

AN ANALYSIS OF ETHNIC NETWORKING OF KOREAN IMMIGRANT PARENTS  
IN SCHOOL PARTICIPATION

by

MINJUNG LIM

(Under the Direction of Kyunghwa Lee)

ABSTRACT

Parent involvement in schools involves constantly constructing meaning through social interactions. Immigrant parents often encounter structural barriers that constrain their ownerships in schools, and turn to their own ethnic groups in search of supportive social networks. The purpose of this study is to examine whether Korean immigrant parents as a group create effective social capital conducive to authentic involvement in the school. As a collective mode of social interaction, ethnic networking of a particular ethnic group negotiates understandings and actions authored by immigrant parents, in relation to parental involvement in school. By using a critical ethnographic case study, this study unpacks contradictions and complexities in Korean immigrant parents' participation experiences, and challenges the hegemonic discourse of parent involvement prevailing in the school.

INDEX WORDS: Parent involvement, Parent participation, Family-school partnerships, Asian Americans, Immigrants, Qualitative research, Ethnography

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MINJUNG LIM

B.S. Chung-Ang University, Korea, 1992

M.A. Chung-Ang University, Korea, 1999

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MINJUNG LIM

Major Professor: Kyunghwa Lee

Committee: Cheryl Fields-Smith  
Diane Brook Napier

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso  
Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
August 2009

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Keumjoo Choi, and to God, who have been foundations of who I am and what my dreams are.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The dehumanization resulting from an unjust order is not a cause for despair but for hope, leading to the incessant pursuit of the humanity denied by injustice. Hope, however, does not consist in crossing one's arms and waiting. As long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I fight with hope, then I can wait. (Freire, 1970/1993, pp. 72-73)

This study derived from my prior and current experiences, shaped by and shaping who I am as a researcher. Since my junior year of college, I have been active in an urban community-based organization and have had long-term relationships with families in an impoverished community in Korea. As an educator, I came to recognize my privilege and develop a critical awareness of the social inequalities embedded in educational institutions. My experiences with children in poverty necessitated a comprehensive understanding of educational contexts, leading me to enter a doctoral program in the United States. My change in position, from a member of the social majority to an international minority student, further reinforced my concern about social inequalities within a mainstream society. With a sympathetic identification, I became strongly intrigued by the lived experiences of minority groups in the United States, particularly the ethnic agency offered through ethnic communities. I believe this topic reflects collective "frontiering" in which minority ethnic groups attempt to create their space and networks in the host country (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). Specifically, in this study I investigate Korean immigrant parents' ethnic networking in an elementary school while they are involved in the school for their children's education. Does social capital embedded in the ethnic community

counteract social inequalities in immigrant families' relationships with the schools? What external and internal forces affect the process of parent participation? How do immigrant parents and school actors negotiate this process?

My interest in ethnic networking in relation to parental participation draws on a growing literature offering theoretical and empirical insights into education for immigrant students. Since the passage of the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965, new waves of immigrants from Asia and Latin America have been rapidly changing the racial/ethnic composition of the U.S. population. By 2002, roughly 23% of the total U.S. population was categorized as foreign-born or second generation — the children of immigrants. Among these “new Americans,” one-half hailed from Latin America and more than a quarter came from Asia (U.S. Census, 2003). While new waves of immigration have always created concern in mainstream American society, the diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds of post-1965 immigrants have attracted greater scholarly and public attention than previous migrations from southern and eastern Europe (Zai, 1994). In particular, the distinct linguistic and cultural heritages of nonwhite newcomers pose an emerging challenge to American educators and policy-makers. A report from the National Association of State Boards of Education (2002) estimated that by 2040 no one ethnic or racial group would comprise a majority of the national school-age population in the United States. Scholars in education must address the increasing racial/ethnic diversity in American classrooms and devise better ways to respond, not only to structural barriers to institutional resources, but also to students' cultural and linguistic disparities from those traditionally found in U.S. schools.

Many scholars have considered increasing parent involvement as a possible strategy to close the divide among schoolchildren from different socioeconomic statuses and race/ethnicities. Research shows that students with involved parents, regardless of their ethnic background or

socioeconomic status, are more likely to perform well academically, attend school regularly, and advance to postsecondary education (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). High levels of parent involvement are positively correlated with improved academic performance, higher test scores, and positive attitudes toward schooling (Fan & Chen, 2001).

However, immigrant families who have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds from the host culture are likely to face structural barriers to building collaborative relationships with schools. Researchers show that despite the immigrant parents' high expectations for their children's academic achievement, these parents tend to be constrained in their access to institutional resources due to a lack of knowledge about the standard model of parent involvement (Bernhard, Freire, Pacini-Ketchabaw, & Villanueva, 1998; Collignon, Men, & Tan, 2001). Depending on the resources available to them, immigrant parents instead are often involved in their children's education in ways dissimilar from conventional forms of parent involvement. For example, in one study, Chinese American families utilized a variety of community resources and informal networks to support their children's learning in and out of the home, but did not participate actively in volunteering or decision making procedures (Siu, 2001). Similarly, E. Kim (2002) reported that school-based parent involvement, such as school contact and PTA participation, had no significant impact on Korean immigrant children's achievement, whereas home-based involvement positively related to their academic achievement. Kim argued, "Korean parents may be reluctant to participate in their children's school activities due to linguistic/cultural barriers, and they may seek to compensate for this through home-based parental involvement, which is less likely to be constrained by these factors" (p. 539).

Such increasing awareness about the social realities of immigrant families questions whether a unified concept of parent involvement is commonly shared among the social actors

involved in education. It requires a paradigm shift in defining avenues of parent involvement from a linear, unidirectional emphasis on parental responsiveness to school needs to a notion of “shared responsibility” within and across contexts of school, family, and community (Epstein, 2001, p. 40). As a cultural representation of parent involvement, ethnic communities bring a distinct mode of reciprocal relationships with schools through which personal and/or collective agency interplays with institutional structures. The collective networking of ethnic parent groups constitutes unique fields of parental participation, which cause particular groups of ethnic parents to engage in school activities in certain ways. Immigrant studies show that a close-knit community in which members maintain strong co-ethnic relationships and preserve cultural values can provide community-driven benefits conducive to better social adjustment and academic achievement (Lew, 2006, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 1998; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Potential harm, nonetheless, exists in the negative social capital associated with homogenous ethnic communities, such as “exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group memberships, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward leveling norms” (Portes, 1998, p. 15). Studies also point out class differences within ethnic communities (Lew, 2004; Louie, 2001). Despite ample evidence of positive benefits from ethnic communities, the questions of whether and how parental ethnic networking interacts with institutional structures remain unanswered.

In search of answers to these questions, this study employs a case of Korean immigrant parents to provide a contextualized, qualitatively informed account of the interactive processes of parental participation. The practice of parental participation contains constant meaning making, entailing a dynamic, interactive process moving back and forth between parents and schools (Barton, Drake, Perez, Louis, & George, 2004). By critically examining parents’ participation experiences and ethnic networking, I hope to revisit the dominant definition of parental

involvement, and deepen our understanding of the complex negotiations in which immigrant parents are involved to provide meaningful and successful educational experiences for their children in the host society.

### Problem Statement

In the past two decades, parent involvement has been considered a crucial factor related to better outcomes in children's education (Berger, 1995; Epstein, 1995; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994) includes a new national educational goal for school-family partnerships, requiring every school to increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children. Additionally, Title I mandates the implementation of partnerships with families in order for schools to maintain their funding (Decker, Decker, & Brown, 2007).

While few would question the benefits of parent involvement in educational outcomes, parent involvement has been defined and measured in various ways. Two subtypes, however, characterize involvement: home-based and school-based (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007). Home-based parent involvement includes parental interactions and activities related to a child's learning outside of school. Organizing and monitoring the child's time, helping with homework, discussing school matters with her or him, and engaging in literacy and reading activities at home are typically recognized as consistently associated with better school performance (Finn, 1998). School-based involvement, by contrast, focuses more on parental participation in school activities, including attending teacher-parent conferences, school events, and performances; visiting and observing classrooms; volunteering in school affairs; and other school-related outside-the-home activities.

Studies show that parent involvement does not yield the same beneficial effects across different groups of children, nor does it imply identical levels of involvement among different groups of parents. In contrast to the consistent advantages of home-based involvement in promoting children's learning (e.g., Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993), evidence of the effectiveness of other types of school-based involvement has been largely incompatible. For instance, McNeal (1999) found that parent-school contact and interactions had little influence on improving achievement or reducing problematic behaviors for adolescent students. He attributed this negative correlation to the fact that parental contact increases when a student has academic or behavioral issues. In contrast, Lee and Bowen (2006) reported a high level of association between parent involvement at school and their children's academic achievement, but noted significant group differences in levels of parent involvement at school. Parent involvement at school occurred most frequently for those who were middle-class European Americans and those who had attained higher levels of education.

There may be several explanations for the inconsistent effect of parental involvement at school, but many researchers point to inequality in power relationships between schools and parents as an attribute of this phenomenon. Dehli (1987) criticized the problematic climates embedded in the conventional forms of parent involvement at school:

By defining the constituency as 'parents' and constituting involvement in a formal meeting and textual mode — the taken-for-granted mode of bureaucratic practice — the very openings for participation confirm subordination, silence and 'apathy.' At the same time the structuring of parents' organization and representation is hierarchical. (Cited in Bernhard et al., 1998, p. 79)

To address this issue, some studies adopt systematic approaches for improving family-school relationships. For example, Epstein (1995) suggested a model of school, family, and community partnership that helps educators provide comprehensive approaches in planning and implementing parent involvement. This model includes six types of involvement, specifying goals, practices, challenges, and redefinition for each: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. This model emphasizes the interrelated interactions between school, home, and community structures in relation to learning and describes how schools can work with families and communities for children's education.

However, these practices are likely to focus on what parents do to engage with their children's schooling (Barton et al., 2004). Although schools continue to promote parent involvement by planning and implementing various programs in and out of schools, parental involvement has been defined as centering on classroom and school needs; otherwise, it becomes invisible within the school context (Griffith & Smith, 2005; Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

Researchers have challenged the dominant definition of parent involvement that is deeply rooted in middle-class conceptions (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001). In this discourse of parent involvement, other groups of parents, such as poor and working-class parents, racial/ethnic minorities, and speakers of a home language other than English, tend to have little ownership over schooling due to their limited knowledge about the normative forms of parent involvement (Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005). The values and importance of the family's culture tend to be disregarded and diminished in an effort to transmit the school's values and goals to the family (Valdes, 1996). The influence of parent race/ethnicity

and class, as fundamental factors associated with the effectiveness of parental involvement, has been frequently identified in ethnographic studies (Lareau, 2002, 2003; Lew, 2007).

Yet, few studies have examined the process of ethnic networking that influences immigrant parents' access to resources in and relationships with schools. This study attempts to provide critical insights into the interactive process of parental participation by examining the ways Korean immigrant parents engage with ethnic networks in school settings. Given the increasing populations of immigrants and children of immigrants in American schools, it is imperative to revisit the conventional forms of parent involvement in schools that are likely to reinforce inequalities in immigrant families' school relationships, and to identify the potential of ethnic networking in empowering marginalized groups of parents.

### The Study

This study adopts symbolic interactionism and critical inquiry perspectives on parental participation. It explores the functions of ethnic networking conducive to the authentic participation of immigrant parents. This study is not about understanding the effect of parental involvement on learning and teaching, but about reconceptualizing the social interactions between immigrant parents and their social structures, including the school and the ethnic community. My interest is in uncovering the dynamic processes of parental interactions with social actors in relation to parental involvement in school.

As a collective mode of social interaction, the ethnic networking of a particular ethnic group provides different ways of understanding that affect the members' interplay with the school. In these processes, the dominant discourse of parental involvement valued and practiced by the school constitutes an overarching structure that shapes individuals' meanings and actions in relation to parent involvement in the school. I intend to unpack commonly shared notions of

parent involvement embedded in the school context, challenge the status quo and hegemony that perpetuate the marginalized position of immigrant parents within the conventional discourse of parental participation, and provide alternative actions for social change.

Because this study examines social interactions in parental participation, I draw on the concept of social capital as a means of illuminating the ways in which immigrant parents engage with their children's education. Social capital can serve as a "powerful tool for understanding educational stratification by race, ethnicity, and immigrant status" (Kao, 2004, p. 175). Social capital is not a single entity that exists on the individual level; rather, it is generated, mobilized, and negotiated by social actors who have different positions and social networks in a hierarchical structure (Lin, 2000, 2001). Whether social capital can serve as a counteractive agent that limits or modifies social inequalities in immigrant families' relationships with schools, however, needs further inquiry. As Lareau and Horvat (1999) argue, the process of "reproduction is jagged and uneven and is continually negotiated by social actors" (p. 38). Identifying the functions of ethnic networking is pivotal in understanding the dynamic processes of parental participation that are negotiated between immigrant parents and school actors.

With these underlying assumptions, this study examines the participation experiences of Korean immigrant parents and their ethnic networking within the context of an elementary school. The purpose of this study is to examine whether Korean immigrant parents as a group create effective social capital that is conducive to authentic involvement in the school. The interactive process of parental participation is analyzed as a form of mediation between the ethnic community and the social capital embedded in school contexts.

The research questions that inform this study are the following:

1. What are the participation experiences of Korean immigrant parents in this particular school?

2. In what ways and to what extent do Korean immigrant parents mobilize social capital in relation to their involvement in the school?
3. How do Korean immigrant parents engage with ethnic networks to access forms of social capital conducive to effective participation?
4. In what ways does ethnic networking affect inequalities in immigrant parents' relationships with the school?
5. What are the reverse influences of social capital associated with the ethnic community?

### Significance

The recent waves of immigrants with distinctive cultural and linguistic heritages press the question of how differences in social capital affect immigrant parents' involvement in schooling. Many researchers have studied inequalities in social capital across ethnic groups with different cultural values and practices (Bernhard et al., 1998; Carreón et al., 2005; Ceja, 2006; Chin & Phillips, 2004; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Nonetheless, the multi-contextual *processes* of social interactions remain unexplored. It is necessary to contextualize underlying circumstances such as ethnic community in order to capture the dynamics of social interactions in immigrant parents' everyday experiences. Through the examination of ethnic networking in an elementary school, this study illuminates the complexity of immigrant parents' participation experiences as they intersect in multiple contexts.

Additionally, immigrant studies have identified community-based benefits, which ultimately serve as external agents for better social adjustment and academic achievement (Lew, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 1998; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Simultaneously, close social relationships within an ethnic group activate community forces that influence individuals' interpretations and responses to the dominant discourse (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1995). However, the

literature fails to address the potential role of ethnic networks that can counteract social reproduction or collude with the status quo within an institution. This study examines how collective ethnic networking constitutes a unique field of parental participation by affecting individuals' meaning making and actions.

Moreover, studies in education have positioned Asian Americans as either subordinated to the "culture of power" in school cultures (Delpit, 1988) or the model minority stereotype (Schneider & Lee, 1990). Despite a significant increase in Asian populations in the United States, their voices have not yet been heard sufficiently in educational discourses, compared to those of African American and Latin American groups. By foregrounding the participation experiences of Korean immigrant parents, this study provides new insight into the social realities of Asian American parents, who have been relatively neglected within educational research.

Similarly, researchers have indicated significant variances within ethnic communities, resulting in differential effects on student achievement (e.g., Lew, 2004; Louie, 2001). Many studies have criticized the model minority stereotype of Asian Americans for ignoring heterogeneity in groups and distracting public attention from their social realities (Chun, 1995; Lee, 1996; Suzuki, 1995). This study shatters the monolithic image of Asian Americans as model minorities by focusing on tension within a group of Korean immigrant parents. Tension reflects contradictions and complexities in social interactions and provides alternative interpretations for social change (Thomas, 2003).

In sum, this study not only provides insight into what schools can do to support immigrant families' involvement in education, but also opens up a space for meaningful dialogues among different cultural groups. Recognition of the complex negotiations authored by

Korean immigrant parents improves cultural sensitivity toward others and invites transformative actions that can create effective learning environments for all children.

### Organization of Chapters

Chapter 1 introduced the topic of ethnic networking in parental participation and criticized prevailing conceptions of parent involvement that are likely to problematize immigrant parents' effective engagement in schooling. In addressing this issue, an approach to the potentials of ethnic communities was proposed, in conjunction with the rationales and purposes of this study.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of current research on the educational involvement of immigrant families and the theoretical perspectives guiding this study. On the conceptual base of social capital, the experiences of post-1965 immigrants and Korean immigrants are presented, including the function of ethnic communities in promoting immigrant families' adjustment in the host society. The chapter also explains how the perspectives of symbolic interactionism and critical inquiry theoretically frame this study.

Chapter 3 details the research design and processes of fieldwork and analysis. It also provides reflection on the researcher's role and methodological challenges emerging from the research process.

Chapter 4 presents a description of the context of family-school relations at North Creek Elementary School as a means of developing a situated understanding of Korean immigrant parents in this particular school. It shows how the Korean immigrant parents engage in the school and initiate a Korean mothers' meeting in the discourse of family-school partnerships influenced by the recent demographic transition of the school.

Chapter 5 highlights the interactive processes of parental participation among 12 Korean parents, mediated between social capital and the ethnic community. Based on their levels of participation and possession of social capital, the parents' experiences and social interactions are analyzed and then reconstructed into four types of interaction: cultural broker, solo navigator, team worker, and outsider. Each type of interaction represents characteristic involvement commonly authored by the group of parents in the processes of school participation.

Chapter 6 examines the multiple discourses on parent involvement generated within two particular contexts, North Creek Elementary School and the Korean mothers' meeting. Against a backdrop of the discourse of middle-class parenting, this chapter shows how ethnic networking affects Korean immigrant parents' relationships with the school and analyzes the underlying sources of complexity embedded in parental participation.

Chapter 7 provides a summary of the findings and calls for change in the current discourse of parent involvement, from parental labor support to authentic partnerships for enriching children's learning. It also presents a nuanced analysis of middle-class Korean immigrants associated with the Korean mothers' meeting. Recommendations for schools and immigrant study are proposed, along with limitations and suggestions for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

#### Social Capital in Immigrant Parents' Involvement

In recent years, a growing body of research has examined the benefits of parent involvement with regard to educational outcomes. As a means for addressing the persistent achievement gap, parent involvement has received great attention in educational literature. However, the levels and effects of parent involvement on educational achievement differ among groups with different socioeconomic statuses and race/ethnicities. The concept of social capital can be an effective means for examining group differences in the process of parent involvement by illuminating the operating mechanism embedded in social interactions between and within the groups. Particularly, because of their relatively marginalized social positions in the host society, immigrant parents are likely to employ distinct patterns of involvement which might result in differing effects on their children's education. The following sections provide a theoretical base for social capital and review current research on immigrant parents' involvement in education and social capital.

#### *Theories of Social Capital*

Social capital has been defined in various ways and addressed differently over the past three decades. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) initiated the first systematic analysis of the concept, suggesting three forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social. He defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (p.

248). Within certain conditions, social capital can be converted to economic capital. Bourdieu's social capital is comprised of two elements: first, social relationships that allow individuals to claim access to resources embedded in social relations; second, the amount and quality of those resources (Port, 1998). Because social capital is a form of capital possessed by the collective, the volume of social capital a person possesses or is able to obtain depends on "the size of one's connections and on the volume or amount of capital in these connections' possession" (Lin, 2001, p. 22). Thus, for Bourdieu, social capital is a "collective asset" that endows members with credits, and it represents "the investment of the members in the dominant class engaging in mutual recognition and acknowledgement so as to maintain and reproduce group solidarity and preserve the group's dominant position" (Lin, p. 27).

Bourdieu's focus on inequalities in the amount of capital can be further elaborated by referring to other major concepts in his work: cultural capital, habitus, and field. According to Bourdieu's theory (1986), cultural capital exists in three forms: embodied (personal dispositions, attitudes, and cultural knowledge), objectified (artifacts and cultural goods), and institutionalized (educational qualifications). Through socialization and past experiences, a person acquires a set of internalized dispositions, *habitus*, and brings it to the field where structured social relations occur on a macro- and micro-level. Bourdieu (1994/1998) viewed social space as a field of forces and struggles between agents with "differentiated means and ends according to their position in the structure of the field of forces, thus contributing to conserving or transforming its structure" (p. 32). In a given field of interaction, different forms of capital have various values according to the dynamic of the field. When one's habitus fits with the field in which he or she is engaged, capital possessed by the individual is rewarded as an advantage. Bourdieu asserted that,

as such, the culture and symbolic values of the dominant class are imposed and reproduced through pedagogic action, such as schooling (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

A second analysis of social capital is the work of James Coleman (1988), who defined the concept by its function as “a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors — whether persons or corporate actors — within the structure” (p. 98). If any structural aspect is considered capital, it should serve a function for certain ends in particular activities. Social capital inheres in the structure of relations and may be specific to certain activities. In other words, social capital is “the resources, real or potential, gained from relationships” (Lin, 2001, p. 23). Coleman proposed three forms of social capital that can be useful resources for actors to further their interests in social relations: (a) obligations and expectations embedded in trustworthiness of structure, (b) information channels, and (c) norms and sanctions that contribute to the common good. While all social relations have the potential to produce social capital, certain kinds of social structures are more able than others to facilitate forms of social capital beneficial to actors. Particularly, Coleman focused on intergenerational closure or the closure of social networks where parents know the parents of their children’s friends. A high degree of closure within a social structure facilitates the existence of effective norms between and among actors, and creates trustworthiness that leads to the emergence of obligations and expectations.

