
Parent Surveillance in Schools: A Question of Social Class

ELIZABETH MCGHEE HASSRICK

University of Chicago

BARBARA SCHNEIDER

Michigan State University

Because teachers work in relatively closed classroom spaces, they are notoriously difficult for administrators or parents to observe. At the same time, middle-class parents have demonstrated an interest in “opening” the closed classroom door. Findings from this research suggest that surveilling parents provided advantages for their child during the school day. Using their social networks, middle-class and socially connected working-class parents from this study increased levels of informal teacher surveillance by closely monitoring teachers in classrooms. Teachers, in turn, felt watched by surveilling parents. Poor parents and isolated working-class parents with little access to information about their child’s classroom relied on teachers for mentorship. In order to isolate class differences, which are easily conflated with race differences, this study investigates a school with all African American families. This study identifies interactional mechanisms dependent on parent social class that facilitate unequal levels of everyday teacher surveillance in classrooms, securing school advantages for middle-class children.

Introduction

Teacher monitoring has been primarily understood as operating through loosely coupled administrative lines of authority, in which teachers have considerable autonomy to practice their craft, behind the closed doors of the classroom (Bidwell 1965; Lortie 1975; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Weick 1976). Parents are primarily understood as interested spectators, external stakeholders, or helpful partners of teachers, mostly interested in the educational outcomes of their individual child, rather than the organizational dynamics that shape the everyday instructional environment in schools (Epstein 1987, 1991;

Electronically published December 8, 2008

American Journal of Education 115 (February 2009)

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0195-6744/2009/11502-0001\$10.00

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Lawrence-Lightfoot 1978; Parsons 1959; Waller 1932). Even when parents act collectively to challenge teachers on behalf of individual children (Horvat et al. 2003), they are still considered as external actors or advocates, rather than organizational insiders. These beliefs suggest that everyday teacher practices and external client pressures are disconnected. The everyday classroom activities of teachers, like other professionals, are perceived to be buffered from external influences from peripheral actors such as parents (Coleman 1990; Parsons 1963). Professional trust, based on reputation and the internal regulation of professional activities, is believed to protect actors, such as teachers, from everyday client scrutiny. Such perceptions ignore the important dimension of the parent-teacher relationship that occurs during informal interactions between parents and teachers and among parents. They also prevent meaningful progress in the study of pedagogy and impede our ability to create educational policies that address inequalities of parent access to teachers.

Recent research suggests, however, that middle-class parents are able to “open” the closed classroom door. Lareau (1989, 2003), for example, studying African American and white middle-class families, found that parents secured detailed information about what was happening at school through their ties with other parents, teachers, and school administrators, thus enhancing their ability to “customize” the educational experiences of their child through home-based interventions that closely paralleled school activities. These advantages were provided by both African American and white middle-class parents.

Middle-class parents influence more than what happens at home when they interact strategically with other parents and teachers in their child’s school. Lareau (1989, 6) argues that they create “well traveled pathways” that span school, community, and home settings when they volunteer in classrooms, parent-teacher associations, school committees, neighborhood associations, and informal playgroups. When parents interact formally and informally with teachers, administrators, school staff, and other parents from the school, they can affect more than the individual outcomes of their own children. They can shape classroom- and school-level dynamics. Parents are rarely conceptualized as organizational insiders, but their access to the inner organizational

ELIZABETH MCGHEE HASSRICK is a postdoctoral scholar for the Committee on Education at the University of Chicago. BARBARA SCHNEIDER is the John A. Hannah Distinguished Professor in the College of Education and the Department of Sociology at Michigan State University; principal investigator for the Data Research and Development Center at NORC and the University of Chicago; codirector of the Alfred P. Sloan Center on Parents, Children, and Work at the University of Chicago and NORC; senior fellow, NORC at the University of Chicago; and research associate with the Population Research Center, NORC and the University of Chicago.

workings of schools may enhance their ability to participate in the daily unfolding of instructional activities in classrooms. It may be that the formal and informal interactions parents have with their child's teachers have a monitoring function that is designed to observe, assess, and influence instructional behaviors.

In this article, we focus on questions that have received significant attention in previous education research thus far: for example, How do interactional dynamics among parents and between parents and teachers provide advantages for children from different social class groups? However, unlike most previous research in this area, we investigate the extent to which interactions between and among parents and teachers shape what teachers do inside their classrooms during the school day. While the presence of middle-class parents in the classroom has been understood as facilitating home advantages, this study seeks to explore how parents' access to classroom activities regulates everyday teacher practices in the classroom. In order to isolate class differences, which are easily conflated with race differences, this study focused on differences within one racial group, that of African American parents. To anticipate the central findings of this analysis, our research suggests that teachers did feel watched by middle-class and well-connected working-class parents, who used their social networks to scrutinize their classroom practices.

Interactions between Parents and Teachers

Before the last decade, scholars primarily focused on the learning outcomes of individual children situated in families with more or less human capital. By contrast, recent scholarly efforts have investigated interactions among parents and between parents and teachers. This interactional approach allows for a more accurate accounting of how school context shapes the advantages that middle-class parents broker for their children. For example, middle-class parents tailor the advantages they provide at home by consulting with teachers or other parents about what is happening at their children's school. Parents can arrange for tutoring that complements what teachers are doing in their classrooms, or they can mimic spelling test procedures that occur in the classroom when they drill their children at home (Lareau 1989, 2003). Middle-class mothers actively seek detailed information to strategically interface with their child's teachers. For example, they determine what time teachers are available for one-on-one informal conversations and how to effectively appeal to teachers for advice on managing interventions at home (Lareau 1989, 2003; Lareau and Shumer 1996).

Similar to Lareau, Baker and Stevenson (1986) found that middle-class children have better educational outcomes because their parents are intensively

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involved in managing their educational experiences at home and at school. Their results suggest that middle-class mothers continually engage in a “long series of small things” that assist their child in maximizing learning opportunities at school (Baker and Stevenson 1986, 165). They monitor their child’s everyday academic performance in the classroom and course selections that result in their enrollment in advanced level subjects, increasing their ability to compete for admission to college.

Useem (1992) also finds that middle-class parents interact with their child’s teachers in order to learn what academic opportunities are available at school so that they can then influence their child’s mathematical placements. Useem argues that middle-class parents are integrated in social networks in which they exchange information about school activities and programs. “Busy professional women in this study often knew just who to call to find out ‘what was going on’ and what sorts of interventions for their children might be appropriate” (1992, 271). Middle-class parents, she argues, become knowledgeable about school affairs because of their engagement in informal networks with other parents from their child’s school.

Muller and Kerbow confirm the coordination advantages that well-connected parents have in keeping “abreast of developments in school policy” (1993, 30). They suggest that parents can better align themselves with teacher and school-level demands when they are socially connected with each other and with school staff. However, these informal networks are not characteristic of all parents. Muller and Kerbow found that informal parent social ties are most prevalent among white parents, at least one of which has a college degree. Furthermore, the level of connectivity among parents whose children attended the same school also varies according to the developmental stages of children, with the highest levels of involvement occurring during elementary years (Hill 2001; Hill and Craft 2003).

