, considering the problems our parents are facing, what do we expect of them? Now, if you ask this question to administrators, "Parents just need to make enough donations. That's all…" they would say, but then if you ask it to a teacher, "Parents need to discipline their children and prevent them from disturbing [my] instruction…" they would say. This is how it is. These are the main concerns we [educators] have when we expect parents to engage.

Both Kara and parents seriously criticized these issues and found them problematic for school/teacher-parent/family collaborations. Criticizing administrators' thirst for donations, one parent shared, "…we [as parents] don't want this in schools. Well, don't call parents to the school only for donations. I mean this is how it is in general… all schools… as far as I am concerned." Similarly, Kara highlighted:

> When we look at the issue from parents' perspectives -what are their benefits and losses when they visit schools? - they have serious concerns. Why? For about 80 years, throughout the history of the [Turkish] Republic, a perception of schools has formed. [Throughout this history] we [schools] invited parents in once a year and only asked them to donate to the school and send them back. Parents experience this with their first child, second child, and now with the third child, I am asking them to come to the school. [Asking me] What do you think that parents would think? [They think] that we are going to ask for money again. Education is equal to rent-seeking; education is equal to money. That is exactly what we don't want to have.

Besides donation requests, parents were often called in when their child was involved in a disciplinary problem. Kara found teachers' problem-centered approaches problematic for parents' relationships with schools and shared:

> "Parental engagement is very important!" every teacher will say, but what do they do about it. They just expect parents to take care of their children when the children

> cause a problem in their classrooms. Therefore, they ask parents to come only when students disturb their instruction, and blame parents for these problems.[43]

Similarly, Mr. Boz (the school counselor) further explained:

> As I said before, we only call them when there is a problem. As a result, parents lose their belief that they could contribute to [their children's] education. [Thus,] when they are invited to the school, they start thinking, "Probably there is a problem that they will tell me" ... You would have a greater impact if you call parents before any problem occurs, when there is no problem. Much greater impact!

These excerpts suggest that constantly exposing parents to these limited roles (disciplining their children and financially supporting schools) and focusing on problems instead of solutions cause parents to develop the negative conceptions of teachers and schools to which Kara referred.

Another reason that one can attribute to the cause of parents' negative conception of teachers and schools was the way that parents were treated in schools. Parents especially complained about the negative and accusatory language teachers used toward parents. Most of the parents who I interviewed in this study argued that they hardly have access to schools (in Turkey) and when they do have access, they are not treated with respect, but are instead ignored, scolded, and excluded. For instance, one mother, after complimenting Kara for he treats her, shared one of her experiences with the previous counselor/advisory teacher of 8-E[44] and stated:

> I mean, one day I came here [to the school] due to a problem my child caused. I mean I don't send my child here to cause problems. [At this point, she did not want me to think badly about her son and wanted to make clarifications] Please don't take me wrong. He is not a bad child, but as any other child does, he caused some small problems. When I came to the classroom door, you should have seen the way he [the previous teacher] acted with all his hands and gestures. It was as if I sent my child to misbehave, cause problems, and drive his teacher crazy. I was disgraced and ashamed every time. As a woman, I couldn't even respond, but had to listen to all of these comments and go home. Who could I talk to about these things anyway?

[43] This is not from an interview. Kara mentioned this in a casual conversation that we were holding during one of my school visits.

[44] When it was 7-E.

For these reasons (focusing parental engagement on problems, consistently exposing parents to harsh treatments in schools, and restricting their roles to limited practices), parents think poorly of teachers and schools. Kara suggested that without changing these "negative mental pictures," it would be unreasonable to expect parents to trust and develop relationships with educators. Now, I will focus on the strategies that Kara employed to change parents' negative perceptions of teachers and schools and gain their trust.

Strategies to Break Down Negative Images. As parents' negative images of schools and educators appeared to have disturbing effects on likely school-parent relationships, this case has suggested four main strategies as the solution to address these negative images: treating parents with respect, using a positive language and focusing on solutions, avoiding monetary discussions and prioritizing children, and finally showing altruistic behaviors. After elaborating on parents' negative images, Kara pointed out his strategies when he said:

> … this prejudice builds a barrier before education. It negatively affects our communication with parents and students. For this reason, I try to be sincere, student-centered, and counseling-centered as much as possible in my parent meetings. Throughout my 25-year career, I have observed that when parents start feeling like we truly value their children, they start showing us their real personalities and finally behave normally, because they say, "This teacher doesn't expect anything, he loves my child as his own. I can trust him". When parents receive this message, they start displaying their authentic personalities. It is at this point that we can start the type of communication and interaction we want.

Treating parents with respect. As briefly mentioned above, this case suggests that the harsh treatment towards parents causes them to construct negative images of teachers and schools, which in turn creates a barrier, preventing parents from coming to school and communicating with their children's teachers. After positively commenting on the Ataturk Middle school's welcoming/accepting culture toward parents, one father reported: "Yet this is not how the situation is in other places [schools]. In the other school [his other child's school], however they treat a

student, they treat parents in the same manner: based on a culture of scolding/rebuke." The parents often praised Kara and Ataturk Middle school in this regard. For instance, one mother stated: "This is the first time that a teacher treats me this warm/nice and values my child. I really thank Kara for this." Throughout my observations, it was also clear to me that Kara paid utmost respect not only to the parents, but also to his students as well. He always smiled at them, made jokes, and listened to what his students and their parents had to say. As one mother shared while complimenting Kara's respectful treatment, said: "I have known Kara for ten years. My elder child was also his student. Hmm, I mean, it is really important the way teachers treat you." The same mother reported that Kara was an "exceptional teacher" for how he treated parents.

This case suggests that parents are often looked down upon in schools and are not paid respect. This was especially true when parents wanted to engage beyond their defined roles and intervene in areas of administration and instruction. To change parents' negative images, the first thing that educators need to do is to change their attitudes toward parents. In fact, Kara believed that this is the result of teacher education and professional development systems that fail to educate teachers on matters of parental engagement. Kara reported that teachers receive no training regarding parental engagement, and they are not capable of communicating with parents.

Using a positive language and focusing on solutions. Again, as discussed above, the parents did not like it when teachers focused solely on problems and used negative language, often holding parents responsible for the problems. On the other hand, when I was observing Kara's meetings with the parents (both individual and group meetings), it was clear that they followed a solution-centered approach, which helped parents feel like they were supporting their children instead of punishing them for what they had done (such as disturbing school order or instruction). While engaging parents, Kara was passionately trying to help his students. This was clearly stated

when one of the mothers said: "He is an idealist teacher. I mean, he is not doing it for the money, but he makes you feel that he is struggling for the people, [his] students. For other teachers, it feels like they are doing it for money." In fact, Kara was conscious and cognizant about how he interacted with the parents. Emphasizing his solution-centered approach, he stated:

> … I never establish a negative dialogue; I never complain to a parent about her/his student [child], never! I only provide guidance. I mean, I say like, "It might be helpful if she/he [student] do this," but I don't say "this is bad [about her/his child]". Because child's… I believe it is the most detrimental factor hindering the [teacher-parent] communication.

On another occasion, Kara also suggested that parents, when they believe they will learn some useful information or skills when they visit the school, see it as a source of happiness. He continued: "Because you don't invite them to complain about their child; you don't call her/him in for a disciplinary issue, but you invite them in order to educate parents." Here, Kara also highlights the importance of building parents' capacities and suggests that parents will like teachers and schools better when they learn from them, but I will discuss this issue in the following sections in more detail.

Avoiding monetary talks and prioritizing children. As explained above, the parents, Kara, and the school counselor, all suggested that monetary discussions create and reinforce a negative tension between parents and schools, and consequently between parents and teachers. Especially in Kara's interviews, avoiding monetary issues in his dialogues with parents was one of the most highlighted issues. I have already provided excerpts from him in this regard, but here is another example where he suggested that teachers need to focus on students, while avoiding financial matters:

> Now, this is an irritating phrase, "Parents are customers," and I vigorously refuse to use it, because we [educators] cannot use a word about providing customer satisfaction, neither in private nor in public schools. Because "education" and "money" are like two chemicals that lose their characteristics when put together.

> We especially need to separate these two. After all, once you satisfy a parent's child in terms of guidance and education, she/he [parent] will already be happy. Here, looking at the issue from a customer satisfaction perspective would only mean degrading education.

Supporting Kara's thesis, parents also reported that they appreciate Kara's attention to their children. Parents several times stressed Kara's love and compassion for their children. For instance, one father stated:

> There is this about Mr. Kara. Really.. Hmm. His care, attention for the children, is very good. This is really good. My children have been going to schools for such a long time. I have never seen a teacher like Kara. He even came to our homes. He examines as far as children's rooms, their psychology; pays attention to everything [related with children]. This is a very nice thing.

When Kara asked parents to do something, or come to the school, they knew that it would be something benefitting their children. This can be better understood if we consider the cases where parents criticized teachers for only asking parents' support to ensure the discipline in their classrooms.

***Showing altruistic behaviors*.** Parent interviews also suggested that the parents were impressed Kara's altruistic, self-sacrificing behavior, as he tried to help his students and their parents. The parents often mentioned how Kara took from his own free time and spent it for his students and the parents.

> Let me give you this example. He is a teacher, but still has his own private life. When he comes here [to the school], he has a certain schedule, and he can just complete it and leave. Then he can spend his time with his family. I mean, this is not a private school [he is not paid for the extra work], he is just a government employee/public servant [he only receives a fixed salary]. After finishing his work hours, he can just go home, lay down, and rest. Instead of doing this, if he is actually spending this time with us, even coming to our homes, then this is about compassion and caring.

Other parents highlighted the activities, seminars, and projects he organized for them, and others emphasized how he made himself available 7/24. Seeing Kara's sacrifice, combined with the other

strategies I have discussed so far, the parents distinguished Kara from the negative teacher images they had constructed in their minds before. Consequently, all of these strategies helped Kara gain the parents' trust and affection. Parents felt valued and respected with Kara and in turn stopped judging him based on their previous perceptions of teachers.

> Let me tell you this. You would go to where you are loved, right? This is human nature: you would go where you are valued, paid attention to… because he doesn't do it for money.

Increasing Parents' Awareness and Capacity Building

Kara argued that all teachers complain about lack of parent interest in and engagement with their children's education, but little effort is made to promote change. As mentioned earlier in this chapter (when discussing Kara's attributes), Kara genuinely believed that parents love their children unconditionally, and this love will make them take any necessary action for the good of their children. Building on this belief, Kara believed that teachers need to increase parents' awareness, as their engagement is vital for their children. According to Kara, it is also teachers' responsibility to build parents' capacities, so that they can constructively support their children.

Another barrier that was addressed to improve parental engagement in this case was parents' lack of awareness of their roles as parents, and the importance of these roles for their children's achievement. Kara argued that parents in his school usually come without any previous experience or an encounter with parental engagement. He argued that parents had received neither formal training, nor the chance to observe their own parents engaging with their education when they were students themselves. In fact, some of AMS parents did not have any formal education at all. Thus, Kara stated that today we expect parents to perform a practice with which they have no previous familiarity, nor knowledge of the concept. He further argued that this lack of awareness is one of the main reasons for parents' lack of interest in their children's education.

Otherwise, he was fully convinced that parents value their children more than anything, thus they are ready to do anything for them, including the activities teachers might ask of them in support of their children's education.

> In such low SES communities, the main reason for parents' lack of interest in their children's education is their lack of training and experience [with the concept]. I mean, they do not receive a training, and they haven't seen a role model in their own parents. How are they supposed to model this behavior on their own?

He continued to say that if teachers can familiarize the parents with the concept and convince them that their engagement is necessary and important for their children's success, then "their perspectives will definitely change, and teachers will win over these parents."

This case also suggests that besides increasing parents' awareness, educators also need to provide parents with self-development opportunities and try to build their capacities. Instead of loading parents with standard information, Kara stated that parents are more likely to attend events that help them build their capacities, learn new information, and develop in a way that they can better address their children' problems. He explained, "When we look at the issue from the parents' perspectives - what are their benefits and losses when they visit schools? - they have serious concerns." He thought that, in the current situation, parents' visits were not benefitting them, because parents were not learning anything new, but rather hearing teachers' complaints about their children and administrators' concerns about school finance.

At this point, Kara thought that it was the teachers' responsibility to provide parents with adequate educational opportunities so that they can improve themselves to become active participants in their children's education. He also believed that without properly educating parents, what they practice as parental engagement might cause even greater problems. He defined this situation as "elephants in a glass store". This suggests that parents without teachers' counseling and guidance are likely to utilize some unhelpful parental engagement practices and possibly

punish their children harshly, subjecting them emotional torture, scolding, and even beating them up.

Therefore, capacity building was a key asset in Kara's case, and he addressed this task very diligently. He tried to take advantage of every opportunity to teach the parents some practical and useful information at every encounter they had. He stated:

> Whenever parents come, I absolutely give them a short seminar about family communication, children, education [system], or testing [system]. This way, when parents go to their homes and ask themselves, "What have I learned in the school today?" they can recall a couple of good things. I mean, people think based on their perceptions. I need to create a perception. This is the first step.

Kara believed that parents want to see some benefit in their visits to the school, and they are bored receiving standard information. Therefore, he squeezed a short educative session into every parent meeting, and tried to give some useful information every time parents visited the school. I will talk more about this while analyzing parent meetings and home visits.

After addressing the negative images and prejudices that parents have and creating the necessary parent development programs, attending these programs rested on parents' shoulders in Kara's classroom, because Kara did not spare much effort to reach out parents who refused to come to the school. As Kara put it, "... these parents must give me that opportunity first and say, 'Dear Kara. Here I am. I have come to school. Change me now.' I claim that I will change these parents, but I can't do anything for those who don't give me this chance."

Communication and Inclusion

In the previous chapter, when I was defining parental engagement, I discussed teacher-parent communication as a key parental engagement practice that parents performed in Kara's classroom. Now, I am going to examine this concept from Kara's perspective: how he promoted communication and used it to nurture other forms of parental engagement practices. The

communication Kara established with the parents can be distinguished by three main characteristics: language used, content of the communication, and communication channels utilized.

Language. First of all, Kara was very nice to the parents and treated them with respect. Regardless of their social status, he always welcomed them kindly and talked to them in a way that they could understand. For example, when the parent was illiterate, he adjusted his tone of speech and avoided academic terms so that the parent would not have difficulty understanding his words. Parents really appreciated and often acknowledged during the interviews the ways Kara talked to them, and they complained about the ways other teachers communicated with them.

To be frank, Kara could be seen as a gifted personality in regard to using language. Regarding his literacy major and distinguished educational level, his speech was very eloquent, poetic, and flawless. He argued that teachers in Turkish school are not receiving enough training in communication. He believed that first, teachers need to be properly educated for their communication skills and then, they should be able to help their parents improve their communication skills with their children.

Content/Focus of Communication. Kara described his communication as student-centered. For him, prioritizing students and their problems was an effective method for attracting parents' attention. As the school counselor described, teachers and administrators usually focused on their own problems in their communications with parents. Thus, teachers would usually focus on students who distracted from their instruction and would want to find solutions to problems interrupting their instruction. Meanwhile, administrators would typically prefer to talk about students who disturbed school discipline, as well as monetary issues, and would want to find

solution to these issues. In both of these scenarios, students are described as the problem, or the source of the problem, and their parents are humiliated in these conversations. Yet, Kara diligently avoided discussion of money and did not wait for a problem to occur before inviting the parents. Instead, he focused on individual students and strove to provide the parents with useful information about their child's progress, focusing on solutions for moving students forward. Also, he always spared some time for parents' agendas and usually concluded with a short educative session for parents. Since he relied on the belief that children are the most precious things to parents, he thought every parent would be willing to engage in these types of conversations and contribute to their child's progress.

Multiple Channels and Time Devoted for Communication. Kara devoted an enormous amount of time for communicating with parents. Compared to other teachers, this characteristic was viewed favorably by the parents and helped him gain their trust and respect. When describing Kara, one father stated: "After finishing his work hours [in the school], he can just go home, lay down and rest. Instead of doing this, if he is actually spending this time with us, even coming to our homes, then this is about compassion and caring."

It was mandatory that teachers organize one parent meeting a semester for their counseling classrooms, but Kara organized one parent meeting each month and communicated with the parents about their children's progress. Besides this, he also held weekly office hours every Thursday between 1pm-3pm[45], had a lot of parents dropping by the school, visited parents at their homes, and kept himself available 24/7 by phone. Students also helped maintain teacher-parent communication by carrying messages back and forth between him and their parents. Kara actively used a WhatsApp group with his students, which helped his classroom stay connected all the time.

[45] This was when Kara's schedule was available.

For Kara, having parents in the school was very important for achieving effective teacher-parent communication and collaboration. Therefore, he tried different ways to attract them to the school. Besides monthly parent meetings and weekly office hours, social gatherings and student-led events were another way for reaching out to the parents in Kara's classroom. The parents found these non-formal events tempting since they felt more comfortable attending them. Kara particularly highlighted the effectiveness of student-led events in attracting parents to the school. He explained that:

> Well, I am going to give you a very tangible example. Parents become very happy when you [as a teacher] organize a social event about their children and contact parents through this event. For example, if you cast a role for their children to perform in a poetry show, and invite parents to this show, that creates a very powerful communication.

Other Issues that Matter

School Administration. This study shows that school administration plays a critical role in promoting parental engagement and implementing effective parental engagement programs. Mr. Kara believed that it is teachers' responsibility to engage their parents, but it is impossible for individual teachers to achieve this without school administrators' permission and support. Reviewing their experiences in other schools, parents in this study argued that they had been treated badly in schools. Particularly, school administrators perceived the parents as troublemakers and did not welcome them in their children's schools. Administrators saw their job as a highly professional matter that should go beyond parents' reach. Although they described this school as exceptional, I observed many parents being ignored and sometimes treated negatively, even in Mr. Kara's school. For example, when I was at the school for a parent interview, I witnessed one of the school assistant principals yelling at a parent, because he wanted him to ask the school cleaning staff to clean the student restrooms. After the incident, when the assistant principal was explaining

his reasons, he stated that he got mad because he thought parents have no right to tell them what he is supposed to do. They need to keep their nose out of school matters and keep their concern only for their own children. Despite these problems, both Kara and the parents described this school administration as exceptionally permissive and encouraging for the parental engagement activities Mr. Kara organized in his classroom.

"Stand out of my sunlight". When asked about what he expects of school administrators, Kara stated:

> What I, first, expect of school administration is to stay out of the way when idealist people are trying to realize their ideals. … [When] you have a dream and others don't, they can put a wall between you and your dreams in this country. We don't have this problem in this school.

