Logics and the Orbit of Parent Engagement

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Abstract

Despite the recognized importance of parent engagement, schools often fail to meaningfully engage parents. One approach to help remedy this issue would be to surface educators' beliefs and cognitive maps which inform parent engagement practices. These influential values and belief systems within an institutional field, known as logics, offer a means to analyze and unpack how history and normative parent engagement practices continue to shape how schools invite or exclude parents today. This literature review reveals three logics regarding parent engagement from current and historical literature. The logics of educators know best, parents know best, and parents as partners continue to enable and constrain values and practices of parent engagement. These logics shed light on the dominant ideologies of the relationship between parents and schools and therefore provide an opportunity to challenge the potentially narrow ways educators have conceived of the role of parents.

Key Words: logics, orbits, parent engagement practices, historical literature review, educators know best, teachers, family, partnerships, community, schools

Background

History repeatedly demonstrates that perspective alters our understanding of the world. Likewise, parental engagement is often defined by differing perspectives that ultimately drive the purpose of engagement. One way to visualize parent engagement is to picture parents in orbit around their child's school, with their ability to engage being subject to the particular tilt of educational

policy towards either emphasizing school accountability or the importance of each student's learning and development. In contrast, another way to understand parent engagement is that it is the school that orbits the child and their family and thus is subject to the desires and goals of parents and learners. Both conceptualizations, in fact, can and do define parent engagement as the field is wrought with many interpretations, definitions, and goals related to why, how, and to what extent parents engage in their child's education (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Price-Mitchell, 2009).

As the definition of parent engagement varies based on purpose and perspective, so does research provide different ideas and conceptualizations of the construct. For example, it is often the case that the terms "involvement" and "engagement" are used interchangeably to describe communication and collaboration between those who share responsibility for a child's education, namely educators and adults in the home (Epstein & Connors, 1992; Murray et al., 2015; Van Roekl, 2008). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), for example, defines parent engagement as families and school faculty working together for improved learning, development, and health of students, and demonstrates that children who are supported by their parents are less likely to struggle with mental health or smoke, have better reproductive health and outcomes, exhibit less violent behaviors, and are more physically active (CDC, 2012). Meanwhile, other educational researchers describe parent engagement as a co-constructed process, where "parents', caregivers', and teachers' behaviors, practices, attitudes, and involvement [as well as the institutions'] expectations, outreach, partnerships, and interactions" are grounded in shared responsibility for the student and his or her learning goals (Weiss et al., 2009, p. 4).

Taking these varied definitions into consideration, we (the authors) ground this article in an understanding of parent engagement as co-constructed and comprised of parental voice and presence (McKenna & Millen, 2013). Parental voice means adult caretakers having the opportunity to express concern, frustration, goals, and dreams, and to not only be heard, but to have those words bear weight in making educational change. Parental presence means both the invitation to, and creation of, formal and informal spaces to share responsibility for children's learning. This is a more equitable reframing of the parental role that contributes to meaningful, comprehensive partnerships and support systems for learners (Carreón et al., 2005; McKenna & Millen, 2013; Weiss et al., 2009). When schools prioritize parent engagement in these ways, there are associated achievement outcomes which make a case for focusing on parent engagement in schools in need of improvement.

While purpose and definition may vary by perspective, the outcomes associated with parent engagement do not, and research consistently demonstrates the importance of parental voice and presence in schools. When parents engage in their children's education, those children tend to have more consistent attendance, score higher on tests, earn better grades, and have higher motivation and stronger self-confidence (Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2015; Pomerantz et al., 2007). Further, at the school level, more parent engagement is associated with higher quality instruction, test scores, and teacher motivation and satisfaction (Park & Holloway, 2017). Such findings are buoyed by plentiful literature around the importance of parent engagement (Cochran & Henderson, 1986; Epstein et al., 1997; Rutherford et al., 1997) as well as how schools and districts might better include parents in their work (Auerbach, 2007; Epstein et al., 2002; Harris & Goodall, 2007). It is important to note that these studies generally rely on how those working in schools understand and describe engagement, which is traditionally measured by attendance at events, participation in parent–teacher conferences, or as membership in a parent–teacher organization (PTO or PTA). These narrow and inequitable ways of understanding parent engagement highlight more "acceptable" forms of engagement (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002), while more inclusive understandings tend to be difficult to measure and correlate with outcomes (Fernández & López, 2017; Watson & Bogotch, 2015; Weiss et al., 2009).

Other researchers attempt to explain why parents may not participate in ways schools expect or desire (Anderson, 1998; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Lareau, 2003; Lightfoot, 1978; Lopez, 2001) and offer strategies to raise levels of engagement (Axford et al., 2019; Cohen-Vogel et al., 2010; Watson & Bogotch, 2015). Finally, there is a small but growing, number of critical works which problematize the way engagement is framed and encouraged (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Anderson 1998; Fernández & López, 2017; Watson & Bogotch, 2015; Weiss et al., 2009) with even fewer offering radically different ideas about what parent engagement could be (Hong, 2021). However, there is a lack of research looking at how values and beliefs of educators have influenced parental engagement efforts in the past and present and the ways logics of parent engagement perpetuate ineffective and/or even harmful approaches to parent engagement.

To help begin to fill this gap, we utilized the institutional theory framework of logics (Scott et al., 2000; Thornton et al., 2012). Logics are the beliefs and cognitive maps which inform organizational practices. These influential values and belief systems within an institutional field, according to Scott et al. (2000), "specify what goals or values are to be pursued within a field…" (p. 171); logics also "guide and give meaning to [actors'] activities" (p. 20). Thus,

naming these logics can support our understanding of how narrow definitions of engagement and inequitable practices may have been perpetuated or gone undisturbed over time. Logics provide a broad lens for better understanding the field of parent engagement and specifically considering the value basis for how decisions regarding parent engagement are made and why parents are invited to participate in particular ways and not others.