The more social ties that parents generate through building relationships with other adults who are centrally or peripherally concerned with the education of their child, the better able they are to manage the education decisions that occur during a child’s schooling careers (Baker and Stevenson 1986). Parents can appeal to family members, friends, or even acquaintances with whom they already have previously established ties, such as colleagues with educational expertise or neighborhood friends who have their child in a comparable school. Such individuals can provide information and advice about their children’s academic and social development, for example, identifying the best teacher (Horvat et al. 2003; Lareau 2003) at each grade level or the available and appropriate extracurricular activities in the community. Sandefur and Laumann call this effort to recruit interested actors “complete structural closure around a target” (1998, 486), in which the target, in the example above, is the child’s educational progress. Both parents and teachers benefit

from structural closure because the more information they have about the child's progress, the better equipped they are to create productive learning experiences for the child. Social closure between parents and staff also increases levels of disciplinary control in classrooms (Domina 2005). In addition to the individual advantages that are transmitted to children through the human capital of their parents, the inclusive quality, duration, and intensity of interactions that occur between home and school greatly influence the educational advantages of children.

Social Closure and Teacher Constraint in Classrooms

While social closure provides children with learning benefits, it also increases the level of everyday surveillance of teacher practices, potentially constraining teachers. Sandefur and Laumann explain that "the social capital that permits parents to more effectively watch over their children also permits surveillance of other adults involved in childrearing" (1998, 488). Surveillance as it is used here describes how the relationships that create closure around a target also expose participants to greater levels of everyday scrutiny by one another. They are primarily considering the loss of privacy that parents may experience at home, as other adults gain access to information about what parents are doing at home with their child. In this article, we consider how parent surveillance might shape what teachers are doing in their classrooms.

Both positive and negative consequences can emerge when a watchful dynamic is established between parents and teachers who are jointly monitoring the educational progress of children. For example, teachers can develop trusting relationships with parents as a positive consequence of shared practice. Parents and teachers can collaborate with one another to build consensus about their expectations of children and increase levels of social control both at home and at school (Coleman 1990; McNeal 1999). Parents can act jointly to provide timely, targeted supports for teachers if they are well informed about daily classroom activities. By being knowledgeable about what is going on in the classroom, parents can provide timely information about how their child receives the teacher's instruction, as well as how their child is affected by different classroom dynamics. Careful parent monitoring of everyday classroom instruction can create subtle pressures and incentives that aid teachers in being more responsive to both the individual and the group needs of their students.

By contrast, monitoring parents can negatively affect teachers by undermining their professional judgment and practice. For example, parents can seek to intimidate teachers by "ganging up" with other parents to complain about discrete events (Horvat et al. 2003), or they can consult with principals

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regarding their concerns about teacher practice without allowing teachers the opportunity to defend themselves. While parents are expected to act as advocates by demanding the best instruction for their child, parents that actively monitor what teachers are doing in their classrooms can influence resource allocations and retention for teachers. Bryk and Schneider (2002) provide an example in which middle-class parents exercise the authority vested in them by their local school council to seek outside input regarding the selection of curricular programs without consulting the school staff. While their actions can readily be understood as reasonable attempts by consumers to use outside assessment to improve their child's educational experiences, the lack of input from the professional staff increases the vulnerability of the teachers and administrators at the school and, as a result, can decrease their effectiveness.

Social, organizational, and institutional contexts can shape the degree to which parents influence the everyday practices of teachers. Different social arrangements, such as parents who have dense exchange networks with other parents or teachers who provide parents with unobstructed access to their classrooms, might shape teacher practices. Also, parents and teachers who provide each other with timely, accurate, and detailed information about the everyday classroom experiences of children can generate dense informal networks that might shape teacher behavior. In addition, the degree of social trust between parents and teachers as well as the normative agreements between parents and teachers regarding the surveillance of teachers can also affect the social contracts that develop between teachers and parents. Finally, the social status of parents can affect their perceived legitimacy when they attempt to constrain teacher behavior.

Race also shapes how parents influence teacher practice, specifically with regard to social trust. Levels of social trust are lower in schools that teach minority children. Not only are the resources that can solve problems scarce in poor, minority schools, but minorities, African Americans in particular, have the lowest amount of social trust (Taylor et al. 2007) due to a long history of racial discrimination at individual, organizational, and institutional levels (Feagin 2000; Wellman 1993). The lack of social trust in organizations that serve minorities is tied to greater, more durable historical trends of racism. If parents perceive that schools are not receptive to their interventions and they believe, from past experiences, that their efforts will be rebuffed by organizational gatekeepers, they will be less likely to approach teachers (Cooper and Christie 2005; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997; Pomerantz et al. 2007).

All stakeholders in poor, urban, minority schools, including administrators, teachers, students, and parents, are more vulnerable because of the decreased levels of social trust (Bryk and Schneider 2002). "Being in a vulnerable position makes people circle up all their little resources. They're looking over their shoulder. Sociologically, we should regard the capacity to trust as a marker of

social privilege” (Payne 2005, 7). Because trust between teachers and minority parents is so strained, they often have conflicting perceptions of one another (Lawrence-Lightfoot 1981). For example, teachers interpret the lack of participation of minority parents as apathy and disinterest for their child’s educational progress, rather than “the inability to negotiate the bureaucratic maze of schools or as a response to a long history of exclusion and rejection at the school door” (Lawrence-Lightfoot 1981, 100). White, middle-class parents and teachers establish trust more easily among themselves because social, cultural, and economic resources help to synchronize expectations and build collective efficacy.

Research Questions

Are teachers constrained by the relational expectations of middle-class parents as they execute their everyday classroom instructional activities? To investigate this process, this study explores the following questions: How, when, and where do parents, across different social classes, obtain information about their child’s classroom experiences and evaluate teacher performance? To what extent does parent monitoring pressure shape teachers’ everyday practices? What are the likely effects of teaching surveillance by parents? This research project examines these questions intensively by studying a new charter school, using a variety of data collection methods including interviews, observations, and a network analysis.

Method

School Site Selection

ABC Charter School was selected as the field site for this study because it is an urban public school with a mixed-income population of 227 prekindergarten through fifth-grade students.¹ Mixed-income urban public schools provide a unique research opportunity to investigate how middle-class parents attempt to shape organizational practices in schools where they represent a minority, possibly providing examples of activities that are less visible and more normative in homogeneous suburban or private school environments.

It is important to note that parents might be more vigilant about evaluating the effectiveness of their child’s teacher because of the charter school status of ABC. For example, charter schools typically suffer from high teacher turnover, and charter school teachers have fewer credentials (Miron and Applegate 2007). Teacher variability might increase levels of parent vigilance, as teachers

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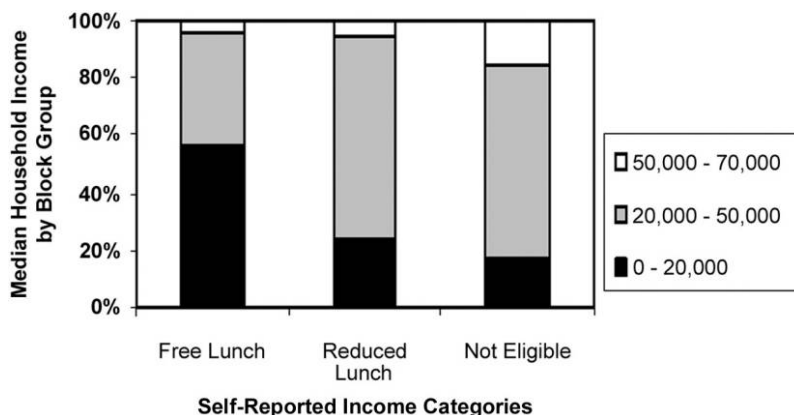


FIG. 1.—Average neighborhood incomes of ABC families, where “neighborhood” refers to the 2000 census block groups.

within the same school and even the same grade level have been found to produce different learning gains in their students (Nye et al. 2004). Also, parents choose to enroll their children into charter schools, indicating that they already are more likely than other parents to investigate school options for their child. In addition, ABC Charter is a new school, and as such, parents might be more likely to monitor the school to establish the quality of the curriculum, schoolwide climate, and safety concerns.