From this perspective, Coleman emphasized the roles of parents and communities in developing social capital for the next generation. According to his theory, social capital embedded in close parent-child relationships allows the financial and human capital of parents to be transferred to children. Likewise, the social capital of a dense community effectively exerts social control through norms and sanctions (Coleman, 1988; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987).

Coleman's focus on family- and community-based capital has received great attention from scholars in education and has served as the basis for much of the conceptualization of social capital in educational studies (Dika & Singh, 2002).

### *Immigrant Parents' Involvement in Education*

According to Coleman (1988), family norms and close intergenerational relations, as forms of social capital, lead to the development of human capital for the children. In general, children of immigrants bear a sense of obligation toward their parents and are motivated to achieve success, as they perceive themselves to be a main reason for the immigration of their families. Close parent-child relationships and the shared experience of migration are likely to generate intensified social capital, thereby promoting the children's motivation and achievement. Immigrant families' strong commitment to educational achievement has been well captured in immigrant studies (Kaufman, 2004; Rumbaut, 2006). For instance, Li (2004) examined Chinese immigrant parents' educational expectations and concluded that cultural expectations, perceived minority immigrant status, and tension accompanied with acculturation were the main factors in sustaining positive correlations between parental expectations and children's achievement. Similarly, Hao and Bonstead-Bruns (1998) found that highly shared family expectations enhanced academic achievement, and immigrant status increased educational expectations.

While family process plays a critical role in promoting academic achievement among immigrant or minority students, family-school relationships constitute another social structure that affects education for immigrant children. There is some consensus among researchers in the field of parent participation that immigrant parents from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds show less active involvement in school affairs than their "mainstream" counterparts (Edwards & Dandridge, 2001; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Immigrant parents have been labeled

as “uncooperative” or even “uncaring” within the traditional dimensions of parent participation, including Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) committees, teacher-parent conferences, school events, and volunteer activities in and out of classrooms (Lee, 2005).

Researchers have attributed this “passive” participation of immigrant parents to structural and cultural barriers embedded in family-school relationships. According to Bourdieu’s theory, valued cultural capital is arbitrarily differentiated by the rules existing in the field of interaction; schools serve as institutionalized structures where the dominant culture’s symbolic values are imposed and reproduced (Bourdieu, 1994/1998; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Immigrant parents with different backgrounds may differ in terms of educational habitus and cultural capital, and are likely to possess less of the cultural capital valued by the institutions.

Many studies have incorporated Bourdieu’s theory in attempting to elucidate the structural barriers in school settings that constrain minority immigrant parents’ access to institutionalized resources (Bernhard et al., 1998; Collignon et al., 2001; Perreira, Chapman, & Stein, 2006; Ramirez, 2003). Immigrant parents’ limited knowledge about school culture and lack of understanding of school practices restrained them from building collaborative family-school relationships. Immigrants with limited English proficiency were alienated from the parental networks of middle-class families, relying on the immediate circles of social relationships created within available kinship groups. For example, Ceja (2006) examined the role of protective agents such as parents and siblings in the college choice process of Chicana students. Although Mexican parents’ high educational expectations have been well reported in previous research, the parents in this study were greatly limited in assisting with their daughters’ college choices and application processes; in many cases, siblings who had already gone through these processes replaced parental help.

Additionally, immigrant parents may exhibit different types of involvement because of their differences in educational habitus, which derive from differences in financial resources, educational knowledge, and experiences with and confidence in the educational system (Grenfell, James, Hodkinson, Reay, & Robbins, 1998). Li's (2006) study of Chinese parents' involvement in literacy and schooling showed the cultural conflicts occurring between Canadian teachers and Asian immigrant parents. Unlike the widely researched, lower SES minority families, the middle- and upper-class Chinese parents in this study actively resisted school practices that did not match their own views of education. Their interventions at home were intended to counterbalance their children's failure to acquire the literacy skills necessary for academic success. However, rather than creating the desired remedial effects, the cultural misunderstandings and miscommunications between the teachers and parents intensified the differences between school and home (see also E. Kim, 2002; Siu, 2001).

Contrary to these studies, Monkman, Ronald, and Florence (2005) examined how the agency of social capital can limit or transform social reproduction processes in school contexts. Studying a low-income, Spanish speaking urban school community, they pointed out that schools can provide immigrant families a "critical vertical link" to social capital (p. 28). Through contact with teachers and administrators, the families were able to access resource-rich networks that involved more heterogeneous members with higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Similarly, some studies investigated the role of school-based community programs in developing social capital for vulnerable families (Terrion, 2006) and urban high school students (Hemmings, 2007). Program staff in these studies created useful links to social resources and networks that function as "bonding," "bridging," and "linking" dimensions of social capital (Terrion, pp. 157-158).

In a different vein, some studies have examined the relationships between social capital and educational outcomes across racial/ethnic groups. Specifically, Asian cultural values have frequently questioned whether they can promote academic achievement as a form of cultural capital (Kao, 1995). For example, in a meta-analysis of the effects of parent involvement on minority students' academic achievement, Jeynes (2003) reported that the benefits of parent involvement were greater for African Americans and Hispanics than they were for Asian Americans. He argued that parent involvement may be the most beneficial strategy in the absence of other cultural factors promoting higher achievement which are likely to be found in Asian families (e.g., reverence for learning, importance of family values and honors, and a strong work ethic). Also, Pearce (2006) compared Chinese Americans and European Americans in terms of the effects of cultural and social structural factors on achievement. The study suggested that when social structural factors (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status, family composition, and parent education level) are controlled, the effect of cultural factors (e.g., parental expectations, parenting styles, and home-based involvement) become evident. While variables regarding parental school contact had a negative influence on educational attainment for Chinese American students, the positive effects of cultural factors were clear in the findings.

In short, the practice of parent involvement and its impact on children's education differ among groups with different socioeconomic statuses and races/ethnicities. Generally, because of structural barriers, immigrant parents with less or distinctly different social and cultural capital tend to face challenges in school engagement, thus maintaining a marked distance between home and school (Carreón et al., 2005). In these cases, what would immigrants' social relationships outside of the school be? Some groups of immigrants create their own enclaves that assist with group members' socioeconomic adjustment and children's academic success. The next section

provides a review on how ethnic communities have promoted post-1965 immigrants' adjustment to the host society.

### Post-1965 Immigrants and Ethnic Communities

Due to their diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, the question of how post-1965 immigrants would assimilate into American society has been a primary issue in immigration discourse. Contrary to general perceptions, today's immigrants (except for some groups of political refugees or illegal immigrants) tend to be more educated than past immigrants have been. Proposing immigration selectivity, Feliciano (2006) asserted, "All immigrants, whether legal or illegal, represent a positively select group from the home country because they are more ambitious and willing to work, or have higher levels of education than their counterparts who stayed behind" (p. 61).

Post-1965 immigrants have faced an American "land of opportunity" that is radically different from the one encountered by previous immigrants. Today, the United States is defined as a globalized, post-industrial society. The emerging "hourglass" economy of the United States, with an extremely polarized opportunity structure, is hardly able to provide the well-paid manufacturing jobs that enabled earlier generations of immigrants to achieve middle-class status (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). On one end of the hourglass economy are well-remunerated, knowledge-intensive industries that allow immigrants to achieve upward mobility at a rapid pace. On the other end of the hourglass economy are poorly paid and uninsured service-sector jobs that demand little skill and knowledge from immigrants. In order to gain access to American mainstream society, today's immigrants must cross this narrow bottleneck of occupational structure in the hourglass economy. Otherwise, these new immigrants might be caught in a cycle of downward assimilation and poverty.

Because of the lack of opportunities provided for immigrants, coupled with potential racial discrimination and language barriers for the majority of nonwhite newcomers, some argue that the previous explanation of straight-line assimilation — ethnic and racial minorities will be assimilated into the host society over time (Gordon, 1964) — may not be appropriate for all immigrants. For example, Portes and Zhou (1993) suggested the theory of segmented assimilation, in which minority immigrants deliberately maintain their ties with ethnic communities in order to obtain ethnic capital and moral support. Since each immigrant group's path to social mobility differs according to the mode of incorporation effected by governmental policies, societal reception, and the strength of ethnic communities, they argued that a selected assimilation into the host society may be the “best strategy for capitalizing on otherwise unavailable material and moral resources” (p. 96) for minority immigrant families.

Consonant with this theory, assimilation studies show that a close-knit community in which members maintain close social relationships and mutual networks could benefit not only the immediate family, but also the entire community by offering economic capital and network-mediated resources such as start-up capital, information about business opportunities, access to markets, and a reliable labor force (Portes, 1998). While post-1965 immigrants are likely to face limited access to social capital bound up in the mainstream society, social capital acquired through ethnic ties provides a steppingstone to better adjustment for many ethnic minority immigrants. For instance, the Cuban community of Miami has served as a shelter, providing resources to its second generation to avoid downward assimilation. In this community, Cuban American teenagers were protected from extensive exposure to outside discrimination and contact with youth subculture of many urban areas. The prosperous Cuban American enclave has

also created economic opportunities beyond the limited industrial and tourist sectors where most other immigrant groups in the area find employment (Portes & Zhou, 1993).

Coleman emphasized the role of community in developing human capital for the next generation (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). Social capital embedded in a dense community operates sanctions and develops norms that guide and control its children's behaviors and activities. Dense, functional ethnic populaces perpetuate certain cultural norms and values that promote the academic achievement of their ethnic group by offering moral support and effective social control. For instance, in his study of Punjabi students in California, Gibson (1988) found that the children of immigrants excelled compared to their native co-ethnic peers because they retained tight connections to the values of their immigrant parents, not fully assimilating into the mainstream peer culture (as cited in Gonzalez, 2005). Similarly, Zhou and Bankston (1998) suggested that strong co-ethnic communities foster better community-driven benefits, such as social adjustment and academic performance, by providing cultural values and social support. Despite the low socioeconomic family background of Vietnamese Americans, the study found that Vietnamese American youths who maintain strong ties with their ethnic communities were more likely to finish high school than their other Southeast Asian, European American, or African Americans peers. These studies show that the academic performance of minority students can benefit from strong co-ethnic communities that use social and economic resources to reinforce parental culture. The benefits of strong co-ethnic ties as forms of social capital in promoting better educational achievement have been reported in Korean immigrant studies (Lew, 2003; Zhou & Kim, 2006).

Some emphasize the subjective experiences of individual minority groups in relation to their sociocultural adaptation embedded within an ethnic community. Ogbu (1991) suggested

two types of minority groups with distinctive cultural frames of reference that interact with their understandings of social mobility: voluntary minorities and involuntary minorities. Voluntary minority groups such as Chinese immigrants perceive their hardships in American life as temporary, “barriers to overcome with the passage of time, hard work, or more education” (p. 11) and develop a folk theory of getting ahead based on education. Because they migrate to the United States in search of a better life, voluntary minority groups maintain a positive dual frame of reference since their current status will be likely to surpass the one they had in their home country. In contrast, involuntary minority groups, such as African Americans, Mexicans, and Native Americans, realize their blocked opportunities as minorities and develop a folk theory to emphasize collective efforts to overcome opportunity barriers. Because conforming to dominant groups is threatening to their minority identities, they often develop an oppositional cultural frame of reference which “makes crossing cultural boundaries and engaging in cross-cultural learning more problematic” (p. 16). Ogbu (1995) argued that such cultural frames of reference operate as community forces that shape the collective orientations of individual minority groups toward social mobility and offer coping strategies to ameliorate their minority disadvantages.

Nonetheless, some point out that potential harm also exists in the social capital produced by a closed, dense ethnic community (Portes, 1998). For example, children in the Korean American community of San Francisco Bay were committed to achieving academic success that was considered the “essence of being Korean” (Kim, 1993, p. 244). When these children’s interest and lifestyles did not fit in with those approved by the family and the community, however, their freedom and individual choices were curtailed, often resulting in significant emotional problems.

Further research (e.g., Lew, 2006) has indicated variances between immigrant families in the access and accumulation of social capital within the community; these variances contribute to differential effects on the educational performance of second-generation children and youth. Differences in socioeconomic status typically determine and influence the process of capital accumulation and distribution among immigrant families. For instance, Louie (2001) found that educational strategies employed by Chinese American parents differed by social class. Middle-class Chinese American parents working in the mainstream economy had better social positions and access to economic capital such as superior schools and private tutoring programs, while urban Chinese American parents relied exclusively on educational information derived through ethnic networks.

The complicated nature of ethnic communities raises critical questions as to whether and how ethnic communities influence the educational contexts of immigrant families. In the next section, I review the case of Korean immigrants, including their educational experiences and ethnic communities in the United States, as a means for understanding the complexity embedded in the lived experiences of Korean immigrant families.

#### Overview of Korean Immigrants

Korean immigrants constitute a large part of the “new” ethnic Asian population in the United States. About two-thirds of the Korean American population of the United States arrived after 1970 (Hurh & Kim, 1984), and the majority of these residents are foreign-born. Over ten decades after the initial influx began in 1903, the number of Korean immigrants has increased dramatically; currently, the Korean American population is over one million and comprises approximately 0.4 % of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census, 2000). Although the growth rate

of Korean immigration to the United States has declined since the 1990s, Korean Americans rank as the fifth largest Asian American population.

Historically, Korean immigration to the United States can be divided into three broad periods. The first is the period of early immigration from 1903 to 1924, which included male laborers to the Hawaiian sugar plantations and their picture brides. This early immigration officially ceased as a result of the Immigration Act of 1924, which stemmed the flood of Asian immigration through annual quotas (Jo, 1999). Small numbers of political refugees and students who were involved in the anti-Japanese and independence movement continued to immigrate to the United States; most of them returned to Korea after Korea regained its independence in 1945. The second wave of immigration resumed after the Korean War (1950-1953) and followed the subsequent U.S.-Korean military alliance. From 1950 to 1964, the close connections between the two nations in politics, economics, and the military created a favorable climate for Koreans. Many immigrated to the United States; among them were the Korean wives of American servicemen, war orphans, political refugees, and some professionals and students. The third and largest wave has been encouraged by the passage of the immigration act of 1965, “the most liberal immigration law in American history” (Hurh, 1998, p. 32). Nicknamed the “family immigration,” the increased number of immigrants is due in large part to the family reunification category of the 1965 act. Since 1976, 90% of Korean immigrants have been admitted based on family reunification grounds (Jo, 1999).

Korean immigrants tend to migrate to the United States in search of a better life, a motivation attributable to the earlier destabilizing economic and political conditions in Korea. However, since the late 1980s the nation’s improved condition has contributed to a significant reduction of immigrant figures; instead, increasing numbers of newcomers cross the Pacific to

obtain better educational opportunities for themselves and their children. According to the Korean National Statistical Office (2006), the number of Koreans going abroad for study or training exceeded 100,000 during 2005, with a quarter of those headed for the United States. Korea ranks third in U.S. international school and college enrollments, behind India and China (“59,000 Koreans Studying in U.S.,” 2006). A new type of transnational family where the familial unit separates in order to provide better educational opportunities for the children has become a trend in Korea. More and more parents are deciding to live separately; the mother moves abroad with the children while the father stays in Korea for financial support (Kim & Greene, 2003).

As is common with other East Asian immigrant groups, new Korean Americans are one of the most highly educated immigrant groups in the United States. According to the Census data (2004), half of all Korean Americans aged 25 years and over have at least a Bachelor’s degree, while only 28% of European Americans and 48% of Asian Americans have attained the same educational levels. However, a closer look reveals the lack of correlation between education and income for Korean Americans. Their median family income for 2004 was \$53,020, which was lower than that of the total U.S. population (\$53,692) and of Asian Americans in general (\$65,132). The proportion of families below the poverty level was 13.5%, which was also much higher than 10.1% of the U.S. total and 9.4% of Asian American populations. These figures support Hurh’s (1998) argument that “contrary to the popular image of Korean Americans as a success story, they have not attained income parity with whites or with other major Asian groups” (p. 53).

In addition, Korean newcomers have commonly experienced occupational downward mobility. Due to language barriers and racial discrimination, many have been unable to transfer

their prior skills and knowledge into the U.S. labor market and have ended up as manual laborers or small business owners. For example, Min's (1981) interview study with Korean small business owners in Atlanta, Georgia, found that almost 70% had a college degree and 75% had held white-collar positions or professional occupations prior to immigration (as cited in Jo, 1999).

Korean Americans' concentration in small businesses can also be attributed to the increased pattern of chain migration since the 1980s. Many Koreans were admitted based on family reunification and settled near large Korean communities in which relatives or acquaintances resided. The cultural and family resources obtained through ethnic communities have helped Korean immigrants operate their own small businesses successfully and allowed them to take "advantage of opportunities in an ethnically sheltered market that is not generally accessible to non-Korean entrepreneurs" (Hurh, 1998, p. 63). Korean Americans' higher rates of entrepreneurship resulted in a wider geographic distribution; Korean immigrants have dispersed throughout major metropolitan areas in the United States. Of particular interest is the recent influx of Koreans into the southern states. For example, Georgia was the state showing the largest increase in Korean immigration in the 1990s (Yu, Choe, & Han, 2002).

Nonetheless, due to their relatively short history of immigration, Korean Americans' impact on American society has not been as distinguishable as that of other immigrant groups (Hurh, 1998). The emerging 1.5 and second generations might play a primary role in developing their contributions to American society.

### *Educational Involvement*

The value of education is a critical cultural component in East Asian society. Generally, East Asian students are highly motivated by a strong desire to upgrade their socioeconomic status, uphold family honor, acquire admiration from their teachers and parents, develop self-

confidence, and obtain a good job (Schneider & Lee, 1990). Koreans show similar trends in their perspectives toward education.

Historically, Koreans view education as a means to success, power, and status (Sorensen, 1994). Because the national examination system was the only means for upward mobility in past Korean society, Koreans placed education at the highest level of social standing (Kim & Greene, 2003). In addition, Confucian traditions, particularly two key value orientations — respect for learning and obedience to authority — heavily permeated the fabric of Korean society. According to Confucian beliefs, education is a tool for cultivating a moral mind, a means for maintaining collective social order, and a reliable and desirable way to increase social mobility. If people are well educated, they will truly love their country (Chung, 1994). Along with the Confucian traditions, familism strongly affected Koreans' familial relationships. Because children know that their success is not simply for themselves but for their whole family, and the concept of filial piety is the basis of all moral meanings and conducts in Korean society, children usually acknowledge their heavy responsibility to study hard and succeed in school (Schneider & Lee, 1990).

In contemporary Korean society, educational qualifications still determine one's socioeconomic status. While the economic benefits of higher education have been decreasing due to an over-supply of college graduates, parents and students persist in pursuing higher education in order to prevent any disadvantages from not having a certain level of education (Kim, 2002). Consequently, the competition for high-stakes exams is fierce, and many families are motivated to migrate to the United States where the educational system is viewed as less competitive and more profitable in the emerging global market.

Korean families are continuing this practice of strong investment in their children's education, even when they immigrate to the United States. In a study of the Chinese and Korean immigrant communities in Los Angeles, Zhou and Kim (2006) found that the majority of Chinese and Korean youths they interviewed attended privately owned supplementary educational institutions that provide an extra boost in academic areas. They argued, "like their Chinese counterparts, attending *hagwons* (supplementary educational institutions) has become a common experience among Korean American youth and one of the defining characteristics of being Korean American" (p. 12). Similarly, in an ethnographic study on career choice among second-generation Korean Americans, Kim (1993) found that Korean American immigrant parents regarded "prestige [as] synonymous with the academic achievement of their children" (p. 228). All parents, regardless of their socioeconomic status, held the idea of success as a "combination of money and children's education" (p. 229).

Indeed, most Korean immigrant parents pin their hopes on their children's success in professional careers and put a great deal of pressure on their children to get good grades. According to Ogbu's (1991) cultural model, Korean immigrants can be considered a voluntary minority group that values education as a means for achieving social mobility. To succeed in American society and realize their American dreams, immigrants of the Korean communities strive to maintain their ethnic pride and familial ties by willingly sacrificing family resources for their children's education. Park (1998) indicated that Korean American parents and their children had very high educational and occupational aspirations. Almost 100% of parents wanted their children to have at least a four-year college education if not more, and 93% answered that they were willing to sacrifice for their children's education.

While Korean immigrant parents view American education positively and trust the authorities of the schools, they nonetheless confront certain barriers that often inhibit their active involvement in school affairs (Sohn & Wang, 2006). As in the cases of many minority parents, successful parent involvement in school is challenging for most Korean immigrant parents. Traditional American forms of participation, such as attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering in the classroom, fund-raising for the school, and helping with homework, are difficult for many Korean immigrant parents, particularly for newcomers who have limited English proficiency and lack an understanding of American school systems (Kim & Greene, 2003).

Specifically, Lee (2005) examined groups of Korean American parents in a Korean-English two-way immersion program. In a systematic effort to improve the selective participation of the Korean American parents, the program staff planned and implemented a parent workshop tailored to the parents' needs. Korean-language interpreters, small discussion groups facilitated by American and bilingual Korean parents, phone contacts, and Saturday meeting schedules were provided; as a result, over 50% of the Korean American parents attended the workshop. Lee concluded that schools can affect the patterns of parental involvement through systematic changes, but changes for truly empowering the parents must be based on the parents' experiences by carefully examining the various dynamics of their participation.