When using a logics perspective, one can call attention to critical questions such as who *is* engaged? And, who decides what engagement looks like? Further, this framework pays attention to the values promoted or marginalized as educators plan for ways to engage parents. This descriptive study picks up these questions and aims to reveal the inherent values and beliefs in past and present parent engagement research and practice. Since logics drive organizational identities and actions, a more equitable approach to engagement would likely require a shift in logics. Specifically, in this study, we work to identify the logics belying parental engagement efforts over time and in the present day via research and reports and ask the following research question:

- What are the prominent logics of parent engagement as evident in history and current research literature?

To answer this question, we first discuss logics as a framework, lay out our methods and then shift to surface salient logics of parent engagement throughout a sample of historical and current research in the field. Throughout history and current research, we find two categories of logics, those which are centered on the school's goals, and those which are child and family focused. Within these categories, we identify three logics regarding the ways educators view and value parents and their engagement. We conclude with some considerations of the interconnectedness and overlap of these logics, the uptake in reform efforts, and implications for future research.

Theoretical Framework

Institutional Logics

In this study we draw on institutional theory, specifically logics, to construct an understanding of values, beliefs, and focusing schema, which inform the identities and practices of educational organizations around parent engagement. Institutional logics are the forces which shift organizational decision-making, goals, identity, and practice via values, beliefs, and cognitive maps. Logics are "carried by participants in the field to guide and give meaning to their activities" (Scott et al., 2000, p. 20; see also Thornton et al., 2012).

Logics are one concept within institutional theory, a theory focusing on stability or change as a result of governance structures, actors, and logics (Scott & Davis, 2007). Thornton et al.'s (2012) approach to institutional logics research suggests logics focus individuals' attention in organizations (p. 91), and these logics also inform the decision making, sensemaking, and mobilization mechanisms whereby organizational practices and identities are formed (p. 95). This means organizations and individuals make choices, knowingly and unknowingly, based on the logic(s) to which they identify (Thornton et al., 2012). For example, in schools, administrators and educators make choices about which parent engagement strategies to use based on assumptions and values about who is engaged, how, and for what purpose.

Institutional Field

Important to this study is the concept of institutional field, within which regulations and norms or systems and logics exist and enable or constrain the legitimacy of organizations (Russell, 2011; Scott & Meyer, 1991). Thornton et al. (2012) asserted that, within an institutional field, such as parent engagement, there may be several logics, identities, and practices which can shape and inform the individual identities and practices of a single organization in that field—in this case, a school district. Within the field of parent engagement, logics structure the vocabularies which organizations and actors (administrators and educators) use to justify or explain their actions (e.g., establishing volunteer opportunities or parent committees) to others (parents, district leaders), thereby making them legitimate (Sewell, 1992 in Jones & Livne-Tarandach, 2008). These keywords, as instantiations of logics, signal to other organizations (e.g., parent organizations, other schools and districts) the role parents can or should play by enabling or constraining activities (Jones & Livne-Tarandach, 2008; Thornton et al., 2012).

Looking broadly at the logics of parent engagement provides insight into the enduring organizational values and beliefs about students and their families. Since some changes in organizational practices are initiated by shifts in logics (Thornton et al., 2012), a logics lens can help to better understand these changes or why some practices and identities endure (Scott et al., 2000), as well as why some logics appear more salient during a time of transition or mandated improvement.

Logics in Education Research

Logics are not often used to situate educational practice and policy in a sociological understanding. We build on the work of others who established this connection and paved a road for future work using logics to analyze the

practices and identities in schools to better understand change and stability (e.g., Coburn, 2001, 2004, 2006; Russell, 2011; Rigby, 2014; Woulfin, 2016; Woulfin & Weiner, 2019). Russell (2011) sparked an initial interest in logics, describing, via document analysis, the shifting logics of kindergarten from developmental to academic over a long period of time. Woulfin (2016) surfaced two competing logics of reading instruction, "Accountability First" and "Just Read," and described the ways district leaders promoted accountability while coaches worked to hybridize the two. As we discuss next, Rigby's (2014) work specifically influenced our methods. In her work focused on the logics of school leadership, Rigby conducted cyclical data collection and analysis from research, policy, blogs, and broader discourse in the field of instructional leadership. In so doing, she identified three logics and added to the field by offering terms to describe practices and beliefs embedded in different ways of leading. Like instructional leadership, parent engagement has been defined in multiple ways throughout history. Lack of parent engagement, like a lack of instructional leadership, is often blamed for underperforming schools or added as a remedy in educational reform mandates. Thus the example of the logics of instructional leadership suggests the importance of investigating the logics of parent engagement.

Defining Logics and the Discourse Around Parent Engagement

Naming logics requires making sense of underlying beliefs, values, and cognitive maps which may influence organizational level structures and practices, as well as district level documents and policies (Scott, 2000; Thornton et al., 2012). Naming logics also requires understanding the field in which those logics live, that is the identities, practices, organizations, research, and actors that interact with one another related to parent engagement (Thornton et al., 2012). For example, past research has defined involvement as school-based activities, and engagement as those opportunities which are student-centered (Goodall, 2013; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1997; Watson et al., 2012). The in-vogue term now is engagement, and it is broadly used in both policy and practitioner documents to describe activities in which parents are involved in educational spaces. This shows a shift in the field of parent engagement and how policies drive discourse. Other research has noted how educator practices have simultaneously privileged and marginalized some forms of engagement while blaming the marginalized, generally families of color, for a lack of engagement (Fernández & López, 2017). Fernández and López further highlighted how the discourse around parent engagement shapes understanding, beliefs, and eventually value systems which influence future practice.