Based on school information, all parents at ABC were African American, and there was some variation in family resources, education, and occupational status. Approximately 70 percent of ABC families qualified for free and reduced lunch, and 30 percent did not. ABC families were mainly clustered in three different neighborhoods that were 98 percent African American. The neighborhoods were somewhat economically diverse: 10–20 percent were middle-class residents. The three neighborhoods were located within a five-mile radius of the school. This study primarily investigates social class differences among parents and attempts to hold the race of parents constant by selecting a school with 100 percent African American parents. But it is important to note that race provides the backdrop on which the class differences between parents and teachers are discussed and interpreted. Fifty percent of the teaching staff members were white, and 50 percent were African American.

Combining neighborhood level characteristics with self-reported income information at the individual level, figure 1 demonstrates the extent to which ABC families are situated in different kinds of neighborhoods. In this case, neighborhood context is measured using a range of annual incomes at the block group level, beginning at \$0–\$20,000, which is displayed with a black bar,

\$20,000–\$50,000, which is displayed using a gray bar, and \$50,000–\$70,000, which is displayed using a white bar. The school places families into three different categories according to their self-reported annual incomes, including free lunch, reduced lunch, and not eligible for free lunch, represented on the x -axis. Data from the 2000 census indicated that the majority of students who attended ABC lived in neighborhoods where the average income was between \$20,000 and \$50,000. A greater percentage of the poorest students lived in poverty-level neighborhoods (see fig. 1).

ABC Charter was situated in an urban neighborhood undergoing gentrification. Redevelopment efforts clustered closest to the school building and around the immediate vicinity of the school; approximately 75 percent of the housing stock was completely new or redeveloped. The school building itself had been recently renovated, and the 100-year-old, historic, brick facade had been restored.

Data

Data collection included 70 observation days and 37 semistructured interviews. Overall, 24 parents, 12 teachers, and one school director were interviewed. A total of 216 hours of observations were made in two primary classrooms, teacher resource rooms, the main office, hallways, school playgrounds, and the parent room. Additional observations were conducted at Math Night, Literature Night, volunteer breakfasts, the volunteer award ceremony, multicultural assemblies, parent-teacher organization (PTO) meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and two parent-recruitment meetings.

Two sets of parents were interviewed, based on their economic background. In this study, free lunch parents were categorized as poor, reduced lunch parents as working class, and not eligible for free lunch parents as middle class. The first set included 18 parents. They were selected from three different classrooms across grade levels, using a stratified random data collection design, based on free lunch application designations.² The 18 parent interview responses were matched with the teacher data.

The second set of parent interviews included six parents. These interviews were collected after several parents, teachers, and administrators independently discussed the importance of a group of eight middle-class parents who had exited ABC together at the end of the prior year. To learn more about why and how these parents exited the school, additional data collection occurred. Initial analysis confirmed that five of the eight parents were middle class, and all of the exited parents were from one classroom. Six of the exited parents agreed to participate in the study, and they were interviewed.³ Additionally, a social network instrument was administered to these parents to

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TABLE 1

Description of Parent Interview Data

Demographic Characteristics	Parent Interviews
Race:	
African American	24 (100%)
Social class:	
Poor	7 (29%)
Working class	7 (29%)
Middle class	10 (42%)

learn about their interactions with each other.⁴ Open-ended question probes were also included that solicited details about how parents assessed teacher performance and specific interactions that occurred between parents and teachers and among parents.⁵ As shown in table 1, slightly over half the parents would be considered poor or working class, whereas 42 percent of those interviewed would be classified as middle class by the criteria used in this study. Overall, 24 parents were interviewed.

Two sets of teachers were interviewed. The first set included nine ABC teachers who taught prekindergarten through fifth grade, and each interview lasted between one to three hours. The interview protocol was designed to solicit details about how teachers assessed parent involvement and specific interactions that occurred between teachers and classroom parents. The second set included three teachers who had previously taught the children of the group of parents who had exited the school at the end of the previous year. Overall, 12 teachers were interviewed.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis were done in tandem, allowing for the development of working hypotheses, the adjustment of data collection strategies, and the pursuit of new data regarding interactions that were discussed in interviews and observed when conducting field work (Miles and Huberman 1994). Coding categories were developed from theoretical review and analysis of interview and observational data. All interviews and observation notes were read several times, and memos, pattern coding, case analysis (across social class), and written summaries were developed to assure the quality of data collection and provide opportunities for ongoing data analysis. Qualitative data analysis software, called ATLAS.ti (Muhr 2004), was used to facilitate data analysis strategies. Parent, teacher, and administrator responses to the

social network instrument were analyzed using social networks analysis software, called UCINET (Borgatti et al. 2002). Since free lunch rankings were available for all students, all parent names cited in field notes and parent and teacher interviews were coded with a rough measure of social class, allowing for the triangulation of findings across different data sources.

Measures

Although most studies consider parent involvement as a supportive dynamic between the teachers and the parents, in this study, initial data analysis indicated that teachers perceived the middle-class parents “watching” them as they were teaching and critiquing their everyday practices. This watchfulness suggested a new measure of parent and teacher interaction, which is termed “surveillance.” Surveillance is used to describe the watchful dynamic that occurred between ABC middle-class parents and teachers; it implies awareness of those who are being watched, as well as those who are watching.

Coding for Surveillance

To measure how parents managed the surveillance of the everyday activities of teachers, two types of occurrences were coded in parent interviews and field notes: instances in which parents indicated that they were watching the everyday activities of teachers by themselves or with others and instances in which parents initiated the detailed evaluation of everyday classroom activities with the teacher, the principal, other classroom parents, other parents (i.e., neighborhood friends), education professionals, or advocates. The content of parent surveillance activities was coded for two main topics: academic, representing curricular concerns about children, and disciplinary, representing social and emotional concerns about children.

Teacher Practice under Surveillance

At ABC Charter, middle-class and well-connected working-class parents engaged strategically with other parents and teachers in order to enhance their ability to surveil everyday teacher practices. Monitoring parents sought out other parents and teachers during formal school events as well as during everyday routines, such as dropping off their children for school or picking them up. Official school activities, such as Family Math Nights, monthly parent breakfasts, and PTO meetings provided parents opportunities to interact with

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other parents and teachers in order to possibly influence what teachers did during the school day. For example, during Family Math Night, I observed one middle-class parent question her child's teacher about a science fair judge she perceived to be biased and unprofessional. The teacher agreed with her concerns and promised to confront the judge and possibly exclude her from further participation. Whereas poor parents tended to attend these events to learn about school programs, all middle-class parents interviewed for this study saw these sessions as opportunities to strategically advocate for enhancing the learning opportunities of their children.