Seen from Bourdieu's (1986) theoretical perspective, Korean American families possess cultural capital different from that of mainstream society. While certain forms of cultural capital such as beliefs in learning and effort contribute to academic excellence for many Korean American students, not all forms of capital may be valued by the institutions. For instance, Yang and McMullen (2003) examined the relationship between American teachers and Korean parents

in terms of effectiveness and cultural sensitivity in communication. While the teachers indicated that Korean parents showed great respect and admiration for them, they perceived Korean parents as being overly focused on academic achievement, particularly on their children's English mastery. From the stance of the Korean parents, however, the mastery of the English language is necessary in a global market and represents a major advantage of coming to the United States. Such mismatched values and beliefs hindered the Korean parents from effectively activating their possessed capital in school contexts and caused misunderstandings and misconceptions in communication. Korean parents' less active participation in school activities was identified in other studies as well (Kim & Greene, 2003; Sohn & Wang, 2006).

Supportive relationships with school actors, on the other hand, helped Korean parents activate their possessed capital. Supportive bilingual teachers played a key role in English acquisition for young Korean children and eased these students' adjustment to American schools (Ryu, 2004). In contrast, limited social and economic support within an urban context caused Korean American students to adopt anti-academic attitudes and encouraged them to drop out of school (Lew, 2004).

In short, Korean immigrant parents have faced structural and cultural barriers to effective access to institutional resources and involvement in American schools. As noted earlier, however, Korean American communities have played a crucial role in underpinning Korean immigrants' social mobility in the United States. Next, I provide a description of Korean American communities which facilitates a contextual understanding of the ethnic networking of Korean immigrants.

### *Social Capital in Korean American Communities*

The mass influx of Koreans to the United States is a relatively recent phenomenon. Most Korean immigrants are categorized as “post-1965” ones who settled in established Korean American communities based on family reunification. The proliferation of Koreatowns with their concentration of Korean businesses offers ethnic resources for Korean newcomers in the form of business opportunities, information, co-ethnic networks, and moral support. Regardless of their geographic location, Koreatowns share several characteristics: (a) they function as the economic and ethnic activity center for Korean immigrants, especially for newcomers; (b) their major consumers are Korean Americans; (c) their signage is largely in Korean; (d) they are normally situated within multiethnic inner-city areas; and (e) their employees generally live in suburbs, while the poor and elderly are likely to remain within the town (Hurh, 1998).

In terms of their strong ethnic ties and networking, Korean American communities can be considered “institutionally complete communities” because “networks of social organizations dominate an immigrant/ethnic community” (Min, 2001, p. 174). In the areas where Korean American populations are highly concentrated, a concomitant growth of an ethnic network of social organizations including Korean business, churches, ethnic associations, and ethnic media such as television, radio, and newspapers also exists. In their study of Korean immigrants in the Chicago area in 1986, Kim and Hurh (1993) found that most Korean Americans had maintained their pervasive attachment to Korean culture and social ties regardless of their length of residence in the United States. Korean Americans tended to speak Korean inside the home, preferred to read Korean newspapers or magazines, mostly ate Korean food, and affiliated with ethnic organizations or social networks, usually Korean immigrant Christian churches. They argued that Americanization and ethnic attachment are not wholly mutually exclusive processes,

and that the Korean Americans' mode of adaptation can be said to be "additive" as certain aspects of American cultural and social patterns are added on to the traditional Korean ways of life without replacing or modifying the old parts.

Such strong focus on ethnic solidarity among Korean immigrant communities was noted in Lee's (1996) ethnographic study of a high school. Most Korean American students in that school maintained a distinct Korean identity and formed their own Korean student association in order to distance themselves from other Asian student groups. To succeed in American society Korean parents instructed their children to learn "American ways" by actively imitating white Americans; at the same time, they encouraged their children to maintain Korean traditions and a co-ethnic network. Reflecting their parents' belief in education as a means for social mobility, the Korean students in the study were willing to accept the stereotype of the model minority and even ignored some academic problems among their Korean peers.

Coleman (1988) suggested that a community with close social relationships provides an effective structure for developing norms and sanctions leading to better academic performance for the children within the community. Researchers have provided sufficient evidence of the benefits of Korean American communities in promoting academic achievement. The ethnic resources and social capital generated by supplementary educational institutions in Korean communities contributed to the disproportionate representation of Korean students in prestigious college enrollment (Zhou & Kim, 2006). Korean immigrant families shared values emphasizing academic success and maintained strong ethnic networks that reinforced norms appreciated by the family and the community (Kim, 1993). The second generation of Korean students also acceded to their parents' ties to the ethnic community and constructed a second-generation youth network that created access to bicultural and bilingual institutional agents (Lew, 2003).

However, such additive or selective assimilation might be problematic in that it hinders immigrants from being fully engaged in the host society. Min (2001) warned, “Koreans’ monolingual background, along with the extensive development of their ethnic media, segregation in their own religious congregations, and their economic segregation, isolate them from the larger society” (p. 195). While social capital offered by Korean American communities helps the first generation assimilate into the host society in a selective way, such a strong ethnic attachment negatively influences the process of an individual’s integration in the mainstream society. This in turn may stimulate ethnic segregation as a way to moderate the stressful effects of discrimination.

Nonetheless, today’s Korean communities in the United States are undergoing a transition. 1.5- and second-generation Korean Americans differ from their first generation immigrant parents; generally, they are bilingual and bicultural. Although most Korean immigrants preserve ethnic ties regardless of their length of residence in the United States, a generational gap between Korean immigrant adult children and their elderly parents has been noticed (Kim, Hurh, & Kim, 1993). Because children become more rapidly Americanized than their parents, the traditional pattern of selective assimilation among Korean immigrants may be changing as the next generation of Korean Americans increases. Additionally, studies note that socioeconomic status within Korean American communities is quite polarized (Ablemann & Lie 1995; Lew, 2006). Such socioeconomic differences within the communities mirror a significant variability among second-generation Korean Americans in educational attainment.

Moreover, recent newcomers who seek better educational opportunities show a distinguishable pattern of assimilation in the host country; they construct a transnational identity by which they claim membership simultaneously in two different localities. For example, Kim

and Greene (2003) addressed the issues experienced by Korean parents as their children transitioned to American schools. One mother, who lived apart from her husband to support her child's education in the United States, expected that American education would benefit the psychosocial wellbeing of her children because of its reduced focus on academic performance. However, she also acknowledged her concern about her daughter's playtime "when she compares this [playtime] with what other Korean children her [daughter's] age would be doing after school" (p. 116). The mother's sense of membership can be seen as transnational, moving back and forth between Korean and American contexts.

The change in Korean communities requires a new understanding of these communities and their contexts in transition. While the role of ethnic communities has received much attention from scholars in economics and education, diversity within an ethnic community and the dynamic relationships among the members needs further inquiry. In order to explore complexity within a particular ethnic community, this study focuses on a group of Korean immigrant parents and their participation experiences in an elementary school. In the next section, I discuss the theoretical frameworks that underpin and guide my research questions.

### Theoretical Frameworks

#### *Symbolic Interactionism*

In this study, the dynamic interactions between Korean immigrant parents and school actors were carefully observed and interpreted through the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is derived from the theory of pragmatism as developed by scholars such as G. H. Mead, John Dewey, William James, and C. H. Cooley (Denzin, 1992). Symbolic interactionism focuses on the process through which individuals understand their world. Blumer (1969) suggested three interactionist premises:

- (a) that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them;
- (b) that the meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows;
- (c) that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (p. 2)

People interpret the actions of others rather than simply reacting to them. Through social interactions, people learn the meanings and symbols essential to the expression of thought. These meanings are shaped by the self-reflections that actors bring to their situations, and in turn allow these actors to carry out actions and interactions (Denzin, 1992). Thus, how people interpret their situation results from the meaning attached to such actions, which is mediated largely by symbols. Symbols, called conventional signs (Hewitt, 2003), differ from signs or gestures. Signs are directly and intrinsically linked with present or proximate situations, whereas symbols transcend the immediate situation. Meltzer (2003) described symbols in human interactions:

Human beings ... respond to one another on the basis of the imputed intentions or meanings of gestures. This renders the gestures *symbolic*; that is, the gesture becomes a symbol to be interpreted, becomes something that, in the imagination of the participants, represents the entire act. (p. 257)

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, the individual and the context in which that individual exists are inseparable. Symbolic interactionism views meanings as “social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact” (Blumer, 1969, p. 5). Because meanings change depending on the context of the individual, truth is tentative and is best understood through individual interpretations of the reality of a social

context, or in other words, through “the putting of oneself in the place of the other” (Crotty, 1998, p. 75).

In addition, studying social phenomena requires a micro-level framework. Because society consists of individuals who are involved in interactions within larger networks of other individuals and groups, research in symbolic interactionism focuses on understanding the common or intersubjective meanings of a situation from the perspective of the individual and social groups. Symbolic interaction, “the merger of self and social interaction,” is the main means “by which human beings are able to form social or joint acts” (Blumer, 1981, p. 25).

Symbolic interaction provides an effective theoretical perspective for understanding how individuals interpret objects and other people in their lives and how this process of interpretation contributes to actions in specific situations. Due to its focus on the understanding of common meanings of a situation gathered from the perspectives of both the individual and social groups, a large number of social scientists have drawn on symbolic interactionism in their interpretive studies of various aspects of schooling (Kinney, Rosier, & Harger, 2003). Symbolic interactionism is, therefore, highly relevant to the examination of parent participation mediated between Korean immigrant parents and their ethnic community.

From this perspective, the practice of parental participation can be defined as a constant process of meaning making between a parent and other social actors in a school. The functions of ethnic networking are examined based on the intersubjective perspectives of the group members in a given context; “The meanings of objects and acts must be determined in terms of the actor’s meanings, and the organization of a course of action must be understood as the actor organizes it” (Psathas, 1973, as cited in Crotty, 1998, p. 75). Paying close attention to the premises of

symbolic interactionism offers a useful framework in exploring a first-hand perspective of the parents, teachers, and other social actors in the school.

### *Critical Inquiry*

In this study, I also adopt critical inquiry as a means for locating “the meaning of events within the context of asymmetrical power relation” (Thomas, 2003, p. 46). Critical research assumes that “all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations which are socially and historically constituted” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994, p. 139) and that “culture is not a realm apart from the give-and-take of everyday society but mirrors its contradictions and oppressions” (Crotty, 1998, p. 159). Lather (2004) characterizes critical research designs as follows:

- (a) they explore more interactive, dialogic, and reciprocal research methods that work toward transformative action and egalitarian participation;
- (b) they connect meaning to broader structures of social power, control, and history;
- (c) they work toward open, flexible theory building grounded in both confrontation with and respect for the experiences of people in their daily lives and profound skepticism regarding appearances and “common sense”;
- (d) they foreground the tensions involved in speaking with rather than to/for marginalized groups. (p. 209)

Although I embrace an interpretive framework based on symbolic interactionism in search of descriptions of the lived experiences of Korean immigrant parents, interactions in daily lives are intrinsically multiple and often include contradictory meanings that would not be explained by paradigmatic interpretative frames (Thomas, 2003). Critical research aims to “unmask hegemony and address oppressive forces” situated in meaning construction (Crotty, 1998, p. 12), thereby effectively disclosing complexity and power asymmetry embedded in

family-school relationships. Accepting this critical perspective, I understand parental participation as the negotiating process of contested meanings and actions that reflects “tension between control and resistance” (Thomas, p. 48) among social actors in the school, involving multiple interests of different parties.

In particular, I am interested in articulating the ways in which competing ideologies, rooted in both Western and Asian cultural values, manifested themselves in beliefs, actions, and social relations among the Korean immigrant parents in this study. In the discourse of parent involvement, Asian parents tend to be considered either disconnected from the host culture (G. Li, 2006) or as the model minority stereotype (Schneider & Lee, 1990). A critical perspective challenges this bidirectional discourse, which often reproduces unequal power relations between different cultural groups. Instead, critical research looks for alternative interpretations that can address how situations could be improved (Thomas, 2003). A focus on the tensions within a cultural group can provide alternative action possibilities if the underlying sources of conditions are examined.

Moreover, I am an indigenous researcher who studies my own people. I have a strong commitment to advocacy for marginalized people, such as Korean immigrant families, through my research practice. My research is value-laden, emancipation-oriented, and critically colored. My research project has the political goal of deconstructing the conventional discourse of parent involvement, which privileges white, middle-class groups over others. It also aims to reveal the complex negotiations authored by Korean immigrant parents in the process of parental participation. Combining two theoretical perspectives, symbolic interactionism and critical inquiry, provides an instrument for the advocacy research that I seek as well as a constructive suspicion of the legitimacy of my knowledge claim.

## Chapter Conclusion

This chapter looked at the current literature on the educational involvement of immigrant families and the theoretical perspectives guiding this study. In the past decades, a growing body of research has revealed the benefits of parent involvement to student achievement. Of notable value is the heightened awareness about what constitutes parent involvement along with structural barriers that impede effective connections between families and schools. Research shows that immigrant and minority parents have difficulty in accessing institutional resources and often mobilize unique ways of involvement dissimilar to the conventional forms of parent involvement.

Social capital provides an effective conceptualization for exploring educational stratification by race, ethnicity, and immigrant status (Kao, 2004). From this conceptual basis of social capital, this chapter reviewed the educational experiences of post-1965 immigrants and Korean immigrants in the United States. As agents for social capital, the roles of ethnic communities were highlighted in promoting social adjustment and student achievement for immigrant ethnic groups.

To provide a contextualized analysis of Korean immigrant parents' participation experiences and the functions of ethnic networking, two theoretical perspectives, symbolic interactionism and critical inquiry, framed this study. With these theoretical foundations, this study conceptualized parental participation as a constant process of meaning making, negotiated between a parent and other social actors in relation to parental involvement in school.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Qualitative researchers study participants in their natural settings, attempting to understand or interpret phenomena in relation to the social meanings and activities in these settings. As Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg (1992) noted, the “choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked, and the questions depend on their context” (p. 2). Because this study examines the ethnic networking of Korean immigrant parents in relation to parental participation, my questions include a close examination of people, activities, and issues within this context, and these questions determine the methodologies and methods effective for my research. In this chapter, I outline my research design and describe how the study was conducted and analyzed. More specifically, I describe the following: first, a research design, including the selection of site and participants; second, a conceptual framework that underlies the focus of analysis; third, methods for data collection and analysis; fourth, my role as the researcher and the ethical considerations involved in this project; and finally, methodological challenges identified through the research process.

#### Research Design

This study is a critical ethnographic case study. Through a combination of two approaches — critical ethnography and case study — this study examines issues embedded in the context of Korean immigrant parents’ involvement in school. Case study focuses on “a bounded system or case or set of cases” (Walters, 2007, p. 93). Because this study intends to provide an example of the agency of ethnic networking among a particular ethnic group, case study,

specifically an “instrumental case study” (Stake, 2005, p. 445) in which a particular case is investigated in order to offer insight into an issue or redraw a generalization, is adopted. Careful attention is paid to the potential transferability of the findings. Stake suggested that “naturalistic, ethnographic case” data can parallel actual experiences and provide opportunities to facilitate the processes of “naturalistic generalization” (p. 454). This study advocates this process of naturalistic generalization, which offers a naturally emerging understanding of issues in immigrant education, as well as experiential knowledge about parent participation situated in a particular case.

I also consider this study a critical ethnography. Critical ethnography is a “confluence of interpretivist field studies and critical streams of thought” (Goodman, 1998, p. 51). Critical ethnography investigates social meanings and actions in ordinary settings and reproduces them “in a way that exposes broader social processes of control, power imbalance, and the symbolic mechanism that impose one set of preferred meanings or behaviors over others” (Thomas, 2003, p. 48). Ultimately, it aims for social change that transforms oppressive power relations.

I chose the approach of critical ethnography for two reasons. First, the context that the Korean immigrant parents engage with composes an integral part of their lived experiences. While this study looks at cases of Korean immigrant parents with regard to their social interactions in school participation, understanding the cultures of the elementary school and of the Korean group constitutes not only a background context but also a crucial component of who the parents are and what they do and can do. In this respect, the workings of power relations in social systems, such as the school and the Korean meeting, are examined in search of alternative solutions for improving social inequalities in family-school relationships.

Additionally, I decided to adopt critical ethnography because of my political stance in this study. Critical ethnographers have overt political intentions to change people's consciousness (Foley, Levinson, & Hurtig, 2000). They are "ideological" and partial in that "all standpoints represent particular interests and positions in a hierarchical society" (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005, p. 218). Initially, I considered combining case study and ethnography for this study. For an ethnographer, it is important to "foreground" the culture of the people in inquiry and to "background" the culture of the researcher (Preissle & Grant, 2004). While the researcher observes and interprets activities from his or her own perspective as an outsider, the representation of social realities or the meaning of the world in a given culture is presumed to be an insider's perspective. During my engagement in the field, however, I realized that my interpretations of cultural contexts were intrinsically "mediated by the interaction of a complex set of status variables, such as gender, social class, age, political affiliation, religion, and region" (Banks, 1998, p. 5). I could never claim that my interpretations were "authentic," nor could I reach the ethnographic goal of representing insider perspectives within the contexts I studied. Instead, I have become aware of my ideological sensitivity to social inequalities, and through this awareness, the status quo and oppressive discourses existing in family-school relationships and ethnic networking of the homogeneous cultural group began to be unmasked.

In summary, combining case study and critical ethnography offers an effective strategy to challenge situated meanings by balancing particularity with the richness of a thick account. As a methodology, ethnography prevents the observation and interpretation of contexts from being tainted by "foreshadowed problems" (Stake, 2005, p. 448), and enables the researcher to pay close attention to complexity and nuances of the research situation from various angles (Walters, 2007). This combination of multiple methodologies provides "triangulation" (Denzin, 1970) as a

“strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5). Diversity inherent in different perceptions leads to the identification of multiple realities within which people live. This study attempts to reveal such complexity and contradictions in the participation experiences of Korean immigrant parents in an elementary school by adopting a critical ethnographic case study. In the following, I describe the selection of the site and participants and explain the methods and analytic strategies used in this study.

### *The Setting*

This study took place in Jackson,<sup>1</sup> a southeastern city of approximately 65,000 in 2008. The Jackson community is a new city, having a 2-year history as a municipality, which serves predominately European American inhabitants with a large Asian population including Chinese, Koreans, and Indians; it has a smaller percentage of African Americans and Hispanics. The school district is comprised of nine elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools (the third high school will open in 2009).

North Creek Elementary School, a site for this study, is located in the city of Jackson. At the time of this study, the 2007-2008 school year, the school served 828 preK-5<sup>th</sup> graders from mainly middle- and upper-class families (only 3% of the students qualified for the free and reduced lunch). The school is a one-story building with 103 staff members; the average class size was 20. Since the school opened in 1997, it has been renowned for its academic excellence and active Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The school has been ranked as one of the top schools by neighborhood parents.

North Creek Elementary School was selected for several reasons. First, the school had a sufficient proportion of Korean American students enrolled. With a growing Asian population in the city, North Creek Elementary School's tradition of academic excellence has attracted many

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms are used throughout for all locations, participants, and individuals mentioned by the participants.

middle-class Asian immigrant families. According to the school website, approximately 55% of the student population was categorized as Asian and among those, about 20% were identified as first or second generation Korean Americans. Second, the school is one of 24 schools in the state that earned the Parent Involvement Schools of Excellence Certification from the National PTA. This certification is based on the PTA's six Standards of Excellence: Communication, Parenting, Student Learning, Volunteering, School Decision Making, and Collaborating with the Community (The Family Handbook of 2008-2009). Parents are actively encouraged to join the PTA as it supports various school-related fundraisers and family activities (e.g., annual fall festival, school dance, and bingo nights), in addition to its members' volunteering for classroom activities (e.g., reading time, one-on-one support, the cooking, parties or special research projects, and computer time). The school also operates the foundation, a non-profit organization for parents, the public, and business community donations, along with a local school council consisting of the principal and the representatives of parents, teachers, and business partners. These strong emphases on parent involvement and community collaboration make the school an ideal site for studying the interactive process of parental participation. Lastly, the school has associated with the Korean mothers' meeting, a voluntary ethnic parental organization that supports Korean parents' participation in North Creek Elementary School. This meeting provides a natural setting to explore ethnic networking among the members and its influence on family-school relationships.

### *Participants*

The participants in this study consist of a group of Korean immigrant parents whose children are enrolled in North Creek Elementary School. A maximum-variation approach was used through snowball sampling. A maximum variation sampling is a group of purposefully

selected participants who represent a wide variety of experience in relation to a phenomenon in question (Maykut & Morehouse, 2000). By using Patten's (2002) snowball sampling, which "obtains knowledge of potential cases from people who know people who meet research interests" (Glesne, 2005, p. 35), I purposefully selected information-rich parents with diverse backgrounds in terms of immigrant status, length of residence in the United States, and proficiency in English.

Recruitment was conducted in several steps. First, I gained access to a Korean immigrant parent in the international PTA committee through the principal's referral, and this parent introduced me to the leader of the Korean mothers' meeting. I explained my research interest to the leader and asked her to suggest other Korean mothers of the meeting who might be willing to participate in my research. The leader recommended several mothers and, based on her contact information, I solicited via phone the named mothers' participation. I also contacted other Korean mothers in person while attending the monthly Korean mothers' meetings and parental volunteer activities within the school. Lastly, advertisements recruiting research participants were posted twice in the school's web-based weekly newsletter. I received four phone calls from interested parents, and among those, three parents participated in the study.

In all, 12 Korean parents, 11 mothers and 1 father, with most children at the pre-kindergarten through the third grade levels (one participant's child was in the fifth grade) participated in the two series of interviews.<sup>2</sup> Of the 12, 2 participants did not participate in the second round of interviews: One informed me that she would not participate in the follow-up interview, and the other did not return a call requesting her participation in the second round interview. Table 3.1 provides an overview of the participants' demographics. Participant names

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<sup>2</sup> The leader of the Korean mothers' meeting was interviewed three times.

were changed based on their real names: when one had an English name, such as Diane, an English pseudonym was used, and when one had a Korean name, a Korean pseudonym was used.