One such discourse by Barton et al. (2004) understood patterns in parent engagement as ecologies, drawing on theories of space and capital to interpret the whys and hows of engagement, as well as how parents understand their engagement experiences. Their conceptual work drew on critical race theory and cultural–historical activity theory to focus on actors' knowing and doing in the context of schools, how the community and its values enable and constrain the knowing and doing, and how all of the interactions are mediated by power and politics. Thus, Barton et al. described engagement as mediation of space and capital, as the authoring of space via activation of capital, and the positioning in spaces by expression of space and capital. Based on this understanding, the authors define three conjectures: parent engagement mediates space and capital in relation to school community members, understanding engagement as mediation means it is both an action and a position, and differences in engagement occur as both macro and micro phenomena.

Similarly, Baquedano-Lopez et al. (2013) considered the various problematic discourses around parent engagement. They named these discourses "tropes" and labeled them "Parents as Problems," "Parents as First Teachers," "Parents as Learners," "Parents as Partners," and "Parents as Choosers." The authors then offered a decolonized and empowerment approach to parent engagement but stopped short of describing these discourses as shaped by deeper logics which would not disappear even if the language or approach shifted.

In laying the foundation for understanding parent engagement via this new conceptual framework, Barton et al. (2004) and Baquedano-Lopez et al. (2013) called attention to how values manifest themselves in practices and how understanding those values can shed light on social practices and the ways they enable and constrain interactions. Yet, in both cases, their conjectures fell short of getting at the value systems which inform and give meaning to particular engagement activities (Scott et al., 2000; Thornton et al., 2012). Instead, their framework outlines the social context and the actions which indicate a parent's position or activation of capital without fully engaging in understanding or categorizing the broader rules and expectations which shape their position, thus the need for this inquiry.

Methods

To answer the research question about prominent logics of parent engagement, we engaged in an in-depth review of past and present literature for thematic content analysis.

Logics in the Literature

Phase I

To support our inquiry regarding logics of parental engagement, we first broadly scanned the institutional field of parent engagement by reading policies, histories, school websites, news articles, and editorials mentioning "parents," or "parent engagement." We noted major ideas and themes across the organizational field, building a background before narrowing our search with an academic search engine. In this phase, a Google Scholar search for "parent engagement in schools" returned over 1.1 million results and required significant narrowing. In this first pass, we focused on the history of parent engagement and identified, from literature within the past 10 years, the 3 or 4 most frequently cited pieces which documented the history of parent engagement in the background of current empirical work. This narrowed our historical sources to five (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Price-Mitchell, 2009; Watson et al., 2012) and provided a foundation for developing a historical understanding of parent engagement. Further narrowing the Google Scholar search to include only the United States still returned nearly 20,000 hits; however, it was unlikely that individual case studies and randomized-control trial studies would provide insight into systems level logics, due to narrowness of scope. We thus further narrowed the search, and eventually identified 18 articles which focused broadly on parent roles and models of engagement and were mainly written for practitioners—superintendents, principals, and teachers—as well as one meta-analysis of outcomes which reinforced the importance of parent engagement.

We then cross-checked the references of these 18 articles to ensure we did not miss any prominent pieces on parent engagement. Doing so permitted us to identify four additional pieces referenced by a majority of the 18 articles and broadly utilized in the field. As we read through these 22 articles and 5 historical overviews, we wrote memos regarding our understanding of the ways parents have been and are currently framed relative to schools, how their roles in schools have shifted and continue to shift, and the common approaches districts take in the area of parent engagement. (Note: these 27 references are denoted with * in the reference list.)

Phase II

In Phase II, we looked across the 22 articles and 5 historical overviews for the language used to define parent engagement and describe the role of parents and the nature of the parent–school relationship. Coding this data provided a set of logics that we organized and compared evidences of within a matrix. We did this predominantly based on language patterns, allowing us to best describe

and define the logics we uncovered (Huberman & Miles, 2002). In this way we used thematic content analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) to provide an understanding of parent engagement via a "free form data set" (p. 613). We initially identified six logics, but eventually, with collaboration among the co-authors, collapsed the six into three, realizing after feedback and further analysis that there was some redundancy.

Finally, using Rigby's (2014) narrowing technique as an example, we looked at five district websites across the three largest urban districts and two large suburban districts in the same small New England state as our sample (Krippendorff, 2013 in Rigby, 2014). The purpose of this scan was to identify the language commonly used to discuss parents and their roles and to look for language indicating potential models or approaches to parent engagement. We looked across different spaces, urban and suburban—knowing that parent engagement can look different in these spaces—to ensure that we were capturing more broad and diverse keywords. We added recurrent key phrases and any mentioned models (e.g., Epstein et al.'s 2002 partnership model) to our matrix to further describe the found logics. This process served as a check, to ensure that the logics we identified appeared to play out in practice. Throughout the entire process, we continued to write memos to develop understanding of enduring or shifting logics and discourse in the institutional field of parent engagement.

Limitations

While we were purposeful in the narrowing technique and identification of sources, we recognize there may be historical and current pieces we missed. Our analysis and interpretation of potential underlying beliefs, values, and schema which we identified as logics might be labeled or understood differently by someone else. We addressed this potential limitation by condensing the initial six logics into three broader and all-encompassing logics; we believe that doing so captures the essence of the logic rather than naming highly nuanced and specific micrologics. We acknowledge that the decisions made about how to name and define these logics were influenced both by our roles as former educators and as parents. We memoed throughout the analysis process and shared findings and memos among co-authors and colleagues as a means of checking the impact of these limitations. We also presented preliminary findings at a conference and received helpful feedback from other organizational theory scholars. Furthermore, despite attempts to look at diverse research and perspectives, the first author recognizes that, as a White woman, I have different experiences which affect the lens through which I understand parent engagement. I look forward to future opportunities to listen to the lived experiences and perspectives of parents of color and to process together how centering their voices and values might shift logics in the field of parent engagement.