Kara did not have any difficulty in regard to organizing events in the school, inviting the parents, and hosting them in the school. In fact, the parents increased the parent visibility in the school and sometimes wanted to talk to school administrators as well when they came to meet with Kara. Despite these factors, Mr. Kara stated that he did not face any difficulty getting permission for any of the events he organized in or out of the school. In another interview, Kara also stated:

> The school administration may not take the same perspective as teachers. I respect this, because a school administration's priority is meeting the school's needs. Since their focus is on the needs of the school, naturally they take a financial approach: "How can I collect donations? How can I meet the needs of the school? etc." Because of this [monetary] focus, school-parent relations aren't as good as we would want them to be. However, the school administration [in this school] is not making it difficult for teachers. … [at least our] school administration has no intention of sabotaging, restraining, or criticizing my efforts, but teachers need to be self-motivated and take the initiative.

Encouragement and Support. In this case, school administrators may have not assumed much of a direct role in engaging parents, but particularly the school principal, besides being permissive, was encouraging and supportive of his teachers in regard to engaging their parents. As Kara put it, "In fact, I feel administrators' encouragement in my efforts. They praise my efforts [to

engage parents] and present me as an example to other teachers". He further explained that this recognition and acknowledgement was assuring for him and gave him justification as he was doing something different from the other teachers.

As much Kara valued administrator support and consolation, he did not believe that it was enough to create a wider movement in the school. He believed that it would require more direct engagement from the school administrators to create such school-wide trend for engaging parents. This was clear when Kara articulated:

> I mean, first of all, we have this problem. I do this [make an effort to engage parents], but it is unlikely that you can find another example here. One blossom cannot bring spring. I do it because I like to do it, I do it because I am an idealistic person, or simply I do because I enjoyed doing it as a private school teachers and want to continue. However, if you ask this to another teacher, she/he doesn't do it [make effort to engage parents].

Supporting this, the school counselor also stated that there is no reason for teachers to bother themselves with parents and indulge in parental engagement activities. Teachers already have busy schedules, and policies in regard to parental engagement are only recommended, not compulsory. Although administrators' encouragement and support was a source of motivation for Kara, it was not enough for other teachers to undertake the necessary initiatives to engage their parents.

Mobilizing All the Resources and Getting Support from Others. In different activities, Mr. Kara received help from different people in the school. Included among these people, especially, was one of other Turkish literacy teachers, one of the science teachers, and the school counselor. In particular, the school counselor, Mr. Boz, appeared to be a key person helping Kara and supporting him in almost all the large scale parental engagement programs he organized. Mr. Boz not only helped Kara with organizing seminars, he also, based on his expertise, gave presentations in these seminars. He was also invited to home visits, and Kara

always consulted him when dealing with students' and parents' problems. For example, there was a mother who visited Kara in his office hours a couple of times during this study. Unfortunately, the mother did not consent to allow me to observe her case, but Kara always attended her meetings with the school counselor.

Kara's Personality and Skill Sets. Kara stated that teachers in Turkey are not properly prepared for engaging their parents, either in the college, or after graduation. The school counselor, Mr. Boz, also stated that the school district provides various professional development opportunities, but none of these includes parental engagement training. According to Kara, first we need to educate our teachers if we want them to be ready for such an undertaking. We need to both improve their skill sets in this regard and impart a culture of parental engagement. Kara argued that he received this culture and improved his skills during his private school experience and kept building on this experience. He described that school as a counseling-centered private school where engaging parents was embedded in the schools' culture. However, both Kara and the parents believed that such a school-wide move requires a top-down enforcement through policy change.

Discussion of the Findings

This section is devoted to the discussion of the findings vis-à-vis the first research question that inquiries about the ways parental engagement was defined in Kara's case. The definition explored focuses on parents' roles in support of their children's education. As discussed in the findings chapter, parental engagement was fundamentally identified as collaborating with Kara (or teachers) to support their students' test preparation. Kara employed several strategies to foster this collaboration. In this section, I will discuss several issues related to specific findings and focus on their various implications.

Defining Teacher-Parent Collaboration (Question I)

The findings revealed that parental engagement, in Kara's classroom, was defined as a teacher-parent collaboration centering on students' test preparation processes. Kara tried to create an environment for the parents of his students in which parents could increase their awareness of their roles, hone their parenting skills and actively communicate with Kara to exchange information about their children. Kara was able to engage most of the parents[46] into this collaboration, but he was not able to engage the "poorest group" in activities. There are several implications that these findings suggest.

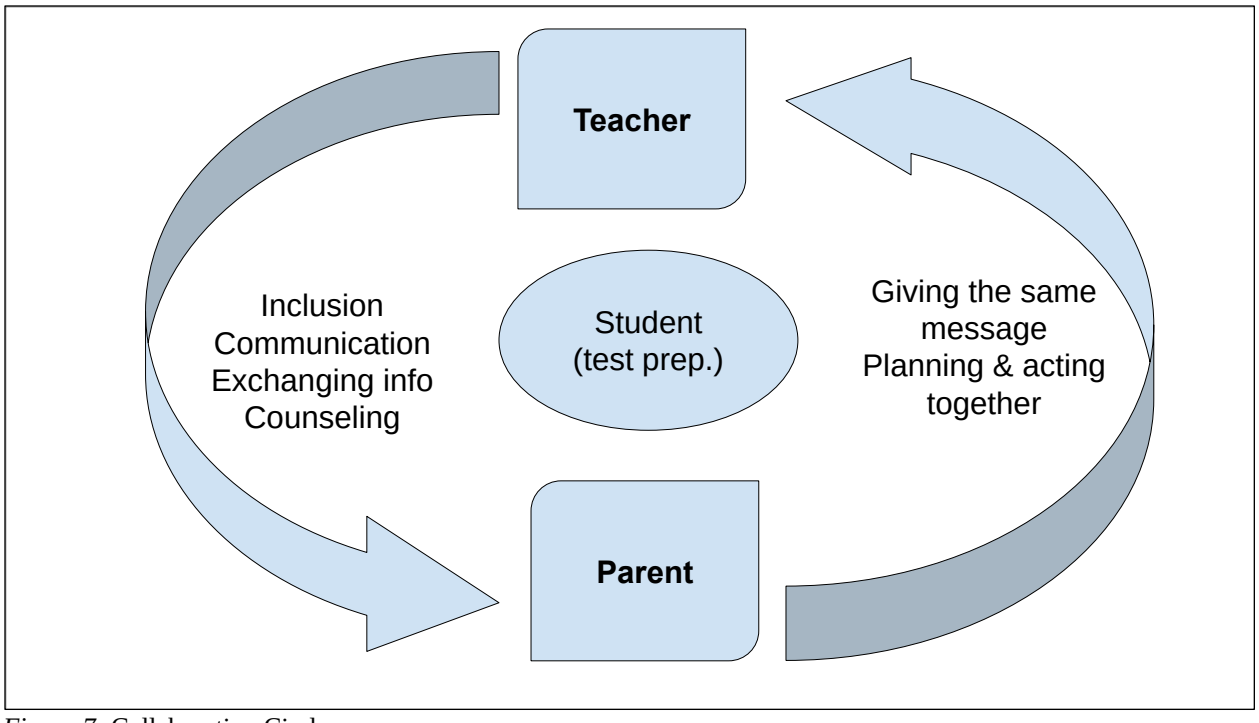

Figure 7: Collaboration Circle.

Administration on the periphery. Before delving into what was in the findings, it is worth briefly discussing what was missing that school administrators were not "in the picture" as parental engagement was defined in this case. The prevailing literature suggests that Turkish school

[46] About two thirds of the parents were engaged in Kara's activities to some degree.

principals focus their attention mainly on the managerial duties (Bellibas, 2015). As a result, school administration and instruction rise as two separate organizational tasks managed by two separate groups: administrators/managers and instructors/teachers. Similarly, in Kara's school (Ataturk Middle School), school administration and classroom instruction were separated from each other. All the participants (parents, teachers and administrators) often said that administrators' duties were to handle managerial issues and keep the school safe and running, while leaving instructional responsibilities and parents' engagement on this regard to the teachers. Of course, administrators and teachers had certain rights and responsibilities toward each other, but overall, these two worlds functioned independently from one another, especially in regard to matters of parental engagement. As a result, the definition of parental engagement was very instruction-centered and concerned with teachers in AMS.

This separation can be tracked to the way that Turkish education system is organized and operated. Gumuseli (1996) reported that Turkish school principals are overloaded with bureaucratic tasks that take away all of their time and energy from instructional matters and leave them as mere system managers. The centralized system, indeed, promotes a bureaucratic management and leadership among the principals (Silman, & Simsek, 2009). Further, Gumus and Akcaoglu's (2013) study shows that Turkish principals are not in fact prepared to indulge in such a challenge as their training and preparation do not equip them with the necessary skills and tools. Therefore, "Turkish principals generally devote most of their time to bureaucracy and managerial tasks, leaving instructional duties to teachers without providing the support and guidance teachers need" (Gumus & Akcaoglu, 2013, p.10).

Literature suggests that the type of leadership provided in the schools only affects the ways parental engagement is understood and practiced: how teachers view and value the practice (Ho,

2009). Based on these findings, it can be argued that we need a strong leadership to be able to expand the effort put forward by Kara. For instance, Kara was able to develop his consciousness thanks to his experience in a private school where engaging parents was a common practice. To create a school culture that not only welcomes parents, but also encourages teachers to engage parents, we must have school administrators fulfil more active roles (Ho, 2009; Johnson, 2007; Johnson, 2006; Khalifa, 2012).

Focus of parental engagement. The focus of parental engagement was student-centric, aiming to help and benefit students, rather than concerning instructional or administrative issues. The goal of almost all parental engagement practices that were discussed in this case focused on students' test preparations as Kara envisioned and intended to help students better prepare themselves for the national high school entrance exam. Based on this goal, parental engagement was defined based on parents' efforts to support their children. Apparently, Kara wanted parents to directly contribute to their children's education instead of some school, or teacher agenda.

Literature suggests that parents are often invited schools for reasons that do not contribute to their children's education (Cinkir & Nayir, 2017). As a result, parents grow skeptical about the parental engagement activities organized in schools. One of the biggest critique in this regard was directed to financial matters as parents were often asked for donations during their school visits. For instance, Erdogan and Demirkasimoglu (2010) reported that school administrators tend to approach parents with financial interests while ignoring parents' voices in decision making processes. Ozdogan and Aydin's (2010) study shows that even teachers and administrators are aware of the fact that they focus too much on financial matters in their communication with parents. Therefore, educators also believe that their financial reliance on parents harms their

relationships with parents. Similarly, another issue that parents often criticize is schools' problem centered approaches toward parental engagement.

In this case, parental engagement was about neither of these objectives, but about parents' efforts to support their children as they prepared themselves for the entrance exam. For parents, it was valuable to think that they were helping, or at least trying to help their children. Kara completely believed that once parents are convinced to that they will start responding to teachers' collaboration efforts. Therefore, it can be suggested for teachers to adopt a student-centered approach for engaging parents and try to engage parents in ways that they can improve their children' lives.

Nature of parental engagement. First of all, the nature of parental engagement in this case was teacher-initiated, school-centered and was defined as a set of professional skills. In supporting students' test preparations, parents were only supposed to participate in activities structured by Kara exactly the way he wanted. Although Kara keenly listened to the parents' problems and concerns and tried to give voice to parents, he did not really try including parents in the decision-making processes vis-à-vis instruction and other classroom issues. Even when Kara was listening to the parents, the focus of communication was often test preparation and issues parents faced while meeting the goals that Kara set for them.

Thus, all of the activities that were cited as parental engagement in this case was initiated by Kara. As he explained, Kara developed his parental engagement consciousness during his private school years, and what he tried to do was to inculcate this understanding in the parents he worked with in the Ataturk Middle School. For this, he organized a lot of capacity-building activities for parents to teach them how to engage with their children's education not only in the school, but also at their homes. He basically provided each of them with a road map for their

engagement and trained them to walk on this path with him. This approach is different from culturally responsive understandings of parental engagement which appreciates recognizing the diverse ways different parents may choose to engage with their children's education.

Besides being school-centric and teacher-initiated, parental engagement was also seen as a professional skill (positivistic paradigms) that parents were supposed to master. Despite the common discourse, all the parents in this case, regardless of their backgrounds, stated that they deeply care about their children's education and Kara also believed in this for all of his parents. Yet still, neither Kara nor the parents themselves believed in the parents' skills and qualifications to support their children, and parental engagement was believed to be a set of professional skills that parents did not have but were supposed to master before engaging.

The literature review conducted in chapter 2 suggests that engaging all parents requires schools to go beyond the traditional conceptualizations and recognize all diverse forms of practices. Based on this literature, my assumption, prior to the fieldwork and the data analysis process, was that Kara, a teacher who was acknowledged for engaging the parents of his students in a public school that was located in a district of dominantly poor and immigrant students, would define parental engagement as culturally responsive practice. However, the findings suggest that especially Kara saw parental engagement as a set of technical skills rather than as a socially and culturally situated practice and he believed that to achieve effective parental engagement, both teachers and parents need to be trained and taught the scientifically proved effective practices. Otherwise, Kara believed that parents would be like "elephants in a glass store," damaging the very products (children) that they want to polish and preserve (for similar findings, also see Erdogan & Demirkasımoglu, 2010).

Because of this belief, what parents knew and possessed was rendered irrelevant in the school. Their contributions were considered effective only to the extent that they could fulfil certain "effective" parental engagement practices that Kara envisioned for them. In fact, things that they could do beyond these predefined practices were considered not only ineffective, but actually as detrimental for students' development and achievement.

Conformity. Denessen, Driessen, Smit and Sleegers (2001), in a study that they conducted in Netherlands, found that Turkish and other minority parents in Netherlands, perceive schools more as experts than as partners. Similarly, the parents in this study saw Kara as an expert and tended to take his lead as granted without questioning. Kara spent a lot of time trying to teach his parents how to be involved in their children's education and support the goals he sets for the students, and the parents' definitions and/or understandings of what it meant to engage appeared to be similar with Kara's.

It appears that parents in Kara's classroom consolidated administrators' and teachers' beliefs that both administration and instruction are professional exercises that went beyond parents' capabilities to interfere. Maybe just like Latino parents (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004), Turkish parents might also be thinking that their interference with school activities can cause detrimental and unfavorable outcomes. In fact, Denessen et al. (2001) examined cultural differences in regard to Dutch, Turkish and Moroccan parents' involvement behaviors in Dutch education system, and they found that Turkish parents value "conformity" with school rules and regulations while Dutch parents chose autonomy and self-realization over conformity. They further argued that, as the Dutch education system promotes these egalitarian values, minority parents face a confusion and cultural conflict between these values: conformity and self-realization.

Strategies (Question II)

Turkish literature suggests that both teachers and administrators talk highly about the role and importance of parental engagement, but in practice, little is done to establish a collaboration between schools and parents that supports parents' engagement with their children's education (Erdoğan & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). In fact, teachers and administrators believe that collaboration is something that parents should offer to support schools and teachers as they educate their children (Ozgan & Aydin, 2010). Thus, it can be argued that teacher-parent collaboration is a phenomenon that is often expected of parents alone (Balkar, 2009). In fact, existing efforts do not go beyond organizing school-parent meetings to share some standard information based on school administrators' judgements and complain about parents' lack of support and interest in their children's education (Cinkir & Nayir, 2017; Erdoğan & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). As a result, teachers complain about parent attitudes and parents criticize how they are treated in schools (Ahioglu-Lindberg, 2013; Erdener, 2016).

This case suggests that parental engagement is a joint responsibility. Thus, if educators ever want to see parents collaborating with them, there are several steps that they have to take. In this line, Kara's case suggests teachers should start working on parents' perceptions of teachers and schools, build parents' capacities and spare more time for communicating with parents through diverse channels.

Strategies for teachers. Aligned with literature (Ozgan & Aydin, 2010), this case suggests that parents are often mistreated in schools and consequently develop negative images of educators. When educators do not see parents participating in school activities and performing certain traditional parental engagement roles, they tend to label parents as uncaring, uninterested and further impair their relationships with schools (Auerbach, 2007; Gaitan, 2012; Goodwin &

King, 2002; López, 2001; López, Scribner & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Moreno, Lewis-Menchaca & Rodriguez, 2011). Kara also highlighted this problem and he believed that all parents love their children unconditionally and deeply care about their education. In fact, his parental engagement philosophy was based on the belief that "their children are the most valuable things in their parents' lives, and there is nothing that teachers cannot convince parents to do for their children's sake." Similar to other studies (i.e., Ozgan & Aydin, 2010), Kara was convinced that parents are not collaborating with schools in supporting their children because of their unfruitful experiences and negative images of educators (Ozgan & Aydin, 2010). Therefore, to start a teacher-parent collaboration, teachers have to start changing these images with positive and welcoming ones.

As suggested in the literature (Çelik, 2005; Genç, 2005; Ozgan & Aydin, 2010), focusing on donations and problems in school-parent relationships appeared as an important issue that educators need to avoid. In this case, Kara and also the school psychologist Mr. Boz were very critical of these traditional ways of approaching parents. As Kara summarized his thoughts:

> When we look at the issue from parents' perspectives -what are their benefits and losses when they visit schools? Parents have serious concerns. [They ask themselves] Why [would I pay a visit]? For about 80 years, throughout the history of the [Turkish] Republic, a perception of schools has formed. [Throughout this history] we [schools] invited parents in once a year and only asked them to donate to school and send them back. Parents experience this with their first child, second child, and now with the third child, I am asking them to come to the school. [Asking me] What do you think that parents would think? [They think] that we are going to ask for money again. Education is equal to rent-seeking; education equals to money. That is exactly what we don't want to have.