Table 3.1

*Korean Parents Profile*

Name	Education and English Proficiency <sup>3</sup>	Occupation	Immigration
David <sup>4</sup>	M.A. from the U.S. Fluent in English and Mandarin	Small business (former technician) Wife: Chinese, IT consulting	Immigrated in 1994 U.S. citizenship
Diane	B.A. from the U.S. Fluent in English	Housewife (former marketing trainer) Husband: American, programmer	Immigrated in 1980 U.S. citizenship
Eunjoo	M.A. from the U.S. Fluent in English	Housewife Husband: restaurant owner (former manager in a Korean company)	Immigrated in 2000 U.S. citizenship
Eunjung	B.A. from Korea Not fluent in English	Housewife Husband: manager in a Korean company	Immigrated in 1996 In process of permanent resident
Eunmi	M.A. from Korea Not fluent in English	Housewife Husband: manager in a Korean company branch	Immigrated in 1992 (Lived in Korea 2002-2006) U.S. citizenship
Hyunjoo	M.A. from Korea Not fluent in English	Housewife (former special educator) Husband: manager in a Korean company branch	Migrated in 2007 Representative visa
Jamie	B.A. from the U.S. Fluent in English	Kindergarten paraprofessional Single mother	Immigrated in 1980 U.S. citizenship
Jeeyung	B.A. from Korea Not fluent in English	Housewife (former telemarketer) Husband: wholesale business	Immigrated in 1991 U.S. citizenship
Junghae	B.A. from Korea Not fluent in English	Housewife Husband: family business (former engineer)	Immigrated in 1999 U.S. citizenship
Monica	M.A. from Korea Fluent in English	Small business Husband: commercial realtor (former researcher)	Immigrated in 1986 U.S. citizenship
Myungsook	B.A. from Korea Not fluent in English	Part-time tutor (former music teacher) Husband: small business	Immigrated in 1997 In process of permanent resident
Nayun	M.A. in the U.S. Not fluent in English	Graduate student (former private English institution owner) Husband: manager in a Korean store (former broadcasting worker)	Immigrated in 2006 In process of permanent resident

<sup>3</sup> Levels of English proficiency were assessed based on self-report.

<sup>4</sup> David was an only father who participated in the study.

Along with the Korean participants, 5 school personnel, 3 European American parents who served on the PTA board, and 1 Taiwanese mother whom I met in a school activity participated in individual interviews. The pre-K and fifth grade teachers were selected due to their involvement in the task committee of the school.<sup>5</sup> Profiles of the school staff and non-Korean parents are summarized in Table 3.2. They were each interviewed once.

Table 3.2

*Non-Korean Participants Profile*

Participant	Name	Gender	Age	Race/Ethnicity
Principal	Mr. Kauffman	M	35-40	White
Assistant principal	Ms. Smith	F	35-40	White
Pre-K teacher	Ms. Kimble	F	40-45	White
Fifth grade teacher	Ms. Wobble	F	30-35	White
ESOL teacher	Ms. Thomson	F	50-55	Russian American
PTA co-president	Mrs. Cooper	F	40-45	White
International committee chair	Mrs. McGraw	F	40-45	White
Adult ESL instructor	Mrs. Baldwin	F	40-45	White
Taiwanese mother	Mrs. Chen	F	35-40	Chinese American

Analytic Framework

This study examines the participation experiences of Korean immigrant parents in North Creek elementary school in order to explore the functions of ethnic networking conducive to successful family-school partnerships. This section presents an analytic framework that serves as the analytical focus of this study. Barton and her colleagues' ecologies of parental engagement model (2004) and Ogbu's notion of community forces (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1995) guide this analytic framework at two different levels.

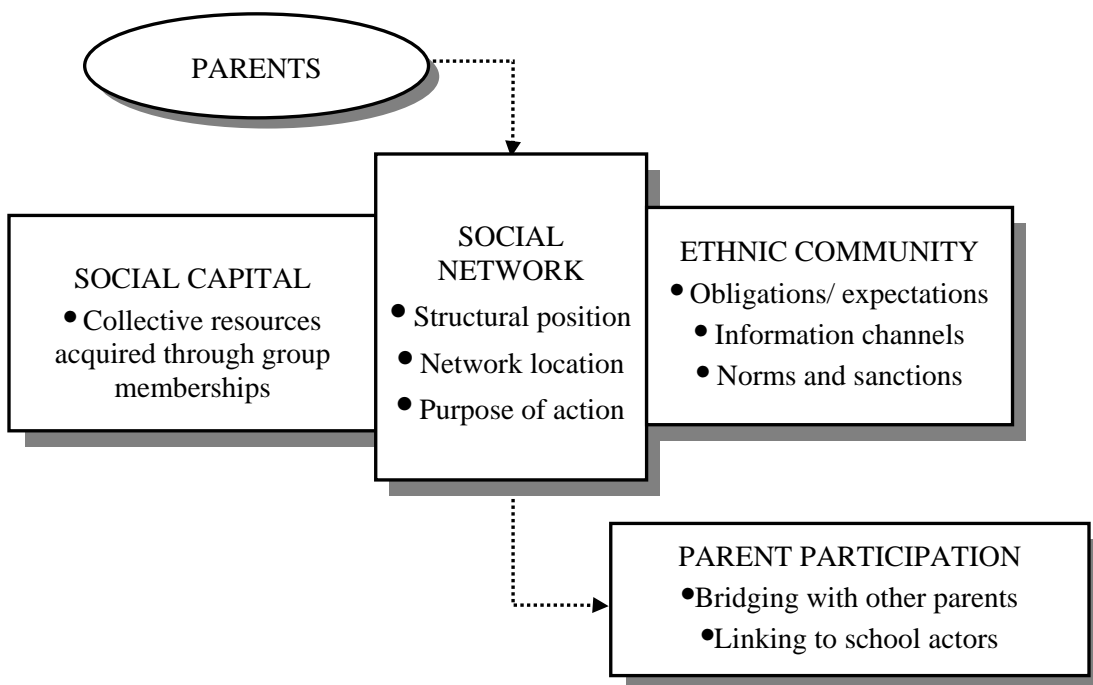
<sup>5</sup> Details of the task committee are presented in Chapter 4.

First, at an individual level, parent participation is understood as the dynamic, interactive process of social interactions between a parent and the school actors. In the ecologies of parental engagement (EPE) model, Barton et al. (2004) considered engagement to be “a set of relationships and actions that cut across individuals, circumstances, and events that are produced and bounded by the context in which that engagement takes place” (p. 6). Incorporation of the EPE model serves to reflect the ways in which Korean immigrant parents engage with ethnic networks as a form of mediation between the ethnic community and social capital. The process of parent participation is analyzed with a focus on the actions and orientations to actions of Korean immigrant parents in their social interactions with the school and community-based actors.

Next, at a group level, Ogbu’s (1995) notion of community forces provides an analytic base for examining social interactions between the group of Korean immigrant parents and the school. As the products of sociocultural adaptation within a particular ethnic community, community forces entail a set of specific beliefs, values, behavioral patterns, and coping strategies in response to adverse societal treatment (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Foster (2004) suggested that cultural ecological theory can unveil the complexity embedded in minority groups’ experiences by recognizing the dynamic interaction between community and system forces. Accepting this perspective, I understand parent participation through ethnic networking as the negotiating process of resolving and establishing contested meanings and actions between a particular group of ethnic parents and the school. The collective ethnic networking of the group activates community forces that influence individuals’ interpretations and responses to the dominant discourse of parent involvement within the school.

With these considerations, I investigate the interactive process of parent participation at either individual or group levels. Specifically, the individual analytic framework for this study draws on various theories of social capital: Bourdieu's (1986) definition of social capital, Coleman's (1988) community-based capital, Lin's (2000, 2001) network theory, and Woolcock's (2001) operation of social capital. Based on a composite of these theories, I analyze the ways individual Korean immigrant parents interact with various social actors in the process of school participation. The individual analytic framework for the study is depicted in Figure 3.1.

In the process of participation, a parent gains resources inherent in social relations by interacting with other parents (bridging) and school staff (linking). The success of participatory action is associated with one's social network, modified by social capital offered through group memberships and/or the ethnic community. In the following sections, I explain each box of the framework, which emerged from the ideas proposed by the aforementioned theorists.



*Figure 3.1.* Individual analytic framework for the study.

### *Social Capital*

Social capital, presented in the left box, is drawn from the conceptualization of Pierre Bourdieu (1986). He defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (p. 248). His definition of social capital is instrumental, focusing on group memberships that provide individuals with collectively owned resources through their participation in groups. The social capital generated through connections among members can be used as credits, and the volume of social capital a person possesses or is able to obtain depends on “the size of one’s connections and on the volume or amount of capital in these connections’ possession” (Lin, 2001, p. 22).

From this, social capital embedded in social relations among Korean immigrant parents is conceptualized as “collective resources” by virtue of their participation in groups. Because this study focuses on whether or not collective ethnic networking enhances access to institutional resources for Korean immigrant parents, social capital as a collective resource acquired through group memberships can effectively explain “investment” or “purposive actions” authored by Korean parents.

### *Ethnic Community*

Ethnic community, presented in the upper right box, draws on Coleman’s (1988) theory. Coleman explained that social capital inheres in the structure of relations and suggested three forms of social capital that can be useful resources for actors to achieve their interests in social relations: (a) obligations and expectations embedded in trustworthiness of structure; (b) information channels; and (c) norms and sanctions that contribute to the common good. While all social relations have the potential to produce social capital, certain kinds of social structures are

more effective than others in generating forms of social capital beneficial to actors. A dense community where members maintain close social relationships and mutual networks, such as the Korean mothers' meeting in this study, is likely to produce reciprocal obligations and expectations between the members, distribute information channels across the members, and exert social control through norms and sanctions enacted upon the members (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). Through a Colemanian lens, I analyze the functions of social relationships within the Korean mothers' meeting and define forms of capital acquired through ethnic networking.

### *Social Network*

Parents' social network, presented in the middle box, is conceptualized based on Lin's (2000, 2001) network theory. Similarly to Bourdieu (1986), Lin (2000) emphasized that social groups gain different access to social capital because of their advantaged or disadvantaged structural positions and associated social networks. One's network location influences his or her access to social capital for the purposes of action. Cross-group ties facilitate access to resource-rich networks for members of the disadvantaged group in resource-poor networks, but such ties are rare in daily interactions. Lin (2001) called this tendency the principle of "homophily" (p. 39); social interactions tend to occur among actors with similar or contiguous resources and lifestyle characteristics.

Based on this proposition, each parent has a different social position and network associated with his or her positioning in a group. A parent who occupies a relatively high position in the group (for example, a leader of the Korean mothers' meeting) may access social capital in a way different from other members of the group and is likely to have easy access to resource-rich networks such as school administrators or PTA board members. In contrast, a parent who has little contact with the Korean group may benefit less from the information

channel offered by social networking within the ethnic group. In this way, parents' social networks differentiate the processes of parent participation.

### *Parent Participation*

In the process of participation, a parent engages in social interactions with social actors, such as other parents and teachers, and activates social capital. Based on Woolcock's (2001) theory, the lower left box explains the ways individual parents interact with other actors in school settings. Woolcock explained that social capital operates multidimensionally, and outlined three of those dimensions: bonding, bridging, and linking. The first dimension is bonding, which refers to homogeneous relationships within the family and among kin members. The second dimension, bridging, refers to heterogeneous relationships that are outside of the immediate network, yet horizontally connected with those who are similar in terms of demographic characteristics. Linking, the third dimension, encompasses vertical connections, whereby individuals forge "alliances with sympathetic individuals in positions of power ... in order to leverage resources, ideas, and information from formal institutions beyond the community" (Woolcock, 2001, as cited in Terrion, 2006, p. 158). Specifically, this study focuses on the dimensions of "bridging" (horizontal relationships between Korean immigrant parents and other parents) and "linking" (Korean immigrant parents' vertical relationships with school personnel) that operate in the processes of participation.

### *Data Management and Analysis*

Fieldwork spanned fall 2007 to spring 2008 and included several methods of data collection: semi-structured interview, observation, focus group, and document analysis. This combination of multiple methods aims to provide "triangulation" (Denzin, 1970) which refers to a "process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an

observation or interpretation” (Stake, 2005, p. 454). However, qualitative researchers acknowledge that objective representation has limits to its being perfectly accurate and repeatable. In this regard, triangulation is “less a strategy for validating results and procedures than an alternative to validation which increases scope, depth and consistency in methodological proceedings” (Flick, 2002, p. 227). By employing different methods, I attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of meanings in question and identify them from multiple angles.

### *Interview*

Individual interviews were sequentially conducted according to the process of data collection. At the initial phase of data collection, I conducted one or two semi-structured interviews with all participants. Each session involved a series of guiding questions followed by additional probing questions (see Appendix A for examples of questions used in each interview). The intent of the first interview was to explore the participant’s experiences and perceptions relevant to the topic of inquiry. A type of episodic interview, which facilitates the specific presentation of situations and episodes “in a general, comparative form,” was the primary mode of these semi-structured interviews (Flick, 2002, p. 105). Similar but slightly different questions were asked according to individual characteristics of each of the three groups of participants (Korean parents, non-Korean parents, and school personnel) with a focus on “group-specific differences in experiences and everyday knowledge” (Flick, p. 109).

Based on the preliminary findings from these initial interviews, I conducted follow-up interviews with 10 of the 12 Korean parents who were foci of the inquiry. Two Korean parents did not participate in the second round of interviews, and one interview was conducted over the phone. The intention of the follow-up interview was to elicit details of the participants’ perspectives and experiences on a theme or story that stood out during the first interview.

Each interview lasted approximately 1 to 1.5 hours, and all were tape-recorded and transcribed. Interviews with Korean participants were conducted in Korean and were first transcribed in Korean and later translated into English for data representation. Interviews with the school personnel and non-Korean parents were conducted at locations within the school, whereas those with Korean parents were done outside the school, mostly at the participants' homes or a bakery. The location and time of each interview was determined by the participants' preferences. Specifically, in the first interview, three Korean parents were interviewed together due to their preferences for a group interview. They participated individually in their second round of interviews.

### *Observation*

Along with the interviews, I attended and observed school events and parental meetings (e.g., PTA meetings, the adult ESL program, and family nights). I also attended the monthly Korean mothers' meetings four times and participated in several Korean parents' volunteer activities, including presentations to classes and a lunch for teachers. A total of 15 observations took place during the school year of 2007-2008. I took field notes during observations and kept a written journal to record my reactions and thoughts during data collection.

Throughout observations, I remained on the margins as much as possible in order to see settings "without being the focus of attention" and to be freely "present without being fully participant" (Glesne, 2005, p. 73). During the Korean parents' volunteer activities, however, I participated with the parents in these activities and conducted informal conversations so as to confirm my understanding of the context.

### *Focus Group*

At the final phase of data collection, in search of socially constructed meanings, I conducted a focus group interview with attendees of the Korean mothers' meeting. A focus group is a useful way to gather further insight into issues that are identified through individual interviews (Glense, 2005). Since the Korean mothers' meeting had been a main site for examining the functions of the ethnic networking under inquiry, questions regarding the meeting's goals and activities were produced (see Appendix B for questions of the focus group interview). Some parents addressed these issues during their one-on-one interviews, and I expected to gain free-floating ideas generated by the group dynamics in a more natural setting than the interview format.

The meeting of the focus group took place at a Korean bakery near North Creek Elementary School where the Korean mothers' meeting used to be held. I discussed the plan of the focus group with the leader of the Korean mothers' meeting and shared the questions with her. The focus group interview lasted approximately one hour and was facilitated by the leader. A letter of permission was distributed individually during preparation for the meeting and three tape-recorders were used in different locations to capture multiple voices. During the focus group interview, however, I noticed that one leader dominated the conversation, with the rest of the participants remaining silent throughout the group discussion. In the section of methodological challenges, I discuss certain drawbacks of conducting focus group interview with this particular cultural group.

### *Document Collection*

I also gathered pictures of school activities and school-related documents, such as newsletters, pamphlets, and minutes of the Korean mothers' meeting, as a means for obtaining

further information about contexts. The use of documents and written records results in certain advantages; for example, the documents are unsolicited and uncontrived because they are routinely compiled in social settings. Additionally, these documents are essentially non-reactive as they are immunized from the research purpose (Brewer, 2000). Particularly, the school's weekly newsletters and the Korean mothers' meeting minutes provide longitudinal data. They include information about school events and agendas that reveal the overall patterns of parent participation in terms of topics, goals, and ongoing issues over the years. I was able to trace the history of the Korean mothers' meeting from these documents.

### *Data Management*

Each interview was transcribed verbatim but in a reduced form, omitting intonations and gestures. Pseudonyms were given to all of the parents and locations in the transcribed data. The school personnel and children were designated by either professional status or relations with the participants such as 'my son' or 'my daughter.' In the field notes, observed people were primarily described based on ethnicity and social roles (e.g., a Korean mother, a European American father, an African American teacher). I personally transcribed all of the interview data and recorded the log of interview transcripts and field notes with comments and reflections.

The data were entered and analyzed using the ATLAS.ti software program, which enables the researcher to manage, extract, compare, explore, and reassemble the data in meaningful ways. This program's "network view" function was most useful; after initial open coding for the single case, I explored relationships between codes and memos and conceptualized thematic categories by connecting sets of similar elements in a visual diagram. Such visual aids from the network view allowed me to see sophisticated patterns between codes

and quotations in a creative, yet systematic way. An example of network view is displayed in Figure 3.2.

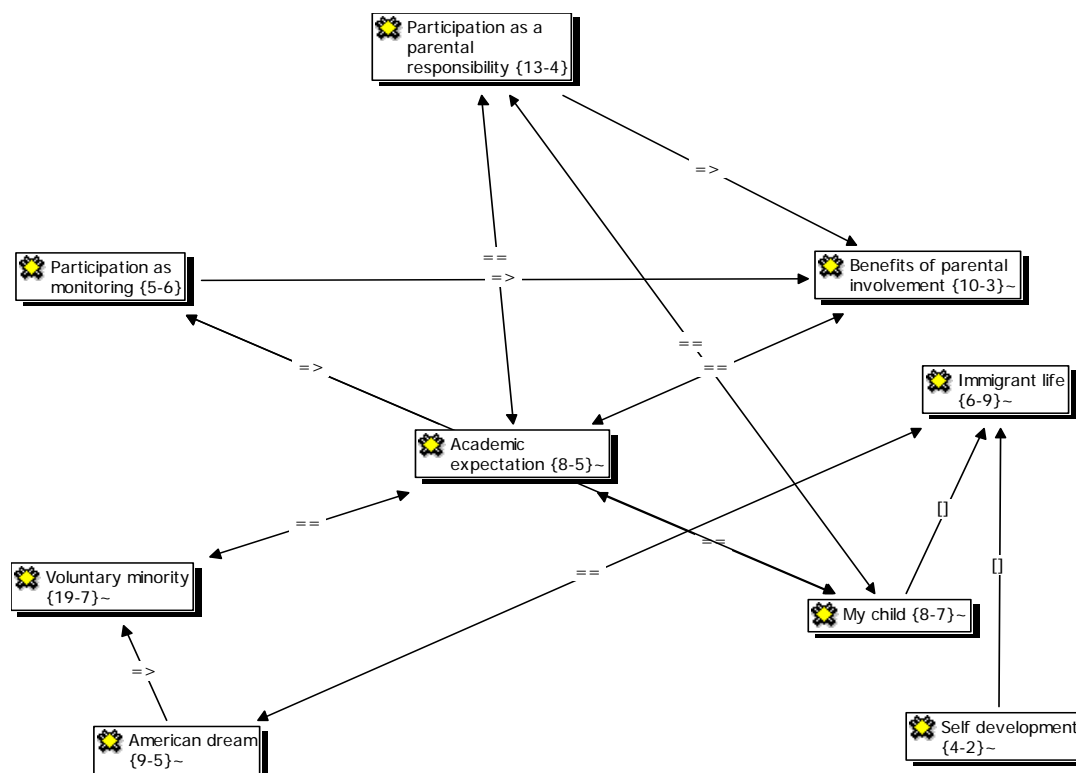


Figure 3.2. Network view of the meanings of school participation.

### Analysis

In order to access comparable perspectives distributed in social groups, thematic coding outlined by Flick (2002) was used for data analysis. First, I categorized the Korean participants by levels of school participation (i.e., active, fair, passive) and capital possession (i.e., American-based social capital, American and Korean equivalent social capital, Korean-based social capital). Participation levels and capital possession were determined based on observations and interview data. The intent of this categorization was to compare and contrast the participation experiences of Korean parents, with reference to the individual analytic framework. Results of the categorization are displayed in Table 3.3. Then, a brief description of the participants and main

themes were produced for each case. These case descriptions were continuously revisited throughout the analysis and modified as necessary (see Appendix C for the case description).

Table 3.3

*Analytic Category of Korean Parents*

Social capital	Participation		
	Active	Fair	Passive
American-based	Diane Jamie	David Monica	
American and Korean equivalent	Eunjoo	Eunmi	Hyunjoo
Korean-based	Eunjung Myungsook	Junghee Nayun	Jeeyung

By using open and selective coding, I next developed a series of categories for the single case that represent the thematic domains of the research questions. Once I generated categories and thematic domains from the first case analysis, I then crosschecked successive cases in order to increase their comparability. The developed thematic structure served as an essential component for cross-case comparison. Negative cases were identified and preserved in order to avoid the “superficiality” that often results from aggregating or averaging multiple cases (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p. 435).