Findings: Logics of Parent Engagement

This findings section is organized into what we deem to be three categories of logics: (1) those which orbit around the school's goals and outcomes, (2) those which orbit around the child's goals and outcomes, and (3) those in which schools and parents orbit separately yet well coordinated. We name one logic in the orbit around school goals and outcomes, the logic of *educators know best*. We name one logic where learning orbits around a child's goals and outcomes, the logics of *parents know best*. Finally, we name a logic where schools and parents orbit separately but in coordination around a child and his learning needs, the logic of *parents as partners*.

Figure 1 illustrates the orbit of parent engagement and how the three logics, *educators know best, parents know best*, and *parents as partners* can be illustrated as orbits. The first oval illustrates the logic of *educators know best* and positions school most prominent at the center, with the student dwarfed in its doorway, and parents orbiting at afar around the school. This logic highlights the goals of the school and informs practices which invite parents to engage in limited ways. The second oval illustrates the logic of *parents know best* and features the child prominently in the center alongside various family dynamics. In this logic, learning orbits around the child and his family, indicating that shared family values and goals drive the student's experience. School is not a part of this orbit since this logic is generally not taken up in the public school setting and instead informs practices such as homeschooling or, in some cases, school choice. The third oval illustrates the logic of *parents as partners*, and positions the child at the center, standing on books representing his learning, with school and parents orbiting separately but with points of overlap, indicating shared responsibility for the child's learning and best interest.

Figure 1. The Orbits of Parents in Each Logic

Logic 1: Educators Know Best   Logic 2: Parents Know Best   Logic 3: Parents as Partners

In the three sections that follow, we define each of these three logics by how they shape a definition of parent engagement, what they call attention to, how parents are treated and viewed, and how schools are positioned. We further give a historical context for each logic and the ways it has waxed and waned over time before situating each logic in current practice and research. We summarize these three logics in Table 1.

Table 1. Logics of Parent Engagement

Logic	Definition	Identifying Activities
School-Centered Logics		
Educators know best	Decisions about learning, goals, needs, and schools are made by and for educators acting as experts. Parents are invited into the school to assist with school-determined activities. At an extreme level, this logic may exclude parents altogether, causing educators to view parents as barriers to learning	Conferences, invitations to presentations, PTA, fundraising, and opportunities to assist at school-determined events. In extreme cases: exclusion, complaints about parents, deficit mindset
Student-Centered Logics		
Parents know best	Decisions about learning, goals, needs, and schooling are made by and for children by their parents acting as experts; parents make decisions about school based on what is right for their child and family	Homeschooling; School choice; community-run schools
Parents as partners	Overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein); parents are invited to participate in ways that impact their child's learning and school experience	Forums with leadership around decisions involving the school and community, links to outside agencies, inviting the community into schools, inviting parents to participate in learning activities in the classroom, encouraging parents to advocate for their child with special needs; some well-functioning governance councils

School at the Center of the Orbit

The following logic is grounded in the belief that parent engagement serves to promote school goals and outcomes, such that parents orbit their child's education at a slightly removed distance. This logic informs practices which invite parents closer only when appropriate or necessary to achieve school-focused goals or as a formality.

Educators Know Best

Definition. The logic of educators know best defines parent engagement not as a strategy, but as an unnecessary or bonus feature for schools. This logic focuses on the needs, know-how, and opinions of educators, and assumes that as long as parents get their children in the door, then educators know how to provide the necessary quality learning experiences. This logic emphasizes the expertise of educators and the outcomes schools and educators strive for, such as higher test scores, consistent attendance, and smoothly run school days. The logic of educators know best pays much less attention to parental voice and rarely values parents' presence beyond the role of attendee (e.g., conferences or concerts) or volunteer (e.g., PTA, fundraising, or chaperoning). An extreme version of this logic, not always present and generally less obvious, holds that parents are barriers to quality learning and even frames parents as problems. This negative extension of the logic of educators know best informs a deficit mindset and legitimizes activities to help parents, particularly those from minoritized groups, conform to school expectations or "be better parents" as determined by the school or district. The logic of educators know best is evident as far back as 1642, was particularly prevalent in the late 1800s and early 1900s and again in the 1960s and 1970s, and continues to inform some practices in schools today.

History. The earliest suggestion of the logic of educators know best surfaced even before universal public education in the United States. Massachusetts passed the first education law in 1642, requiring colonists provide their children and servants with education. The logic of educators know best became apparent within five years, when governing officials decided that some parents were not appropriately following through with this mandate. The response was to then require all towns with 50 or more citizens to hire a schoolmaster and provide public schools for free, White males, taking education out of the hands of parents and shifting it to municipalities (Hiatt-Michael, 2001; massmoments.org), "that learning may not be buried in the grave of our fathers in the church and commonwealth…" (Cremin, 1961, p. 181). Public schooling was not free or universal at first, a further indication that these laws were an attempt to shift parent roles and thus the orbit of parent engagement toward the political and capitalist goals of schools and society at large (Hiatt-Michael, 2001).

The logic of educators know best calls attention to another factor that motivated public schools to remove community control and parental input. The immigration boom of 1880–1930 welcomed over 27 million immigrants to America. The sudden influx of diverse cultures, languages, and backgrounds led to an educational crisis and the further bureaucratization of school control (Barrett, 1992; Hiatt-Michael, 2001). A nationalistic urgent need to provide citizenship training and "Americanize" immigrant children and their families led to practices of excluding families from their children's schooling. This meant low-income and immigrant families were excluded from school-based decisions, school became compulsory, and a longer school day was established to combat child labor practices and "better societal life" (that is, reduce crime or even visibility of immigrant youth), largely to the benefit of White middle and upper class families. Common schools proceeded to take up this logic of educators knowing and doing what was best for children, as the public school system developed and endeavored to establish a unifying culture and well-managed society, particularly by Americanizing via education native Americans and immigrants (Barrett, 1992; Cremin, 1961; Davies, 1992; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Katz, 1975).