Many middle-class parents incorporated interactions with other parents or teachers into their daily routines. For example, most mornings, after the school start bell, small groups of parents were observed lingering at the front door of the school, engaged in vigorous discussions about what was happening in classrooms. With the primary age group, these clusters were also found inside the building, just outside the classroom door, or in the hallway nearby the office. Middle-class parents that volunteered in classrooms were regular participants in informal discussions that occurred during drop-off and pickup.

Also, during more formal, scheduled interactions, such as parent-teacher conferences, middle-class parents not only advocated for their children but also tried to influence how teachers delivered instruction during the school day. For example, one middle-class parent interrupted the teacher's presentation three different times during a parent-teacher conference.⁶

The parent asked the teacher if her son knew that he was supposed to read slowly for comprehension and not read fast and show off. The parent explained that at home he reads quickly sometimes because he is showing off. The parent said that she wasn't an expert, but she thought that if she was to give the test and the student was starting out by reading really fast, she would [she held the test as if she were administering it and placed her hand carefully over the page obstructing the text] say to the student, "Now stop for a second. The purpose here is to understand what you read, so you need to slow down." (Field notes)

Not only does this parent challenge the teacher about her knowledge regarding her son's ability, but she also questions the teacher's competence in helping him learn to read. The interactions that occurred among parents and between parents and teachers in formal and informal arenas helped watchful parents coordinate their efforts toward enhancing their child's educational experiences while at school.

Academic Surveillance

Monitoring parents sought to identify how much academic learning was taking place during the classroom day. They identified specific practices and routines that teachers were implementing in their classrooms, such as how teachers graphed the daily temperature, taught math concepts using a spiral method, or used a “red light” disciplinary system, not to implement such activities at home but rather to determine whether their child was receiving a rigorous education while at school. Careful surveillance of classroom teacher practices was seen as normative and appropriate among the middle-class parents interviewed at ABC.

Monitoring parents also used ties with professional colleagues to enhance their ability to evaluate the academic performance of teachers. When evaluating her daughter’s math homework, Jan Noddings, a middle-class parent, consulted with a professional colleague at work about her child’s math homework assignments.⁷

I really liked the way that she is learning math concepts by applying them to real life. One of my colleagues is involved in a math organization for the state. So I’ve been talking to him casually about the kinds of homework that my daughter has been bringing home since kindergarten. He said it was excellent. . . . But, I’ve gotten the test scores off the Internet, and Mason Elementary [a nearby magnet school] is running rings around ABC, especially in math. ABC has some work to do. I told the [ABC] director that they have to go over to Mason Elementary and figure out why their test scores are so high.

It is important to underscore the activities this parent undertook to assess the quality of instruction her child was receiving, even after her professional colleague declared the instruction “excellent.” Jan Noddings sought additional confirmation from other sources regarding performance indicators, located comparable school data, and directly counseled the school director.

While there were a few working-class parents who participated in monitoring everyday teacher practices, they were situated within groups of middle-class parents and most often voiced their concerns as shared concerns. Lisa Johnson, a working-class parent, explained how she and other middle-class classroom parents jointly monitored the academic practices of Miss Levington, the class substitute. She compared the substitute’s approach to grammar instruction with that of the regular classroom teacher and discussed the impact curricular changes were having on the students in the classroom. “Ms. Levington [the long-term sub] had a whole different teaching style [than the

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regular classroom teacher]. We saw that they were missing in a lot of the basics. And she had to deal with a lot of classroom management issues on top of her trying to bring them up to par. She held them accountable for grammar. They had never been really pushed to be grammatically correct, as far as the verbs and spelling properly, doing complete sentences so that they can have clear thoughts.”

While monitoring parents at ABC were mainly concerned with their children’s classroom experiences, their surveillance efforts also reached beyond the classroom to include certain organizational processes. For example, Serena Harris, a middle-class parent, discovered that teacher attrition was a problem at ABC, while consulting with her friends who had children in the upper grades. “Parents ask, ‘What happens with our kids next year?’ The teachers aren’t just leaving. They’re leaving under suspicious circumstances. You’re telling us ‘Don’t worry about it. It’s not our business.’ And then other teachers are expressing their desire to find a position somewhere else because it just wasn’t working for them. And I guess I feel like if the teachers are feeling like this and they’re wanting to leave, how much effort are they really giving to the kids?”

Monitoring parents were not only concerned with school issues such as teacher attrition; they also debated how the school’s mandate to provide rigorous educational experiences for poor students affected the academic processes of all students enrolled at the school. Gina Towns, the middle-class parent of a pre-K student, described how she believed ABC’s mission affected the overall pace of instruction for all students. “My child has been in school from age two, and when she got to ABC she was ready for much more rigorous work than she experienced. The administration told me that school nowadays was not about drill and practice but learning through play, being more well rounded, but the one-letter-a-week approach brought my kid to a screeching halt. Everything was too slow. ABC is designed to meet the needs of kids who don’t have pre-K background. Kids with a pre-K education can move faster.” Gina Towns targeted the way in which ABC was “designed.” Even though school directors tried to convince her that her child was learning “through play,” she concluded that the lack of pre-K instruction for many ABC students helped to explain why the school was not able to meet her child’s learning needs.

Surveilling parents not only targeted how ABC’s mandate affected the delivery of curriculum; they also discussed how the mandate shaped the way administrators dealt with parents. Serena Harris, a middle-class mother, expressed her belief that school staff did not take her critiques about academic curricular practices seriously, in part because of their mandate to “save” low income minority students. “They feel like they have this curriculum that’s going to save some of these young black kids, and they’re saving them, and they know it’s right because a lot of them have been in education for five thousand years, and they know what’s best, and we don’t. I guess my husband

told me better: 'My children aren't lost; they don't need to be saved.' So I don't want the facade of you working with me as a parent. I want the reality of it." Parent surveillance, while implicitly aimed at enhancing the individual achievement of particular children, was also directed at evaluating the contextual effects of classroom activities and school-level mandates.

Disciplinary Surveillance

Not only did vigilant middle-class and well-connected working-class parents watch over the academic experiences of their children, they also expressed concerns about how their child's self-esteem was affected by activities that occurred during the school day. While volunteering at the school, Delia Hines, a middle-class parent, observed a teacher disciplining her child. She did not agree with what the teacher had done and shared what she had observed with a family member, who was also a professional educator.

I saw one instance where she [her daughter] was in the hallway with a friend and, yes, they were running, but the teacher was like you know, "You need to go and dah dah dah." But they were running with a book to sit down to read it. Well, why would you take that away? I am talking to educators in my family—I have help in doing all this stuff—she [her relative] said, "Get her out of there!" And I said, "Why?" She said, "There's studies done. There's a study done on what is expected and what kids get praised for in African American schools versus white schools. African American schools will do this a lot of times, and white schools it's 'Oh, you can read that or you can do this or whatever.'"

Delia's family ties with educational professionals provided her with exposure to research about race and disciplinary practices that confirmed her own feelings about what was wrong with the way the teacher had disciplined her child.