Lastly, results of this case comparison in one thematic domain were displayed in matrix form by social groups — Korean parents,<sup>6</sup> non-Korean parents, and school personnel — thereby demonstrating the social distribution of perspectives on the issues. Cross-group comparisons were determined depending on aspects of theme relevance. For example, the code of “proper role of parents” was compared among all three groups, whereas codes related to the Korean mothers’

<sup>6</sup> Korean parents were presented by their categories.

meetings were compared among the Korean group only. The thematic structure of case analyses developed through this analytic process is shown in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4

*Thematic Structure of Case Analyses*

Themes	Codes
Korean family-school relationships	<p>Teacher (or non-Korean parent) beliefs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proper role of parents</li> <li>• View of the school</li> <li>• View of international families</li> <li>• Cultural sensitivity</li> <li>• Status quo</li> <li>• Changes for collaboration</li> </ul> <p>Korean parent beliefs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational expectation</li> <li>• Proper role of parents</li> <li>• Parenting efficacy</li> <li>• Knowledge about American schooling</li> <li>• View of the school</li> <li>• Status quo</li> <li>• Changes for collaboration</li> </ul>
Korean mothers' meeting (KMM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roles of KMM</li> <li>• Personal needs for KMM</li> <li>• Social capital through KMM</li> <li>• Changes for KMM</li> </ul>
Participation as interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meanings of school participation</li> <li>• Self-positioning (ethnic identity, cultural assimilation, involvement efficacy)</li> <li>• Social relations (network diversity, access to ethnic network, tension in interaction)</li> <li>• Activities</li> <li>• Barriers to involvement</li> </ul>

### Researcher Role and Ethical Concerns

Indigenous ethnographers who study their own cultural groups need to be cautious about their presupposed insider status and their potential for distorting meaning construction, whether these possible misconceptions are culture specific or personal (Jones, 1995). While I benefited from sharing an ethnic background with my Korean participants in terms of easy access and a precise understanding of cultural meanings and demeanors, there also existed a danger from my insider “familiarity” that may have led to taken-for-granted and exaggerated interpretations (Mercer, 2007). I was somewhat more careful to avoid sensitive topics in order to maintain positive relationships with my Korean participants, especially those with whom I conducted more in-depth interviews, than I was when I interviewed school personnel and non-Korean parents.

Specifically, I found that the level of receptivity toward me varied according to a particular individual’s connection to the Korean mothers’ meeting, whose members maintained relatively close relationships with one other. I had to redefine my position in order to be part of the culture of the Korean group. I consciously avoided posing probing questions to the attendees and maintained a reserved demeanor in order to be accepted while participating in the meeting. I often found myself constrained from being involved in collective conversations, instead striving to fit into the group’s collective order. My deliberate self-representation may be ethically inappropriate and possibly instrumental, yet this position on the boundary provided me with the least intrusive place to be an insider, barely accepted into the group culture of the meeting.

While participating in school activities and parental meetings, I assumed an “observer-participant” role (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 268), in order to reduce the insider pitfall of familiarity and to secure more trust in my relationships with the participants. I kept a certain

distance from the participants in these contexts so as to not become heavily involved in their social lives. I constantly reflected on my own meaning constructions with the participants and the data, and frequently revisited my position in the processes of research engagement.

I believed that this observer-participant role alleviated some ethical issues concerning the participants. Because my engagement with the participants could never be free from my research interest and schedules, assuming an active participant role could have caused a potential exploitation of the participants and a betrayal of their trust in my participation. It seems unethical for researchers to forge relationships with participants, befriend them, and then leave the setting when the research is completed (Tisdale, 2004). Moreover, the nature of the qualitative approach arouses concern as to the privacy of participants. Despite my commitment to protecting participant confidentiality, conducting qualitative interviews is likely to disclose personal histories. Indeed, a growing number of researchers criticize the unethical aspects of traditional in-depth interviews and believe they both manipulate respondents and treat them as objects rather than as individuals (Fontana & Frey, 2004).

With these ethical considerations in mind, before having them sign a consent form, I informed the participants that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason, and that all names of people mentioned would be changed (see Appendix D). A written consent form for Korean participants was provided in both English and Korean, and informational letters about the study were delivered prior to any observation of private activities, including the Korean mothers' meeting. In fact, some parents withdrew their decision to participate in the study when they were asked to sign the consent form, and two Korean parents did not participate in follow-up interviews, although they did not drop out of the study.

Another role I assumed in my research was that of an “advocate” (Glesne, 2005, p. 136). My research project had the political goal of revealing complex negotiations authored by Korean immigrant parents and to make their voices heard in immigrant studies. However, my overt advocacy paradigm became problematic as I encountered the status quo within the Korean group. I doubted my insiderness because my ideological identification appeared to be disparate from my cultural group. At many moments in the study, I had to question where my consciousness came from and whose interest was being served through my research. As an indigenous researcher who pursues the political ends of advocacy research, I had to take account of my responsibility to my own community by critically analyzing my inner voice. This was an ethical matter. Smith (1999) points out the moral issues in doing indigenous research:

The struggle for the validity of indigenous knowledge may no longer be over the recognition that indigenous people have ways of knowing the world which are unique, but over proving the authenticity of, and control over, our own forms of knowledge. (p. 104)

Acknowledging situated knowledge by explicating differences between the researcher and the researched can be one way to address this ethical dilemma. My lived experience was significantly different from the Korean mothers associated with the meeting, despite our commonalities in terms of gender, social class, ethnicity, age, and region. Bank (1998) argues that “it is not their experiences per se that cause individuals to acquire specific values and knowledge during their socialization within their ethnic or cultural communities; rather, it is their interpretations of their experiences” (p. 5). While my career experiences contributed to my critical awareness of social inequalities, the mothers affiliated with the meeting were mostly housewives; some of them had never worked outside the home. Their romantic, uncritical views

of American lives may have been rooted in their unique social realities, which were sheltered from hostile treatments from the host society as well as privileged by their middle-class backgrounds.

To recognize situated knowledge is to admit one's limited perspective based on particular and personal locations within the field (Narayan, 1993). Insideriness shaped by the researcher's biography cannot ensure the authenticity of knowledge claims, nor can it legitimate our moral accountability in working with our own community (Labaree, 2002). The researcher can be an insider and outsider "to a particular community of research participants at many different levels and at different times" (Villenas, 1996, p. 718). I acknowledge "betweenness" in my fieldwork (England, 1994, p. 86). Fieldwork is personal, relational, and political. The researcher is not free from the power relations in the field that fundamentally affect her relationships with the researched. At the same time, the researcher herself makes up this betweenness.

I also admit that my texts are partial, subjective, and situated between the participants and myself. My political stance colored my texts; I had to negotiate my ethical dilemma of advocacy among heterogeneous groups with multiple interests, and I decided to privilege the voices of the most marginalized over others. Reflecting on my reflexivity in relation to researcher roles and associated ethical matters enables me to locate where I have been in the research process, and to recognize my situatedness with regard to knowledge claims.

### Methodological Challenges

This study posed several methodological challenges. The first was to consider the particular cultural contexts of the participants in selecting methods relevant to the study. In East Asian culture, from which the Korean parents came, interdependent ways of being have been

strongly encouraged (Markus, Mullally, & Kitayama, 1997; Shweder et al., 1998). Being opposed to collective modes of discourse implies that one is standing out from the group, which was undesirable in the context of the Korean mothers' meeting. Given this cultural emphasis on collective harmony, my selection of a focus group interview with participants in the Korean mothers' meeting was neglectful of the social dynamics of this particular cultural group. During the hour-long focus group meeting, it was the leader who spoke predominantly; based on the questions, which I planned to discuss and had shared with her, the leader presented her thoughts and ideas in relation to the collective vision of the Korean mothers' meeting while the other members carefully listened to her words without any questions or suggestions. While a focus group intends to explore social interactions and synergetic results from those social dynamics, cultural contexts provide overarching avenues for constituting the particular group dynamics. In addressing drawbacks of focus group research, Glesne (2005) cautions that some people might be silent because their ideas differ from the majority of the participants. In the cultural context of this particular group of parents, the methods of group discussion in public cannot simply be applied in the same way that they can be in Western culture, where individuals are encouraged to express their personal opinions.

Second, selecting participants from one school makes it difficult to guarantee confidentiality in the research process. In particular, conducting individual interviews in a bounded community such as the Korean mothers' meeting increases the likelihood that participants might know each other and recognize who participated in the study. Difficulty in gaining permission for interviews from the participants associated with the meeting was partially attributable to individual personal anxiety over privacy exposure. Moreover, the participants were openly recruited in some cases. Although the participants were informed about their rights

of voluntary participation in the study before individually signing a written consent form, qualitative studies in bounded communities nevertheless raise a significant challenge of confidentiality.

Third, participation observation requires careful selection of sites and people with regard to certain aspects of subject relevance. My observations primarily included school related activities such as volunteering or school events, which provided rich data for exploring the family-school relationships of the participants. However, I did not observe everyday interactions at an individual level, which means my understanding of each individual's unique pattern in parental participation was limited. Two rounds of individual interviews allowed me to compensate for the inadequate selection of observations to some extent; nonetheless, I was unable to obtain multiple interpretations of the context and the participants through triangulation because some interviewees rarely participated in the settings I observed.

Lastly, my translation of interview transcripts into a second language resulted in lost meanings. As a speaker of English as a second language, communicating with Korean participants in the Korean language was an advantage for me; I could capture the subtle meanings and intentions between the lines of their words. However, translating their words into idiomatic English language was a daunting task. Although I consulted on my translation with native English speakers, they did not know the Korean language, and I could not explain specific meanings that were rooted in cultural contexts. The precise meanings of words and sentences may be lost in my inadequate translation. Collaboration with a bilingual colleague might be one way to reduce language meanings being lost in translation.

These challenges identified through the research process nonetheless offered new insight into qualitative methods. I was able to apply my theoretical knowledge in practice and learn

about research procedures, technical skills, and most importantly the values of risk taking and perseverance.

### Chapter Conclusion

This chapter detailed the research design and the processes of fieldwork and analysis. This study adopted a critical ethnographic case study approach intended to examine critical issues in the general contexts of Korean immigrant parents' involvement in school. From fall 2007 to spring 2008, I conducted fieldwork at North Creek Elementary School, located in a city of the southeastern United States. Data collection involved observations, interviews, and document gathering. I interviewed 21 participants (12 Korean parents, 5 school personnel, and 4 non-Korean parents) 1-3 times each, and observed school activities and the Korean mothers' meeting. Thematic coding was the primary method for data analysis. In order to gain comparable perspectives, I also compared each case based on the developed themes.

The fieldwork provided an invaluable opportunity to learn about the participants and myself as a researcher. I reflected on my researcher role and the reflexive nature of my fieldwork. In retrospect, I described some methodological challenges recognized through the research process.

## CHAPTER 4

### FAMILY-SCHOOL RELATIONS IN CONTEXT

The practice of parental participation involves a dynamic, interactive process of meaning making between individual parents and schools. Meaning, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, is a “social construction,” dependent on individuals’ intersubjective interpretations in a context (Blumer, 1969, p. 5). Individuals and the contexts in which they exist are inseparable in that individuals’ interpretations and actions are shaped through social interactions occurring in a social context. In this sense, the very act of parent participation requires a specific understanding of the context in which parents and other school actors are situated.

This chapter describes the context of family-school relationships in North Creek Elementary School in order to understand the experiences of Korean immigrant parents in this particular school. I begin with a description of the family-school partnerships constructed by parents and the school staff, including their respective attitudes toward the school community and certain tensions existing in the parent-teacher relationships. I then provide a brief overview of demographic change in the school and explain the school’s outreach programs intended to revitalize parental participation. Next, I present the general characteristics of Korean parents’ relationships with the school and impediments to participation that stood out for the Korean parents. Lastly, I describe how a group of Korean parents initiated the Korean mothers’ meeting at North Creek Elementary School in an attempt to pursue collective agency that supports Korean parents’ involvement in the school. A brief overview of the meeting’s history, purposes, and organization are presented.

### Family-School Partnerships at North Creek Elementary School

North Creek Elementary School is situated in the northeastern corner of the city of Jackson, where middle- to upper-class families live in neatly maintained single house subdivisions. The school serves primarily European American students, along with relatively large numbers of Asian children. Unlike neighborhood schools that include several zones of apartment housing, residents with children in North Creek Elementary School were exclusively homeowners, which enabled the school to maintain consistency in the student population. The community provided “nice, stable” parents who were, according to the description of Mr. Kauffman, the principal, “very supportive but...not demanding” (Interview, 11/13/2007). Entering the school, one is confronted with a brightly decorated storage desk for volunteers, a separate volunteer sign-up sheet, and a welcome greeting from the receptionists at the front desk. With strong parent and community-based support, the school has been recognized as a National PTA School of Excellence and has received several awards for its academic achievement. The principal proudly explained the school’s tradition of academic excellence for the past 11 years:

Our CRCT scores . . . were top of the county seniors, we were the second in the county last year. We won the governor’s award this year, so we were doing a good job academically. We were trying to balance strong academic with some sort of fun.

(Interview, 11/13/2007)

Literature on families and schools recognizes class differences in schooling outcomes, noting intensive interactions coordinated by middle-class families with schools on behalf of their children’s academic success (Griffith & Smith, 2005; Lareau, 2002, 2003). Similarly, parents at North Creek Elementary School appeared to possess adequate economic capital and willingness to invest in promoting academic achievement through active involvement in their children’s

schooling. Myungsook, a Korean parent whose two children attended the school, described her impression of the intensive relationships between middle-class parents and the school:

We cannot say economic status directly connects to educational matters, but financial support has to do with the mothers' role. ... Mothers can be available because they don't have to earn money. Here, so many mothers come to school every day, just as teachers do. (Interview, 4/16/2008).

In relation to economic status and parent involvement, Monica, another Korean parent who uses an English name, considered the family-school relationships of North Creek Elementary School as being similar to those of private schools. She had been a business partner with the school for several years and described the benefits and pressures that middle-class parents bring to the school: "In this school, many families live in houses worth over several million dollars. They donate a thousand dollars at once. It's just like a private school. ... The principal may have an undisclosed concern about the parents' strong voice" (Interview, 1/30/2008). She perceived Mr. Kauffman, the principal, to be a good but ambitious person who would not be easily controlled by parents; she added wryly: "Well, people like us [Koreans] are very good parents as we don't speak up."

Overall, the parents and teachers in this study judged the quality of administrative leadership positively. The relatively young principal and assistant principal, both in their mid 30s, frequently made themselves approachable to the teachers as well as the parents, showing openness in their interactions. Jamie, a kindergarten paraprofessional who was also a Korean parent, described the administrators' non-authoritative leadership:

Other principals and assistant principals have people serve them. ... Our principal [Mr. Kauffman] and assistant principal [Ms. Smith], however, are leaders who think, "What

can I do for my teachers and kids? How can I serve and help them?” (Interview, 1/27/2008)

Although the principal and assistant principal were younger than about half of the teaching staff, their leadership appeared to be welcomed and supported by the school community, at least by the teachers and parents in this study. Not surprisingly but interestingly, Ms. Smith, the assistant principal, was satisfied with her work at North Creek Elementary School mostly because of the high quality environment it offered for her two children. While she had originally planned to move on to a principal position, Ms. Smith hesitated to apply at different schools to be a principal:

I love this school. I love working with the principal. I love the community. ... If I were here for another ten years, I am ok. My daughter is here. My son, who is only two, I hope to bring him [to this school]. ... My priority has changed. I am a parent. To me, it's important that I have a good place for my kids. (Interview, 2/27/2008)

Apparently, as the principal proudly mentioned, the family-school relationships of North Creek Elementary School were generally seen as positive and collaborative. The partnerships between families and the school provided mutual benefits for the school staff and parents, who shared the common goal of the children's educational success. All school staff and parents in this study revealed their pride in this school, considering partnership between families and the school as the most influential factor in maintaining the school's tradition of academic excellence. Mrs. Baldwin, a European American parent who was actively involved in classroom activities as well as serving on the PTA board, decisively concluded: “The strong school needs strong teachers, strong students, strong administrators, and strong parents” (Interview, 3/5/2008).

Nonetheless, inevitable tensions existed underneath the seemingly successful partnerships at North Creek Elementary School. All social relationships essentially contain conflicts and complexity rooted in different positions and self-interests. I now turn to some of these tensions within the parent-teacher relationships of the school, as respectively perceived by the school staff and parents in this study.

### *Tension*

#### *Teachers' perspectives.*

Affluent parents are omnipresent, eager, earnest, ambitious, and entitled. They cross the family-school boundaries frequently and with ease; they feel as if their presence and their demands are legitimate and that teachers are there to serve and respond to the needs of their children. (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003, p. 128)

The teachers in this study considered the high expectations of North Creek parents double-edged. They appreciated that the parents' intensive support for education had contributed to the school's accomplishment of high test scores, yet they also mentioned the pushiness and rigorous demands of the parents; according to Jamie, the Korean American kindergarten paraprofessional, parents' high expectations implied "extra work" for the teachers. She explained: "We cannot lay back. ... Parents with high expectations ask questions and demand more. Such and such, please send one more, why did my child get this grade? ... Then we have to respond to all those things" (Interview, 1/27/2008).

Particularly, Ms. Wobble, a European American fifth grade teacher with 11 years of teaching experience, felt that teachers were under scrutiny from parents who constantly monitored the quality of the curriculum. She emphasized the importance of team planning across all fifth grade classrooms in order to maintain trustful relationships with parents:

If we [fifth grade teachers] all do pretty much similar things, then we're going to get respect [from parents]. If not, then, we're going to be watched. ... Why do some classrooms do this but another classroom does not? Especially in our school, because we have parents who have high expectations and who want to make sure [what teachers do], if you don't have that real similarity, then you start having that: "She might not be a good teacher. Or she may be a good one, but I don't know what she's talking about." (Interview, 2/20/2008)

In addition to parents' high expectations, there is an intrinsic conflict between "the particularistic relationships a parent has to his or her child" and "the institutional forms of appraisal of that child" done by a teacher in the context of a classroom (Griffith & Smith, 2005, p. 114). The teachers in this study viewed some parents as having unrealistic expectations about their child's academic achievement that might be inappropriate and even detrimental to the overall development of the child. Specifically, admission to the Talented and Gifted (TAG) program has frequently been an issue among parents and teachers in the school. The TAG program has been designed for gifted learners who meet certain criteria of creativity, problem-solving, higher order and critical thinking, and advanced research and communication skills. Ms. Kimble, a veteran European American pre-kindergarten teacher, considered that Asian parents in general and Indian parents in particular appeared excessively academically oriented; if a child was not qualified for the TAG program, the parent tended to consider their child unsuccessful academically. She expressed the issue from an American educator's viewpoint, which emphasizes differentiated instruction tailored to each child's ability level:

American parents . . . want their children to do well but more realize that sometimes their abilities are different. . . . International [Asian] parents ... are not always disrespectful,

but they just push, push. ... You say to them, "Your child is having difficulty in reading these words. Your child needs to improve in this academic area." They say, "Ok, we'll work on that. What do we need to do to get into the TAG?" (Interview, 2/26/2008)

Nonetheless, at the end of her conversation, Ms. Kimble revealed her satisfaction with support from parents who have high expectations, saying; "for the most part, the parents are happy with what we are doing. They're not so much trying to push the teacher to do more. They are pushing their children to do more" (Interview, 2/26/2008). Less focus on academic areas in her pre-k classroom might reduce explicit conflicts with parents to some extent.

*Korean and non-Korean parent perspectives.*

Michelle Fine (1993) pointed out the asymmetry in power structures embedded in family-school relationships, asserting; "They [parents] are usually not welcomed, by schools, to the critical and serious work of rethinking educational structures and practices" (pp. 682-683). Teachers' professional knowledge and authority are assumed to be non-challengeable, and as such, in the context of North Creek Elementary School, there was a clear boundary between parents and classroom practices. The school website provided the following policy regarding classroom visits: "We value every minute of instructional time with our students. Unless you have an appointment or are volunteering in the classroom as scheduled by the teacher, please do not enter your child's classroom."

Myungsook, a Korean parent whose two children transferred from a neighborhood school, compared the strict appointment policy of North Creek Elementary school with her experience at the previous school, where parents were freely allowed to visit classrooms and observe instructional activities: "When my children transferred into this school, I asked, 'Can I observe the classroom?' 'No, you should make an appointment in advance.' ... In the former school, I

came to the classroom and met the teacher anytime I wanted” (Interview, 2/15/2008). She understood the necessity of an appointment policy in order to reduce interruptions to instructional practices. However, she was envious of parents volunteering for the Accelerated Reader (AR) program or room mothers<sup>7</sup> because they could be present in the classroom in formal ways. She also expressed her concern about the scant information the school gave about student placement and curriculum, although she said she would trust and conform to the school’s decisions.

As in the case of Myungsook, some Korean parents often used their own or vicarious experiences with different schools as a frame of reference in judging the quality of teacher professionalism. Eunjung, a Korean parent who had two children in the third and fifth grades, shared a story about a neighborhood Korean parent who had negatively commented on the low level of commitment of the teachers in North Creek Elementary School:

Her child attended a different school before transferring to North Creek. In that school, teachers kept working after class even until 7 or 8 p.m. But North Creek ... One day, she went back to school at around four o’clock to take something her child forgot, but nobody was there. Of course, teachers can work and prepare for lessons at home, but she believed that North Creek teachers were not working as hard as the previous school’s teachers did.