During the same time period, the logic of educators know best also legitimized decisions to further bureaucratize and democratize schooling, such as creating graded classrooms and curricula, the addition of more teachers, establishing a principal to oversee school operation, and the professionalization of teachers and standardization of learning. Education innovators at the time, such as Mann and Barnard, claimed these moves were in favor of equity; however, the increased bureaucracy led to the alienation and devaluation of parents' desires and goals for their children's education (Davies, 1992 in Hiatt-Michael, 2001). This shift led to generations of disconnect and dissatisfaction for many working and low-income parents as they looked from a distance at the decisions and curricula determined for their children, rightfully believing schools belonged to those in the middle and upper class (Shipman, 1987).

As a response to the isolation and devaluation of parents, the National Congress of Mothers formed in 1897 and was intended to provide a means for including White mothers in the education of their children. The original members were deeply involved in curriculum decisions and had space to voice concerns. However, the organization exists today as what we know as the Parent Teacher Association or Organization (PTA or PTO), and though their mission and vision have adapted, there is little research demonstrating any change in engagement opportunities for diverse parent groups, usually focusing instead on fundraising or event planning (Hiatt-Michael, 2001).

The scientific management movement[1] beginning in the 1800s also informed the logic of educators know best, and did so well into the 1960s, 70s,

and even 80s (Callahan, 1962; Hiatt-Michael, 2001). These efforts sought the one best and most efficient way of doing things. The influence on engagement initiatives even throughout the 1990s often served, and, at times continues to serve, to make schools more "efficient" by relying entirely on the decisions and desires of educators, even at the exclusion of other stakeholders. In the context of schools, this meant putting all planning, decision making, and knowledge in the hands of "experts" (e.g., principals or a few select educators). These shifts gave the logic of educators know best a stronghold on the mindsets of teachers and parents alike (Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Watson et al., 2012). For example, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) model of the parental involvement process posits that a parent's choice to be involved is influenced by specific invitations and demands from the school and a balance of time and energy as well as perceived efficacy. For many parents, the degree to which they choose to engage is directly related to their prior school experiences, education level, language, and perceived influence (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Current Research and Practice. The logic of educators know best continues to inform the parent engagement initiatives that schools deploy (Mapp, 2013; Weiss et al., 2009). The logic of educators know best shows up in school-focused and driven activities such as noninteractive informational sessions, attendance incentives for families, tracking access on parent portals, focusing on contracts to improve attendance, frequent fundraisers, or family resource centers which function apart from the school itself. This is despite much research demonstrating the positive impact of meaningful parent engagement on children and their futures (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2015; Park & Holloway, 2017) and policies such as Title I and the Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA (2015) which mandate such engagement. Often committees or initiatives designed to invite parents into the school space are dominated by principals and teachers who share professional cultural capital and power and, as a result, may devalue or band together against outside influence (Anderson, 1998; Delpit,1994). Collectively, these policies and actions perpetuate the logic of educators know best by positioning educators as knowing better than parents what schools and students need.

Recent research calling attention to inequitable relationships in schools and to the ways social capital influences educator and parent interactions suggests that the logic of educators know best has an extreme form which defines some parents as problems and presumes that some parenting styles and family cultures impede, rather than support, student learning (Fenton et al., 2017; Ishimaru, 2019; Marchand et al., 2019). This extreme micrologic is activated in deficit mentalities, shut-door policies which ask parents to leave children at the door, and unwelcoming schools. When educators, informed by the logic of

educators know best, favor the values and opinions of some parents—generally White and middle class—and make assumptions about others based on their cultural and social capital, they perpetuate inequalities and reinforce the status quo (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Auerbach, 2007; Bourdieu, 1987; Brantlinger et al., 1996; Delpit, 1994; Giroux, 1983; Huang & Gibbs, 1992; Lareau, 1987; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Moles, 1993). Actions shaped by this extreme extension of educators know best may move educators to exclude parents from decisions that impact their child's education or may influence misguided attempts to offer "parenting resources" which subtly endeavor to influence parents of color to adhere to normative, White, middle class parenting practices (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999) while devaluing preexisting funds of knowledge (González et al., 2006).

Student at the Center of the Orbit

The following logic is grounded in the belief that parents and schools function to provide the best possible learning experience for a child. In this case, parents and children steer the learning process, and the learning orbits a child and his family's values and goals.

Parents Know Best

Definition. The logic of parents know best defines parent engagement as parents acting as experts on their children. The logic of parents know best pays attention to a parent's responsibility to make most, if not all, decisions regarding their children's education and needs. In this way, the logic of parents know best pays less attention to the actions and beliefs of educators and the goals or plans of a school or district. An extreme version of this logic surfaces among parents who choose to homeschool or "unschool." The logic of parents know best is evident in history from as far back as rural community-run schoolhouses (some of which still exist) and in the 1970s rise of homeschooling. There is also evidence of the logic of parents know best within the school choice movement. While the logic of parents know best informs some practices in and out of schools, it is naturally less prominent in public schools where this study has focused and where educators make the majority of decisions.

History. The logic of parents know best surfaced initially in the history of rural schoolhouses. In these remote and small learning spaces, schooling was often a small and seasonal part of a child's education (Rogers, 1998; Tyack, 1972). Children learned important skills and values from the community in which they lived and gained vocational training in the same way. Education was derived through the partnerships between family, church, neighborhood, and occasionally school, and often all these entities utilized the same building. Parents had the right to determine what was taught and by whom, and since

the teacher relied on the community for room, board, and pay, it was in his best interest to please his students' parents. The vast majority of literature around rural schooling was written by schoolhouse masters with the community often being framed as the "rural school problem," suggesting that negotiating with parents who had all the decision making power proved a challenge to those tasked with teaching students (Rogers, 1998; Tyack, 1972).