In addition to evaluating how teachers were interacting with their own children, monitoring parents also carefully observed how teachers managed other children who were misbehaving and disrupting classroom learning. Sally Nevers, a middle-class parent, spoke about how the interactions that her son had with misbehaving students in the classroom influenced his social development at ABC. "The children at ABC were kind of rough. He had never been exposed to that kind of rough behavior in his previous school. At the beginning of the year, the kids were using profane language, and he told a teacher, and the boy he told on turned the whole class against him for being a tattler. . . . The kids teased him and were mean and rough. It was a

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serious culture shock for him, and he had serious social challenges. Also, the kids didn't put their work first and got into trouble doing other things."

Monitoring parents also evaluated organizational procedures about discipline that affected teaching and learning in the classroom. Serena Harris, a middle-class parent, observed how in-school suspension procedures were affecting classroom learning. "I go up there [in-school suspension room], and I see the same kids, day after day, in there. This isn't working for them. It's not stopping their behavior. It's not helping the school. Those same kids get sent back to their classroom still disruptive, and it's just a constant thing. And the teacher is frustrated. The teacher can't teach." Serena Harris was criticizing in-school suspension procedures and the way in which teachers were handling disruptions in their classrooms. But perhaps more important she was observing a pattern that suggested to her that certain children were being isolated for misbehavior, and the problem was not with the children but the teacher's social control in the classroom.

How Teachers Cope with Watchful Parents

Surveillance implies the active awareness of those who are being watched, as well as those who are watching. Teachers at ABC discussed how particular parents and groups of parents were observing them and openly critiquing their teaching. Table 2 presents some examples of surveillance from linked parent and teacher interviews.

While all teachers represented in the table indicate that they were forced to deal with parent surveillance, they responded differently to it, with Ms. Owen and Ms. Crane accepting the right of parents to watch and evaluate them, and Ms. Cloud actively defending herself against parent surveillance pressures. Ms. Owen openly acknowledges the covert activities of the monitoring parents and solicits direct communication from the parents, diffusing some of the tension and intimidation caused by parent surveillance. Ms. Crane interprets Delia Hines's questions as a request for professional advice.

By contrast, Ms. Cloud is able to effectively defend herself from parent critique by presenting a united front with the school director about the daughter's accelerated reading abilities. Celia Jones, a middle-class parent, questions the grading standards of her child's teacher, explaining how she met multiple times with both her child's teacher and the principal to get the school to address her concerns about grammar. Both the teacher and the school director appear undaunted by the concerns and feel that the parent is unjustified in her criticisms. These quotes illustrate the types of surveillance parents used with the teachers and the types of responses the teachers had to these direct and sometimes critical views of their professional judgments and practices. In

TABLE 2

Examples of Middle-Class Parent Surveillance, as Described by Parents and the Child's Teacher

Parent Interview Text	Teacher Interview Text
Nicole Brown (MC): I've gone into the classroom on Fridays to help with other parents. . . . We [Jahela (MC), Sarah (MC), and Alyssa (MC)] agreed that Ms. Owen's classroom management is not as strong as her instruction, but I don't necessarily know that that's a knock against Ms. Owen. She's got some real challenging kids. Her class has a lot of students who are new to ABC this year, so they haven't been indoctrinated yet.	Ms. Owen: In the beginning of the year, I didn't feel that the parents trusted me at all. I had two or three parents [Nicole (MC), Sarah (MC), and Alyssa (MC)] in here every day for the first two months. I asked them flat out, "You have been back here watching me for two weeks. If you see something I need to now, you are observing me, so I am open to feedback."
Delia Hines (MC): I like the teacher to be very observant. I hang out in the teacher's classroom as much as I can, all day if I could, and watch Lillian do her thing. I want to see that the teacher is sort of watching my child, paying attention and all that. I want to know if she's getting enough attention from the teacher, and I definitely want feedback as to how I can help process.	Ms. Crane: I have a parent [Delia (MC)] this year who has an only child, and often she'll come to me and ask, "Is this OK for Lillian to be doing?" I guess if you're asking somebody, you believe that they're going to give you some good advice. So we talked a lot about what Lillian was talking about in the classroom.
Celia Jones (MC): I constantly reviewed her homework, and I said to Ms. Cloud, "She's lacking phonic skills." And Ms. Cloud kept saying, "Well no, Catherine is reading three grades above grade level." But I remember diagramming sentences and things of that nature. . . . I even mentioned it to Dr. Max. "I just don't think they're getting what they need." And he said, "No, Catherine is doing well, I'm not sure why you feel like there's a problem."	Ms. Cloud: I have more parents [Catherine's mom (MC) and Devon's mom (MC)] saying, "I think what my child could be, should be doing better." They're saying, "I don't know if I would have accepted that piece. I think they could have done better on some certain piece of work."

NOTE.—MC (middle class), WC (working class), and P (poor) indicate the social class background of the people being discussed by the interviewee.

some instances, teachers made their everyday practices more overt and solicited supplemental information from parents, as was the case with Ms. Owen, or they provided supplemental information to surveilling parents, as was the case with Ms. Crane. At times, barriers were erected that obstructed parent influence, as was the case with Ms. Cloud and the school director.

Once they became cognizant of group and individual middle-class parent

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surveillance pressures, teachers implemented a variety of interventions that shaped their teaching activities at a group level and at an individual level. For example, Ms. Norton explained that she responded to middle-class parent complaints about math curriculum by providing a detailed math newsletter for all parents. She also organized a Family Math Night, during which parents learned hands-on math applications by playing math games with their children. Ms. Owen described how she responded to several middle-class parents' complaints about discontinuing her newsletter by reissuing it. "They really appreciate my weekly letter." In both instances, teachers provided supplemental learning opportunities for surveilling parents.

Teachers also provided individual interventions in response to the concerns of monitoring parents. In the following example, Ms. Murphy provided extra classroom support and administrative interventions to address the academic concerns of Makeyla's mother, a middle-class parent.

Makeyla Ward's mom came to me with concerns about her child who was at a pretty high level. She wanted to know if there was any way for her child to get put into a higher grade classroom this year. I spoke to Dr. Max about it, and he didn't think it was a wise move. I still think she wished we had done it, especially for math. There are math games I am modifying, but I don't know how much more I can do to the games to make them more challenging. I even tried to see if there was a way that I could shift the schedule around so she could go to an upper grade classroom for math instruction, but it doesn't work out because of gym and library preps.

Although she was ultimately not successful, Ms. Murphy went so far as to try to arrange the school schedule so that Makeyla could receive more challenging math instruction.

A Note about Parent Surveillance and Race

Although all parents at ABC Charter were African American, teachers had different racial identifications. While parents who participated in the study did not report differences regarding their interactions with African American or white teachers, African American teachers believed that the racial heritage that they shared with parents at the school helped to mediate some of the negative aspects of parent surveillance.⁸ All of the African American teachers interviewed cited race as an important asset in getting information from parents that helped them to establish productive relationships. Ms. Cloud said that race affected the directness with which she approached parents. Because both she and the parents were African American, they could have more direct

conversations about supposedly covert surveillance activities. Ms. Cloud articulated her experience of race in rich detail, when asked about parent trust.

My kids are all 100 percent African American, and so am I. So just by that fact, they know that I am going to understand certain things just because we share a common race. We share a common history, so they can assume certain things because of that. So it makes them comfortable to a certain degree, so they don't have to work as long to build up trust with me. It definitely works to my benefit and to our benefit because we do have commonality. . . . They know that I am going to understand that. That I am going to be sensitive to those needs because I know what it is because you have got to experience it.