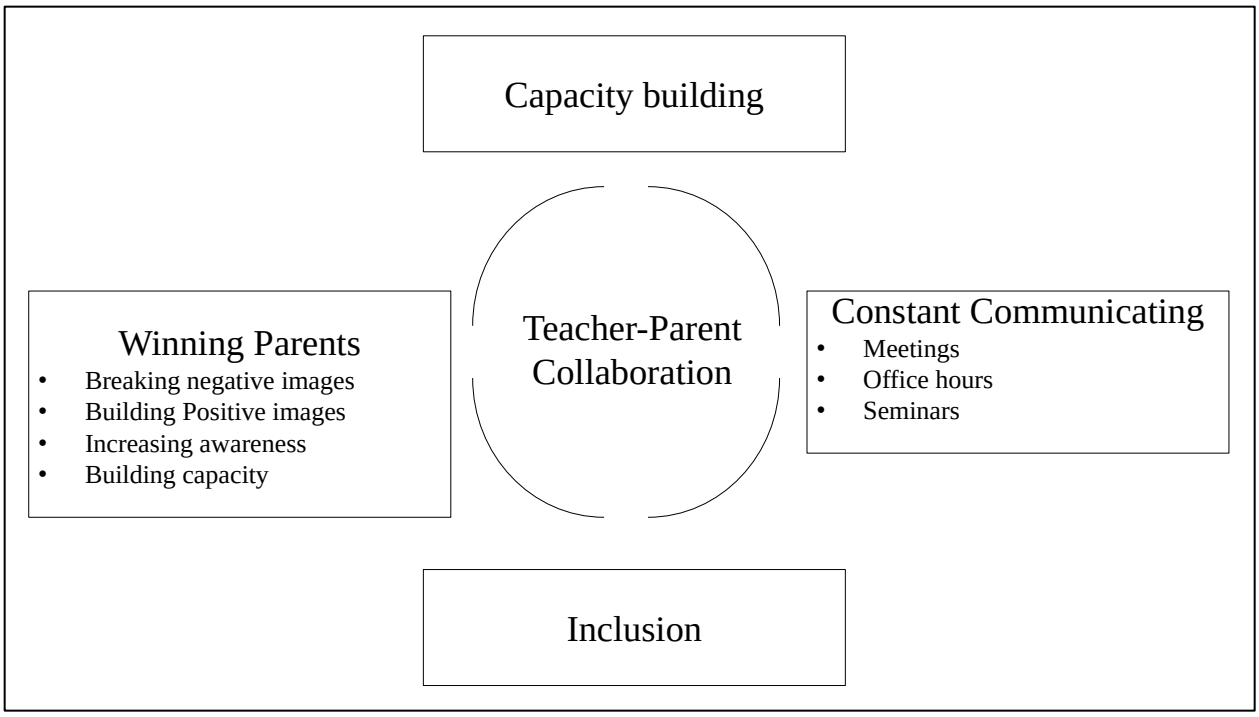

Figure 8: Promoting Teacher-Parent Collaboration.

To change this perception, this case suggests that educators develop new ways of thinking about parents as well as parental engagement and try to link parents' engagement with their children's needs/education. In this case, Kara focused on students' test preparations and tried to garner parents support in helping students better prepare for the national exam. Seeing Kara trying to help their children, parents developed trusted toward him and got motivated to work with him in supporting their children. Once this trust was established, in fact Kara and 8-E parents organized a bake sale to raise money for the school. Yet this was only possible after parents believed that Kara was trying to help their children rather than just to the school.

Another reason for parents' lack of appearance in schools can be traced back to the ways they are treated in schools. Literature shows that how parents are treated in schools greatly affects their participation in school-based activities (Erdener, 2013; Erdener, 2016; Ahioglu & Lindberg, 2013). When the 8-E parents were distinguishing Kara, they criticized the "rude" and "impolite" ways teachers talked with them. Similarly, Kara pointed out that teachers often fail to properly

communicate with parents, because they do not receive any training in this regard. As a result, parents often feel disrespected and/or ignored. In Kara's classroom, parents were paid utmost respect and treated politely. Kara, as he explained himself, raised a consciousness about this issue during his private school years where engaging parents was a norm. His school organized seminars and assigned books to sharpen teachers' communication skills and improve teacher-parent collaboration. However, most of the teachers in the public-school system are not given these chances. Consequently, they are not able to develop necessary communication skills and ultimately fail to address parents. Therefore, it can be suggested that teachers should receive more training in regard to teacher-parent collaboration (Ozgan & Aydin, 2010) and improve their communication skills so that parents are treated with respect and dignity in schools.

Finally, this case suggests that teachers avoid loading parents with standard information and try to make school visits more meaningful by giving parents voice, listening to their needs, and providing them with opportunities to build their capacities in ways that they can better help their children. Literature suggest that school-parent communication is often one-sided from educators toward parents, but parents demand that they are given more voice (Ozgan & Aydin, 2010). For Kara, building parents capacities was a vital task for parents' engagement. He stated that parents are more likely to come back if they leave schools with some new information that they can put into practice. Kara tried to tap into all resources around him to help parents learn something new to improve their relationships with their children. For example, he collaborated with the school psychologist while organizing seminars and consulting parents.

In conclusion, parents are often invited to schools for issues that concern administrators or teachers, but they want to see the link between their engagement and their children. As Cinkir and Nayir (2017) suggested, parents in Turkey often believe that what schools invite parents for is not

contributing to the educational processes. Parents in this case were willingly engaged in activities that benefited their children. They wanted to learn how else they could support their children so that children academically perform better. To engage parents, Kara first had to deal with parents' previous perceptions and the "negative image of educators."

CHAPTER 5: CASE OF MRS. KIBAR

The previous chapter focused on our first case, case of Kara, and how he was able to create an enthusiasm for parents' engagement in his counseling classroom. Now, this chapter, focuses on our second case, case of Mrs. Kibar, and similarly, begins with a presentation of the case findings, and concludes with a discussion of these findings. Again, similar to the first case, the main purpose of the analysis in this case was also to discover practices that helped the teacher (Kibar) in engaging parents with their children's education. The following research questions have guided the overall structure of the findings:

1. How did 11-A parents feel about their children's education and their roles as parents? Did they value their children's education?
2. How did parental engagement look like in this case? What was understood, valued, and promoted as good parental engagement practice?
3. What strategies were used to foster 11-A parents' engagement?

The analysis of the data has yielded five main themes:

1. First, all parents, regardless of their SES, deeply cared about their children's education, and they were ready to do everything in their power to make sure their children received a quality education.
2. Second, despite their care and keen sense of responsibility, all parents reported feelings of despair, impotency, and/or feeling lost.
3. Third, parental engagement was understood as a collective effort to help students to solve their problems.
4. Fourth, strategies for teachers.
5. Fifth, strategies for school administrators.

Kibar's Beliefs about the Parents and Parental Engagement

Similar to the previous chapter, I will again start with a brief discussion about the teacher's beliefs about parents and parental engagement. In terms of personality, Kibar pictured a surprisingly different teacher character for parents. In contrast to formality that Kara enjoyed following in his work, Kibar was intimate, and informal with the people around her, including parents.

Raised by a single mother, Kibar was deeply aware of the value of having a parent's support, especially in difficult times. She believed that it was her mother's efforts that made it possible for her and her two other siblings to complete college. In her own difficult childhood experience, she learned that school life is especially difficult for children who have to struggle with a lot of problems in their personal lives. Therefore, she tried to work with the parents especially when their children were going through a difficulty. Kibar complained about the parents' lack of interest, but she also believed that their engagement was required to help her students truly feel supported.

Since Kibar was aware about the necessity of garnering parents' support, she did not give up on parents just because they were not showing interest in parental engagement by coming to the school. Instead, she visited all of her parents to tap into this resource and to better help her students to confront the difficulties they were facing. The following section is devoted to exploring the kind of parental engagement that was implemented in Kibar's classroom, and it provides more details about how parental engagement looked like in this classroom, 11-A.

Theme I: High Regard for Education and Parents' Sense of Responsibility

The first theme that emerged from the data was the parents' high regard for the value of their children's education and their sense of responsibility regarding the successful completion of

this task. Every single parent who was interviewed in this study highly valued their children's education and reported that they assumed half of the responsibility for their children's education, leaving the other half to schools. When they were specifically asked about how much of the responsibility falls on parents in comparison to schools, they all stated that the ratio would be "50-50." These parents also reported that they were doing everything in their power to provide their children with the necessary support that the children needed to continue on their educational journey. They often said, "I do everything for my child to study and go to school." In fact, some of the parents stated that they moved to Istanbul so that their children could go to better schools and have facilities and opportunities available to them.

One father, for instance, stated that he moved to Istanbul when he was young, searching for a better job. Then, he met his wife and married her in that city. Later, after seven to eight years, they decided to move back to his hometown. He cited the cause for the last move being due to finding better educational prospects for his children, as he stated, "Now (two years ago), we came back for children's education," and:

> This time [two years ago], we came back for the children's education… As for now, I would be more comfortable in Kars [his hometown], perhaps I wouldn't need to even work there. What my father left me in Kars would probably suffice until I die. Instead, here I am, working for 1400-1500 Turkish Lira a month and serving under other people. I don't think there is a better struggle than this [for his children's education].

Another father (both mother and father were interviewed together), who worked as a truck driver, highlighted how much his family was ready to sacrifice so that their daughter could complete her education:

> We do our best so that she can go to school. I mean, let's say she is able to pass the university entrance exam. It is not a question if we can afford it or not. We will sell

> [what they had], we will borrow [money], we will work harder. I mean we will find a way, but she will go to that college.[47]

Another mother reported: "When the topic is your child, your offspring, and his education, I will never ignore, or delay it. I will always be by his side." Again, a mother expressed, "No matter what, May God give him long life, but I will send him to school till the very end (to college). Otherwise …"

All parents stated that they cared about their children's education and were trying their best to support them. In fact, these parents did not even want to consider other options for their children. They all wanted their children to complete their education and make better lives for themselves than the ones their parents had. As it can be seen from these quotes, parents showed their willingness, often by referencing the various sacrifices they made for their children so that they could have better educational opportunities and continue their schooling.

Theme II: Desperation and Powerlessness

The second theme that emerged from this study was the parents' feelings of "desperation and powerlessness." Again, almost all of the participating parents expressed these feelings to some extent. Despite their willingness to support their children's education, they often reported that they did not know what to do and how they could support their children. They often expressed frustration over their lack of education and its various consequences, such as the inability to communicate effectively with teachers and their children, provide academic support to their children, and navigate their way through the system. For instance, in an interview with a family (father and mother), I asked how they were supporting their daughter's education, and the mother sadly reported that they could not help her with her classes:

[47] All public schools, including universities, are free in Turkey, but to be accepted into a university, one has to compete with other candidates in a very competitive national test. Once admitted, students usually pay a small fee, but what this father means here is to pay for other living related expenses.

> **Father:** We do everything in our power,
> **Mother:** but if you are asking about her classes, if we understand these [and] help her with them, that is a "No!"

Similarly, another father commented about his lack of academic knowledge, which he thought was necessary for him to support his child:

> Besides, if my child has something that she must do, can I help her? I mean I am not at that level where I can contribute, and I will never be there. I have only my experience in life. If she were to tell me about her school, I mean, she studies accounting, finance. I have done some business and have that experience. I know some math. Considering that, I only know addition-subtraction. But, what they do in their major is beyond my knowledge. Don't you agree?

Parents felt despair also due to their own demanding workloads and lack of time. A mother of four mentioned how her work schedule impeded her engagement and took away all of her time and energy. She stated that, "You know, mothers should be by their children's side anyhow. Especially when they [children] are studying. Yet, I can't, you know [gets emotional and deeply breathes], but she [her daughter] still battles on by herself." The same mother also expressed her frustration over her inability to motivate her daughter and stated:

> Plus, I don't really know how to help. They have a lot of work, classes. If you pressure the kid, she goes complaining about her class load. I mean, if I were to ask why she doesn't study, she says, 'too many classes'; I don't know, 'this and that'; she says she gets bored. In fact, if you force 17-18 years old teenagers, they never study that way. They work only when they want. We don't know much about how to manage them.

Another mother also spoke about her inability to motivate her children to study, "When you pressure them, kids withdraw into themselves even more and close up… If you tell them what's right and what's wrong, he goes like, 'Mom, I already know what I am doing!'" Other parents shared similar sentiments, expressing their inability to motivate their children, and they also reported powerlessness in regard to connecting and communicating with their children. For

instance, a mother shared, on various occasions, her inability to connect to her son. For instance, she stated:

> I am disconnected from my son... He is a closed child... How could I know? He doesn't tell me what is happening in the school, but I always keep asking and asking… I am really, you know, keen on and close with my son, both as a mother and as a friend as well. Sometimes, we smoke together. 'Okay, look! Let's not do this secretly. That's not a good thing, but tell me about this as well.' Since this already exists, I let him, but I want no secrets. I want him to tell me everything.

Theme III: Parental Engagement for Solving Students' Problems

This theme, consisting of six main sub-themes, centered on the prevailing perception of parental engagement as it unfolded in the context of Ms. Kibar and 11-A[48] parents. Throughout this section, I will elaborate on each of its constituent sub-themes and their relative components. It is necessary to clarify several points and briefly describe how parental engagement, in general, looked in this case.

Clarification: The concept of parental engagement is often used interchangeably with parent-school partnership in the literature and yet, this study uses parental engagement to refer to any support that parents can employ to support their children's education, including partnering with schools and teachers. Families and schools might be working toward the same goal, supporting students' education, either by using some form of cooperation and collaboration, or by striving in their isolated worlds. Partnership, here, is a different and, in fact, more specific concept, indicating parents' ability and/or responsibility to work together collaboratively with the schools to help and support their children's education. That being said, every parent who participated in this study believed that they were supporting their children's education to the best of their abilities and yet, some of the parents did not, or were not able to, partner with the school and Ms. Kibar (or

[48] "11-A" is a pseudonym that is used to represent Mrs. Kibar's counseling classroom. It stands for 11th grade section A. In CEML, there were five 11th grade sections named: 11-A, 11-B, 11-C, 11-D and 11-E.

with teachers) in doing so. In the following section, I will focus on Ms. Kibar's efforts and strategies to establish effective partnerships with the 11-A parents.

As a result of coding my interview, observations, and document data, six themes emerged defining the concept of parental engagement in the context of Ms. Kibar and 11-A parents. In fact, it appeared that 11-A parents employed five different forms of parental engagement activities to realize a common goal, solving their children's problems that were distracting them from school.

1. Solving student problems: This can be said to be the main focus of parental engagement
2. Communication
    a. Home visits
    b. School-parent meetings
    c. Calls
3. Support (moral and spiritual, material, academic):
    a. Moral and spiritual
    b. Material
    c. Academic
4. Advocating for your children
5. Advising and sharing wisdom:
6. Monitoring for Safety

Figure 9: Components of communication.

Solving student problems: the main focus of parental engagement

The way that parental engagement was understood by Ms. Kibar, the assistant principal, the school counselor, and the parents was somewhat different in its nature and purpose. Not surprisingly, the parents' understanding often centered on their children and the children's well-being. They wanted to help and support their children and solve problems that distracted them from achieving in school. Mr. Tatar and Mr. Parlak's definitions, on the other hand, took a more school-centric form. They hoped for the parents' support and collaboration to run the school more smoothly. Ms. Kibar's definition played a key role here in this case. She shared the same concern as the parents and deeply cared about her students. As a result, instead of focusing only on her classroom management and instruction, she prioritized the students and their individual needs. In fact, she often became emotional during our interviews and once cried as she discussed saving her students and why she was driven to visit dozens of families each semester.

> I mean, because it is not like [could not finish the sentence] ... Look, isn't this our future? Okay! Then, losing it means losing my future. I think of it in this way. Hmm… if I can save some of these children, then it means maybe in the future, someone will save my child [She stopped here and started breathing heavily as if she was about to cry, but still trying to smile as she always did]. You are going to make me cry now [at that point she was talking really slowly and trying to stop herself from crying]. Look, I mean, because… Hmm… the more I help my students, the more help my child and grandchild will receive in the future. This is our future I am talking about [at this point she could not hold herself together any longer and tears started running down from her eyes].

As in this example, she always talked about saving the students by helping them, solving their problems and improving their conditions, and by parental engagement, by which she meant garnering parents' help and working together toward this goal.

I have already discussed vocational high schools as well as this specific school above in the context section, but in summary, vocational high schools often attract the most vulnerable and disadvantaged students in the entire Turkish education system. Students who struggle

socioeconomically and academically often end up in a vocational high school and, consequently, these students experience even more issues than their peers in other types of schools. As a result, parental engagement activities in Mrs. Kibar's case usually focused on solving student problems. These problems were sometimes academic, but often were much more comprehensive. Mrs. Kibar believed that what is happening in a student's life cannot be separated from their academics, and students who were experiencing difficulties or problems in their lives could not succeed in school.

Dealing with adolescents in a vocational high school brought a wide range of issues to be handled onto Mrs. Kibar's table. Switching schools, conflicts with other teachers and/or administrators, disciplinary cases, things causing emotional disturbance, and substance abuse are only a few issues she dealt with. As parents also wanted to solve the problems with which their children were dealing, Mrs. Kibar worked with them to find the cause of these issues and to help children and their families to overcome them. Concentrating her efforts on student problems, Mrs. Kibar highly valued working with the parents. Therefore, she made an intimate and deliberate effort to learn about her students, connect, and bond with them and with their families, so that her students trusted her and felt comfortable with her. The rest of the parental engagement activities that are discussed below targeted this final goal, solving student problems.

Advocating for your children and supporting them

As parents wanted to solve their children's problems, parents' advocacy for their children appeared to be a pivotal parental engagement activity for 11-A parents. Both the parents and Mrs. Kibar believed that advocating for one's child was an important parental engagement role for parents to tackle. Advocating took various forms in 11-A. One of the most common ways parents demonstrated this engagement was when parents tried to help their children switch schools. With the counsel and support from Mrs. Kibar, seven parents decided to switch schools and enroll their

children into a regular high school at the start of the school year. There were two more parents who were trying to do the same during the spring semester. Mrs. Kibar mentioned these events proudly and presented them as achievement stories of her parental engagement activities. She said that these were her best seven students, and she believed that they had a good chance of succeeding in the national university entrance exam. "They wanted to go to college" she said, but "they couldn't do it from here. I really miss them, you know. They were the best students in my classroom, but I am happy for them… and proud. They sometimes come and visit me."[49] Switching schools was a tough decision to make. The first thing parents had to do was to make sure that this was the right decision. Thus, they had to talk with the teachers and the administrators in both schools (CEML and the target school), collect information about their students' performance, and then convince the target schools to accept their children in the middle of a semester.

Another form of parents' advocacy occurred when parents had to stand up for their children. This happened when parents thought their children were mistreated, or subjected to an unfair treatment in the school: sometimes by their peers, sometimes by the teachers, and sometimes by the administrators. As I mentioned earlier, students involved in disciplinary problems are punished as a result. In fact, all of the male students, during the data collection stage, were sent to the discipline committee at least once. One of the parents, whose children were previously involved in disciplinary incidents, stated that their children were treated harshly, unfairly, and disrespectfully. In fact, even the parents were treated harshly and disrespectfully when their children were involved in disciplinary actions. It was at these times that parents and Mrs. Kibar thought parents needed to stand up and advocate for their children, because, as one mother put it,

[49] One time, I was able to observe one of these visits when two of these seven students visited to the school and looked for Ms. Kibar. Unfortunately, she was not in the school at the time, and students had to leave without seeing her.

"Children can't talk to teachers when that kind of thing [treatment] happens. They can't defend themselves, explain 'the incident happened this way.' They can't tell it like that to administrators."