The logic of parents know best also informed two movements which continue today, homeschooling and school choice. Homeschooling was common in the 1700s and 1800s, and then reemerged as a contradiction to compulsory education in the early 1900s (Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Murphy, 2013). However, homeschooling as we recognize it today gained popularity with the liberal left via John Holt in the 1960s and 1970s, based on the premise that education should be less structured, flexible, and completely child centered compared to common public schools (Murphy, 2013). Homeschooling also gained popularity with the religious right via Raymond Moore in the late 1970s and 1980s, based on the premise that education should be centered around "family values" and religious beliefs (Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Murphy, 2013). Important to the history of the logic of parents know best, both streams of homeschool ideology hold that the parent and the child ought to steer a child's learning, that children are natural learners, and that a child's curiosity and needs should ultimately shape their education (Murphy, 2013).

Some evidence of the logic of parents know best also surfaced in the market of school choice. School choice, generally attributed to Friedman (1955), predates the current structure of lottery systems for magnet and charter schools and initially emerged in the form of vouchers enabling families to receive funding to attend the state-approved nonprofit, religious, or government-run school of their choice (Logan, 2018). Even without vouchers, families often choose private or parochial schools for a variety of personal reasons which can lead to higher levels of engagement, though some research suggests volunteering may increase but true engagement is similar to that found in public schools (Oberfield, 2020; Walters-Sachs, 2020). Others have touted school choice as a means of inspiring competitive school reform or as a means to remedy inequities of access and quality (Friedman, 1955; Logan, 2018).

Current Research and Practice. While perhaps a less prominent logic in history and research compared to school knows best, the logic of parents know best is apparent in the practices of school choice, homeschooling, and grassroot parent organizations. School choice is not purely a child-centered practice and often satisfies political agendas within the field of school reform (Logan, 2018). But allowing parents to choose the learning environment best for their child is a practice that continues to be informed by the logic of parents know best. To

that end, for this article, we treat school choice as inspired only in part by the logic of parents know best. School choice, while often designed or purported to address equity, diversity, and access issues, gives parents the power to choose where their child attends school within an externally controlled set of schools and is therefore not purely up to parents.

The logic of parents know best continues to influence homeschooling parents. Homeschooling has gained prominence in the past 50 years. In fact, prepandemic, it was estimated that 6–12% of all students will be homeschooled at some point in their K–12 careers, and that at any given time, over 2 million children are actively homeschooled (Murphy, 2013). Homeschooling, as the ultimate exercise of choice, continues to gain popularity both among the conservative right and liberal left, and though for differing reasons, both legitimized by the logic of parents know best (Murphy, 2013). While COVID-19 impacted schools after this review was completed, it is important to highlight the fact that many parents chose to homeschool during the pandemic for a variety of reasons including but not limited to hesitancy related to remote learning practices, health and safety, as well as access to resources (Carpenter & Dunn, 2020).

Taken together, the practices of school choice and homeschooling demonstrate that the right to have control over a child's education is democratic and potentially positive. At times, enacting this right based on the logic of parents know best is a form of quiet dissent that if shared or organized might have greater impact on a larger body of students. Thus, the logic of parents know best remains an important potential influence that is generally left untapped.

The Overlap of Orbits: Partnership

The following logic exists where the orbits of parents and school around the child cross paths, that is, the overlapping nature of home and school. While partnership surfaces as a common buzzword in many districts and plays out in various ways, a true partnership would shift the orbit of both school and home to best serve a child's learning within the context of the broader community.

Parents as Partners

Definition. The logic of parents as partners defines parent engagement as a shared responsibility for a child's learning experience. The logic of parents as partners pays attention to the goals of the student and family equally at the center alongside the goals of the school, and in some cases the goals of one inform the other, such that learning and development is integrated and comprehensive across home and school (Epstein et al., 2002; Reschly & Christenson, 2012; Weiss et al., 2009). The logic of parents as partners values the voices and

decision-making power of parents in regards to their child's education, and it informs practices such as governance councils, advisory committees, and advocacy groups. This logic in isolation ultimately informs community schools which are run by a board of families and outside community members and, when done well, meets the physical, social, and cultural needs of its families and in essence becomes a hub of the community it serves (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002; Redding & Thomas, 2001). The logic of parents as partners was not evident in history, except in relation to the school as community literature in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Coleman, 1987). Specifically, the first evidence we found was in the work of Joyce Epstein and colleagues (1992, 1997) and others who built on her work. The full potential of this logic is often impeded by the coexistence of the logic of educators know best.

History. The logic of parents as partners has informed endeavors to counter the narratives of alienation, racism, and indoctrination in mass schooling with broadened uses of schools as social centers, grounding learning in local experience and knowledge, and enacting fluid roles between parent and teacher. Community-run schools emerge as the most effective and prominent form of partnership. Community schools gained popularity in the immigration boom of the early 1900s, designed to incorporate culture and unique family skills with academic needs. Community schools continue to surface as solutions when other school reform attempts fail, particularly when there is public dissatisfaction around traditional public schools and parents act as advocates desiring a deeper, more meaningful partnership with their child's education (Oakes et al., 2017; Rogers, 1998).

Community-run schools often have a counter-cultural balance in power and control, as community members and families may be deeply engaged in the democratic processes of school administration (Oakes et al., 2017; Rogers, 1998). Though there are differences in how these tenets are structured and practiced in individual schools, these distinctions identify a school as a community institution rather than a traditional public school. Community schools can and do work within the public school system and service children of varying ages (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2018), but are not common.

Since community schools are fairly uncommon, they do not serve as the sole evidence of the logic of parents as partners. Additionally, in some instances, even a full-service community school may leave parents out of decision making and utilize their community partnerships to act on behalf of families rather than alongside (Keith, 1999; Nevárez-La Torre & Hidalgo, 1997). Evidence of the logic of parents as partners eventually emerged in mainstream research and practice when Joyce Epstein introduced the language of overlapping spheres of influence and a parent engagement model of partnership in the

early 1990s (e.g., Epstein & Conners, 1992). Her framework is now widely adopted and cited, albeit in various stages of implementation.