(Interview, 3/21/2008)

Similarly, Junghee, another Korean parent whose son was in first grade, explained how often she and her son’s teacher communicated via email, although she was suspicious the teacher’s willingness to communicate: “She [the teacher] might have done these things because I asked her to do so” (Interview, 12/14/2007). When her son was in preschool, Junghee had had a very negative experience with a teacher whom she considered racist. She emphasized the importance

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<sup>7</sup> A room mother is a parent volunteer who assists the teacher in ways such as hosting the classroom parties.

of parental contact with teachers in order to prevent possible discrimination against minorities in the United States.

As mentioned by Myungsook, volunteering for classroom activities provided parents with a legitimate opportunity to observe classroom practices and learn about educational strategies. Yet, the parents in this study, particularly non-Korean parents, tended to see their participation as a means for monitoring teaching practices, thereby protecting their own children from disadvantages. Mrs. Baldwin, a European American parent, described how she exercised initiative in an attempt to show her willingness to support the teacher as well as monitor teaching practices:

I don't want to turn my child over someone. ... They [teachers] are teaching book knowledge and raising my child just as much as I'm raising my child. That's why I just can't say "Ok, you do it, you teach them." (Interview, 2/26/2008)

Mrs. Chen, a Taiwanese American parent who came to the United States in high school, also considered parent involvement necessary for identifying problems that teachers might not notice. For instance, she looked at her second-grade daughter's school folder and found many uncompleted assignments. She knew her daughter tended to be distracted while sitting beside other children, yet the classroom had been arranged in small groups. In order to address this problem, Mrs. Chen contacted the teacher and asked her to separate her daughter's desk from the group:

I told the teacher if she didn't finish her work on time, pull her aside. At first, she came home and was upset because she had to sit apart from other students. But later, when she finished her work on time, she said she felt great. ... That's the way she has to do it. (Interview, 2/26/2008)

Indeed, most parents in this study not only perceived parent involvement as a parental responsibility, but also attempted to influence educational practices in favor of their child, which sometimes resulted in conflicts with the teachers. Nonetheless, the ways in which parents intervened or engaged in educational practices varied depending on individuals. Researchers have identified parents' class and race/ethnicity as the most salient factors influencing the effectiveness of parent involvement (Lareau, 2002, 2003; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lew, 2007). In the context of this particular school, whose students were mainly from middle- and upper-class families, parents' race/ethnicity is a more significant matter. A recent demographic change occurring in North Creek Elementary School had a significant impact on the discourse of parent involvement; I now turn to this change in order to focus on the position of Korean immigrant parents in this school.

#### North Creek Elementary in Transition

At the time of this study, North Creek Elementary School was in transition. Beginning in 2003, the Asian influx and the declining number of European American families in the neighborhood transformed the school demographics. According to the *2007-2008 State of the School Address*, 55% of the student population was categorized as "Other" consisting mainly of Asian (30%), Asian Indian (20%), Multicultural (3%), and Hispanic (2%) students. The white student population steadily and significantly decreased from 81% in 1997 to 38% in 2007. The black student population has slightly increased from 2% in 1997 to 7% in 2007.

The county in which North Creek Elementary School is located does not distinguish between the Asian and Asian Indian populations. The percentages have been recorded through the school's internal database program based on the Individual Student Profile. Figure 4.1 shows changes in the student population over the school's history.

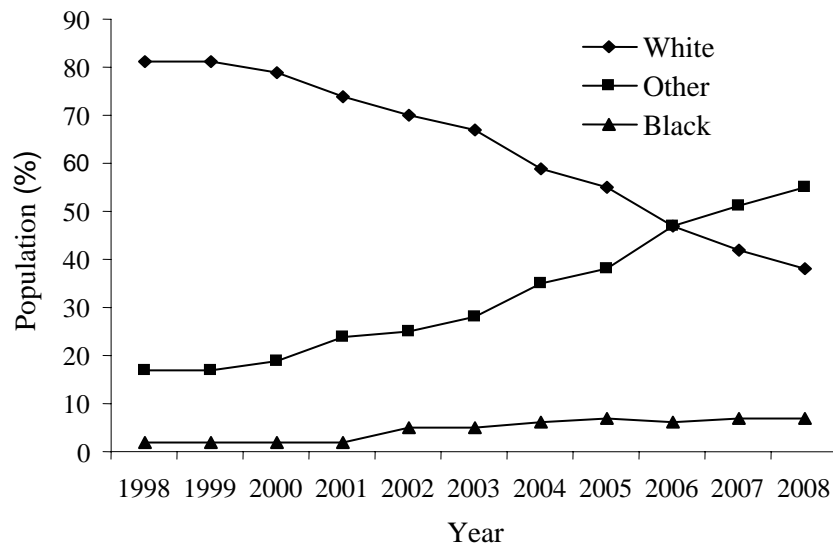


Figure 4.1. Trend of the student population.

The demographic composition of each grade level is presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

*Demographic Composition of Grade Level*

	Pre-K	K	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
White	25	36	42	27	41	41	43
Asian	34	34	25	37	26	31	27
Asian Indian	24	17	20	21	23	15	19
Black	7	6	10	10	6	7	6
Multicultural	7	6	1	3	2	3	5
Hispanic	3	1	2	2	2	3	0

Note: Numbers presented indicate percentages.

Participants in this study perceived this profound change in student demographics differently. For some participants, the changing student population provided an invaluable opportunity for the students to learn about cultural diversity through naturally occurring daily

interactions. Mrs. McGrow, a European American parent who had lived in Japan and assumed the chair of the international PTA, expressed her gratification with a growing diversity within the student population:

I thought this is so good for my kids. I had to get my international experiences as adult. Here, my children, sitting in the cafeteria and seeing someone eat rice, asked, “Mommy, why do they bring rice?” I said, “You know, we got all different cultures, different food.” To me, it was good learning. (Interview, 2/20/2008)

Moreover, the increase in the Asian student population implies a change in the parent demographics, in that Asian parents have become a majority in the school community. Eunjung, a Korean parent who actively participated in school activities, welcomed the changing status of Asian parents, saying, “Now, many Indians and Asians are here, so we can rely on each other. I feel more comfortable while attending school meetings because I see many Indians and other parents who cannot speak English fluently [just like me]” (Interview, 3/21/2008).

However, the increasing Asian populations presented problems for the tradition of parental support for school functioning. At North Creek Elementary School, parents have been encouraged not only to join the PTA, but also to become active participants in school functioning by either volunteering or attending school activities. More than 90% of the school’s parents have joined the PTA, and through this organization, a substantial proportion of the school’s activities (e.g., Accelerated Reader program, Fall Carnival, Science Force, and Field Day) have been organized and implemented by parent volunteers. Despite parental involvement being taken for granted at the school, Asian parents tended to be less actively involved in school activities and volunteering for classrooms compared to American parents. Difficulty in maintaining the tradition of strong parent participation has often resulted in frustrations and complaints from the

school staff. Ms. Wobble, the fifth grade teacher, described an emerging sense of crisis among the teaching staff in sustaining parental volunteerism:

We have seen a pretty drastic decline in volunteerism at this school, and that's a concern.

There are things we have to stop. ... Now, we are having fewer people who come into the school than we used to be. We try to figure out how we can connect with the community, make more people comfortable with coming, and volunteering here. (Interview, 2/20/2008)

Along with the decreasing number of parent volunteers, communication with families who had cultural and linguistic backgrounds different from those of the school staff, which consisted for the most part of European American females, was another challenge. While children learn English rapidly, their parents tend to have greater difficulty in acquiring the level of English proficiency that could ensure genuine communication with the school. The principal described the school's challenges in communicating with parents whose first language was not English: "If we send something, we just expect that all the views are understood, [but] that's not always the case. ... Sometimes the kids read to the parents. Sometimes that works, sometimes it doesn't" (Interview, 11/13/2007). Ms. Kimble, the pre-k teacher, expressed similar concerns about authentic communication with non-English speaking parents: "Talking to parents, sometimes you feel like, 'OK, I said all this, do they understand any of it?' ... Because they want to be respectful, so they say, 'Yes, yes, yes, OK' and they really don't understand" (Interview, 2/26/2008).

Moreover, this demographic transition appeared to have provoked white flight from surrounding communities. Diane, a Korean parent who uses an English name, spoke English fluently and had many American friends, talked about a rumor circulating among her neighbors:

Even in my subdivision, many white families move out. They never explained why, but people speculated that they moved out because of too many Indians in the community ...

Now, many Indians live around the area, and some people might see it as a problem.

(Interview, 5/1/2008)

Since Indian students generally do well in the school, Diane did not worry about increasing Indian populations in her subdivision as well as at North Creek Elementary School. However, she thought, the drastic decrease in the European American population in the school might not be beneficial for the students because it would reduce opportunities for learning the mainstream culture.

In sum, the recent demographic change has affected the entire school community. For the teaching staff in particular, effective connection with culturally diverse families was an important component of successful education for all students. In the following, I describe how North Creek Elementary School has initiated several outreach programs targeting new Asian families in an effort to improve understandings of cultural diversity within the school community.

### *Outreach Programs*

To “bridge the gaps and embrace the change,” according to Ms. Smith, the assistant principal (Interview, 2/27/2008), North Creek Elementary School planned and implemented several outreach programs: an International PTA committee, a *Get Smart about Culture* program, the North Creek 3.0 Committee, and an Adult ESL course. In the 2008-2009 school year, the school also planned to create a Korean English bilingual liaison position, to be filled by a Korean American paraprofessional who would perform as an interlocutor between Korean families and the school. What follows is a brief overview of each program in chronological order.

*International PTA committee.*

Since December 2005, the school has operated an international PTA committee independent of the school's regular PTA organization. The international PTA committee was initiated by two European American parents who served on the PTA board in an attempt to provide a welcoming place for international parents. Mrs. McGraw, the chair, explained the purpose of the committee:

[The international PTA committee is] friendly circles of people. ... If a newspaper says, "Please help the school," you might, you might not. But if somebody asks you individually, [you might help]. So that's how the international committee kept growing because we got together and we didn't put demands on anyone. We said, "We just want to get to know each other, and next time we meet, we will have coffee again or tea, please invite your friends." (Interview, 2/20/2008)

In 2008, 57 members from 15 different countries were affiliated with the international PTA committee, and five of the 12 Korean parents in this study belonged to the committee.

*Get Smart about Culture program.*

The Get Smart about Culture program was proposed by the international PTA committee when the committee started in December 2005. The program consists of parent presentations about world cultures; parent volunteers, recruited by the international PTA committee, come to the classrooms and provide a variety of instructional activities that help the students understand different world cultures. Ms. Smith, the assistant principal, explained the threefold benefits of the program: "[The program] helps teachers, the kids, and the parents. The parents involved are developing their leadership, teaching in the classrooms; and the teachers can be in their classrooms and they're learning also" (Interview, 2/27/2008). In fact, the number of parent

volunteers who participate in the program has been significantly increasing; according to the principal, approximately 100 parents were signed up for the Get Smart About Culture program at the time of the study, an increase of over 300% from the previous year.

*North Creek 3.0 committee.*

In spring 2006, the North Creek 3.0 committee was formed among the school staff, including the principal and a business consultant who was a parent at the school. A book, *The World is Flat*, by Thomas Friedman (2005), served as the underlying guidance for the direction of the committee, which aimed to help the children prepare for successful participation in a global world. Thomas Friedman calls the present day, when individuals and small groups globalize via the Internet, “Globalization 3.0,” following countries (Globalization 1.0) and companies (Globalization 2.0). The staff and the principal called themselves “North Creek 3.0” and began work on defining the future of their own school community. The principal explained the purposes of the committee: “You can look at it as a problem, or you can look at it as an opportunity” (Interview, 11/13/2007). To address the opportunities of a global future and the challenges of a global school environment, the 3.0 committee identified three areas of focus: (a) learning about the values of different cultures; (b) improving parent-teacher communication; and (c) celebrating and teaching more about American culture.

While the three major areas had been suggested through the committee meetings, the ultimate goal of the committee was to build authentic relationships between culturally diverse families and the school staff. For example, the committee invited different groups of Asian parents — Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese, and Indian — to lunch with groups of the teachers affiliated with the North Creek 3.0 committee. Each group of three or four teachers was assigned to meet with the parents from a specific national group in a local restaurant on a weekday. Ms.

Kimble, the pre-K teacher who met with a group of Korean parents, explained how such informal conversations with parents had helped the teachers improve their awareness of cultural diversity:

We came back to school and shared stories with our colleagues, “Listen to what I learned!” It is passed on and then you get this, “Ok, that’s why they do that.” When the children call us “teacher” and we say, “What’s my name? I’m not a teacher, you’re not a boy.” But they say that in Korea and China [because] you don’t respect them if you call their names. You call them by “teacher.” ... Just simple little things like that. And I think the more we understand, the easier it is to communicate and to understand the differences we are able to find. (Interview, 2/26/2008)

The North Creek 3.0 committee has held one or two meetings during each academic year and has played a leading role in guiding the school’s outreach initiatives.

*Adult ESL course.*

The adult ESL course was a weekly one-hour conversation-based program held for ten weeks each semester. The program started in spring 2006, and since then Mrs. Baldwin, a European American parent who had been a former elementary teacher, has taught the course in a trailer at the school. She explained that the number of course enrollment was 10, and seven to eight mothers attended regularly (Personal communication, 12/04/2007). Among the 10 mothers, eight were Koreans, in addition to one Russian and one Indian mother.<sup>8</sup> Since the class meetings were held immediately after school hours, around 2:30 p.m., no fathers enrolled in the program.

According to Mrs. Baldwin, the essential goal of the program is to promote parents’ confidence in communication so that it “makes it easier for them to volunteer in the classroom, to volunteer doing anything” (Interview, 2/26/2008). Newspapers and a book about American

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<sup>8</sup> When I observed the class, one Indian and four Korean mothers were in attendance.

cultural customs were used as the reading materials for the class, but the focus of the course was to provide parents with opportunities to speak English and improve their knowledge about American school systems. Eunjung, a long-term Korean participant in the adult ESL program, explained her reason for taking the course: “If you want to send a letter to the teacher or discuss something about the school, this course is perfect for getting information about how to do that. It makes easier for me to approach teachers and ask questions” (Interview, 3/21/2008). Because the class was small, the parents developed mutual acquaintances over time, which provided additional information channels beyond the instructor.

*Korean English bilingual liaison.*

In order to effectively communicate with non-English speaking parents, specifically Korean parents, the school has planned to provide a Korean-English bilingual liaison in the 2008-2009 school year. Jamie, the Korean American paraprofessional at the school, will be appointed as a bilingual liaison,<sup>9</sup> From the beginning of her work at North Creek Elementary School, Jamie provided occasional translation services for parent conferences or meetings, and many teachers consulted with her to improve their awareness about Korean culture. Revealing a desire to help Korean families in need of a bilingual liaison, Jamie described her translation experiences for Korean families whose children were not successfully adjusting to the school:

Most parents I translated for . . . didn’t speak English. They were busy working, so they could not help with their child’s schoolwork. They were struggling and became frustrated because their child had difficulty in keeping up with other students, but they didn’t know what to do. As a Korean teacher at the school, I want to help those parents so that they can get through these difficult situations. (Interview, 4/6/2008)

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<sup>9</sup> Jamie began her work as a bilingual liaison in August 2008, after data collection for this study. There was no liaison for other ethnic groups.

While the school was able to access groups of parent volunteers<sup>10</sup> and the county translator for translation services, Jamie was considered a valuable resource for the school staff in connecting with Korean parents, particularly with newcomers who had little knowledge about the school system. The school also expected that the bilingual liaison could reach out to the broader Asian community, re-igniting volunteerism among parents who tended to participate less actively in the school affairs.

In summary, increasing Asian populations at North Creek Elementary School had changed the homogeneous racial discourse in the school community, prompting the school to create several initiatives to cope with this demographic transition. Korean families, who comprised approximately 11% of the total student population of the school, had contributed to creating this new context.

#### Korean Parents' Involvement in the School

I truly believe and notice with Korean parents, they value our opinions, they value education, and they want the best for their children. They do want to be involved, but maybe they don't know how to get involved, whether it's they don't know how or the language. ... They know that we have their children, their best interests at heart, I really believe that. (Interview with Ms. Smith, the assistant principal, 2/27/2008)

Ms. Smith expressed her concern over the Korean parents' lack of involvement in school activities. She appreciated that the Korean parents valued education and respected the school's authority, but perceived existing gaps between the Korean parents and the school that may have been attributable to language and cultural differences. While several Korean parents, such as Eunjoo, actively participated in the classroom and school activities, few Koreans served on the

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<sup>10</sup> The school ceased to recruit parent volunteers for translation services after hiring the bilingual liaison.

PTA board, in contrast to the five to six Indian and Chinese parents, respectively, among over 55 positions listed on the board at the time of this study.<sup>11</sup>

As addressed in the assistant principal's statement, the tendency toward "passive" participation among immigrant parents has been largely conceived as a phenomenon rooted in structural and cultural barriers between families and schools. Immigrant parents' limited knowledge and understanding of school practices restrain them from building collaborative family-school relationships (Perreira et al., 2006; Ramirez, 2003), and their cultural capital is devalued by institutional agents (Ceja, 2006; Chin & Phillips, 2004). Cultural differences regarding the notion of parental involvement impede Asian immigrant parents' participation in school affairs (Lee, 2005) and even cause them to compete with mainstream teachers by exercising counteractive involvement at home (Li, 2006). Immigrant parents tend to be positioned on the margin, maintaining a marked distance between home and school (Carreón et al., 2005).

In the following sections, I provide a description of the Korean families' relationships with the school by unpacking how historical and cultural situations have influenced the ways Korean parents have positioned themselves within the school. I also identify major impediments to participation among the Korean immigrant parents in this study.

### *Family-School Relationships*

Lareau (2002) presents a cultural model of childrearing practice based on social class. According to this model, middle-class parents engage in "concerted cultivation" by fostering and accessing their child's individual abilities and opinions, and actively intervene in school on the child's behalf. Working-class and poor parents, on the contrary, are involved in the

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<sup>11</sup> A Korean American parent who was second generation joined the PTA board in spring 2008.

“accomplishment of natural growth,” providing caring, safe conditions for their child’s own growth, but depending on institutions with a sense of powerlessness and frustration (p. 753).

The Korean immigrant parents in this study were middle-class parents who invested intensively in their children’s education. Their length of residence in the United States varied from six months to 27 years. Eight parents possessed citizenship and three were in the process of becoming permanent residents. One parent was a dependent of a resident alien who had a representative visa. Despite having parenting practices congruent with those of European American middle-class parents at home, the Korean parents interacted with the school staff in ways similar to working-class and poor parents as described by Laureau (2002). This characterizes a separation between home and school that is rooted in Korean cultural practices.

In the East Asian culture from which the parents came, a school tends to represent an authoritative, separate space marked by a clear boundary between home and school (Walsh, 2002). The Confucian tradition of obedience to authority, which heavily permeates the fabric of Korean society (Schneider & Lee, 1990) and is still shared by many Korean immigrants, persisted in the ways in which the Korean parents interacted with teachers and administrators at North Creek Elementary school. The school staff and European American parents in this study generally portrayed Korean parents as “respectful,” “supportive,” and “valuing education” while pointing out Korean parents as being reserved and self-conscious in their ways of interacting.

More specifically, however, the teachers in this study perceived Korean parents’ conformity to school authority and their humility differently. Ms. Thomson, the ESOL teacher who was a Russian American, considered Korean parents akin to Russian parents: “They want to be nice to the teacher, they want to please the teacher, the teacher for them as well as for their kids” (Interview, 2/20/2008). Similarly, Ms. Kimble, the pre-K teacher, described her

experiences with Korean parents in a positive way: “If there’s a problem with the child, they deal with it. They don’t make excuses, like some parents do: ‘Um, he did that because’ or ‘No, he never did that before’” (Interview, 2/26/2008). Ms. Wobble, the fifth grade teacher, on the contrary, expressed her difficulty in communicating with Korean parents because “it’s a very one-sided conversation” (Interview, 2/20/2008). In her conferences with parents, she often encountered Korean parents who did not understand what she was saying but kept smiling without requesting any clarification.

Based on Lareau’s model (2002), some parents who make excuses, like those mentioned by Ms. Kimble, appear to be middle-class parents who tend to take more initiative and exert more pressure on teachers. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) portrayed the different attitudes toward schools according to parental background:

At one end of the spectrum are privileged parents who bring the power of their money, their status, and their influence to school with their children. Their expectations are high, their demands rigorous, and their sense of entitlement assumed. At the other end are poor parents, often parents of color or newly arrived immigrants, who feel uncomfortable coming to school or approaching their child’s teacher, who have no idea how to negotiate the institutional bureaucracy, and who tend to see the teacher as the ultimate authority and rarely question her judgment. (p. 109)

Indeed, three European American parents in this study frequently demonstrated their sense of entitlement to intervene in their child’s education and monitored pedagogical practices by participating in classroom activities. For instance, Mrs. Baldwin, a mother of three boys in 5<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 1<sup>st</sup> grades, revealed her confidence in initiating involvement: “Show your willingness to help at the very beginning. I also let the teacher know that you are an involved parent and then,

you're not going to just sit back and watch and wait" (Interview, 3/5/2008). Similarly, Mrs. Cooper, a co-president of the PTA board whose children were in 5<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> grades, hoped to be more involved in the classroom activities after completing two years of her official term because most of the PTA activities are "more behind the scene, they [her children] don't see me in the classroom" (Interview, 2/20/2008).