I was able to observe a collective advocacy effort that Mrs. Kibar's parents' took against a teacher who, according to the parents, had a personal grudge against all male students in 11-A. Some parents invited Mrs. Kibar over to their house and discussed the issue before taking any action in the school. This was interesting for me to observe, because these parents used Mrs. Kibar as a resource, but this was only possible because Mrs. Kibar gained the trust of these parents and made herself available to them through her home visits. Parents did not know how to defend themselves in the school, but they trusted her guidance. Parents were convinced that they had to advocate for their children when the children had a problem, or when they were involved in a problem. In fact, a father of a girl explained his reasons for the scarcity of his school visits in this way: "It is because, she never came to me with a problem, saying, 'Father, this isn't a good classroom, I can't learn in this class, or I have terrible teachers.' If she were to tell me, 'My teacher treats me so badly,' then I would of course go and talk to the teacher…."

Parent-Teacher Communication and Partnership

The parents' communication with Mrs. Kibar was rather infrequent, inconsistent, and unstructured in nature. Most parent-teacher communication focused on solving a student problem, and parents' communication with Mrs. Kibar served as a form of engagement, which bonded parents' engagement efforts with Mrs. Kibar's, enabling parents to coordinate with her and benefit from her cultural capital in solving their children's problems. An apt analogy to illustrate the role that communication served in this case would be the water-way which enables effective transportation by means of boats and ships sailing on it. Parents wanted to transfer three forms of goods to their children (advocacy, support, and advising) in the form of parental engagement. Their

communication, and sometimes partnership, with Mrs. Kibar only enabled a more effective and smoother transfer for them. Mrs. Kibar's home visits were the most important communication channel, but three other types of communication channels were distinguished by the participants: parents' school visits, telephone calls, and students acting as messengers.

Visiting the school, participating to the school-parent meetings, using students and phone calls.

Visiting the school. Parents' visits to the school were indeed rare, and there were not a lot of occasions when parents were invited to the CEML, but still, coming to school, especially when invited, was considered another form of parental engagement to enable parent-teacher communication. Particularly, administrators and Ms. Kibar thought that this was a vital engagement role that all parents had to fulfill. In fact, Ms. Kibar often complained about the inadequacy of parents' school visits and participation in the school-parent meetings. In one of these occasions for instance, she stated, "Parents don't come here. I mean I organized a parent meeting last semester. I had 33 students back then. Among those, about 10 of them showed up. This is the number of parents for an entire semester."

School-parent meetings were organized once every semester and were reported as the most important school-wide parent event in the school. Yet, Ms. Kibar stated that only 10 or less of the parents (of 33) attended the first parent meeting during the Fall semester in 2015 and five parents (out of 26 this time) attended the second meeting during the Spring of 2016. Ms. Kibar blamed the parents for not coming to the meetings, as she noted: "Some are just careless. Okay, in some cases both parents are working, but in some cases, they are just careless, because they don't work, yet still do not come."

Parents had different opinions in regard to school-parent meetings. Some parents believed that it was necessary to visit the school, but they did not have the time, while others reported that

they learn everything from their children, and they did not see any point in coming to the meetings. In fact, this second group also criticized the way school-parent meetings were organized. For instance, one mother argued that these meetings did not give parents any voice and focused on the problems of the school, particularly financial issues. This particular mother did not attend the 2016 Spring meeting, but what she said was right because during the 50 minute school-parent meeting, parents sat still and listened to teachers, who quickly informed them about the courses they taught, and one school administrator who informed them about the school's financial needs and asked them for donations.

Despite parents' reluctance to attend the school-parent meetings, they all believed that it was necessary for parents to visit the school when their children had a problem in school. Not surprisingly, 11-A parents visited the school only when they were invited by the school administration, or when their students were going through a problem that they had to discuss with the school counselor or Ms. Kibar. During my observations, I witnessed two parents who came several times trying to switch schools and enroll their children into a regular high school and another parent who came because his son allegedly broke one of school codes and was dispatched to the school discipline committee. In this case, the parent came to the school, talked with the school principal, and left immediately afterwards.

***Phones for communication*.** Parents and Mrs. Kibar also used phone calls to communicate with each other. Mrs. Kibar reported that all of her students had her phone number, and the parents could call her anytime they needed her help. However, only a small number of parents reported that they had called Mrs. Kibar before. These had called to seek her counsel on various student problems. On rare occasions, the school administration also used texting as a way to invite parents

to the school for both parent and discipline committee meetings (when their child was having a disciplinary hearing).

Students as messenger. Parents did not often visit the school, phone calls were rare, but students helped Mrs. Kibar and parents to sustain the information flow. In fact, it was through students that Mrs. Kibar organized her home visits, invited parents to the school, and sent and sought information to/from the parents. This happened by sometimes sending verbal messages and other times sending closed envelopes.

In summary, Mrs. Kibar tried to communicate with the parents through parents' visits to the school, calling them via phone and sending messages through the students in some cases. Yet, none of methods seemed effective to Mrs. Kibar, as she criticized the parents' lack of responsiveness to these calls. As these methods did not work effectively for Mrs. Kibar, she found another way to reach her parents, especially when the students needed extra support, and that was visiting the parents of her students in their homes.

Home Visits: As an alternative approach. Ms. Kibar was distinguished and awarded by the district administration for visiting the highest number of families, and she inspired other teachers in the school to do the same. Naturally, the concept was prevalent in all forms data collected in 11-A: interviews, observations, and documents. As parents' communication with teachers was highlighted as an important parental engagement role, Ms. Kibar's home visits played the most central role in this communication. When she was asked about parental engagement in her first interview, the first thing Ms. Kibar reported was the home visits: "Parental engagement, hmm… its components are… First, family visits must be conducted. Then …" she continued listing some other activities (organizing social events and conducting regular school-parent meetings) that she used to engage the families of her students. As Ms. Kibar

critiqued the parents for not visiting the school, she stated that she alternatively used family visits and usually established her first contact with the parents through these home visits, so that she could learn more about her students and their families.

> When teachers and parents are in collaboration, teachers become more active and motivated. Plus, when teachers meet and get to know the parents, students start feeling closer to and comfortable with their teachers. This way, they can more easily open up about their problems to their teachers. This is why I believe teachers must get to know the parents and must find a way to get them involved in the process. The way I do it is through family visits.

Parents often referred to the theme of family visits in their interviews, as well. As Ms. Kibar conducted these visits in her free time (after school), parents held these visits in high regard and praised Ms. Kibar for her efforts. Parents believed that she was willing to sacrifice her own time and energy, because she cared about her students. In fact, this is exactly what a mother reported as she tried to explain her thoughts about these visits. She said this was "because she [Ms. Kibar] cares about her students." Another mother mentioned one of these visits that Ms. Kibar conducted when her daughter decided to drop out of the school:

> I mean, I appreciated the fact that she cared about my daughter. I mean… she came over to my place and talked about my child. She [Ms. Kibar] said 'She [student] shouldn't drop out of school. She needs to study...' It is so touching to see her [Ms. Kibar] speak up for your child.

This quote also provides good insight into the content of the family visits. Aligned with the general focus of parental engagement activities, the central point of the discussions conducted during these visits were about students and their problems. The first visit was often conducted in a manner designed to learn about the students, their families, and their lives, but Ms. Kibar was often examining whether there was any problem that might be possibly affecting her students and their school work. This was clearly highlighted when Ms. Kibar stated:

> The way I do it [meet and communicate with families] is through family visits. This is how I get the opportunity to meet with the parents, see and examine my students'

> rooms. There, I am trying to catch if there is anything that this student can't tell me, a problem that she/he is having.

Raised by a single mother of five children, Ms. Kibar knew what it meant to be a struggling family, and she believed that parents' SES affected their ability to support their children, but she did not think that poverty and parents' lack of education devalued their contributions. Her mother was single, illiterate, and she still thought that it was her mother's efforts and contributions that made it possible for her and her siblings to complete their education. She proudly mentioned these contributions on several occasions during our discussions and interviews.

> My father left my mother (with five children) … We were raised in a one-bedroom apartment. Yes, my father provided some financial support, but it was my mother who raised us. She can't read, or write, but she is like… She is a strong woman! I believe she is the one who made it all possible for us to complete our educations, because she was able to raise a doctor son, me, and she has another daughter who is also a teacher.

Support (moral and spiritual, material, academic)

Parents reported three forms of support as ways to engage with their children's education: moral, material, and academic support. Although all three forms were noted as important parental engagement tasks, parents often complained about their own lack of academic skills to provide this for their children.

Moral and spiritual. This task was mainly performed through parents' communication with their children and through showing children their love and friendship. Participants who were mothers, especially, referred to this as being friends with their children by listening to them every day and sharing their problems. One mother, for instance, noted: "She (my daughter) tells me everything. I am telling you. We are like friends. If someone takes a step here (in the school), my daughter will tell me about it at home. This person did this, that person did that, someone fought with that guy, another guy disrespected teacher by doing that." Interviewing a couple together, the mother complained about her inability to spend more time with her daughter due to

her new baby boy, while the father bragged about his dialogue with her daughter. He described his relationship with his daughter as an elder brother and sister relationship and said, "It is no problem for me. Anything can be said. If anything is needed, I will get that. If she needs to tell me something, she just does it, and so do I. I can tell her the mistakes she is doing, and she can tell me mine. Between us, there is not a problem." At that moment, the mother also agreed with the father. "That's right. He listens to his daughter. He cares a lot about his daughter, can't tell her no." Similarly, a working mother stated:

> You [a mother] need to give her [to her daughter] the trust so that she [her daughter] will show you [mother] this closeness. My daughter really does this. Look! Even when I have just come home from work and while I am trying to cook, she comes and talks to me. She just goes like, 'Mother! Do you know what happened today in the school?'

Although parents recognized the fact that they needed to spend time with their children and support them morally, some parents complained about their inability to comply with this. Sometimes the cause was their workload, and sometimes they just did not know how to contact and communicate with their children

Meeting Basic Needs. These parents were aware that the opportunities through which they could support their children's education were limited, and they had to do their best while investing their limited time and energy. They often referred to what they were doing to sustain their families as a form of parental engagement. This, especially, happened after they talked about their lack of skills to provide academic guidance for their children. For instance, one mother reported, "I can only support him economically. I tell him '*You just study. I am behind you* [supporting you],' but I can't do much to educate him." Another mother also stated, "As long as she continues her education, I will buy whatever is needed." One father similarly stated, "I am a man who works in a shipyard, sometimes during night shifts, but I will always make the

money they will need. As long as he continues, I will never complain. This is all for their schooling, for them to get an education." His wife referred to her house chores as her engagement, "I swear I do my best. I clean his room… I do his laundry, tidy up his room."

Parents also referred to their commitment to buy basic school supplies as their engagement and felt good about their engagement as long as they were able to meet their children's demands in regard to buying these materials. For instance, a father, who worked as a truck driver, stated:

> I can only ask, 'My daughter, what do you want? What do you need (for school): notebook, pen/pencil, pocket money, etc.' I (as her father) handle things like this. This is my duty and also I say, 'My daughter, please study! And tell me what you need. I will do my best to get it.' They asked for internet, we bought it. I am personally against the internet. I mean, I was trying to prevent it from being in my house. Still I don't allow it after 8-9 pm.

Parents referred to their daily life struggles as their engagement, as they believed they were struggling so that their children had what they needed to achieve in school, including being fed, dressed, and sheltered. Administrators and Ms. Kibar reflected on parents' needs to work and meet their families' basic needs, but they did not mention this as a form of engagement. For instance, one of the school's assistant principals, Mr. Tatar, reported:

> We are aware. I mean when we look at our families with economic problems, they naturally give their priority to different things. What I mean is, instead of their children's education and success, they prioritize what they need in their houses and feeding their children as prominent.

Ms. Kibar also made similar reflections and wondered how educators could expect those parents to have any meaningful engagement with their children's education while they were working day and night.

Academic support and guidance. Providing academic support and guidance for their children was a responsibility that parents valued as a part of their roles as parents. Academic support was perceived as a theme of parents' ability to help their children successfully complete

their school work. Primarily, three different forms of academic support were mentioned by parents who wanted to support their children academically: helping to complete homework, creating a quiet and distraction-free study environment, and overseeing children as they studied.

Helping their children in completing their school work was the most cited activity by the parents, but these statements were always in the form of groaning about their inability to provide this kind of support. In other words, parents distinguished this activity as part of their parental engagement task, but they also believed that this kind of an engagement was not in their arsenal.[50] For instance, one father put it his way:

> Besides, if my child has something that she must do, can I help her? I mean, I am not at that level where I can contribute to her studies, and I will never be there. I have only my experience in life. If she were to tell me about her school, I mean, she studies accounting and finance. I have done some business and have that experience. I know some math. Considering that, I only know addition-subtraction. But, what they do in their major is beyond my knowledge. Don't you agree?

On the one hand, most of the parents who participated in this study believed that making a direct contribution and helping their children with their homework was an important parental engagement role that they could not provide due to their insufficient academic skills. On the other hand, these parents also did other things that did have an indirect impact on this process. For instance, they created quiet spaces for their children and removed things that could distract them from studying. Some parents stated that they turned the TV off and tried to motivate their children to study. One mother believed that relieving her daughter from household chores and leaving her alone during exam times should be considered as her support.

Some parents also reported that they accompanied their children while they were studying and others tried to oversee the process by checking whether the children were studying or not. As

[50] I am only including this here because I want to capture every possible way through which these parents defined their roles.

one mother stated, "I usually check on him to see if he is studying. He studies in the bedroom while I stay in the kitchen. I don't understand his work, I read my Quran [while he studies]." Another mother shared how she set an example for her children and accompanied them by reading her prayer book as the children studied:

> For example, I sometimes take my prayer book and my husband takes the Quran, I mean, he always reads it.[51] He reads the Quran and I read my prayer book. Now, we have to set an example. We are an example for them. Then I look at my children. 'Let's read!' (This is how) I help them.

Motivating by means of advising (sharing wisdom) and exposing students to Life

The notion of supporting children's education by motivating them was a prevalent sub-theme among the parents. As the parents grumbled and grieved about their life conditions, they did not want their children to share the same path. In fact, this was the exact reason why they highly valued education and wanted their children to save themselves from following the same path by means of leveraging education. To make sure this happened, the parents tried hard to motivate their children by giving them advice about life, setting a good example, and helping them experience the difficulties of real life. Parents often reported how they talked to their children and told them about "real life" and how they could save themselves by studying hard and completing their education. One parent shared how she tried to motivate her daughter: "I warn her! I say, 'My daughter! It is my duty to support your schooling. I mean, I am struggling, trying hard to make sure you receive education, (but) you too need to battle, study so that you won't sell yourself short.'" Another mother similarly stated how her husband would advise their children:

> In our family, the father always sits, for example. My husband, he sits, explains everything to the children… You have to show your children what you went through. Show them and see how they study… I mean there was time I could not find a loaf of bread to eat. I am still a tenant (I don't have my own apartment). By

[51] This father was crippled from waist down due to a work accident. The mother reported that he did not have a job and spent his time in bed.

> telling and explaining to her, "Look my daughter! I can't buy a pair of shoes for my feet. You study so that you can."

When advising their children, parents focused on various topics and issues, including but not limited to academic well-being. In fact, for some parents, the first thing they wanted to achieve was to raise good people, citizens who would benefit their community. For instance, one mother stated that she advises her son so that he will grow into a salutary man for his community. "We raise children for the future of this country. This is necessary [we do that]!" she said and continued to explain how she tried to convince her son to become a helpful citizen who will improve his community and whose generation will make this country a better place in the future. Another mother, similarly, reported:

> I first tell them (my children) to be respectful to their teachers. When you are home, be respectful to your elders: your mother, father, elder siblings, and show compassion/love for those younger than you. This is number one. Then come the classes, and I always talk about this too.

Besides giving advice, some parents also mentioned being a good example for their children. For instance, one father explained how he tried to be a good example for his son and shared:

> The important thing is that I don't want him to use tobacco. I especially pay attention to this. Thank God, he doesn't. I don't use tobacco. If a guest of mine asks for that, I ask him not to smoke in my place. This is the most beautiful task for a father to prevent his child from this exposure. If the father does it in front of his child and consumes tobacco as if it is something good, then his child will do the same of course.

Two other parents also mentioned setting an example in the context of study habits. They shared how they engage in reading the Holy Quran and their prayer books to set a good example for their children while asking them to study.

Some parents went beyond giving advice and setting a good example, and exposed their children to work experience in mediocre positions, so that their children would understand what

their parents mean when they give advice. These parents really wanted their children to realize the difficulties that their parents had been going through, before it was too late for their children. The parents really wanted to make their children aware of the future that was awaiting them unless they changed it by studying hard. A father, for instance, reported how he took his son with him to work in the shipyard, so that his son would learn how real life is and the true value of education. He shared, "After staying with me for a while, he [his son] would say, 'I have homework father.' Then I let him go do his work." Another father also explained how he made his son work in the local farmers' market until his son showed a desire to study. Similarly, one mother reported that her son did not want to start high school after finishing the middle school with poor grades.

> I asked him 'Son! Do you expect me to look after you now?' and I made him work in an automobile mechanic store. Then he understood! 'Mom! It is very difficult to work like this. I want to go to school.' I told him that he had to work until the schools were open and save some money. I pressured him so much that he wanted to quit that job and find a different one. I knew between switching jobs, he would have some free time and would get used to just hanging around. I said 'No, you asked for this.' I didn't let this happen and made him continue.

Most of these families were raised by poor farming families in rural areas where there were limited opportunities for schooling.[52] As one of them stated, "I didn't go to school enough. I didn't have the chance. Now look what I have to endure for this." They expressed that they did not have the opportunities, and no one warned them about how important education was. Yet, they wanted to make sure that their children had access to quality education and gave them plenty of advice to make sure they understood the value of their education. Thus, the parents shared their life experiences with their children, gave a lot of advice, and exposed their children to some real-life difficulties to increase their awareness and motivation for their education.

[52] Rural areas in Turkey have been suffering from lack of basic resources such as schools, and this is true especially at the high school levels. This has started to change in the last decades, but the parents interviewed in this study definitely suffered through this.

Monitoring your children, knowing about them and setting the rules

The term, monitoring, is used here to refer to the parents' efforts to learn about their children and their lives. Not surprisingly, all of the school staff interviewed (teacher Ms. Kibar, assistant principal Mr. Tatar, and school counselor Mr. Parlak) really expected parents to follow their children's lives and know about their academic standing and progress. Also, school staff expected parents to know and closely follow whether their children adhered to the school rules and codes, disturbed the instruction in their classroom, or had habits that harmed themselves and their community.