When she had informal, day-to-day interactions with parents, she experienced an underlying sense of trust that made her dealings with parents more productive. "It just exists. It is. It is a nonverbal thing. Cues, looks, there is all kinds of things that make things understood. My parents could come in and say, 'you know' and just give me a look, and I understand. And they know that I know [laugh]. You know?"

Ms. Cloud and the African American parents of her students were able to develop trusting relations and reinforce or challenge certain norms of behavior, in part because they shared similar life experiences based on their racial background. Coleman (1990) makes a similar argument about teachers and parents in Catholic schools, where parents and teachers share the same religious faith. Ms. Cloud also explained that her lived understanding of prejudice helped her to advocate more effectively for poor parents. She proactively advised them about whom to contact at the school in order to get their concerns heard.

By contrast, many of the white teachers interviewed at ABC heard about parent concerns from more indirect sources. For example, the principal shared complaints that several parents had about the math curriculum with Ms. Sunny. In response, she went directly to the complaining parents and invited them to come to her classroom so that she could address their concerns. Ms. Murphy, a white teacher, was frustrated with the difficulties she experienced soliciting information from parents about their expectations of her. "I don't think I ever had a direct conversation like, 'I wish you would' It was more inferred, or it could have just been a perception I have gotten from body language and conversation, or a lot of things might be in my head. I might be more defensive because I am white. I'm not sure. . . . Sometimes it could be just overhearing things [from other teachers or parents]." Ms. Murphy had more indirect sources of information about the concerns of her student's parents than Ms. Cloud, and she mentions her race as a possible reason why she might misinterpret the critiques from her student's parents.

When Surveillance Becomes More Visible: Parent Social Networks and Exit

Surveillance was perhaps more obvious among the middle-class and working-class parents socially linked to middle-class parents who had exited the school during the previous year. Social network surveys were administered to a group of parents who had exited the school at the end of the previous school year, as well as to three teachers and one school director. This particular group of exiting parents became important during the data collection for this study because several parents and teachers who participated in interviews discussed how the experiences of the exiting parents influenced their own perceptions about the school. For example, Serena Harris, a middle-class parent, described how she carefully observed the activities of the exiting parents and how they were received by the school administration. "I watched what happened. I sat back because my kids were new to the school, so I sat back and watched. I quietly observed everything. I watched what happened in the school once I started realizing these things, that I wasn't alone in feeling them. I started seeing how the parents reacted. I watched how the administration responded, and I watched how the advisory board responded, and then I watched what the parents ended up doing as a response to all of that [they exited the school]."

While she was watching the exiting parents, she came to understand that she had similar kinds of concerns. She carefully witnessed how the administration handled the parents who were actively expressing some of her same concerns. In addition to observing how teachers teach in classrooms, Serena Harris was monitoring the administration. The following microstudy allows us to locate the social interactional patterns among the exiting parents and their cohort, to observe watchful parents in the classroom context, and thereby to provide an exaggerated example of the watching process.

The network diagrams (figs. 2 and 3) show the communication ties observed among parents from one primary grade cohort, as reported by six members of the cohort, three teachers who taught the cohort, and one school director. The preexisting ties (fig. 2) refer to the parents from the cohort who communicated with each other before their children were enrolled at ABC. The after ties (fig. 3) refer to the people who communicated with each other after the parents had been together for several years.

Few parents knew one another in this cohort before enrollment at ABC, and communication patterns established during enrollment years were largely segregated by social class. Middle-class parents communicated with multiple other middle-class parents, except one isolated middle-class parent. With the exception of two poor parents and three working-class parents who were active leaders in school, the remaining poor and working-class parents were socially

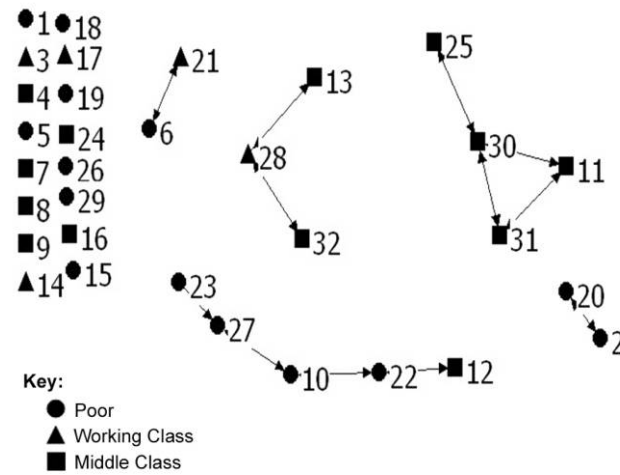


FIG. 2.—Few preexisting ties among classroom parents: communication ties among all classroom parents before enrolling at ABC. Includes ties reported by both exiting parents and ABC staff because both groups reported similar early ties among the exiting parents. The chi-square test for independence between participating parents and ABC staff when asked to identify early ties was equal to .0089, indicating a significant similarity between the way in which the two groups reported previous ties.

isolated; members of other small, isolated cliques; or peripherally linked to the main clique of middle-class parents.

Exiting parents evaluated the academic and disciplinary practices of teachers in perhaps more stringent ways than the parents currently in the school. Helen Moore, a middle-class parent, suggested that her daughter’s teacher, Ms. Parker, was being defensive, when she was trying to obtain information on her daughter’s spelling performance. “Ms. Parker was defensive, and if we [Janet (middle class), Lisa (middle class), and Ellen (middle class)] inquired as to what was going on in the classroom, like we did in previous grades, we were treated with suspicion. My daughter was having some issues with spelling. . . . Ms. Parker said she was aware of it but didn’t know what to do about it. Here she is supposed to be a specialist, and the teacher has not brought it up with the parents.” Helen Moore was expressing her right to assess the performance of the teacher and question the teacher’s professional competence. This questioning of competence was clearly perceived by Ms. Parker, the teacher who became a target of concerned e-mails from the exiting parents. Ms. Parker explained that “from the beginning of the year, they [Helen (middle class), Lisa (middle class), Janet (middle class), and her friend Lynn (working class)]

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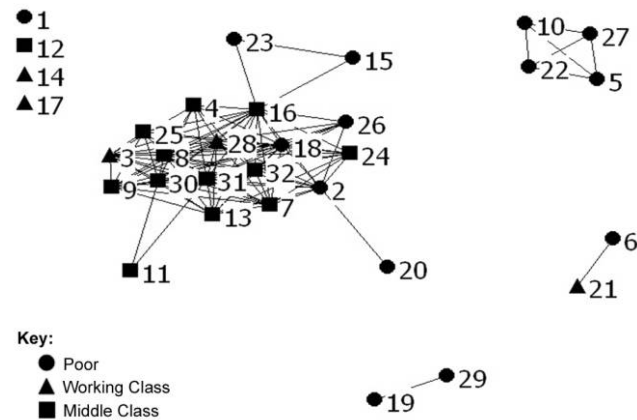


FIG. 3.—One dominant coalition: communication ties among all classroom parents after four years of enrollment at ABC. Includes ties reported by both exiting parents and ABC staff because both groups reported similar communication ties among the exiting parents, with some exceptions. The chi-square test of independence between ABC staff and exiting parents for the large communication clique is equal to .0026, providing strong evidence that they are similar in their perceptions as to membership to the large clique. In contrast, there is not a strong correlation between staff and exiting parents in identifying other smaller cliques. Staff were able to identify several smaller cliques among the parents who qualified for free lunch that exiting parents did not report. The chi-square test of independence for the smaller cliques was equal to .768.

were watching me with the students. It was like they were looking for something wrong. In October, these strange e-mails started coming [to the school director]. The director would bring them to me. The parents had academic concerns. The first one was about spelling.” Ms. Parker perceived that the exiting parents were acting together, watching her as a group and consulting with her supervisor without first bringing their concerns to her.