Contrary to these European American parents, Myungsook, a former music teacher in Korea before she emigrated to the United States, seldom attempted to influence her children's school experiences. Although she had taught professionally in the past, she rarely challenged teachers' pedagogical actions, showing a great amount of respect to them: "I ask questions, but do not oppose their opinions. All of the teachers are very nice and give me a lot of advice. And the things they tell me are really my child's weaknesses" (Interview, 4/16/2008). She had been surprised by American parents' overt demands for their child to be favored when she had volunteered for a classroom party, and came to realize the different notions of parent involvement in American schools:

This may be a kind of American way of parental involvement. ... Volunteer mothers' children came forward and gave the teacher flowers and gifts one by one. "Thank you," the teacher hugged each of the volunteer mothers' children. ... I've never seen anything like it before. Ah! American mothers make their children stand out very openly, and they may do this other times when I am not in the classroom (Interview, 2/15/2008).

In addition to actual experiences with American schools, individual Korean parents' levels of acculturation influenced their interactions with the school, which represent the extent of their assimilation into the host culture. Eunjoo, for example, with a Master's degree from an American institution and a high level of English proficiency, had comfortable relationships with

teachers and actively participated in classroom and school volunteering. She considered teachers to be like friends and occasionally socialized with them outside the school. When her perspectives were different from those of the teachers, she directly questioned them or consulted with other parents, mostly European Americans, in order to resolve conflict situations. Her interventions were nonetheless bounded in Asian cultural ways of family-school interactions; teachers considered her “quiet, humble, sweet,” and Jamie, the Korean American kindergarten paraprofessional, described her as “a Korean lady” with a reserved and courteous demeanor similar to other Korean parents (Interview, 4/6/2008).

In short, in terms of a culturally legitimated family-school relationships, beliefs held by the Korean immigrant parents in this study appeared to differ from those of European American parents. Utilizing Bourdieu’s (1994/1998) perspective, the Korean parents possessed habitus dissimilar from the habitus of the school as characterized by middle-class, family-school partnerships. While the Korean parents in this study viewed American education positively and trusted the authorities of the school, the Eastern Asian heritage of separation between home and school tends to exacerbate those asymmetric power relations between the Korean parents and the school which already exist in the school-parents dyad (Fine, 1993).

### *Impediments to Involvement*

In addition to cultural differences in parental positioning vis-à-vis the school, successful participation was challenging for the Korean parents in this study, which is consistent with other reports in Korean immigrant studies (Kim & Greene; Sohn & Wang, 2006). Although the parents were highly educated and willing to be involved in their children’s education, traditional forms of participation in American schools, such as attending conferences and volunteering in the classroom and at school events, tended to be difficult for immigrant parents. Particularly, Lee

(2005) recognized both structural and cultural barriers to participation among groups of Korean American parents in a Korean English two-way immersion program: (a) structural barriers include communicative competence issues such as lack of linguistic knowledge and confidence, time conflicts, and limited institutional support; (b) cultural barriers involve different norms and values of parental participation and respect for authority.

The Korean immigrant parents in this study reported similar structural barriers to participation in the school. Eunmi, who had two daughters in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades, spoke of the difficulty that resulted from her limited knowledge about educational activities in the school:

For example, when there was a Christmas party in the classroom. ... We are not familiar with the kinds of games played at the party because we did not grow up in this culture.

It's much easier for Americans to prepare a Christmas party because that's the way they live. (Interview, 2/27/2008).

She said that in her second daughter's classroom, where Asian Americans comprised 11 of the 17 students, a European American mother working full time had to perform the role of room mother (who hosts the classroom parties) because no Asian parents volunteered to do it. Another Korean parent, Eunjung, whose active participation had been acknowledged by the school staff, expressed her lasting anxiety over visiting the school even after 12 years of residence in the United States: "Once I plan to go to the school, I become nervous. What if I smell bad? I actually tried not to cook before going to the school. ... Seriously, I'm worried that I would stink" (Interview, 12/04/2007). While the Korean parents in this study spoke English well enough to communicate with the teachers and administrators, most of them, except for the parents who are studying or have studied in the United States, often encountered language barriers in their interactions with Americans, contributing to their hesitation to participate.

Because many Korean parents in this study were housewives,<sup>12</sup> the issue of time conflict was not a main obstacle to their participation in the school. Nonetheless, for full time working parents, involvement in their children's education might be a challenging task. Jeeyung, who had worked full-time before she moved to Jackson, remembered how often she was not able to read books to her daughter due to her busy schedule. While she was attending a technical college in order to gain a credential, her kindergartner daughter used to ask her to read storybooks:

My daughter loved to read books, but I had so many things to do after my class, such as homework, preparing for tests. ... I didn't finish preparing for class until three or four o'clock in the afternoon, when my daughter would ask me again, "Mom! [Please read books to me.]" I would say, "Ok, just a minute." I couldn't read books to her. (Interview, 12/16/2007)

At the time of this study, her daughter was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and Jeeyung stayed at home instead of working. With a bitter smile, she shared: "The time when my child asked me to read books was such a fleeting moment. She never asks me to read books to her these days" (Interview, 12/16/2007).

Besides structural barriers, the cultural barriers identified by Lee's (2005) study were also evident in this study. As described in the earlier section, the Korean parents tended to consider the school as an authoritative place, rarely questioning instructional practices. Even when they disagreed with the teachers, the Korean parents seldom confronted the teacher's decision or resorted to alternative actions as middle-class European American parents do.

In fact, the school staff pointed out certain cultural disparities between Korean families and the school in determining the extent to which adults should supervise children. Last year, for example, several Korean families were called by social workers through the school because of

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<sup>12</sup> Among 12 parents, three worked full time and two had short-hour part-time jobs.

their negligence in child supervision. The Korean families had been in their ministerial training through a Korean church. Because they occasionally went on mission trips for a long time, the families had established reciprocal relationships among themselves for baby-sitting services. The school, however, was not aware of this arrangement among the Korean families and was concerned about being unable to contact a parent who had left home on a mission trip with the church. Ms. Smith, the assistant principal, described the incident from her point of view:

Oftentimes these parents ... they left the area and left their kids in the care of somebody who we are not aware of. ... I don't think ever, the parent has a wish, to say, 'I'm going to go away from school and I don't care.' I do think that they may not understand what the expectation here is, what the law here is about supervision and monitoring the children. (Interview, 2/27/2008)

When this problem occurred, Jamie, the Korean paraprofessional who would become the bilingual liaison, provided translation service for the Korean parents. Later in our interview, she told me how American teachers were surprised by her explanation of Korean childrearing practices where children were encouraged to behave independently without adult supervision from an early age: "They [teachers] said, 'what if there is a fire in the house, what if somebody comes in, what if they get lost?' They were really concerned because they couldn't believe a child would be left unsupervised here" (Interview, 1/27/2008).

Jamie also recognized the different practices of father involvement among Korean families in the school. Although a differentiated gender role between men and women has been noted in American society (Griffith & Smith, 2005), Korean fathers often stand apart from their children's education. She noticed that few Korean fathers came to the school to volunteer, whereas many American fathers actively participated in school activities, such as helping with

set up for school events. Not hiding her disappointment, Jamie said: “I know some fathers have time to help ... but they never show up ... I guess fathers are shy than mothers” (Interview, 1/27/2008).

Indeed, the participation of Korean fathers in school activities was rarely observed during my fieldwork. Eunjung, the Korean mother who actively participated in school events and activities, attributed such passive participation of Korean fathers to the traditional patterns of a patriarchal family system in Korean culture: “My husband never does volunteering, that’s my job. He doesn’t believe that he should be involved in the school. Education matters are all my responsibility. This is the way Korean people think” (Interview, 2/1/2008). Eunjung’s husband attended school events such as family nights infrequently, and she did not push him to do more because she thought her husband was too stressed by his work. David, a Korean father who owned a wholesale business selling hair extensions, however, put much effort into participating in school affairs. Since his job schedule was relatively flexible, David was able to attend his son’s extracurricular activities, such as orchestra performances and puppet shows. David’s active involvement may be an exception; his wife was a Chinese from mainland China and Mandarin, not Korean, was spoken in his home.

As seen above, the Korean immigrant parents in this study faced certain impediments to active participation. Nonetheless, they knew American schools expected parents to be partners and be involved in schools. Next, I describe how groups of Korean mothers initiated the Korean mothers’ meeting as a means to improve their efficacy in participation.

#### Korean Mothers’ Meeting

The commonly shared challenges facing active involvement motivated some Korean parents to pursue collective agency through ethnic networking. In spring 2006, a group of

Korean parents who had become acquaintances through an international school event voluntarily organized a Korean mothers' meeting. This meeting aimed to encourage Korean parents to participate in school activities through sharing information about school affairs and volunteering. Eunjung and Myungsook played major roles in initiating the meeting; from the beginning, Eunjung had led the meeting as a representative, with Myungsook supporting her leadership. Another Korean mother, Eunjoo, had played the interlocutor role between the Korean mothers' meeting and North Creek Elementary School, such as contacting the school administration or the PTA board. Eunjung described how she and some Korean mothers started the Korean meeting two years ago:

I first saw a Korean mothers' meeting when I lived in Chicago. Because my children were babies at that time, I was not much interested in that meeting. Later, I heard another Korean meeting going well in a nearby city. Then, I thought, 'Wow, how wonderful it would be if we had such a Korean meeting.' ... So I called some Korean mothers, and said, "Let's have coffee together." Probably six or seven mothers got together the first time and started the Korean mothers' meeting, which met from then on. (Interview, 12/4/2007)

Since then, the meeting has taken place monthly or bimonthly.<sup>13</sup> The meeting directory listed approximately 30 names with contact information, but on average 10-12 Korean mothers attended meetings during this study. In most cases, they met on Wednesday mornings around 10 o'clock. The meeting was hosted at various participants' houses at the beginning, but soon moved to places other than homes due to a need for parking space. At the time of this study, a neighborhood bakery owned by a Korean, located in a commercial area with spacious parking lots, was used. The meetings were announced through the school newsletters, and Eunjung, the

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<sup>13</sup> The Korean mothers' meeting was not held during the school's vacation months.

leader of the meeting, made individual phone calls to solicit the members' participation several days before the meeting. A ten dollar fee was requested at each meeting from each attendee, and these revenues were spent on volunteering events (e.g., Treat for Teachers, Taste of North Creek) or donations to the school.

The meetings usually spanned two hours. The first half of the meeting was spent on the leader's briefing about upcoming school activities and invitations to volunteering opportunities. Since the Korean mothers' meeting began, Eunjung had documented the minutes of each meeting, including major topics, volunteer lists, and the names of the attendees. The rest of the meeting appeared to be social conversations among Korean mothers. One or two mothers typically left after Eunjung's briefing, while others stayed longer and conversed with each other on various topics, such as after school programs or parenting strategies. Most of the attendees did not have jobs, and some were acquainted with each other through church.

In particular, the meetings focused on helping new members adjust to the school system. New members tended to be welcomed by parents with children in similar grades and were able to gain access to various information and knowledge about the school activities and educational programs. Nayun, a new member in her second year of living in the United States, explained her motivation for attending the Korean mothers' meeting:

Through the meeting, I get specific information about the school volunteer opportunities and work that couldn't be done by me alone. Some mothers know more about the school because they've been in the school for years. They are very helpful to me. I like this meeting because we can volunteer and help each other. (Interview, 12/14/2007)

In addition to the Korean meeting, there was another meeting organized by a group of Taiwanese mothers in North Creek Elementary School. It was a weekly book club where the

mothers read and discussed selected books. A Taiwanese mother who served on the PTA board led the meeting. Unlike the Korean mothers' meeting, information for the Taiwanese book club was not posted in the school newsletters; none of the Korean parents in this study were aware of its existence. The Korean and Taiwanese meetings have operated independently without any connection or interchangeable relationships in their functions.

### Chapter Conclusion

The Korean immigrant parents in this study are middle-class parents who invest intensively in their children's education. However, their cultural values differ from those of the mainstream middle-class European American parents. They respect and trust the school authority. They have a notion that home and school are separate spaces. Moreover, traditional American forms of participation are challenging for many Korean parents.

At North Creek Elementary School, parents play supplementary roles in operating school functions. The recent increase of Asian populations instigated several outreach programs to increase parent involvement in the school. In spring 2006, a group of Korean parents organized a Korean mothers' meeting in order to improve individual parents' active involvement in the school. This meeting is an avenue for collective participation through ethnic networking.

In the next chapter, I analyze the involvement experiences of 12 Korean parents based on their levels of participation and capital possession. The analysis reveals how the parents perceive and engage with ethnic networking in their processes of school participation.

## CHAPTER 5

### PARENTAL PARTICIPATION AS AN INTERACTIVE PROCESS

Studies on parental involvement have identified structural and cultural barriers to immigrant families' collaborative relationships with schools. Parents whose cultural or linguistic background differs from that of the school tend to possess less of the cultural capital valued by the school, thereby reducing their ability to obtain social capital conducive to better educational outcomes for their children (Ceja, 2006; Chin & Phillips, 2004; Valdés, 1996). Incongruence in defining normative parental involvement contributes to the constrained ownerships of immigrant parents within the legitimate discourses of parent participation in school functions, often nullifying their activated social capital (Li, 2006).

These explanations of structural and cultural disparities between families and schools are useful but polarizing, putting immigrant parents on one end and schools on the other of a continuum of school participation. By contrast, Barton and her colleagues (2004) proposed the ecologies of parental engagement (EPE) framework, which defines the process of parental involvement as "the mediation between space and capital by parents in relation to others in school settings" (p. 6). This framework posits parents as both "authors" and "agents," describing a dynamic, interactive process between parents and school actors.

Based on the EPE framework, this chapter highlights the interactive processes of parent participation among 12 Korean parents, mediated between the ethnic community and the social capital embedded in school contexts. The concept of social capital can be an effective means for examining group differences in the process of parent involvement by illuminating the operating

mechanism embedded in social interactions between and within the groups. I conceptualize the social capital inherent in social relations among the Korean parents as “collective resources” by virtue of the parents’ participation in groups (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin, 2001) through either ethnic or cross-racial networking. The analytic framework used to understand the ways in which individual parents interact with various school actors was discussed in Chapter 3 (see Figure 3.1).

In this chapter, the participation experiences of 12 Korean parents are categorized as four types of interaction: cultural broker, solo navigator, team worker, and outsider. Based on level of participation and capital possession, I divided the cases of Korean parents into nine categories (see Table 3.3. in Chapter 3), then reconstructed them into four types of interaction. Each type of interaction represents the characteristic involvement commonly authored by the group of parents. Table 5.1 below shows the list of parents and involvement characteristics by interaction type.

Table 5.1

*Summary of Types of Interaction*

Parent	Types of interaction	Characteristic of involvement
Diane Eunjoo Jamie	Cultural broker	Active level of school participation Access to social capital outside the ethnic network
David Eunmi Monica	Solo navigator	Moderate level of school participation Access to social capital outside the ethnic network
Eunjung Junghee Myungsook Nayun	Team worker	Active or moderate level of school participation Access to social capital through the ethnic network
Hyunjoo Jeeyung	Outsider	Low level of school participation Difficulty with access to social capital

### Cultural Broker: Diane, Eunjoo, and Jamie

The three parents in this category were in their late 30s to early 40s and had lived in the United States for more than 15 years. Diane came to the United States during her junior year of middle school when her family immigrated to the country. After graduating from a university, she worked as a marketing trainer for a computer marketing company where her American husband also worked as a programmer. She had two daughters, one in fifth grade and another in kindergarten. After her second child was born, she stopped working full time, but continued to work part time at the same company, albeit infrequently.

Eunjoo earned her Master's degree from an American school and later immigrated to the United States with her husband, a residential manager of a Korean company branch in the States. Her husband earned his doctorate in the United States and owned a restaurant at the time of this study. Eunjo had two children, one in third grade and another in sixth, who had graduated from North Creek Elementary School.

Like Diane, Jamie came to the United States with her family when she was in middle school. Jamie had earned her Bachelor's degree and had been an elementary school teacher for five years. She stayed at home for a while and had resumed her teaching job two years before the study began. She was a single mother, working at North Creek Elementary School as a kindergarten paraprofessional. Her only daughter was in first grade at the same school.

#### *Taking Participation for Granted*

These three parents' participation histories were framed by naturally evolving experiences as their children were growing up. They attended parent-teacher conferences, school events, and classroom activities, in addition to volunteering for various school affairs, and considered school engagement a part of their parental roles. As soon as their children enrolled in

kindergarten, they became immediately involved in their children's schooling, taking their participation for granted. Since these three parents spoke English fluently, difficulty with the language was not a barrier to their involvement; instead, their levels of participation mainly depended on the amount of spare time they had outside their work. Diane adjusted her work schedule according to her two children's school activities and eventually decided to work at home. As a full time housewife, Eunjoo showed the highest level of participation among the three, attending various volunteer activities in the school two or three days a week. Being unable to attend classroom activities, Jamie frequently dropped by her daughter's classroom after her teaching hours in order to converse informally with the classroom teacher.

In addition to participating actively in school, in an attempt to improve their children's academic performance the three parents engaged in various involvement practices at home. They organized and monitored their children's time, helping with homework, discussing school matters, and providing the children with a variety of extracurricular activities such as music, sports, scouts, and so on. Specifically, their experiences with American schooling and their English proficiency enabled them to acquire cultural capital congruent with that valued by most American schools. For instance, Jamie taught basic arithmetic and literacy skills to her daughter by herself at home. When her daughter took a test for kindergarten readiness, her level of preparedness surprised the kindergarten teacher. Jamie proudly recollected: "I asked the teacher how well my daughter did. She smiled at me and said, 'Your daughter was already ready for school. She told me, 'my mom taught all these things, easy, easy'''" (Interview, 1/27/2008).

Compared to Diane and Jamie, Eunjoo's knowledge about American schools was relatively limited. She earned her Master's degree at an American university, yet had not experienced American schooling as much as Diane and Jamie had. Instead, Eunjoo adopted a

different strategy to gain cultural capital conducive to better academic achievement for her two children. She gained first-hand knowledge of how the school worked by observing various instructional activities while volunteering in the classroom. She helped the classroom teachers by participating in Accelerated Reader (AR) and Science Force programs offered in the classroom for several years. She also provided services in the teacher workroom by preparing instructional materials requested by teachers. Volunteering was a learning strategy that allowed Eunjoo to learn curricular and pedagogical strategies as implemented by the school, thereby providing herself with capital that she needed to help her children's academic performance.

In terms of family-school relationships, the three parents mirrored many characteristics of the middle-class European American parents in this study. They maintained positive relationships with teachers by showing their willingness to support them, and they carefully monitored the pedagogical practices employed by the teachers. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the ways the three parents interacted with teachers nonetheless reflected their levels of Americanization. Ms. Wobble, the fifth grade teacher of Diane's first daughter, perceived Diane as different from other Korean parents: "I think she's kind of an American Korean. ... Because she is, other parents aren't like that. They're very much in their Korean community" (Interview, 2/20/2008). Ms. Wobble, astonished by the fact that Diane still sustained her Korean heritage despite her long-term residence in the United States, yet pointed out Diane's American characteristics, which rendered her distinguishable from many Korean parents. In contrast, Eunjoo revealed attitudes specific to Korean culture in her social interactions — for example, respect for authority — more than Diane and Jamie did. From a teacher's perspective, Jamie described Eunjoo as a Korean parent who was very respectful of the school staff.

Then, what does it mean to be an “Americanized Korean?” How does this dual identity affect the three parents’ social relationships in and outside their ethnic group? How does the social capital possessed by the three parents position them within the context of North Creek Elementary School?

### *Living in Dual Cultures*

The amount of social capital generated from social relationships tends to be subject to immigrant parents’ memberships in dominant social groups. To some extent, access to social networks outside immediate families or the ethnic group demonstrates the network orientation of immigrant parents in that it entails “purposeful actions” and “investment” on the part of individual parents (Lin, 2001). The three Korean immigrant parents had assimilated into American ways of living in many aspects of their lives. The language spoken at home can be an indicator of the extent to which immigrant families culturally assimilate into the host society. In the case of the three parents, English was the main language spoken in their home, particularly in communicating with their children. While the three parents maintained the ability to speak the Korean language, their children tended to have difficulty in speaking, reading, and writing it.

By virtue of her interracial marriage, among the three parents Diane appeared to have access to the most resource-rich networks in the mainstream society. Indeed, she had rarely had contact with Koreans except for her family and relatives since she started college. Because she spoke English without an accent, many Americans and Koreans tended to assume that she had been born in the United States and were surprised by her ability to speak the Korean language. Nonetheless, Diane felt less confident in her bilingual ability and explained her sense of ambiguous identity in daily interactions:

I'm bilingual, but can't speak perfect Korean or perfect English. I feel as though I'm straddling a fence. Well, I don't have any problems communicating with people in English, but in a sense, I'm not good enough in either of them. (Interview, 1/24/2008)

Diane strived to teach her two daughters about their Korean heritage, including the Korean language. While English was spoken exclusively in her home, her daughters were able to speak Korean somewhat because they regularly attended a Korean church with which Diane's parents were affiliated. They also went to a Korean heritage school on Saturdays in order to learn Korean culture and literacy. Diane wanted her two daughters to be aware of their half-Korean roots, attempting to increase their ethnic pride. Because her two children were biracial, Diane was concerned about a possible identity crisis during their adolescence, yet sustained her optimistic aspirations about their futures: "I worried before, and because of that many Koreans tend to oppose to marriage with Americans. But, I don't feel many problems these days because we are becoming more and more multicultural. ... I hope" (Interview, 1/24/2008).

In terms of educational perspectives, Diane considered herself very similar to traditional Korean parents who focus on their children's educational success. She did not permit her two daughters to get less than a grade of "A," pushing them to become professionals and provide care for her in her old age. Although Diane had many American friends and was easily able to gain access to resource networks in the mainstream society, she nevertheless desired to forge social ties with Korean groups through her association with the Korean mothers' meeting.