Despite the importance given to this by the school staff, 11-A parents did not really emphasize this form of parental engagement very much, but they too believed in this parental role to some extent. Their motivation to monitor their children often stemmed from their desire to keep their children safe and out of trouble, but also involved some academically-related monitoring as well. Some parents reported that they paid special attention to their children's habits (e.g. whether they had any addiction or substance abuse issues) and friends (what kind of people they spent their time with). As a result, parents tried to monitor their children in a way that they would know if the children were engaging in, or coming close to, any troubling issues. Thus, they wanted to know with whom their children were spending time, where they were going, and whether they were picking up harmful habits or not (such as substance use).

Some parents reported that they monitored their children at home to make sure they were studying instead of texting, gaming, etc. In fact, some students had gaming addictions, and this was one of the topics that was discussed during Mrs. Kibar's home visits. Parents and Mrs. Kibar often considered this issue to be something impeding students from studying.

Theme IV: Strategies for teachers: Promoting engagement versus partnership

In fact, the concepts of parental engagement and partnership are often used interchangeably in the literature (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Riley, 2014). However, this study uses parental engagement to reference any help that parents can provide to support their children's education, including partnering with schools and teachers. Families and schools might be working toward the same goal, supporting students' education, either by using some form of cooperation and collaboration, or by striving in their isolated worlds. Partnership, as one form of engagement, is a different and, in fact, more specific concept, indicating the parents' ability and/or responsibility to work together with teachers and schools to help and support their children's education. That said, every parent who participated in this study believed that they were supporting their children's education to the best of their abilities. Even so, most of them did not or were not able to partner with the school and Mrs. Kibar unless there was a problem to solve. However, despite the lack of a consistent partnership, 11-A parents and Mrs. Kibar were able to effectively partner in the case of a problem. Therefore, in this section, I elaborate on this partnership and discuss the conditions and strategies that enabled this partnership.

Parent-teacher partnership

Partnership occurs when parents and teachers collaboratively work together to support the children's education. In 11-A, parents and Mrs. Kibar were not always able to work together. However, when the students were having a problem, or an issue that they could not solve alone, Mrs. Kibar and the parents spared some time to get together and join forces to help the students. Rarely were more than one family engaged in the partnership, since the issues often occurred on the individual level, concerning only one student. Naturally, the partners usually consisted of Mrs. Kibar, one student, and his/her parents.

Parent-teacher partnership is the fifth theme that emerged in this study. The theme emerged corresponding to the second research question (strategies Ms. Kibar used to foster parent-teacher partnership) and consists of three sub-themes:[53]

a. Don't judge, be positive, and focus on the solution
b. Don't wait and reach out
c. Student-centered altruism

These three components enabled Mrs. Kibar to gain the parents' trust and establish partnerships with them.

Don't judge, be positive, and focus on the solution. Literature suggests that educator attitudes can significantly affect both students' (Beachum & McCray, 2004; Kunjufu, 2002) and parents' experiences in schools (Erdener, 2016; Balkar, 2009; Ahioglu-Lindberg, 2013). The parents in this study also often referred to educator attitudes when talking about improving parent-school and parent-teacher partnerships. They criticized certain educator behaviors and praised others as very encouraging for parent-educator partnership. In CEML, parents were often contacted when their children caused, or were involved in, disciplinary issues. When such an accident occurred, the school administration and other teachers often wanted to deal with the situation immediately by punishing and disciplining the student. In such cases, the most common procedure was to invite the student's parents or guardians to the school and to scold them for not making sure their child behaved. Then, the student was suspended from the school for a certain amount of time, depending on the severity of her/his misbehavior or so-called "crime." This approach was found discouraging by the parents, especially by those whose children previously

[53] These themes emerged as a result of analysis of the data that was derived from observations focusing on Mrs. Kibar's interactions with the parents and particularly from the interviews conducted with the parents.

went through a disciplinary procedure. These parents criticized the school for focusing on the problems, blaming the parents for the accidents, and treating them harshly.

When treating children who were involved in disciplinary issues and their parents, Mrs. Kibar was different. The parents not only never reported a claim against her, but also highly praised her for being non-judgmental and trying to understand the children to solve their problems. In fact, she often conducted home visits to help these students, and she guided their families as they went through the disciplinary procedure with the school administration and disciplinary committee. At such times, the parents saw her as their partner and sought her help and guidance through the process.

Parents also reported that Mrs. Kibar always focused on the solution and did not judge students and their parents. For instance, a parent who also criticized a school administrator for treating her disrespectfully and impolitely, stated about Mrs. Kibar, “She always thinks about her students and their classes. I mean, even if we have a problem, she talks about the solutions... In my eyes, she is really great, because she is concerned about her students.” The same mother also believed that the children could explain their problems to Mrs. Kibar but not to other teachers and administrators, as this parent thought Mrs. Kibar loved her students and her job: “I think [Mrs. Kibar] likes her job, but those who work only for money can’t do it well.” She also wanted to cite her daughter to explain her point: “Let me repeat my daughter here. I mean… ‘Mother! [Mrs. Kibar] pays attention,’ she says. For example, ‘When we have a problem, [Mrs. Kibar] listens to us and pays attention,’ she says." She did not believe that “students caused problems, but they had problems for which they needed help”. Thus, she focused on helping students to overcome these issues, and it was this solution-centered approach that gained parents’ trust. Thanks to this

approach she did not treat the parents as accomplices to the problems that their children caused for the school administration, but as partners with whom she could support the students.

Don't wait and reach out (ice breaker). Semesterly school-parent meetings were considered the main parental engagement venue for parents to show themselves in the Cumhuriyet Vocational High school, and yet, during the Spring of 2016, only 4-5 parents came to the school-parent meeting, and aside from this, none of them visited the school unless their child was involved in a disciplinary problem and called by the school administration or had some other emergency situation that required immediate parent attention (e.g. switching schools, finding internship). This was a little surprising for a classroom that was recognized as one of the highest parental-engagement classrooms in the entire school district.

Mrs. Kibar, just like other teachers, wanted to have more active parents, in the sense that she thought they should come to the school more often, ask about their children, and collaborate with teachers to proactively prevent their children from having problems. However, the families she served were not this type of group. Criticizing the parents for their reluctance, Mrs. Kibar, however, did not stop there but continued to believe in the value of partnering with the parents as helpful to her students. This belief eventually led her to organize her home visits. She explained this with the following words:

> Parents don't come here. I mean, I organized a parent meeting last semester. I had 33 students back then. Among the 33 families, about 10 of them showed up for the meeting. This is the number of parents for an entire semester. I invite them for months to the meeting, and 10 parents is what you get. When I visit them, I tell them, "You don't come to the meeting, but I am not embarrassed to come here. This is your child, but with your permission, I want to help her/him more than you do." … Aren't these children our future?

As I have previously discussed while defining parent-teacher communication, the initial contact with the parents was established through Mrs. Kibar's home visits. Mrs. Kibar visited each

and every one of 11-A parents in their apartments, at least once a year, and organized out-of-school social activities to meet with the parents. In fact, it was these home visits that enabled the most of the parent-teacher interactions in this case.

Mrs. Kibar's efforts to reach out also served as proof in the eyes of the parents for how much Mrs. Kibar cared about her students and helped her gained the parents' trust. Mrs. Kibar stated:

> You know, first of all, it makes them very happy... [Second] I mean, they become happy and also they broaden their horizons. When I visit a family, they start asking questions about the future of their children. … For example, two families decided to send their children to a regular school. I mean, they shouldn't have waited this long. It should have been done long before [the 11th grade].[54]

Parents often mentioned home visits when they were discussing what they liked about Mrs. Kibar. One mother for instance shared, "I don't have any problem with any teacher, but Mrs. Kibar is very close to us. She comes to our apartment." Another parent similarly shared, "Well! I mean, I appreciated the fact that she cared about my daughter. I mean… she even came over to my place and talked about my child…"

Mrs. Kibar was able to help the parents of her students by reaching out to them through her home visits. When she met with them, she was not only able to make them happy and gained their trust, but also changed their perspectives toward teachers in general. Mrs. Kibar explained it thus: "They think that teachers are from a different planet. They believe we, teachers, are different, but once they meet with me, they realize teachers are not aliens, but the same." Probably for this reason, Mrs. Kibar acted naturally during her visits. She was always smiling, making jokes, and avoiding formal language. Also she dressed plainly. In all three visits that I was able to observe she was wearing loose T-shirts and jeans.

[54] Mrs. Kibar took over this class only when they started the 11th grade.

It was true that the home visits helped Mrs. Kibar to get to know the parents of her students and gain their trust, but it was also true that it was a demanding undertaking which took a lot of extra time and energy on Mrs. Kibar's part. Mrs. Kibar was able to do it through her love and compassion for her students. As parents explained: "[S]he is different, because she loves her job and doesn't do it for money."

Student-centered altruism. This theme, which emerged early during the site observations, stresses the importance of caring about your students as a teacher and prioritizing them in your actions. Mrs. Kibar deeply cared about her students, was concerned about their well-being, and showed this by trying hard to solve their problems. She saw her students as her own "future" and tried to "save it" by helping them. She said crying, "The more I help my students, the more help my child and grandchild will receive in the future. This is our future I am talking about …"[55]

Indeed, she was ready to help her students with any kind of problems they were having, including but not limited to academic problems. She spent a lot of extra time after school and during the weekends to help her students. Her concern for her students was all the more clear when she conducted numerous home visits, organized social gatherings for her students and their families, and tried to solve her students' problems every day. Also, she organized a weekly, after-school reading hour with her class to help them improve their literacy skills and asked other teachers to help the struggling students in her class. For instance, she talked with a physics teacher to provide one of her students with extra help, which in the end helped this student to improve his physics grade.

[55] At this point, she could not hold herself together any longer and tears started running down from her eyes.

Parents also recognized Mrs. Kibar's concern and genuine efforts to help their children, which made them trust in her. Parents often reiterated how Mrs. Kibar loved her students and cared about them, and they were particularly affected when she sacrificed her personal time to reach out to the families, hoping to help their children and solve the children's problems. For instance, one mother reported, "[Mrs. Kibar] cares about my child [and] always talks about my child's problems. I mean, she says, 'What can we do about this?' and things like that… She likes her students." The same mother shared this on another occasion:

> Well! I mean, I appreciated the fact that she cared about my daughter. I mean… she even came over to my place and talked about my child. She [Ms. Kibar] said 'She [the student] shouldn't drop out of school. She needs to continue studying...' It is so touching to see her [Ms. Kibar] speak up for your child… I mean she asks, 'How is Leyla [the student] doing at home?' 'Does she have a problem?' she asks. 'If there is, let me know! Etc.,' she says. She gives out her phone number. [Mrs. Kibar] can make her like school.

Instead of complaining about how the students cause her issues in her classroom, Mrs. Kibar prioritized her students and their problems all the time. Another mother, similarly affected by Mrs. Kibar's care and compassion for her students, shared:

> I mean, she always talks about her students. My child… I mean we, for example, had an issue concerning her classes. At that time, my daughter started falling behind in her classes. [Mrs. Kibar reached me and] talked to me. She said, 'I believe in Meryem. She can do it. She only needs to try little harder. She can try this and that. [Mrs. Kibar] is always about her students and their classes. I mean, even when we have problems, she always talks about the solutions. That's why she is a perfect teacher in my eyes. She always thinks about her students.

Seeing Mrs. Kibar's love and concern for their children, parents put their trust into her and perceived her as their partner. This way, Mrs. Kibar did not feel like an outsider, but the families embraced her as a member when she visited them in their homes.

Theme V: School Administrators' Roles in Engaging Parents

This theme has emerged corresponding to the third research question: what strategies can school administrators use to support/improve parental engagement? Mrs. Kibar and the parents approached this question from their own perspectives, and each pointed out different ways through which school administrators can provide support. I first discuss Mrs. Kibar's perspectives as she requested administrative support both from the district and school administrators. Then, I discuss parents' perspectives, which called upon school administrators to change.

What teachers need from administrators

This theme emerged mainly from Mrs. Kibar's discourse and suggests several ways through which administrators can help teachers in engaging parents. Mrs. Kibar called for both district and school administrators' recognition and permission for her unconventional parental engagement efforts and also valued their encouragement.

Having district recognition/official approval. On the one hand, Mrs. Kibar's home visits and other social gatherings that she organized were somewhat unconventional efforts in her school. On the other hand, the school administrators wanted to run the school according to the rules that were passed down from the district administration, and they did not want to stand out in any way. In other words, they just wanted to follow the rules as precisely as possible and play the game by the book. Therefore, school administrators questioned everything that might come from their base instead of their higher-ups. For instance, for the home visits, Mrs. Kibar reported that she often visited the school administrators, seeking their approval. She explained how asking permission for this unconventional practice caused her a lot of tension in the past (until two years ago when she was awarded for her home visits by the district administration), and as a result, she could not then visit as many parents as she could now.

However, at the end of 2014-2015 school year, home visits were recognized in the school district, and the CEML school principal along with Mrs. Kibar were awarded with a plaque for Mrs. Kibar's efforts to reach out to her parents. As Mrs. Kibar explains in the following excerpt, having the district recognition relieved her from a lot of trouble and, in fact, increased the number of visits she conducted:

> I received an award last year for the home visits. I have been conducting home visits since the first year I started teaching, but I could not go to all of my students like this before, only the ones that I detected. I mean, the ones having problems, or showing potential… This number increased last year. Conducting a home visit before this… The administration could question you and say, 'Why are you going?' Yet, last year, the district government started a project: 'My dear teacher is my guest.' This project just made it much easier for me. When the school principal asked me in the teachers' room, he said, 'There is this project. All teachers will conduct family visits.' I became very happy, because this was what I had been doing already. However, other teachers' reactions were different. They asked questions such as, 'How can we find time for this? We would need resources for this. Who knows who lives where. What kind of places will I go? How will I be received there?' Then we were given a form to list the families we would visit. I just wrote down all my families, because that was a great chance for me. This was exactly what I wanted to have. The principal was like, 'Will you go to all of them?' I said, 'Yes, I will visit them all!'

As Mrs. Kibar further explained, the school principal's approach changed completely after this point, and the school principal started mentioning home visits in his meetings with the teachers. He even asked teachers how many families they had visited so far. As the project proceeded into its second year,[56] more teachers joined the race and started competing with Mrs. Kibar in the number of families they visited. Mrs. Kibar stated that, during the Spring of 2016, she was competing with a colleague, who is also her close friend, in conducting home visits. As she explained, "Now, I compete with Ms. Çicek. She is a friend of mine, another teacher here. Now, it became official: she wants to do it too. She has already visited all of her parents once." Once the

[56] The 2015-2016 school year was the second year of this project, and this study was conducted in the Spring of 2016.

home visits were justified with this district recognition, the school administrators were more comfortable letting teachers conduct them, and teachers such as Mrs. Kibar as well as some other teachers felt more comfortable doing them too.

Encouragement. Mrs. Kibar also stated that besides obtaining the official approval, having school administrators' encouragement was also a motivating factor. In CEML, this came after the district recognition. Mrs. Kibar emphasized that she was able to discuss her activities with the school administrators, seek help from the school counselors, and talk with the other teachers who also visit the families of their students. "I mean, it is not like we need anything [support] for that, but even having someone to talk about these suggestions [is useful]. Even when administrators say things like, 'We need to conduct home visits,' or 'Let's try this. This might be better,' it's very motivating."

What parents need

This theme emerged from the parents' critiques of the school administrators and the way they handled parental engagement. It describes 11-A parents' calls for more responsive school administrator behaviors, in the sense that school administrators treat parents with dignity and try to reflect parents' needs in school activities. When parents talked about their interactions with school administrators, they often referred to two main occasions (school-parent meetings and when they were invited to school for disciplinary cases). They suggested two main changes that can not only benefit parents' interactions with the administrators, but also improve parents' school visits.

Changing the content and structure of school-parent meetings. Parents criticized the content and the structure of the school-parent meetings, and four sub-themes emerged from their discussions: standard information load, high formality, lack of interaction and parental voice, and paucity of meeting opportunities. As one parent put it, "Meetings are not intended for parents, not

very parent friendly, because it is only student academics… grades and school expenses. That's all."

Mr. Tatar[57] explained that school-parent meetings were organized following the first exams to "inform the parents about their children's exam grades" and "absence results." The Spring of 2016 meeting, for instance, was organized between noon to 1 p.m. on a Sunday in April, and six parents participated from Mrs. Kibar's counseling classroom. Parents were directed to their children's classrooms, and Mrs. Kibar's parents all gathered in 11-A. Parents quietly waited until Mrs. Kibar arrived. When she did, she first distributed two pages, which were informing parents about their children's general standings after the first exams and absence issues. Then, she specifically focused on how their children performed in her class. After about ten minutes, another teacher, who also taught a class with 11-A, knocked on the door and took Mrs. Kibar's place as she took off for another class that she taught. Similar to Mrs. Kibar, he also informed the parents about their children's standings in his class. After about five minutes, another teacher came in and this cycle was repeated 6-7 times. During these shifts, Mr. Tatar also paid a visit and informed the parents about the school rules, financial needs, and asked for donations from the parents. During all of these shifts, parents sat quietly and listened to what the teachers and Mr. Tatar had to inform them about. Only in a couple of instances, teachers asked the parents if there was anything they did not understand and if they had any questions concerning what they just heard. At the end, parents dispersed to their homes with two pages of information.

Several parents reported that these meetings provide them with nothing but standard information, and they believed that they did not learn anything new in these meetings. In fact, what was given to the parents during the Spring meeting was not more than what was available to them

[57] Mr. Tatar was one of the school assistant principals, and he was responsible for the 11th grade classes.

through the school website. Parents thought that the content was very shallow and one-sided. As one mother stated, “I mean, all teachers come one by one and each speaks a couple minutes. Then here you go. I guess it is about 30 minutes or so in total anyway.”

Parents had different ideas about what else could be discussed in the meetings. Some parents wanted to make the meetings more social where they could “have some food and social interactions” and in the meantime discuss “school issues” in a more “informal environment”. One parent protested the fact that parents did not get to know teachers and to introduce themselves to them. As she said, “They don’t even know us. No one knows one another [in the meetings].” She suggested that the school could organize an introduction meeting first where parents and teachers could talk about themselves before discussing school matters. “I wish that they would pay more attention. For instance, we don’t have an introductory meeting to get to know each other. They only organize two meetings [in a year] and they just come and talk about students: Boom! Boom! Boom! And dismiss.” Another parent who also objected the content of the meetings similarly asked for multiple meetings and emphasized the necessity of talking about students’ home experiences.