The ability of the exiting parents to watch teachers in their classrooms was enhanced by their direct communication with school directors. All of the middle-class parents interviewed for the social network study explained how they met frequently with school directors about their concerns throughout their tenure at ABC. Their concerns ranged from the way classroom teachers were implementing spelling instruction and math curriculum to the everyday disciplinary practices of teachers. All three teachers who taught the children of these parents explained that they had received information about the concerns of the exiting parents from their school directors.

In addition to meetings with school directors, all parents claimed that they had vetted their concerns directly with teachers by initiating several informal one-on-one meetings with classroom teachers. Damon Jones, one of the middle-class parents who exited the school, believed that parents needed to meet

frequently with teachers so as to create better teacher management of discipline in the classroom.

Parents want to be part of what is going on in the classroom. I want to be involved from the *beginning*, not after it [bad behavior of child] has gone on for too long. Let there be reciprocation. There was a problem with management at ABC. The teachers were too lenient when the kids were rowdy. They would say, "Stop Johnny. Stop Johnny. Stop Johnny. Stop Johnny. Stop Johnny. . . . That's not nice. Don't do that." I don't want my kids around kids who are constantly getting away with things because it could make the kid turn the other way.

Damon explained that he wanted to be involved in making sure that his children did not develop disrespectful behavioral habits while in school, due to mismanagement by their teacher.

In conclusion, the exiting parents asserted their right to challenge the competency of their child's teachers regarding both academic and disciplinary issues, and they brought their concerns directly to the teacher and indirectly to the school directors who supervised the teacher. The teacher sought to protect herself from what she felt to be unjust attacks, and a distrustful communication cycle was established that ended in the exit of several parents from the school. The communication ties among classroom parents reported here provide a visual representation of how the interactional process occurs at the classroom level.

Barriers to Surveillance for Poor Parents

Poor and most working-class parents at ABC faced difficulties monitoring teachers, in part because they had few interactions with school staff and other classroom parents, and as a result they had more limited access to detailed information about everyday classroom practices (see table 3).

Whereas most middle-class parents and working-class parents connected to middle-class parents had several sources of information about what was going on in the classroom, more isolated poor and working-class parents relied mostly on information provided by their child. For example, Ellen Jones, a poor parent, actively solicited information from her daughter by asking her daughter to play "teacher" and present the material the way the teacher presented the material in class. She saw this as an opportunity for her to learn more about what the teacher was expecting from her daughter, as well as an opportunity for her child to practice being a leader. Patty Rodgers, a poor parent, explained that she learned about spelling instruction by watching her son Jaden pick out his spelling words from a book he was reading. "At first I thought, 'Hey,

TABLE 3

Summary of Differences in Parent Monitoring Profiles

TYPES OF INTERACTIONS OBSERVED	PARENT MONITORING PROFILES	
	“Insider” Parents	“Facilitated” Parents
Key elements of each profile	Informal interactions among parents and between parents and teachers directed by parents.	Informal interactions between parents and teachers directed by teachers.
Monitoring networks	<p>Parents had social ties to other parents who were consistently committed to teacher assessment.</p> <p>Monitoring capacity of classroom parents enriched by parent volunteers who were committed to teacher assessment.</p> <p>Between-school comparison capacity enhanced by social ties to educational professional and friends and family with children enrolled in private and magnet schools.</p> <p>Peripherally located parents remain engaged by contributing comparative information and professional intervention strategies.</p>	<p>Monitoring capacity of parents hampered by lack of school access and dependent on information provided by students, support staff, and occasionally teachers.</p> <p>Network participants consistently focused on soliciting teacher mentoring assistance.</p> <p>Informational networks limited to immediate and extended familial connections.</p>
Interventions	<p>Exchanges between parents and teachers detailed and specific, informed by “monitoring” networks.</p> <p>Parents instigate interventions quickly and often.</p>	<p>Interventions most often teacher driven, regarding issues that have become unmanageable in the classroom setting, and require parent “reenforcement.”</p> <p>For extreme incidents that involved administrative action, parents defend their child with the help of outside advocates.</p>
Disciplinary engagements	<p>Parents intervene to assert their assumptions about social and emotional child training into everyday classroom dynamics.</p>	<p>School-driven teacher scrutiny.</p>
Consequences	Elevated levels of everyday informal teacher scrutiny.	

the teacher didn't give you spelling words.' After a while I thought, 'Wow, he is picking words that he didn't understand. And he is seeking the answers, then he goes back, reads it and, it makes sense.'" Remarkably, in both instances, a great deal of evaluation was performed by the parents themselves without input from other parents or the teacher.

Poor and working-class parents were more likely to evaluate teacher practices with their child, rather than with school staff or other classroom parents, which limited the kinds of comparisons that they were able to make. In the following example, Veronica Cole, a poor parent, compares with her children the strengths and weakness of teachers at ABC Charter and Ward Elementary, a nearby public school located in their high poverty neighborhood. "The comparison [between ABC and Ward] is drastic. . . . Janie [her child at ABC] always has homework. . . . That hurts my ten-year-old severely. . . . 'She is only in preschool, Ma, but they [Janie's teachers at ABC] pay attention to her more. They love them more. . . . All the teachers speak and say hello. . . . Ma, Janie is doing a science project in preschool? Ma are we going to do this [make a science project]? Why we can't do this.' I say, 'You have to ask your teacher baby. I don't know anything about this. It's the school's thing.'" In contrast to middle-class parents who compared ABC Charter to nearby Mason Elementary, a magnet school, and Lewis School, a private school, Veronica Cole's comparisons were limited to Ward Elementary, which was one of the lowest achieving schools in the district.

Parents who were reliant on teachers for most of their information about classroom practices made efforts to indicate to teachers that they were ready to cooperate with them. For example, Sarah Wright, a working-class parent, visited her child's classroom, not to watch the teacher but to specifically signal cooperation and support for the teacher and her willingness to take responsibility for her child's behavior. She explained that she "poked her head" inside of her son's classroom because "I want the teachers to know that my kid's behavior is my responsibility, and I don't want them to ever feel like they're alone. Because I'm in there, you know." Ellen Jones, a poor parent, believed that the most important thing she could do for her child's learning was to make the teacher aware of her willingness to cooperate with the teacher.

Vulnerable parents acted to protect their child's teacher from overly critical parents. Jennifer Starr, a poor parent, was a ready supporter of teachers and spoke harshly of parents who questioned what teachers were doing in their classrooms. "I wish all parents could volunteer at the school, if only to see how hard teachers work. Parents don't know all that teachers are dealing with. Those parents are not willing to take responsibility of their own kids."