Current Research and Practice. Parent as partners continues to be a prevailing logic in public schools. Though the logic of parents as partners is evident in varying forms of fidelity, practice informed by this logic is generally based on the value of two-way communication, joint problem solving, and sometimes shared decision-making (Reschly & Christenson, 2012). As articulated by Epstein and Conners (1992), practices informed by this logic situate responsibility for child outcomes as attributed to the equal and overlapping influences of home and school (Anderson, 1998; Brantlinger, 1985; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). The logic of parents as partners is also evident in formal structures and welcoming environments which include parents and invite them to the table, as well as attempts at making parents feel equal in importance and expertise as it relates to their child (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Reynolds & Howard, 2013).

Research suggests demographics impact parents' experiences with engagement in varying ways. For example, parents of high-achieving students may experience their role as partners differently, such that the success of their children depends on their personal involvement (Clark, 1983 in Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Parents of children with disabilities may alternatively have opportunity to act as advocates for their needs (Trainor, 2010). But for parents outside these two groups, practice informed by the logic of parents as partners can pose a challenge, as it assumes shared understanding, a level playing field, and equal access, and does not account for barriers to partnership such as mistrust of institutions, lack of knowledge around codes of power, or acknowledgement of deep-rooted racism (Auerbach, 2007; Carreón et al., 2005; Lareau, 1989, 2003; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Furthermore, the logic of parents as partners assumes parent have equal capacity to engage (Mapp, 2013), yet research finds most schools attempting to utilize a partnership model fail to do so in its entirety and therefore fall short of building authentic partnerships, making uptake of this logic potentially powerful but limited in its current scope (Auerbach, 2009; Mapp, 2013). This finding would suggest that the logic of parents as partners is likely not the only logic informing districts as they attempt to implement a partnership model. We will explain the interaction of multiple logics in greater detail in the discussion.

Discussion

Using historical background and key pieces in parent engagement research, we expand our current understanding by naming logics of parent engagement

which in turn shape "vocabularies of practice" (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 94) and the enduring beliefs educators hold about parents and the roles they play or do not play in their children's education. We identify three logics of parent engagement, one of which falls in the category of school-centered engagement: the logic of "educators know best." A second logic, "parents know best," is centered around a child and their family's values, while the third, "parents as partners," places the child and their learning at the center of parent and school relationships. Each of these logics explains dominant underlying assumptions and commonalities across diverse bodies of research and in-school practices. Additionally, this work shows the importance and utility of using logics as an analytic framework. As we have illustrated, logics can help us to name the ways the vocabulary, identity, and goals of school shape the available initiatives and practices within education, specifically the field of parent engagement. In turn these logics are continually shaping the ways parents and educators understand their relationship both to a child's education and with one another. Thornton et al. (2012) describe the impact of logics:

> Institutional logics at multiple levels of analysis—organizational, field, and society—generate top-down attentional perspectives for processing information and for focusing attention…through the set of social identities, goals, and schemas contained within each logic.…Individuals, through their participation in situated organizations and practices also develop more specialized identities, goals, and schemas. (p. 91)

Acknowledging that actors, in this case parents and teachers, are embedded within particular cultures and contexts, we can then also consider the ways they are enabled and constrained by schema present in the field of parent engagement (i.e., logics) and how these logics can lead to particular actions and/or policies over time.

Returning to the logics themselves, below we situate each of the three identified logics in current practice and research, further explicating the cultural embeddedness of parents and educators in the field of parent engagement. To begin with the first logic we identified, that of "educators know best," we can see how it often still informs a deficit mindset. Often educators perceive themselves as the experts and parents as potential barriers or problems or, at best, uninformed participants in the education system. Price-Mitchell (2009) has written on the implications of such an orientation and its impacts throughout history, particularly in the 1930s when parent education was a means of minimizing immigrant culture and maximizing assimilation. Park and Holloway (2017) described this approach to engagement as "private good parent involvement," meaning that the activities are school-sponsored and support individual

children but may have some spillover effect on the school community. One way to shift the power this logic holds would be to rethink the desired outcomes of school and curriculum—centering parent and child and family values over test scores and benchmarks. Current tensions between remote, hybrid, or in-person learning amidst a global pandemic point to a need to shift the focus from educators knowing best to how parents and educators might collaborate to design an education scenario that is safe, effective, and manageable for both families and educators.

In contrast to the focus the manifestation of the educators know best logic has received, the logic of parents know best is less readily available in the field of parent engagement since we might understand it to inform parent practices such as homeschooling or alternative school options. Since most parent engagement research focuses on public school practices, there was less evidence of this logic at the present, though it certainly created a tension at the inception of public schooling in the United States (Hiatt-Michael, 2001), again in the 1960s–80s as homeschooling regained popularity (Murphy, 2013), and perhaps even now as parents create homeschool learning pods amidst a pandemic. Parents who have been gradually pushed more to the margins of their child's education were suddenly thrust into teaching roles in March 2020 when students nationwide were sent home to finish their school year. Thus, this logic has the opportunity to gain prominence and influence more equitable student- and family-centered practices moving forward.

Finally, the logic of parents as partners surfaces in research around best engagement practices (Epstein et al., 2002; Mapp, 2013) but in action tends to inform a buzzword mentality (Mapp, 2013), offering more palatable language for educators to use when addressing parents and their role at school without a substantive shift in the role parents play. This logic is reflected in the creation of welcoming environments and open-door policies, as well as in the design of school governance councils—but is missing in actual decision making, curricular planning, or capacity building initiatives.