> You know, we should have two meetings. In the first, we can talk about academics and how children are doing in classes. In the second one, for example, we should talk about how they are doing at home with their families, how they are doing in the families. Things like that should be discussed. [Ask] how he is doing at home.

The same mother also expressed her need to discuss the difficulties that she was having while she was trying to engage with her children’s education at her home. She stated that:

> Teachers are just rushing through the grades and leave. We don’t like it this way. I mean, we should be thinking about how we can help a child, how we can motivate him/her if she/he is not distracted, how we can help her/him to keep up if she/he is beginning to fall behind in a class.

The content of the school-parent meetings, designed by the school administrators, was not appreciated by the parents. Parents did not like to be passive receivers of the standard information

that teachers tried to provide them under the supervision of their administrators, but wanted to be known by them. Parents stated, “It would be very nice if they knew us.” Parents wanted teachers “attention” and time to be able to express themselves and have meaningful discussions.

Changing problem-solving approaches. Besides the school-parent meetings, parents also provided feedback on their personal interactions with the school administrators and asked for improvements in this regard. As mentioned before, all parent-administrator interactions occurred in the school during parents’ visits. The parents mainly came to the school for one of two reasons: to attend the school-parent meetings, which was the case for only four parents during the Spring meeting, and to advocate for their children, especially when invited to the school by the administrators. The administrators often called parents when their children were involved in a disciplinary action, such as breaking the smoking rule, regularly violating the dress code, being involved in a fight with a peer, disturbing instruction, disrespecting and disobeying their teachers. Accordingly, this theme was prevalent among the parents who, in the past, had been summoned to the school for their children’s disciplinary actions. When they were invited due to their children’s discipline problems, several parents protested school administrators’ problem-solving approaches.

One of the first things that the parents requested was that the school administrators change the ways they treat the parents. Especially the parents who were invited to the school for their children’s disciplinary problems criticized the way they were treated by the school administrators. They reported that the school administrators “blamed them for their children’s behaviors” and “did not listen what the parents had to say.” For instance, one mother who visited the school after her daughter was sent to the school discipline committee, shared:

> What would you say when you have a guest in your home. [You would] say “Welcome!” You would say, “Have a seat!” Right? … They were cold, no affection, no kindness, nothing. It was as if I was under custody in a police station. I mean it felt that way. What happened was, I was standing, and they were like,

> "Your student was like this and that." I felt like I was being interrogated. I didn't like it at all. … They [administrators] have to treat you nicely. At the end, we are the parents, and I am a woman. When you treat me like that, of course I won't come even if I want to.

Parents also criticized the administrators' lack of sympathy and heed for the parents' needs and problems. They protested they were "treated like kids" and "disrespected". One parent explained how she had a difficult time when she was trying to give an excuse for her daughter's tardiness problem:

> I am telling him that my child was late a couple of times. … I am explaining to him that she [her daughter] takes a bus to come to the school. Plus, she takes care of her younger siblings at nights. I work at nights. I am telling him all these and he goes like, "This is not my problem. Go tell your problems somewhere else. I have to write her absent if she comes late." ... I believe this needs to change. They need to pay attention [to what parents had to tell them]. They need to wait a minute and give it a thought at least. Of course, I would first expect him to say "Welcome! Have a seat!" I mean this is the least, right?

On the one hand, when the administrators ran into a problem, they tried to follow the formal procedure and applied the relevant punishments. They did not want to listen to any excuses as they wanted to establish "order" and run a tight school. On the other hand, parents wanted to be listened to and understood.

Another issue that parents criticized about administrators was that the administrators focused on problems instead of solutions: administrators wanted to know who was involved, who was guilty of what, and issue the rules. Administrators did not focus on solving the student problems but solving the issues that were causing problems for the school. Therefore, their intention was not to find solutions for the students and help them in difficult situations, but to clear out the issues that were causing a problem to the school. It seems that to gain parents trust, administrators need to open themselves up and listen to the parents and try to understand the story, not only from a school-centric perspective, but also from the children's and their families side.

Summary and Discussion

The substance of this section provides a brief summary of the case findings and a discussion of the results in the order of the research questions. The discussion section includes the contributions of the findings and suggests possible implications for teachers and school administrators.

Summary

Mrs. Kibar and 11-A parents were chosen as the focus of this study for Mrs. Kibar's district-level recognition in engaging the parents of her counseling classroom 11-A. The study revealed several key findings. Below, I tried to summarize them in the order of the three research questions which guided this case:

1. How did 11-A parents feel about their children's education and their roles as parents? Did they value their children's education?

2. How did parental engagement look in this case? What was understood, valued, and promoted as good parental engagement practice?

3. What strategies were used to foster 11-A parents' engagement?

First, the findings suggest that all the parents deeply cared about their children's education. Despite the socio-economic difficulties and disadvantages that 11-A parents were dealing with, they all valued education and wanted their children to receive the best education possible. Also, the parents believed that they were doing their best to support their children. That being said, however, most of the parents expressed some form of ambivalence and powerlessness regarding their ability to support their children. Certainly, all the parents wanted their children to receive the best education possible, and they were doing their best to support this, but they also believed that

they could have done much more if they had been better educated and had more financial means to do so.

Second, 11-A parents did not appear to be a very engaged group from a school-centric perspective, seeing that they did not come to the school very often to support the teachers and school administrators with classroom and school management issues, as had been requested. However, from a student/child-centered perspective, these parents believed that they were doing their best to support their children's education. Based on the data derived in this study, the kind of engagement that the parents often mentioned, and Mrs. Kibar fostered in this case, focused on solving students' problems that were disturbing, or could disturb students' academic progress and personal development. In support of this final goal, parents engaged in five different forms of activities in engaging with their children's education: advocating; parent-teacher communication and partnership; providing basic moral and academic support; motivating by means of advising; and monitoring and knowing about their children's lives.

Third, despite the lack of parental presence in the school and their reluctance to contact and coordinate with the teachers, Mrs. Kibar did not choose to blame the parents for the situation and leave it there. In contrast, she continued to believe in the necessity of securing their support and partnering with them in solving the various problems her students were going through. Consequently, she was able to communicate with her parents, and together they were able to establish partnerships to help the students. Analyzing Mrs. Kibar's efforts and strategies to promote parental engagement, this study yielded three main themes that potentially helped her in doing so: don't judge, be positive and focus on the solution; don't wait and reach out; and perform student-centered altruism.

Also, inquiring into the different ways through which the school administrators were supporting, or could be supporting, parents' engagement also yielded two main themes: what teachers need (encouragement, recognition, and approval); and what parents need (more comprehensive and flexible school-parent meetings; solution-centered and considered problem solving approaches).

Discussion

Whether knowingly or unknowingly, educators seek for parents to engage with their children's education in ways that benefit educators and make their work easier in schools (Balkar, 2009). The literature review conducted in this study suggests that educators' perspectives and understanding of parental engagement, what they count as engagement and how they promote it, is critical for establishing partnerships between educators and parents. Aligned with this literature, this study also suggests that to achieve a partnership, first, it is necessary to change educators' stereotypical beliefs about parents and increase their trust in parents. Second, it is also necessary that educators improve their school-centric definitions and acknowledge all different types of activities with their different objectives. For this, educators need to be ready to acknowledge students' and parents' concerns above their own. Third, instead of blaming parents for their lack of presence, educators need to perceive partnership as a joint responsibility and try to find different ways to meet and interact with their parents in more constructive ways. Parents especially demand educators' respect and ask to be engaged in more meaningful ways instead of blindly and passively complying with educators' expectations. Below, I will briefly discuss each of these issues in the order of the research questions.

Discussion of Q1: Perceptions. This study has produced two main findings in response to the first research question: how 11-A parents felt about their children's education and whether they valued it or not.

On the one hand, some of the parental engagement literature suggests that parents, who do not perform so-called "effective," school-based parental engagement practices, act in this way simply because they do not care about their children's education (Goodwin, & King, 2002). On the other hand, a growing body of literature shows that although parents may not meet school expectations for parental engagement, they still deeply care about their children's education and able to support them (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004; Goldenberg, 1987; Hernandez, 2010). That being said, the first finding of this study contributes to the growing literature that challenges the common misconception that is mentioned in the first assertion. The findings corresponding to the first research question indicate that all the participating parents in this study deeply cared about their children's education and were ready to provide any support in their power. This means that, despite all the socioeconomic problems that they were dealing with, these parents still prioritized their children's education and made great sacrifices to support them. In fact, they perceived education as a way to save their children from the strain of their own lives and socioeconomic class.

Literature suggests that when parents do not meet school-based parental engagement expectations, educators often rush to interpret this as a draw-back (on parents' side), as the parents' lack of attention and lack of care for their children's education. However, this misconception only further marginalizes these parents and expands the gap that already exists between them and schools (Auerbach, 2007; Gaitan, 2012; DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005; Goodwin & King, 2002; Moreno, Lewis-Menchaca, & Rodriguez, 2011). To prevent this from happening, teachers need to overcome this stereotypical way of viewing parents by recognizing and acknowledging

parents' care for their children. Of course, to be able to achieve this, teachers need to get to know and listen to parents, paying special attention to all of the kinds of sacrifices they are making for their children. If this can be achieved, then teachers can recognize parents as their potential allies in helping their children. In this study, for example, I tried to share Mrs. Kibar's example to show teachers how they can think about tapping into this potential. Mrs. Kibar, in fact, did criticize her parents for not making themselves readily available to her and to other teachers by visiting the school regularly and proactively supporting teachers in their efforts to help the students. Yet, she also believed that parents love their children, and she saw parents as an important potential that she just needed to find a way to tap into. Therefore, she was driven to find a different way to meet with the parents of her students and garner their support, as she could not ignore their help if she were to solve her students' problems.

Parents' feelings of desperation and powerlessness constituted the second important finding regarding the first research question. Despite the parents' commitment and desire to make contributions to their children's education, these parents felt restrained due to various obstacles, such as their lack of education, academic expertise, social skills, time, and energy. Combined with educators' alienating treatment toward them, parents were left in their isolated worlds. Mrs. Kibar was able to punch a hole through the walls that trapped the parents and disabled their communication with the schools. She was able to meet with them in their homes and listen to their problems. Yet, she alone could not achieve much to meet their needs. She merely tried to solve students' immediate problems that were distracting them from the school. Recognizing parents' desire to support their children's education as a potential, schools can work with parents and help them constantly grow their potential. For instance, 11-A parents cried about their inability to communicate with their adolescent children and motivate them. Schools can listen to the needs of

parents and try to address those to build their capacities. I will discuss this issue in more detail, while discussing strategies for teachers and school administrators.

Discussion of Q2: Definition. How parental engagement is defined in schools is an important and consequential conundrum (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Bower & Griffen, 2011; Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001). By defining parental engagement in a certain way, schools not only promote and foster certain types of practices, they also set the tone for whose engagement counts in schools (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Bower & Griffen, 2011; Delgado-Gaitan, 2012; Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001). This eventually means that certain groups of parents who share the same culture and perspective with schools are better positioned to partner with educators. Therefore, educators need to be careful about how they make sense of parental engagement and who they might be inviting and casting out.

In this case, parental engagement was defined as parents' actions and efforts to help their children in solving their various problems. Focused on this final goal, parents were engaged in various forms of engagement practices. Recognizing the same goal as the parents, Mrs. Kibar and 11-A parents were able to establish a partnership that focused on solving the student problems. Instead of trying to engage the parents around the goals set by teachers and/or schools, Mrs. Kibar adapted a student-centered approach in engaging the parents and partnered with them in helping the students. While the parents were trying to help their children in solving their problems, Mrs. Kibar concentrated her efforts on reaching out to the parents and collaborated with them to remove obstacles from the students' paths.

As discussed in the literature review, the definition of parental engagement is often constrained within limited, school-centric practices in Turkish schools (Erdoğan, &

Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). Schools and educators usually envision certain roles as parental engagement, but the findings of this study suggest that educators need to be open to other possibilities, for there are always other ways in which parents can be engaged. In fact, parents might be highly engaged in their own ways that are not visible to educators. This case suggests that educators need to pay attention to how they understand the concept, what they count as engagement, and how much they prioritize their own values, needs, and concerns over the parents' when they ask parents to engage. Even in this case, from a school-centric perspective, neither Mrs. Kibar nor the school administrators believed that 11-A parents were engaged, or eager to engage with their children's education, since the parents did not participate in the school-parent meetings or visit the school to support teachers and the administrators in running the school. However, if we take a child/student centered perspective, 11-A parents were ready to advocate for their children, and in fact, they were trying hard to support their children to the best of their knowledge and abilities. Mrs. Kibar, instead of forcing the parents to perform these traditional roles, helped them to engage by helping them to solve their children's problems.

School-centric, traditional parental engagement models are often criticized for prioritizing educators' voices over the parents', and yet, Balkar (2009) found that Turkish teachers often define parental engagement in ways that benefit themselves. Along with the opposing literature, this case suggests that undermining parents' concerns and needs is dismantling parental engagement and defeating its purpose. In fact, parental engagement should not be understood as parents' responsibilities to support school goals and better schools, but rather it is time that educators pay attention to parents' needs, concerns, and values, and try to co-create agendas that educators and parents can collaboratively work on. What Mrs. Kibar achieved with 11-A parents was possible

because she was able to find a common goal that parents equally cared about (solving various student problems).

Discussion of Q3: Strategies. Literature suggests that school leadership greatly affects the ways parental engagement is understood in schools and the nature of parent-school relationships (Ho, 2006). Although, this might be true for most of the cases, this study provides two examples where two teachers were able to go beyond the boundaries of their school cultures and establish collaborative relationships with their parents while expanding the existing understandings of parental engagement.

For Teachers. Literature suggests that almost all teachers value parental engagement, and most of them are dissatisfied with the level of parental engagement in their schools (Balkar, 2009). Despite that, they do little to improve the situation except complain about parents (e.g. see Yapimci, & Yapimci, 2003; Yavuz, 2004). In teachers' idealistic world, parents should perform certain sets of "effective" parental engagement roles and support teachers in improving classroom instruction. After all, it is their children that teachers are trying to educate. In the previous section, I argued that teachers need to start thinking about parental engagement differently and broaden their perspectives to include different possibilities. Aligned with this argument, this section suggests that there also might be different ways of thinking about parent-teacher partnership. Inquiring into Turkish parents' and teachers' critiques regarding school-parent collaboration and partnership, Balkar (2009) found that teacher-parent partnership is a phenomenon only expected of parents. In other words, teachers expect parents to comply with educators' expectations and cooperate with them, but they do not work to make an actual collaboration happen. Mrs. Kibar's case provides us with a constructive example of creating

change that teachers can easily make to improve and restore their relationships with the parents (that they are supposed to work with).

Teachers assume that engaging parents should render their job easier. However, with a culturally responsive approach, this may not be the case for most of the time. In these two cases, Mrs. Kibar was engaged herself with a lot of extra work that her colleagues did not even want to consider. By trying to reach out to a community that was earlier left out of the picture, raising their previously silenced voices, and creating opportunities for them to challenge her instruction, she had to sacrifice a lot of extra effort, time, and energy from her own life.

Literature suggests that especially low SES parents face numerous barriers that prevent them from coming to schools and meeting teachers' expectations (Ceylan, Akar, 2010). When teachers sit back and merely complain about the lack of parents' presence and support, they fail to create alternative opportunities to collaborate with these parents. For instance, in this case, Mrs. Kibar sacrificed her own personal time to reach out to the parents of her counseling classroom. In this way, she was able to create a new avenue to interact with the parents who were considered unengaged due to their reluctance to attend school-parent meetings. This is only one alternative that teachers can think of, but the bottom line is that there might be other ways to reach out to parents, and teachers need to stop complaining about the lack of parental participation and find a way to reach out to the parents. When teachers start considering what is convenient for the parents instead of what is convenient for themselves, sometimes a solution can be accomplished by simply increasing the number of meetings and holding them at a range of different times (Balkar, 2009; Erdener, 2016).

Yet, reaching out to parents is not the only obstacle for parent-teacher partnerships. In this study, parents criticized teachers for using rare interaction opportunities, such as school-parent

meetings, as a chance to complain about the students, and for blaming parents for their children's actions. They also criticized the ways they were treated while listening to these complaints. Conducting six hundred and sixty-one surveys in 64 Turkish schools, Erdener (2016) found teacher attitudes to be the most important factor affecting parents' engagement with their children's education. This criticism was also prevalent in Balkar (2009) and Ahioglu-Lindberg (2013). These parent arguments suggest that teachers need to avoid oppressive language and use the interaction opportunities to solve student problems. For instance, if a student regularly has a tardiness problem and "disturbs the order in her/his classroom," teachers can approach this student trying to understand the real problems causing this issue and contact the family with an intention to work on the solution. In this case, 11-A parents were impressed by Mrs. Kibar's un-insulting, un-judgmental, and solution-centered approach to the problems her students were facing. When the parents saw her commitment for the good of their children, they did not hesitate to partner with her, as they trusted her.

Indeed, what parents ask is reasonable and necessary. Çalik (2207) suggests that in public schools where the resources are scarcest, it is not only a professional, but also a social and citizenship responsibility for educators to work hard to engage parents with their children's education to help their students succeed in schools. However, to do this, teachers first need to quit blaming parents and their children for the problems they associate with them and think about ways to create constructive interactions.

For Administrators. As discussed earlier, the Turkish education system has a centralized and strictly hierarchical organization that is designed and governed in such a way that participants carry out the orders that they receive from their higher-ups (Kurt, 2011). Orders come from the central administration and are passed down to the schools through district administrators (Kurt,

2011; Simsek, & Yildirim, 2000) with little or no flexibility and innovation for the players (Kurt, 2011). In this way, orders are carried out in the same manner in all corners of the state. Considering this centralized structure, it may not be a fair request to ask school administrators to create a huge change in the system, but what this study tries to do here is increase awareness about the systemic issues that are causing problems for parents they are meant to serve.

From Mrs. Kibar's point of view, administrators can play more supportive roles instead of directly partnering with the parents. Her statements suggest that administrators need to be supportive of teachers while teachers are working with the parents. From the parents' point of view, though, administrators need to change their perceptions regarding parents' engagement and consider different roles that parents can play in schools. Informing parents was one of the main roles that administrators tried to fulfill regarding parental engagement. They provided parents with information through texting, the school website, and school-parent meetings in five main areas: student grades, student absenteeism, student behavior issues (whether the students were causing problems in the school or not), school rules and policies, as well as school financial needs. It seems that this understanding of parental engagement was rather restrictive and limiting. The school administration assumed that it was the educators' role to inform parents about various other issues regarding the school and their children, and parents were expected to attentively collect this information and act as they were asked. This appeared to be a problematic issue for the parents, as they felt they did not have any say in their children's education or in the operation of the school.