Poor parents, especially those who required social supports due to family crises were more apprehensive about being monitored by teachers than monitoring teachers. Parents requiring social support due to family crises were

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most vulnerable to teacher critique and were particularly grateful for teacher support. Veronica Cole, a poor parent, was relieved when her child's teacher agreed to facilitate her appeal for assistance. "First I had to ask Ms. Crane if she [her daughter] had come to her and told her what had happened [she had witnessed a serious family conflict]. She was like, 'Oh sure,' like it was no big deal. And I was like, oh I like that. . . . And then she directed me to a social worker, and I went and talked to her, and she gave me resources to go to counseling." Veronica Cole was very concerned about being evaluated by the teacher. Her comment, "Oh, I like that," expressed her relief in discovering that the teacher was going to provide her with support without adversely critiquing her family crisis. The school provided crisis counseling for her whole family, at the suggestion of the teacher.

Veronica Cole was aware that her child's teacher was an important gatekeeper to receiving social supports from the school. She needed the teacher to understand her challenges, for example, the difficulties she had trying to get her child to school using public transportation. "When I am late, when I get there, she [the teacher] says, 'Oh, come on in. How are you doing? Y'all finally made it.' And I love that she knows I am trying. So I appreciate that so much. Some kind of way I'm going to make it." She was aware that she needed to convince her child's teacher that she was trying her best to meet school standards, even though her resources were few. She was reliant on the good will and active engagement of her child's teacher, which at ABC, was considerable.

Most parents reliant on teachers for mentorship challenged teachers in only extreme circumstances, often only with the help of external mentors. Ruth Mitchell, a poor parent, finally decided to intervene on behalf of her son, who was enrolled in ABC's special education program, after receiving outside counseling from a social worker. "The only blessing that I had was that Ms. Green, the social worker, was there, and she helped me through this. Because she knew that what they were doing was not what they were supposed to be doing. She said 'No, we're not going to let them do this to him.'" She learned through the advocate what the school was required to provide for her son. Over time, once she learned that he was not receiving services, she became very involved in monitoring his everyday experiences, through the help of a social worker.

Even, or maybe especially, during formal interactions with teachers, such as parent-teacher conferences, poor parents rarely attempted to challenge or direct teachers in the way that was common during teacher conferences with middle-class parents. For example, Katrina Bell, a poor parent, spoke only two times during her conference, once to confirm her interest in a possible tutor session that the teacher offered to provide for Julia and once to give her permission for her daughter to go on a swim trip. The conference was finished

in less than ten minutes and was typical of most parent-teacher conferences between poor parents and their child's teacher.

Discussion

This study provides empirical evidence that African American ABC middle-class parents, and some working-class parents who were socially connected to middle-class parents, sought to provide their children with specific academic and disciplinary advantages in the classroom during the school day. They did this by watching teachers as they taught during the school day or by gathering information from other parents who were closely monitoring teachers in their classrooms. They used existing social networks with other parents, educational professionals, teachers, and administrators to evaluate classroom information gathered during the surveillance process. Such assessments helped monitoring parents to determine whether, when, and how to intervene with classroom teachers. Scrutinizing parents in this study used their social resources, related to status and social networking, to have a more powerful voice with which to shape teacher practices.

Findings suggest that teachers did feel watched by monitoring parents. They used different strategies to respond to the threat monitoring parents posed to their professional authority. Some teachers engaged in what Lawrence-Lightfoot (1981) calls creative conflicts by facilitating critical discussions with parents about classroom practices and by providing supplemental information in the form of newsletters, workshops, or one-on-one exchanges with monitoring parents. At times, they also initiated specific interventions for individual students. Other teachers rejected the right of parents to evaluate classroom teacher practices and defended their autonomy. Some sought protection from parent surveillance from school directors. Although the African American parents at ABC did not cite race as an important factor in their interactions with teachers, African American teachers felt that race played an important role in facilitating successful interactions with African American parents.

Why were middle-class parents watching ABC teachers? One hypothesis is that the middle-class parents who were interviewed for this study, especially the exiting parents who participated in the network study, participated in social cliques that generated and sustained negative gossip about teachers. The higher rate of middle-class exit from the school was caused, in this first hypothesis, by disgruntled parents who had had bad experiences at the school and then motivated others to share in their discontent. A second hypothesis is that middle-class parents, regardless of the good or bad experiences that they might have at their child's school, seek competitive advantages for their children by closely monitoring what happens to their children during the school day. The

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exiting parents, in this scenario, present an exaggerated, more organized, and fully realized example of how middle-class parent use surveillance tactics to influence teachers as they are implementing academic and disciplinary activities in their classrooms.

While both hypotheses provide some insight into why parents might watch teachers, the findings presented in this study provide more support for the second hypothesis. Similar to Lareau's (1989, 2003) home advantage, students whose parents frequently scrutinize everyday teacher practices received a school advantage because of heightened levels of teacher supervision. In addition to intervening about discrete incidents (Horvat et al. 2003), watching parents provided ongoing collective scrutiny that shaped teachers everyday activities in the classroom. Parents who encountered barriers to monitoring everyday teacher practices were primarily reliant on formal lines of accountability and authority that are often largely decoupled from everyday classroom practice (Bidwell 1965; Lortie 1975; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Weick 1976). This study identifies parent surveillance as an important mechanism that forces teachers to "open" their practice, which in turn differentiates the learning experiences of students, enabling what Lareau (1989) calls the "customized" educational experiences of middle-class students in classrooms.

Notes

1. A pseudonym has been created for the school in order to protect the identities of study participants.

2. Parents are asked to fill out a form that has a section on yearly income. This is voluntary. Parents who do not fill out a form are generally assumed by the school to be ineligible for free lunch. A free lunch designation is given to those parents who report an income under \$20,000. A reduced lunch is given to those parents who report an income between approximately \$20,000 and \$30,000. A not eligible designation is given to those parents who report an income above \$30,000.

3. The school would not allow for the collection of network data from parents who had been in the classroom where the parents had exited. Three of the classroom teachers who had taught in these classrooms and one school director agreed to complete the network protocol, in an effort to compensate for participant sampling bias.

4. Network study participants were provided a list of student names from their child's classroom, and these parents were asked a series of cognitive questions about communication networks among the parents during the previous year.

5. Information obtained in field observations and interviews indicated that ABC Charter's mission was to provide rigorous academic instruction for poor, urban students. School directors were social justice advocates with years of urban school experience. Directors sought to hire teachers who were committed to and experienced working with disadvantaged urban students. ABC staff members also received training at overnight retreats and school in-services in how to best meet challenges associated with families that deal with the day-to-day burdens of poverty. The middle-class parent

population at ABC was largely attracted to the school by the school's commitment to an ambitious curriculum and innovative governance.

6. The parent-teacher conferences were an average 15 minutes long, so they are not as extensive as the interview protocols, which ran an average of one and a half hours, but are particularly meaningful because of the interaction component.

7. Pseudonyms are used for all study participants in order to protect their confidentiality.

8. When considering the data collection processes, three possible explanations can be identified that could explain why parents did not discuss race in their interviews. First, the interview protocol did not include specific questions about how parents felt about the race of their child's teacher, thus restricting the opportunity to discuss issues about race. Second, the interviewer was white, and some African American parents might have felt uncomfortable discussing race with a white interviewer. Finally, parents were asked specifically about their child's teacher and not about other teachers that their child had had in the past, possibly limiting the opportunity for parents to compare the practices of teachers from different racial backgrounds.

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