While we have so far treated these logics as discrete, they do not inform practices in a singular, isolated manner; rather there is often mixing and mingling of aspects of one, two, or all three logics. This hybridization of logics (Upton & Warshaw, 2017) allows schools to borrow the language of one logic, often that of parents as partners which is more socially acceptable, while clinging to the identities and goals tied up in the logic of educators know best. In practice, this might look like hosting curriculum nights such as math night or literacy night for parents, described as a means to better understand the work of the school and utilized to impart knowledge from educators to parents. While not bad in intention or purpose, these nights are not partnering alongside parents

or even truly a workshop. Instead they served as lecture-style evenings which reinforce the ideas that only educators know what students need and parents need help to better serve the school's goals (Auerbach, 2010; Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Mapp, 2013).

Another practice which borrows language from parents as partners is the creation of Family Universities, particularly common in districts serving predominantly families of color. These universities state a goal around providing parents with the opportunity to be connected to community resources and be supported in their roles as partners. The stated goals are worthwhile and equitable, but often the practices of these universities rely heavily on the logic of educators know best as they hold events to "educate" parents around attendance, behavior management, or curricula rather than work collaboratively or utilize parent expertise (Auerbach, 2010).

Thus, the prominence of one logic over another does not negate the existence of the other two, even the logic parents know best informs some practices around school choice today, shaping vocabularies and identities in tandem with parents as partners. The hybridization of logics makes the field of parent engagement complex and harder to change because practices are rooted and entangled in multiple logics.

Implications

These three logics focus on the attention and behavior of actors within the field of parent engagement as part of the organization of school. Indeed, logics are important as they shape how educators understand and interpret parent engagement, how parents perceive their role, and how practices of inclusion and exclusion reinforce identities and behaviors, often in problematic ways. The current study then contributes to better understanding and predicting the potential actions of individuals within institutions and the larger institutional level decisions and policies that can drive such behaviors. Thus, applying the lens of logics offers a bird's eye view of where change is necessary and potentially how to initiate change via policy, research, and practice.

Policy

Parent engagement first surfaced in federal policy in 1965 in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and has since reappeared in its reauthorization as No Child Left Behind (2002) and again in the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015). However, except for federal mandates specifically targeting Title I schools, the bulk of parent engagement policy resides at the district level. These policies are vague and state that districts should "support schools," and

educators should "engage parents," but fail to set measurable goals and outcomes. Thus, the gap between what is written and what occurs is wide, spotty at best, and often comprised of short-term attempts to check boxes without meaningful change (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). Policy cannot fix a long history of failure to meaningfully engage parents or end take-up of the long-held logic of educators know best, but it might inspire creative and collaborative engagement practices.

Policies focus the attention of schools and educators on priorities. When teacher evaluation and district policies focus on achievement or attendance, this pulls the attention of educators and parents towards the measurable growth required by such policies. For example, rather than ask for teachers to generically engage parents, it might be clearer to create district and school level policies which aim at building mutual relationships via *listening, creating together,* or *building on expertise.* Thus policies describing the nature of relationships and the impact of relationships in learning communities, authentically informed by the logic of parents as partners, would instead focus the attention of educators and parents alike on building community and mutual understanding.

Research

Opportunities for further investigation might include analyzing the ways school and district leaders draw on these logics or new ones as they plan for parent engagement in improvement plans or goal setting documents. It would also be worthwhile to look for evidence of take-up of these values or perhaps to compare logics held by varying groups of parents.

Logics, by nature of the way they surface in dominant discourse and identities, tend to highlight normative labels and practices which do not describe all parents and families, particularly those of color or diverse backgrounds and experiences. Further investigation and consideration of logics held by diverse parent groups and school types would help to expand an understanding of values and schemas across forms of parent engagement.

Finally, there are currently critical shifts occurring in and out of schools related to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the Black Lives Matter movement. These events and other societal concerns may well trigger change in the logics of parent engagement, and future research might consider shifts in vocabularies, identities, and practices in the field of parent engagement.

Practice

The logics of parent engagement surfaced here reinforce scholarship which suggests that the current teacher training around parent engagement neither sufficiently challenges the roles parents have been relegated to throughout

history, nor the way public schooling perpetuates isolation of parents from their children's education (Epstein et al., 2002; Gay, 2000; Hornby, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Spring, 2016). Particularly evident as we emerge gradually from the COVID-19 pandemic, parents are critical to their children's learning, and it is time to challenge, dismantle, and transform parent engagement practices. Parents who have spent considerable time as their child's teacher and advocate at home will likely not be content to return to school systems in the same roles they were in prepandemic, and it would be a great disservice for schools to pick up where they left off rather than reimagining how they might invite parents to engage (Canady, 2020).

We hesitate to suggest prescriptive practices as implications of naming logics because the logic of educators know best already does that. Often when a researcher or expert suggests a means of involving parents, districts rush to adopt the framework or method whether it is a fit for their community or not. Each school community is unique, thus we should expect parent engagement needs and practices to differ widely.

Logics however, do offer a lens through which to name and call attention to biases, values, and assumptions which inform the relationships between parents and schools in ways other frameworks do not. One further implication in practice would be to name the deficit views, biases, racist practices, and all-knowing mentalities in educators and invest in unpacking these issues. Opportunities for real two-way conversations between parents and teachers, to meet families, visit homes and neighborhoods, and plan together would break down barriers built on the logic of educators know best. In this work one can back up enough to see the orbit of parent engagement around the work of schools but also notice opportunities to shift the mutually dependent orbits of parents and schools to better serve students and their communities.

Endnote

[1]A term coined by Louis Brandeis, also known as "Taylorism," this movement began in factories, seeking one best way to manufacture as efficiently as possible with as little waste as possible, and transferred almost all knowledge and skill to management and away from craftsmen. Principles that endure in education include: quantifiable tasks, measurable outputs, managerial control, minimizing costs, and determining best practices (Callahan, 1962).

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