The main school-parent interaction venue, organized by school administration, was the school-parent meetings. The first step that administrators could take to engage parents in more meaningful ways might be to ask their opinions about the content and the structure of school-parent meetings. Most of the parents found school-parent meetings to be dull and unfruitful

gatherings, for the meetings did not go beyond providing basic, standard information which parents already had access to through the school website. The parents did not want to come to the school to be passive recipients of information that administrators thought necessary, but rather they wanted to interact and socialize with each other and educators, ask questions, and talk about their needs and problems concerning their children. Being a part of a hierarchical system, this concept might be difficult to grasp for administrators, but it appeared that parents were ready and willing to undertake the work necessary to make such a change, for they criticized this issue in their statements.

Parents also criticized that they were often contacted for donations or disciplinary problems in which their children were involved and expected to come to the schools to help administrators resolve these issues. Yet, they could not receive attention and respect when they wanted to advocate for their children. Literature suggests that how parents are treated by school leaders greatly impacts their relationships with schools (Barr, & Saltmarsh, 2014; Erdener, 2016). As Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) put it, "… parents are more likely to be engaged with schools where the principal is perceived as welcoming and supportive of their involvement, and less likely to be engaged where the principal is perceived as inaccessible, dismissive, or disinterested in supporting their involvement." (p.491)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Turkish literature suggests that both teachers and administrators speak highly of the role and importance of parent-school partnerships, but in practice, little is done to establish partnerships between parents and schools or support parents' engagement with their children's education (Erdoğan, & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). Unfortunately, existing efforts do not go beyond organizing school-parent meetings to share some "necessary" information based on school administrators'

judgements and complain about parents' lack of support and interest in the educational processes of their children's education (Erdoğan, & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). Teachers complain about parent attitudes and parents criticize how they are treated in schools (Ahioglu-Lindberg, 2013; Erdener, 2016).

In response to that, the existing literature on parents' engagement in Turkey relies on the school-centric traditional parental engagement models (i.e. Ahioglu-Lindberg, 2013; Balkar, 2009; Erdener, 2013; Erdener, 2016; Tekin, 2008) that are ineffective in helping parents who are historically marginalized in the system (Gaitan, 2012). Deriving from traditional models, existing studies inquire into parents' and teachers' perspectives about the role of parental engagement, the problems and solutions associated with engaging parents and partnering with them (e.g. Ahioglu-Lindberg, 2013; Balkar, 2009; Erdener, 2016; Erdoğan, & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010).

In contrast to existing literature, this study discusses strategies based on two exemplary cases in which the teachers succeeded in engaging the parents they served and successfully partnered and collaborated with them in this process. This study also approaches parental engagement from a broader perspective and goes beyond the school-centric, traditional practices in which parents are often expected to perform in the service of various school goals. Aligned with the culturally responsive models, this study suggests that teachers need to expand the ways they try to engage parents and be ready to incorporate a range of potential activities that parents can offer. While doing so, school-parent collaboration and partnership should not be viewed as parents' responsibilities toward educators and schools, but as activities in which parents and educators can partner to support students and their well-being.

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS

Parental engagement has become a heated topic for research and practice, with the promise that it can improve student achievement and help reduce achievement disparities among different groups of students (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Jeynes, 2003; Jeynes, 2007; Hill & Tyson, 2009). Despite this promise, improving parental engagement for all parents has remained a problem for both practitioners and researchers. Buying into the promise of improved parental engagement, Turkey has been paying an increasing amount of attention to the practice and endeavoring to improve parental engagement in its schools. The purpose of this study is to contribute to Turkey's goal of improving parental engagement in its urban public schools.

Despite school efforts, the level of parental engagement in Turkey is still far from a desired level (Lindberg, 2017). As discussed in chapter two, in regard to improving parental engagement current research focuses on problems and barriers that prevent teachers and parents from engaging with their children's education (Lindberg, 2017). In contrast to this literature, the current study focuses on two successful examples where parents' engagement was improved by two determined teachers. By sharing these positive examples, this study tries to highlight the paths of educators who aspire to become exemplary teachers by improving parental engagement in their schools or classrooms.

This study was guided by two main research questions: How is parental engagement defined in Mr. Kara and Ms. Kibar's cases? What do Mr. Kara and Ms. Kibar do to improve parental engagement? The findings suggest several applications regarding parental engagement practice. The remainder of this chapter tries to situate these findings in the larger parental engagement narrative and discusses what practitioners can do who are ready to take their teacher-parent collaboration to the next level.

Implications for Research

The implications of this study are particularly crucial for Turkish literature. Research focusing on parental engagement often fails to conceptualize the concept beyond rigid definitions and to recognize various ways that parental engagement can be defined and implemented. In response to this, current study presents two scenarios, in which two teachers (Kara and Kibar) achieved teacher-parent collaboration in different ways and promoted different parental engagement practices based on their students' needs.

Providing a counter argument against the confining, one-size-fits-all definitions of parental engagements, Kara and Kibar presented us with two different approaches to the concept of parental engagement, each walking on two different paths for reaching it. For example, Kara's parents were active in the school and conducted many visits to learn from Kara while sharing valuable information and collaborating with him. In contrast, Kibar's parents rarely appeared in the school, but they welcomed Kibar into their homes and engaged in deep discussions and decision-making processes about their children's education. Although all parents genuinely worked hard to support their children's education and eagerly collaborated with the teachers, their engagement looked different in each case.

Another contribution that this study offers for literature is that it focuses on what is working instead of further promoting deficit thinking about parents in public schools. As discussed above, parental engagement literature, particularly in Turkey, focuses on problems and barriers to parental engagement and home-school collaborations. Although, they are helpful in the identification of these problems, they do not really tell us about how we can start changing things and actually win these parents. Different from the extant literature, this study focused on two teachers who were acknowledged in their districts for their successful teacher-parent collaborations and parental

engagement efforts. By examining their efforts and experiences, this study promotes a positive image of these parents, while providing helpful strategies for teachers and school administrators who wants to support parental engagement in their schools.

Overall, it can be suggested that future research needs to approach parental engagement with an open mind, considering all other possible ways that parental engagement can unfold in different situations. Furthermore, we need more research sharing positive examples and empowering parents and educators who, despite all the deficit beliefs, are able to accomplish home-school collaboration. Since this study was conducted at teacher and classroom levels, future research may focus on school level cases and share a bigger picture.

Implications for Teachers and School Administrators

This study also highlights several important points regarding the practice of engaging parents in urban public schools, particularly in Turkey. It is clear from these cases that engaging parents is not an easy task. It requires a lot of extra time and energy from teachers, when they are already occupied with instructional duties and receive little help from their administrators. This being said, it seems that the following insights can still help teachers support parents and increase the current level of parental engagement in their classrooms, especially when they receive the minimum support from their administrators.

It Is Not a Choice: Engaging Parents as a Core Responsibility

Literature suggests that in theory, all parties –parents, teachers, and administrators– value parental engagement and want to improve home-school ties and collaboration (Erdogan & Demirkasımoglu, 2010). However, in practice, educators make little effort to engage parents and often avoid the responsibility (Erdogan & Demirkasımoglu, 2010; Lindberg, 2017). The findings obtained in this study suggest that it is necessary for educators to see engaging parents and

establishing home-school ties as a core school function and an educator responsibility (Lindberg, 2017).

The findings derived from the two case studies complement each other in suggesting that engaging parents should not be seen as an optional practice that is secondary in priority for teachers. Both Kara (in case one) and Kibar (in case two) deeply believed that engaging parents and garnering their support was vital for their students' education. For example, Kara portrayed education as an object sitting on a three-legged stand/trivet, while students, parents, and teachers each represent one leg that holds education in its place. Therefore, ignoring parents and taking them out of the system only cripples children's education and teachers' efforts in this regard. In these two cases, both teachers were convinced that engaging parents was a crucial part of their responsibilities as teachers. As a result, they spent a considerable amount of time and energy trying to achieve this task by creating new grounds, occasions, and avenues for parents to not only participate passively, but also to contribute actively to their children's education. For example, Kibar never hesitated to visit a family after school hours when she thought that one of her students had an issue that needed parents' attention. Kibar and the parents discussed serious issues about the students, and together they tried to help the students overcome various problems that students were facing.

Turkish teachers mostly concern themselves with instructional responsibilities and perceive parental engagement as something that parents need to do. Although they believe in the necessity of the practice, they do not assume much responsibility in engaging parents and establishing teacher-parent collaborations. However, these cases suggest that this perception might be setting a conceptual barrier before teachers and preventing them from taking constructive action. To overcome this barrier, it is not enough to simply convince teachers of the importance of

parental engagement, but also the necessity of their active participation and proactive efforts. In these two cases, efforts began with the teachers, and it was only after Kara and Kibar gained the parents' trust that parents started collaborating with them.

Kara believed that this active teacher effort is particularly necessary for the later grades, five through twelve, because by the time children reach middle school and high school, their parents have already developed a pattern of home-school collaboration: go to school only when it is absolutely necessary. Therefore, the responsibility of winning these parents back who were systematically distanced from schools lies with teachers who believe in the value of home-school collaboration.

In regard to school administrators, in these two cases they only contributed to Kara and Kibar's efforts and determination by being permissive and encouraging. For example, for Kara to be able to organize all the extra parent meetings, seminars, and other events, he needed the administrators' approvals. He stated that many school principals do not allow these kinds of initiatives on the grounds of sustaining school order and security. Yet, the administration in two cases was permissive enough to enable teachers such as Kara and Kibar to act upon their instincts. Considering the impact that school administrators could have in creating new programs (Leithwood, 1994; Hallinger, 2003), it is necessary to have more administrators who are open to new parental engagement initiations (Ho, 2009).

Being Student-Centric and Showing Altruistic Behavior

Aligned with the literature, this study also confirms that Turkish parents have some negative preconceptions about schools and educators (Ozgan & Aydin, 2010). Parents often believe that they are only invited to school for one of two reasons: to donate or to discipline their children. In such cases, parents do not feel that they are actually contributing to their children's

education. This study suggests that teachers need to engage parents in a way that parents can feel they are supporting their children's education. Parents, in this study, felt that they were working with the teachers (Mr. Kara and Mrs. Kibar) in helping their own children. They appreciated the clear link between their engagement and their children. They also appreciated seeing these teachers' sacrifice from their own time to help their children.

First of all, in the two studied cases, the parents felt their contributions were directly linked with their children, academically or non-academically. This idea of helping their own children was highlighted by the parents throughout the study. The findings of the two cases suggest that teachers should focus their parental engagement activities on the students. Thus, any school-centric goals –such as classroom management or donations issues– should come later. This is especially important for teachers who have not yet established trusting relationships with the parents in their classrooms. For example, in Kara's case, he asked the parents to collaborate with him in improving their own children's test scores. In this way, he was able to link the parents' efforts with academic outcomes for their own children. A bit different from Kara, Kibar asked parents to help her in solving their own children's problems. She did not establish a direct link between the parents' efforts and their children's academic outcomes, instead Kibar collaborated with the parents in solving various problems that their children were facing. Still, Kibar's parents felt that they were involved in their children's education and their efforts were benefitting their own children.

Trying to collaborate with parents to help their individual children affected the parents and helped these teachers to gain the trust of the parents. Both Kara and Kibar's efforts made sure that the parents understood how much their children were valued by their teachers (Kara and Kibar). What Kara and Kibar did was to invite parents into a collaboration to help their own children.

Seeing these teachers' efforts in supporting their own children helped the parents trust in these teachers and collaborate with them.

The care and compassion that Kara and Kibar had for their students manifested itself in the form of intentions and actions to help their students. In this study, both teachers concerned themselves with their students and their wellbeing. That being so, they sacrificed from their own time to do good for the students' sake: visited them at their homes outside of school hours, organized extra meetings (only Mr. Kara), and tried to solve their students' problems. Seeing the efforts to help their children, parents started trusting in these teachers (Mr. Kara and Mrs. Kibar) and became even more motivated to engage with their children's education.

These findings suggest that when teachers try to focus their time and energy on helping individual students and invite parents to make a positive change in their own children's lives, parents will be more likely to trust them and recognize the link between their own engagement and their own children. Also, when parents see teachers working hard to help their children, instead of presenting them as children causing problems in their classes, they may become willing to collaborate with teachers.

School Finance

In Turkey, asking parents for donations appears to be an important problem for parent-school relationships (Bilgin, 1990; Aslan, 1994; Doğan, 1995; Oğan, 2000; Başaran & Koç, 2001; Saraçoğlu, 2002; Aslanargun & others, 2004; Calik, 2007; Ozgan & Aydin, 2010). Even educators agree that asking parents for donations scares away many parents from visiting schools (Ozgan & Aydin, 2010). Supporting these findings, this study also finds parents' financial involvement problematic for parent-teacher relationships. Thus, it can be suggested that schools need to find

different resources (Ozgan & Aydin, 2010) or new ways to communicate their financial needs to the parents, while protecting teacher-parent relationships.

In Kara's case for example, Kara overcame this issue by leaving monetary issues to the school administrators. Kara was aware of the need for parent donations, but he also believed that school administrators could present this agenda without hurting teacher-parent relationships. When he met with the parents through monthly meetings, weekly office hours, or drop-by visits, he intentionally avoided any monetary talks and focused on student issues. In her alternative approach to teacher-parent collaboration, Kibar was also intentional in avoiding financial issues during her home visits. She visited parents to solve student problems and did not bring other school matters to the table. The data documented in this study shows that seeing these two teachers genuinely concerned for their children helped parents to trust in the teachers and change the prior "negative image" that parents previously held toward schools and educators.

Considering the current school financial system, it does not seem likely that schools can cease asking for donations from parents. In light of these findings, it can be suggested that schools need to find new ways to communicate their financial needs to parents. These cases suggest that parents should not be asked for donations every time they go to school, or every time that they are contacted by the school. Also, at the very least teachers should be removed from financial issues and should not be required to ask for donations from parents. In Kara's case, he left this issue to administrators, and in Kibar's case, she avoided this during her home visits.

Giving a Voice to Parents: Don't Assume Only Passive Roles

Almost all parental engagement literature agrees that one-way communication, from schools to parents, does not provide a productive stage for parent engagement (Mo & Singh, 2008; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Esptein, 2011). And yet, it is clear that Turkish schools provide few

opportunities for parents to raise their voice and share their concerns with educators (Balkar, 2009). When parents are invited to schools, they often have to stay passive and listen to what educators have to share with them. Parents find this approach problematic for their engagement with their children's education and demand schools provide different platforms for parents to express their opinions, concerns, and wishes (Gokce, 2000; Balkar, 2009).

These two examples show that there is more than one way to give parents a voice, but it is necessary to create opportunities for them to actually have a say about their children's education. In my first case, Kara created several different opportunities for teacher-parent interactions. In some of those, parents participated as a passive audience. For example, during the general school-parent meeting that was organized once every semester by the school administration, 8-E parents did not have an opportunity to raise their voices. During these meetings, parents had to listen to all the teachers and additionally, to the school administrators, in order to be informed about their students' progress and what the administrators had to tell them about the school. Yet, unlike other teachers, Kara organized a parent meeting every month to meet only with the parents of 8-E, his own counseling classroom. By doing so, he was able to spare some time for the parents to ask questions and share their concerns. Further, by holding weekly office hours, Kara provided 8-E parents with the opportunity to have individual meetings with him. Through these interactions, parents were able to share their most personal opinions and concerns, while discussing issues specifically pertaining to their own children. In the second case, while still giving parents a voice over their children's education, Kibar adopted a different strategy. As she conducted individual home visits, she was able to listen to the parents and hear their voices.

The leadership provided in schools is critical for how the staff make sense of parental engagement (Ho, 2009). Also, school leaders play very important roles in implementing any

school-wide reforms (Owens, 2000). Despite that, school leadership has received little attention for improving the Turkish education system (Gumus & Akcaoglu, 2013). Especially in top-down education systems, like Turkey's, it is very important to have administrative support, or at least administrative permission to try new strategies that emerge. Kara and Kibar's cases show how important it is to have administrators' consent before using a new strategy, such as visiting parents at their homes or organizing extra parent meetings in schools. Overall, these cases suggest that when teachers try to create new opportunities, school administrators need to support and encourage them in their quest for two-way teacher-parent communication channels. With their participation, some of these strategies could even be adapted by other teachers, as well as administrators themselves, and develop school-wide momentum for two-way school-home communication.

Regarding the issue of parents having a voice, the Ministry of Turkish National Education asks schools to "create opportunities for students, parents and all school staff to share their opinions", and to "sustain a regular communication between teachers and parents" (Milli Egitim Bakanligi, n.d.). Although these generic statements could provide the necessary justification for eager administrators, apparently, they lack the specificity to guide school administrators' daily practice in creating appropriate opportunities for parents to raise their voices. Therefore, it can also be argued that there is a need for more specific policy requirements for schools to create opportunities for the parents to be heard.

Adopting a Non-Accusatory, Solution–Centered Approach and Treating Parents with Respect

Another point that was common in Kara and Kibar's cases were their solution-centered approaches to parental engagement. Based on the discussions so far, it should be clear that there is a need for being student-centered and avoiding financial matters as educators try to engage

parents with their children's education. Besides these, Kara and Kibar also demonstrated a very positive approach in their interactions with the parents of their students. Literature suggests that especially working-class parents are often contacted by schools for negative reasons, only when there is a problem regarding their children (Davies, 1993; Genc, 2005; Ozbas & Badavan, 2009; Ozgan & Aydin, 2010). However, these two teachers avoided this problem-centered approach and either focused on positive issues or on solutions.

Only calling parents when there is a problem regarding their children is found problematic for parental engagement (Yılmaz & Oznacar, 2016; Ozgan & Aydin, 2010; Aydin, 2008). The two teachers in this study, especially Kara, intentionally tried to change parents' negative preconceptions about schools and educators by inviting them to the school for various positive reasons: celebrating student accomplishments, student showcases, parent seminars, and so on. In this way, Kara intended to change parents' beliefs that they would hear about problems and listen to complaining teachers every time they went to the school. This approach was very much appreciated by the parents and highlighted several times during the interviews.

Different from Kara, Kibar often contacted parents regarding her students' problems, but she did not establish her communication focusing on these problems. Instead of going after wrong-doing or searching for mistakes, she focused her energy on solutions and tried to collaborate with the parents to help their children overcome any difficulty that they were facing. Again, her parents found this approach very positive and praised Kibar for trying to help the parents in supporting their children.

On the one hand, it seems that teachers contact parents, asking them to discipline their children when students do not do their assignments, disturb instruction, or break a school code in some other way. On the other hand, these two cases suggest that these sorts of problems should

not be the only reason for contacting parents (Ozgan & Aydin, 2010). Also, when problems happen, teachers and administrators should adopt a solution-centric approach by trying to help the students, instead of trying to placing blame. As documented in Kibar's case, it is especially dangerous to treat parents harshly and blame them for their children's actions. Several parents in both cases reported this sort of interaction and found it very offensive and repulsive.

Conclusion

Schools are facing increasing pressure to engage parents in their children's education in order to improve various student outcomes (e.g. attendance rate, school achievement, school attainment, and so on). Also, parental engagement is often described as a "natural right for parents" and as a "prerequisite for a democratic society" (Calik, 2007). Yet, how to achieve this still remains a mystery for most of today's public schools. Trying to address this problem, the current study intends to help teachers and school administrators think differently about the practice of parental engagement and strategies that they can use to establish working home-school collaborations. Overall, the findings suggest that there is a need for reframing educators' understanding of what parental engagement is and how it can be incorporated into education. It seems that educators perceive parental engagement as a rigid set of responsibilities that parents need to perform in order to support what teachers are trying to achieve in schools (Erdogan & Demirkasımoglu, 2010; Lindberg, 2017). This study counters this attitude and suggests that engaging parents is not about receiving parents' unquestioned support for whatever is happening in schools, but rather it is about opening up schools to parents, giving them a voice, and creating opportunities for them to contribute to their children's education.

First of all, Kara and Kibar's cases documented that teachers and administrators need to play an active role in establishing home-school ties instead of expecting parents to comply with

schools' expectations (Erdogan & Demirkasımoglu, 2010; Lindberg, 2017). After assuming this responsibility, educators must reinterpret parental engagement with a flexible and context-specific approach, so that parents from different backgrounds can be recognized and engaged without discrimination (López, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Instead of enforcing a predefined practice and expecting parents to comply with it, schools need to pay attention to the voices of their parents and try to understand their needs, values, and perspectives (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Balkar, 2009; Gokce, 2000). Kara and Kibar's cases documented that there is a need to prioritize students during home-school collaborations. Parents in these two cases really appreciated seeing a clear link between their engagement and their children. Both teachers invited parents for reasons that would benefit the parents' own child and the parents eagerly collaborated with these teachers hoping to support their children.

Also, parents want to be heard in schools and demand more active roles in schools' decision-making processes (Gokce, 2000; Balkar, 2009; Erdogan & Demirkasımoglu, 2010). Unfortunately, it seems that the current platforms and structures in schools render parents passive recipients and do not give them opportunities to raise their voices (Balkar, 2009; Calik, 2007; Gokce, 2000). Therefore, it is the educators' responsibility to create new structures in schools, so that parents can share their opinions with them. In these two cases, the regular school-parent meetings that were organized once a semester by school administrators did not meet this need or provide parents with the opportunity to ask even simple questions. Therefore, each teacher found a different way to contact and communicate with their students' parents in their counseling classrooms. To create these new platforms, these teachers had to convince their administrators, and they took extra time to meet with and listen to their parents.

Finally, school administrators and teachers need to be trained in engaging parents, especially in regard to their communication skills. It seems that parents suffer from mistreatment when they visit schools. In fact, it was suggested that school administrators and teachers often focused on problems and sometimes blamed parents for what their children did in school. To change these kinds of practices and prepare our educators to engage in constructive communications with the parents of their students, we must make sure that they have the necessary training and continued support that they need. To this end, it might be a good idea to address these issues in teacher preparation programs and continue to support them through professional development opportunities. In these two cases, not only Kara and Kibar, but also the other seven teachers who only participated in the initial interviews, suggested that they did not receive any training regarding parental engagement. For future research, it might be a good idea to examine current teacher preparation programs and professional development opportunities, in terms of how they are addressing this issue and how they can be improved, so that we can prepare future educators to be ready to harness the support of parents for their students' education.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Letter

Principal Investigator Assurance of An Exempt Protocol

Name of Principal Investigator: Amita Chudgar

Title of Project: Improved Parental Involvement & Engagement: Multiple Case Study of Three Exemplary Teachers

IRB #:X15-1379e

The Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) has deemed this project as exempt, in accord with federal regulations for projects exempt from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review. As an exempt protocol, the appropriate IRB will not be further involved with the review or continued review of the project, as long as the project maintains the properties that make it exempt.

- Since the HRPP is no longer involved in the review and continued review of this project, it is the Principal Investigator who assumes the responsibilities for protection of human subjects in this project and ensures that the project is performed with integrity and within accepted ethical standards, particularly as outlined by the Belmont Report (see exempt educational materials).
- The Principal Investigator assumes responsibility for ensuring that the research subjects be informed of the research through a documented or undocumented consent process, if appropriate.
- The Principal Investigator assumes the responsibility to maintain confidentiality of the subjects and the data, and maintain the privacy of the subjects and protection of the data through appropriate means. If data is anonymous, the investigators will make no attempt to identify any individuals.
- The Principal Investigator assumes the responsibility that co-investigators and other members of the research team adhere to the appropriate policies to protect human subjects, maintain confidentiality and privacy, and adhere to accepted ethical standards.
- If the Principal Investigator adds additional investigators to an exempt protocol, he/she may inform the HRPP of the additions. This may be of particular importance to graduate students if the Graduate School requires proof of IRB approval.
- Any complaints from participants regarding the risk and benefits of the project must be reported to the HRPP.
- Since the Principal Investigator and co-investigators are charged with human subject protection and adhering to ethical principles in exempt research, it is appropriate that investigators be trained in human subject principles. The Principal Investigator and all members of the research team are required to complete MSU IRB educational requirements or equivalent.
- Any change in the protocol which may raise the project from exempt to an expedited or full review category must be presented to the HRPP. If there is any question about a change in protocol the Principal Investigator should consult the Director of the HRPP. Failure to submit changes which raise the protocol out of the exempt category will be considered non-compliance and will be subject to investigation and action by the HRPP.

By signing below, the Principal Investigator assures that he/she will abide by the terms of this assurance and the HRPP exempt policy.

Signature of Principal Investigator _____ 1/19/16 Date

7/17/09

APPENDIX B

Consent Form for Teachers Interview

I am a third year PhD student in the department of the Educational Administration at Michigan State University. I am inviting you to participate in a study that I am conducting to examine the meaning of parental engagement. Please read this consent form carefully before deciding whether or not to participate.

Goal of the research: This research, first, intends to examine how parents and school staff define parental engagement, and second, intends to discover what parents and school staff consider to be effective parental engagement practice. Thus, if you agree to participate, the researcher will interview you to seek your opinions for what counts as parental engagement practice, and what you do to promote these practices. It is important to note that there are no correct or wrong answers. The only focus is on your own perceptions and what you consider to be effective parental engagement.

What you will do in this research: If you agree, you will participate in three interviews (each one-hour-long) in your school. Interviews will be hold during the Spring 2016 semester, (the first interview in February and take approximately 20-30 minutes; the second interview in April and will take approximately 50-70 minutes; and the third interview will be in June and will take approximately 50-70 minutes). During the interviews, you will meet with me to talk about your perspective on parental engagement and how you engage the parents you serve. This conversation will be audiotaped and transcribed.

Benefits: By participating in this study, you will be able to share your perspectives on parental engagement with a wide audience. Through this study, I am seeking to better understand what parental engagement is as it is understood and practiced in urban Turkish schools.

Confidentiality: All of the personal information will be kept confidential, and only pseudonyms will be used for you, your school, and the parents in any printed materials or presentations.

Withdrawal: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can quit or withdraw at any time as you wish.

Protection of the data: The transcripts of the interview will only contain your real name during the transcription process. Once all recordings have been transcribed, all names will be changed to pseudonyms. The interview recordings and transcripts will be stored on my password protected laptop until the completion of this project. Then, they will be permanently erased.

Researcher Contact Information:
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APPENDIX C

Consent Form for Parent Interviews

I am a third year PhD student in the department of the Educational Administration at the Michigan State University. I am inviting you, along with four other parents from your child's classroom, to participate in a study that I am conducting to examine the meaning of parental engagement. Please read this consent form carefully before deciding whether or not to participate.

Goal of the research: This research, first, intends to examine how parents and school staff define parental engagement, and second, intends to discover what parents and school staff consider to be effective parental engagement practice. Thus, if you agree to participate, the researcher will interview you to seek your opinions about what counts as parental engagement practice, and what you do to promote these practices. It is important to note that there are no correct or wrong answers. The only focus is on your own perceptions and what you consider to be effective parental engagement.

What you will do in this research: If you agree, you will participate in three interviews (each one-hour-long) in your school. Interviews will be held during the Spring 2016 semester (the first interview in February, the second interview in April, and the third interview in June). During the interviews, you will meet with me to talk about your perspective on parental engagement and how you engage with the parents you serve. This conversation will be audiotaped and transcribed.

Benefits: By participating in this study, you will be able to share your perspective on parental engagement with a wide audience. Through this study, I am seeking to better understand what parental engagement is as it is understood and practiced in Turkish schools.

Confidentiality: All of the personal information will be kept confidential, and only pseudonyms will be used for you, your school, and the parents in any printed materials or presentations.

Withdrawal: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can quit or withdraw at any time as you wish.

Protection of the data: The transcripts of the interview will only contain your real name during the transcription process. Once all recordings have been transcribed, all names will be changed to pseudonyms. The interview recordings and transcripts will be stored on my password protected laptop until the completion of this project. Then, they will be permanently erased.

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APPENDIX D

Consent Form for Other School Staff Interviews

I am a third year PhD student in the department of the Educational Administration at Michigan State University. I am inviting you to participate in a study that I am conducting to examine the meaning of parental engagement. Please read this consent form carefully before deciding whether or not to participate.

Goal of the research: This research, first, intends to examine how parents and school staff define parental engagement, and second, intends to discover what parents and school staff consider to be effective parental engagement practice. Thus, if you agree to participate, the researcher will interview you to seek your opinion for what counts as parental engagement practice, and what you do to promote these practices. It is important to note that there are no correct or wrong answers. The only focus is on your own perceptions and what you consider to be effective parental engagement.

What you will do in this research: If you agree, you will participate in two interviews (first will take approximately 30-40 minutes, and then second about 50-70 minutes) in your school. Interviews will be held during the Spring 2016 semester (the first interview in April, the second interview in June). During the interviews, you will meet with me to talk about your perspective on parental engagement and how you involve parental engagement processes. This conversation will be audiotaped and transcribed.

Benefits: By participating in this study, you will be able to share your perspectives on parental engagement with a wide audience. Through this study, I am seeking to better understand what parental engagement is as it is understood and practiced in urban Turkish schools.

Confidentiality: All of the personal information will be kept confidential, and only pseudonyms will be used for you, your school, and the parents in any printed materials or presentations.

Withdrawal: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can quit or withdraw at any time as you wish.

Protection of the data: The transcripts of the interview will only contain your real name during the transcription process. Once all recordings have been transcribed, all names will be changed to pseudonyms. The interview recordings and transcripts will be stored on my password protected laptop until the completion of this project. Then, they will be permanently erased.

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APPENDIX E

Observation Protocol for Parental Engagement Venues

After the selection of three teachers, observations will be conducted during the Spring semester, 2016. Observations will start 30 minutes earlier than school starting times and will end 30-60 minutes later than the school ending time, since parents might stop by during these times. The researcher will be spending most of his time in venues where parents appear and spend time the most. Interactions between school personnel and parents should be observed and recorded as much as possible. It is important that the researcher take notes whenever it is possible, paying extra attention to not disturbing the flow of the interactions. As well as verbal messages and interactions, non-verbal interactions should be attended.

Miguel (2008) applies observation as a data collection method for similar purposes. While studying school principals' impacts on parental engagement, she conducts observations "during parent-teacher conferences, parent meetings, in the office, and general observations of the beginning of the day and dismissal time (interactions between staff and parents)". With these observations, she seeks to garner detailed information about the settings and the physical atmosphere parents encountered, as well as how they were treated and what kinds of interactions happened between the school personnel and the Latino parents they were studying. To facilitate a more effective observation, she used Hancock and Algozzine (2006)'s typology, which categorized parental engagement into certain categories such as setting, language used, types of interaction, body language, and facial expressions.

Hancock and Algozzine (2006)'s categories are worth keeping in mind; there are a couple of issues worth noting during observations in this study. During observations, I would like to focus on things such as where parents go, whom they talk with, what topics they talk about (content of the interactions etc.), whether parents are involved in decision-making or not, depth of the conversations, characteristics of the parents and people with whom they talk, how much time parents spend in schools doing what, how they are treated, whether there is any difference in the ways that different parents are treated, etc. There are many factors that may affect parents' engagement in schools. The school setting, the way in which they are treated by school staff, and the characteristics of parents (their educational level, time available to them, and so on) are only some of them. Thus, the observer needs to be attentive to things such as whether schools have a room for parents to meet and talk, whether their presence is appreciated by the school staff, and also whether parents who show up have similar characteristics or not.

Considering all of these factors and the research that has conducted so far, I believe that parents with better situations (higher educational level, better communication skills, more time available etc.) might differ in both the quantity and the quality of their engagement. In fact, Lareau (1987) found that parents with higher SES were more active in parental engagement than parents with lower SES. She also found that while high SES parents were confident in their interactions with school staff, they were also more active during school meetings. In contrast, besides their low attendance rates, low SES parents were also found more reluctant and passive in these meetings. However, Lareau concluded that low SES parents' low engagement had nothing to do with school personnel treatment of them, because she found that all school staff that she studied treated to parents similarly. They had high expectations for all the parents, but it

was low SES parents' skills and conditions that prevented them from showing high engagement in their children's education. Despite Lareau's findings, I still believe that schools and school staff can improve low SES parents' engagement not by treating all the parents in the same way, but perhaps treating them differently. Indeed, I believe that these parents with low SES parents need more help and guidance to show engagement as effective as their high SES peers. Yet, it is up to schools to help them in this or not. Now, when I observe these three exemplary schools that have helped their low SES parents to improve their engagement, I believe I will find some spectacular examples in which teachers put in some extra effort to make this happen. I would like to be able to:

1. Capture the details of interactions: When I am done collecting data, and when it is time to write my findings, I would like to able to portray the way these spectacular teachers engaged with parents, the ways they treated them, how they talked to them, and all of the details of their interactions, including the context, body language, issues they discussed, their feelings, parents' feelings, and how teachers responded/handled these feelings. How much value did they give to parents, did they feel important, valued, welcomed, heard (whether their ideas are valued or not) and so on?
    a. Capture both formal and informal practices used to improve parental engagement.
    b. Capture teacher behaviors that set the norms, values, and culture for parental engagement.
2. I will pay extra attention to teacher behaviors that might be normal, and/or typical to me, so as to not overlook them. I might also overlook things that are unfamiliar to me. Thus, this practices also will be paid extra attention.

APPENDIX F

Social Class

Social class is conceptualized and measured differently in different research. In the broadest sense, it refers to one's "*relative position in an economic-social-cultural hierarchy*" (Diemer, Mistry, Wadsworth, López, & Reimers, 2012, p.3). The power, prestige, and control that one possesses over resources determines his/her social class and the position he/she belongs to on the social stratum (Diemer et al., 2012). Diemer and his colleagues (2012) stated that one can utilize more objective or subjective indicators while defining and measuring social class. This study intends to use a combination of objective and subjective indicators of social class: respectively socioeconomic status (SES) and subjective social status (SSS).

In fact, for both types conceptualizations, I will rely on the same indicators (level of education, income and occupational prestige), but from different perspectives. The difference between SES and SSS can be explained by the degree of their objectivity. SSS is measured based on one's own perceptions of their positions within the cultural-social-economic hierarchy. Instead of focusing on objective social class indicators, SSS focuses on psychological processes through which social class may influence people's lives (Diemer et. al., 2012). Diemer and his colleagues (2012) argued that one can gain a middle income by working in a low prestige job such as plumbing, and subjectively consider him/herself as a member of the working class in terms of his/her lifestyle, or vice versa.

The combined effect of income, educational level, and occupational prestige has been commonly used to define parents' social class (Sirin, 2005). These are important areas based on which we can deduce one's SES and SSS. I will, as well, use information and participants' perceptions in regard to their income, education, and occupation to determine the position (social class) with which they can be associated or feel they belong.

APPENDIX G

Culturally Responsive Parental Engagement

On the one hand, traditional models approach parental engagement as a standardized, school-centric practice that supports teachers and targets directly improving student scores. For instance, attending school meetings, monitoring homework, and volunteering in school events can be cited as traditional parental engagement practices. Culturally responsive models (CRM), on the other hand, criticize confining parental engagement within certain deterministic practices, and emphasize the importance of parents' perspectives and understandings. Culturally responsive models value traditional parental engagement, but also go beyond the dominant, school-centric practices. For example, a less educated, low-income parent may not have enough knowledge to help his/her children to complete their homework, but can teach them the importance of homework and the value of hard work (Lopez, 2001). Also, while traditionally parents are supposed to come to school meetings to communicate and collaborate with teachers, CR engagement may require arranging these meetings according to parental preference: where these meetings are organized, what is discussed, and who gets to speak in these meetings (Graue & Hawkins, 2010; Pushor, 2010). CR teachers believe in every parent, build on their strengths, and empower them beyond the traditional roles (Gaitan, 2012; Pushor, 2010).

In fact, the comparison of traditional and culturally responsive models has fewer implications on specific parental engagement practices than the implication of parental engagement programs in schools. In other words, this comparison is not meant to be a categorization of parental engagement practices, but the categorization of parental engagement programs. In fact, being culturally responsive is not about things that parents do, but about how schools and teachers view parents and their engagement practices. Thus, for parents, "engagement" and "culturally responsive engagement" almost mean the same thing, and parents do not need to put much effort to make their actions culturally responsive.

Yet culturally responsive engagement still can be differentiated based on a couple of characteristics. First of all, culturally responsive engagement is often associated with home-based engagement that occurs beyond the borders of schools where engagement is traditionally expected to happen (Grant & Ray, 2010). From this perspective, teachers implementing culturally responsive parental engagement programs need to take greater responsibilities and conduct home visits, attend community events, and connect with the parents beyond traditional forms. From a culturally responsive perspective, parents' interactions with teachers in these informal settings can be considered as valid as any traditional forms of parent-school communication (e.g. attending a school meeting). The second characteristic is about the focus of the engagement. Parents can engage with their children for various reasons and these do not always directly need to be related with children's education and cognitive development. For example, the act of trying to help their children to develop a good character and a healthy personality can be considered parental engagement. In fact, sending their children to school is only one part of what parents do to raise their children and prepare a better future for them. Thus, culturally responsive engagement not only aims to satisfy teachers and their expectations, but parents' as well. Third, culturally responsive engagement is often linked to active parents where parents take active roles in decision making and defining their engagement.

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