In the case of Eunjoo, her graduate study in the United States and residential conditions appeared to accelerate her relatively rapid assimilation into American society. Before settling in the city of Jackson, her family moved around among several states where there were few Koreans in either communities or schools. Most of her neighbors were Americans and her

children seldom related to Korean friends. Her oldest son could read and write Korean to some extent, yet her daughter could not read Korean and preferred to speak English instead. Eunjoo usually communicated with them in English within and outside the home.

Compared to Diane, Eunjoo established extensive social networks with groups of Korean parents through her active involvement in school activities. Nonetheless, she often felt offended by the excessive focus on academic performance among Korean parents, such as whether their children would qualify for the TAG program. Her educational expectations centered on nurturing potentials tailored to the individual child's characteristics, providing various opportunities in order to identify the child's aptitudes. She explained her perspective on education:

I think academic success depends on an individual's ability. ... My son is not a straight A student. He's very active and easily off task. I've pushed him for many years, but now I think okay, I accept that. Then, my son said, "I want to study hard to make you happy because you were so nice to me." (Personal communication, 11/13/2008)

Due to such disparity in educational expectations, she tended not to relate to recent Korean immigrant parents, including those associated with the Korean mothers' meeting. She preferred to be with American or other Asian parents rather than Korean parents while participating in school events or volunteering. She valued the individual-focused American ways of living and tended to develop extensive social networks beyond her intimate circle of relationships.

Nonetheless, she had several close Korean friends who shared commonalities with her, such as age and study experiences in the United States. She described her sense of collegiality with these parents: "When I talk to them, I feel connected, but some other Korean mothers, even if they've lived here for a long time, still have perspectives very different from mine because they came here following their husbands" (Interview, 1/11/2008).

In the case of Jamie, her daughter knew only a few Korean words, such as *umma* (Mommy), *kogi* (meat), and *ne* (yes). Two years prior to this study, Jamie tried to teach her daughter the Korean language by enrolling her in a Korean heritage school on weekends. However, she encountered strong resistance from her daughter and eventually decided not to push her anymore. Jamie doubted the importance of acquiring the Korean language compared to other foreign languages in the American context because she had not benefited from her ability to speak Korean during her 28 years of immigrant life. Despite her fluent English, Jamie often felt that American parents looked down on her while she was working at school as a teacher:

I am an Asian female and of course have an accent. I couldn't speak perfect English as other Americans do, so it's difficult. And the way people perceive me, "Oh, she's Asian. Her English is not perfect." I can feel it when they see me in that way; then my self-confidence goes down. I can feel it, though people don't say anything to me. (Interview, 4/6/2008)

Jamie hoped her daughter would not be discriminated against because of her racial background when she grows up. Pointing out that most Americans cannot speak languages other than English, Jamie wishfully spoke of her desire to minimize her daughter's minority disadvantages:

We live in the United States. We came to the United States to live, and we will live here until we die. I want my daughter to be 100% American. ... Why do we have to know the Korean language anyway? (Interview, 4/6/2008)

Consistent with her preference for English, Jamie tended to associate with American friends, mostly with fellow teachers. She had a few Korean friends living in the neighborhood, yet avoided forging close relationships with them due to the differences between her and other Koreans. After attending social gatherings with them, Jamie often felt a void and regretted

wasting her time on gossip instead of productive discussion. Moreover, her understanding of the Korean language was relatively limited, constraining her full engagement in conversations. Although she felt refreshed after being with her own ethnic group, Jamie preferred to spend her free time with her only daughter, particularly after she became a single mother.

### *Making a Link*

The social capital possessed by the three parents affected their positioning within the context of North Creek Elementary School. Their high level of participation and English proficiency enabled them to access institutional resources and benefit from associated social networks; at the same time, their advantageous social positions activated “linking” capital that provided connections between Korean parents and school actors in the process of parent participation (Woolcock, 2001).

In my conversation with the three parents, they described how participation experiences had beneficially expanded their social networks within the school, including other parents and the school staff. As immigrants, the three parents had to be pioneers for their space and networks in the host society (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). Participation practices provided them with an avenue of social networking associated with North Creek Elementary School. Unlike Jamie, who had established relationships with her fellow teachers, Diane and Eunjoo had limited relationships with the school personnel but acknowledged that advantageous social capital was offered through their participation practices. Particularly, Eunjoo appreciated her friend-like relationships with many teachers over the years of her active involvement:

I could meet new people in many places, but they [teachers] are well educated, being in leadership positions in the United States. They never speak rudely and they teach children with love. Being friends with these people was such a blessing. (Interview, 1/11/2008)

Diane, on the other hand, spoke of her shyness in interacting with unfamiliar people and was gratified by her improved relationships with other parents, including both American and Korean parents. She tended to be hesitant to initiate conversations with new people and often felt uncomfortable attending school activities by herself. After becoming acquainted with several parents, Diane was able to rid herself of the feeling of being out of place during her participation and began to enjoy greeting other parents in the hallways.

Because of Diane's and Eunjoo's social capital associated with extensive networks involving the school actors, many Korean parents attended to the informational channel offered through them. Particularly, Diane felt strong empathy for recent immigrants and their hardships in developing an understanding of American schooling. She had encountered difficulty in adjusting to her new school when she immigrated to the United States during her teens, yet she was able to overcome obstacles with the aid of social and emotional support from her relatives and other Korean students. Through these personal experiences, she was keenly aware that newcomers were likely to feel powerless and marginalized within the school contexts due to their lack of knowledge and the language barrier. As a Korean/English bilingual, Diane hoped to help recent Korean immigrants better engage in the school by offering translation services and sharing educational information. While attending the Korean mothers' meeting, she frequently provided many Korean parents with consulting aids regarding educational involvement, from curricular information to communication strategies in contacting teachers. She saw the function of the Korean mothers' meeting positively and was gratified by her association with the Korean group: "Whenever I meet Korean parents at the school, I feel so good as a Korean. ... I really like this Korean mothers' meeting because everyone works hard; even though it's difficult, they are so wonderful" (Interview, 1/24/2008).

Eunjoo, however, appeared to be less willing to participate in the Korean mothers' meeting. As described earlier, she maintained a certain distance from Korean parents associated with the meeting. Despite a personal disconnection, Eunjoo played a crucial role in the function of the Korean mothers' meeting by offering volunteer information and contacting school personnel. She appreciated the school's efforts to reach out to Korean parents and felt obligated to repay those efforts in kind through her intermediary role linking the Korean mothers' meeting to the school. Indeed, the teachers in this study expressed their desire to utilize the social capital that active ethnic minority parents can bring into their ethnic communities. For example, Ms. Kimble, the pre-k teacher, emphasized the importance of Asian parents being in leadership positions: "If we have someone who is very involved, who is a Korean, Chinese or Indian, then they're going to go out into their communities and communicate clearly with them" (Interview, 2/26/2008). Although Eunjoo did not serve on the PTA board, her intimate relationship with the board members and the administrators was a valuable asset for both Korean parents and school personnel, especially for mothers affiliated with the Korean mothers' meeting.

Like Eunjoo, Jamie played an essential role in connecting Korean parents with the school. As a member of the teaching staff, she was a valuable resource for the teachers and administrators as the school witnessed an increase in students from Korea. Many teachers relied on Jamie to help them improve their knowledge of culture-specific practices among Korean families that they might not otherwise have understood. For instance, Jamie told of one occasion during recess on a windy day when several teachers were standing around watching students playing outside. Suddenly, they noticed one Korean kindergarten girl wearing a surgical-style mask. Concerned about the possibility of contagious diseases, the teachers became anxious about whether they should let the girl play with other children. Controlling her desire to laugh, Jamie

approached the girl, asking if she was sick. As Jamie expected, the girl was wearing her mask to keep warm during the windy weather, a practice typical among children on cold winter days in Korea. After listening to Jamie's explanation, the teachers were relieved and had a better understanding of Korean cultural practices.

Besides offering cultural knowledge, Jamie was actively involved in communicating with Korean parents as a translator when certain problems occurred. While working in the classroom, she was often called upon by administrators for translation services, especially to help newcomers who could not speak English. Fellow teachers also asked her advice or informal translation help in contacting the parents of Korean children in their classrooms. Showing her pride as a Korean English bilingual teacher, Jamie spoke of her rewarding service for Korean parents:

Several Korean parents told me they wished I had worked here for a long time. ... The fact that a Korean works as a teacher makes many Korean parents feel proud of themselves, making it easy if they have problems and giving them a person that they can depend on. (Interview, 4/6/2008)

In the 2008-2009 school year, Jamie will have a new position as a bilingual parent liaison at North Creek Elementary School, implying her key role in providing "linking" capital for both Korean parents and the school.

#### Solo Navigator: David, Eunmi, and Monica

The three parents in this category were in their early 40s to early 50s and had lived in the United States for 11 to 22 years. David was the only father participating in this study; he had a son in first grade and a daughter in kindergarten. He came to the United States for his Chinese wife's doctoral study and earned his Master's degree here. He ran his own small business, a

beauty supply wholesale enterprise targeting Korean retailers. David had been a webmaster for an American company before starting his own business.

Eunmi had two daughters, one in sixth grade and another in second grade; she held a Master's degree that she earned in Korea. She immigrated to the United States after marriage, following her husband who worked for an American company. The family went back to Korea for several years, returning to the United States one year ago. Unlike David and Monica, Eunmi had no career experience.

Monica was the oldest participant. She had three children: a college sophomore son and two daughters in eighth grade and fourth grade respectively. She came to the United States because she married a Korean American man who had immigrated with his family in his early teens. She had a Master's degree that she had earned in Korea and ran a gift shop in a local mall. She also worked at a Korean radio station as a part-time producer and anchor.

### *Selective Participation*

The three parents' participation histories were characterized by selective participation, which involves "active decision-making processes" through which they identify events and activities available to them (Lee, 2005, p. 306). They attended parent-teacher conferences and school events, and volunteered for school affairs based on their appraisal of the impact of participation on their children's education. They tended to assess the significance of parental activities required by the school and took part in selected events when their work or other schedules allowed them to do so. Since the three parents spoke English fluently enough to communicate with Americans, their participation was not constrained by language barriers; rather it was intentional, indicating a constant evaluation of the effectiveness of their actions.

In the case of David, his choice tended to depend on his work schedule. While he had a relatively flexible work schedule as a business owner, it was difficult for him to attend lengthy activities. David and his wife, who worked as a consultant, carefully adapted their work schedules so that at least one parent could take part in their children's activities. Whenever attending the activities, David noticed that his children looked around to discover which of their parents was among the participants, their eyes sparkling upon seeing him. Admitting that he did not always willingly attend his children's activities, David hoped his participation helped his children realize his support as their father:

Later when my children have grown up, I hope they realize what we did for them so that they will do the same things for their children. ... I try to enjoy the moment when I do something for my children. (Interview, 3/5/2008)

He planned to send his children to Ivy League universities, providing material and educational support tailored to each child's needs and abilities. For instance, his wife enrolled their fourth-grade son, who dreamed of being an attorney, in a summer writing course hosted by a nearby university. By virtue of their experiences in American schooling, David and his wife gained knowledge about American education systems and strategically selected involvement practices according to the best interests of their children. In the process of decision-making, David was able to use his cultural capital to identify educational matters valued by the mainstream society in the form of either school participation or involvement at home.

Eunmi and Monica took part in school activities more frequently than David did. Eunmi had participated in various classroom and school activities when her first daughter was in the lower grades, up until the time her family returned to Korea. Monica had also actively volunteered for years, despite her business, by providing teaching assistance in classrooms,

organizing school events, and being a member of the school-business partnership. Nonetheless, their levels of participation steadily decreased as their children grew older. They did not attend as many school events and spent less time on volunteering. Particularly, Eunmi said she was unwilling to participate in school activities these days: “I’m getting old, so it’s tiring. I do not want to do more than what I have to” (Interview, 2/27/2008). Research on parent involvement has indicated that parent involvement declines as the child advances in grade level (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Griffith, 1998). The decline of parent involvement in the higher grades is attributable a desire to nurture independence according to the optimal development of children and the perceived difficulty in helping with academics. Eunmi provided a different explanation for her decreased participation:

Years passed by. I think I know well enough right now. ... If white parents made a 10% effort, then I had to make a 50% effort to get the same results. They easily spent one hour, but I had to put in five hours. I hated it. Personally, I think I’m done, because I did it that way for several years. (Interview, 2/27/2008)

Nonetheless, Eunmi acknowledged that she had learned from her first-hand experience attending school activities and volunteering, and that her English proficiency and knowledge of American school systems had improved. Her increased communication skills also aided her in developing positive relationships with her children’s teachers. Eunmi’s decreased involvement might demonstrate her confidence in navigating the school spaces, which included her decision to base the level of her involvement on the best interests of her children and of herself.

In the case of Monica, her decreased involvement had to do with her aging, as she had turned fifty. She considered parental participation to be homework given to parents, requiring reciprocal exchanges between school and parents for the children’s benefits:

If we go to a church, we try to help the church. Even employees in my shop should be helpful for my business, and I should benefit them by paying money or understanding their troubles. As such, we should help the school by giving money, providing labor, or showing our interest — that's our duty as parents, our duty. (Interview, 1/30/2008)

With an increased knowledge and understanding of American schools, Monica had practiced multiple ways of contributing to the school that accommodated her work schedule as well as life changes. Within the range of involvement activities, she recommended that newcomer parents should first begin by participating in classroom activities as she had done. From her experiences, Monica discovered that volunteering in classrooms provided the most effective avenue to getting attention from the child's teachers. Later, due to her busy work schedule, she preferred a donation of money to labor as an alternate way to show her interest in the school:

Parents who don't have time and are busy can donate money at the highest level to the PTA. Then, they will feel better. Well, is it impossible for parents to do it at least one time a year? If they can't, that's nonsensical. (Interview, 1/30/2008)

It is noticeable that all three parents had several school experiences prior to enrolling their children in North Creek Elementary School. In addition to their cross-cultural understandings of school systems, the three parents had transferred their children to different schools when they moved from one state or county to another. They developed a sophisticated understanding of the schools and local educational systems, resulting in a critical appraisal of selected participation. For example, David attended to the results of test scores by states in order to assess his school choices. While he evaluated the school climate and curricular quality of North Creek Elementary School positively, David criticized the school's frequent requests for parents' material support, such as providing classroom supplies or fundraising. He suspected that

poor local governance contributed to the school's excessive dependence on parents, a situation that might pose additional challenges to immigrant families. David's critical perspective regarding educational involvement was rooted in his life experiences in the United States as a minority immigrant. Similar to him, the two other parents showed distinct types of identity construction that might affect their social relationships between and within racial/ethnic groups.

### *Surviving as a Minority*

The three parents described their various social relationships with Americans through career or school participation experiences. Some relationships were positive and collaborative. Others experiences were competitive, even hostile. They all experienced racial discrimination in daily interactions and their subsequent disadvantage in competing with the dominant race in the mainstream society. As first-generation immigrants who came to the United States as adults, to some extent the three parents witnessed significant changes in their positions within a hierarchical society, which made their adaptation processes stressful and increased their vulnerability.

David in particular encountered great occupational downward mobility once he decided to emigrate to the United States. Prior to emigration, David had been the prosperous manager of a Korean company in Taiwan, thanks to his expertise in Mandarin. He met his Chinese wife, who was from mainland China, while working in Taiwan, and soon crossed the Pacific so that they could be together when she studied in the United States. In his early years of immigrant life, David regretted his decision at times due to his inability to obtain a socioeconomic status equivalent to that of his previous life, resulting in frequent conflicts with his wife. After his first son was born, however, David cast away his sojourner identity, regarding America as home for his ethnically mixed family. He described how he came to make this decision:

I had to compromise with myself in resolving my inner conflict. ... For my childrearing, Korea would not be good because people still tend to discriminate against foreigners.

Then where should we live and raise our child? Given all this, I had better live here in the United States from now on. Afterwards, I felt this even more strongly. (Interview, 5/2/2008)

Nonetheless, structural barriers in the American job market forced him to quit his job and start his own business marketing to Korean American retailers. Acknowledging invisible discrimination that constrains minority groups' success in the mainstream society, David emphasized the importance of a hybrid identity for the second generation with his term, "being cosmopolitan." He preferred teaching his children Mandarin over Korean, and Mandarin and English were used interchangeably in his home. In addition to speaking multiple languages, he regarded acquiring professional credentials as another prerequisite to being cosmopolitan. Zou (2002) claimed that immigrants adapt multiple identities in order to survive economically and psychologically in unfamiliar and challenging cultural worlds. Multiple identities that coexist and function differently according to context provide immigrants with a "new cultural capital" beneficial for success in the host society (p. 251). David's call for a cosmopolitan identity might reflect his resilience, and represent a sophisticated coping strategy that takes the well-being of his family into careful consideration.

In the case of Eunmi, her experience of returning to Korea enabled her to value the human capital that could be obtained in both Korean and American contexts. Like David, she acknowledged that racism existed in the United States, yet attempted to overcome such disadvantages by raising her children to be bilingual. She explained:

To survive in the United States, it's important for Korean bilinguals to value their Korean heritage as well. Particularly, Korean/English bilinguals might have an advantage when they enter the job market, because they can help American companies gain an advantage in global competition. (Interview, 2/27/2008)

During the four years she lived in Korea, Eunmi's oldest daughter, now in sixth grade, began to identify herself as Korean, improve her ability to speak the Korean language, and to have a group of Korean friends.

Monica described her compromise in identity as a result of adapting to her minority status as an Asian immigrant: "As Asians, we should expect American prejudice toward us; it's natural. Making it an issue is not a good idea" (Interview, 1/30/2008). Specifically, her membership in the school-business partnership sharpened her understanding of power games within the school context. Pointing out the implicit competition among affluent parents on the PTA board, Monica deplored the prevailing classism among rich parents, which tended to be accompanied by racism. While she developed extensive social networks with Americans through her small business and participation experiences, Monica was keenly aware of her disadvantaged position within the mainstream society, accepting her never-ending otherness in social relationships:

Koreans' relationships with Americans — It's like water and oil. I can talk with them and hang around as if we were friends. But if I show that I am better than they are in some way, I cannot be their friend anymore. (Interview, 1/30/2008)

Monica's sense of otherness as an ethnic minority appeared to influence her educational aspirations for her three children. She expected her children to advance to a graduate level based on their talent and interest, and at the same time escape from hardships that might occur in their life paths. Like David, Monica was an ambitious college instructor in Korea until she married her

Korean-American husband, who was a brilliant doctoral student at that time. She planned to pursue her doctorate after her husband completed his studies, yet her life in the United States flowed in an unexpected direction. Her husband, whom she described as “a very good man but somewhat irresponsible,” gave up earning his Ph.D. and later quit his research job to start a commercial real estate business. Over the past 20 years, Monica, not her husband, worked hard to ensure financial security for her family, confronting injustice and discrimination in the competitive business world. Her survival in the United States represents her fortitude and adaptability in given contexts, which she developed through her immigrant life. Likewise, Monica wanted her children to develop competence compatible with their identities, which would make it possible for them to succeed in American society. She said: “I wish my children could become just Americans, living in the United States. But wouldn’t their faces identify them as Koreans anyway?” (Interview, 4/14/2008). Next summer, her oldest son will take part in an exchange program with a Korean university; she hoped such travels would help her children understand Korean culture and improve their limited ability to speak the Korean language.

In terms of social relationships, David and Monica showed similar but slightly different patterns of network orientation. Through work experiences, they both possessed substantial amounts of social capital outside of their immediate relationships, and they both established various group memberships. David was involved in social networks that tended to include mainly business partners. Since his family had recently moved to Jackson from a different state, he had few acquaintances from the neighborhood and spent his free time with family and parents-in-law who lived together to help with childcare. While his business targeted Korean retailers, David rarely socialized with Koreans outside his work, often avoiding contact with them in public places. To him, excessive access to the ethnic network contradicted his belief in

the value of cosmopolitanism and implied the loss of the immigrant spirit. His multiethnic family composition might also contribute to his distancing himself from ethnic networking as a stimulus for his independence.

In contrast, Monica was successful in developing resourceful ethnic networks through her part-time work at a Korean radio station. A variety of Korean professionals participated as guest speakers on her radio program: principals, professors, church pastors, and even college students. She also sang in a women's choir during her spare time and supervised her employees, who consisted of several young women of different races. Nonetheless, Monica's social relationships with Korean parents in North Creek Elementary were relatively limited; she had had negative experiences with some members in the Korean mothers' meeting several years ago and perceived gaps between her and the other (younger) mothers. She rarely associated with Korean parents in the middle school her second child attended, either.

As described in an earlier section, Eunmi forged friendly relationships with many American parents through her assiduous efforts to participate in volunteer activities when her oldest daughter was in the lower grades. However, the hiatus in her efforts caused by her return to Korea and her re-settlement in a faraway state made it difficult for her to sustain the prior social networks with mainstream society. Her recent life in the United States appeared to be bound to her intimate relationship circles, including family and old Korean friends who lived in a different state. Eunmi participated in the Korean mothers' meeting and attended the adult ESL class offered by North Creek Elementary School. Nonetheless, she seldom related to other parents, either Korean or American, outside the school context. While Eunmi would access various kinds of social capital for specific purposes, her social interactions tended to be self-contained, requiring less mutual dependence.

### *Negotiating Family-School Partnerships*

The salient features of the three parents' interaction with school actors were intentionality and negotiated self-representation. Their marginal positions within mainstream society provided a critical standpoint for recognizing power asymmetry across various social settings, including unequal power relations embedded in family-school partnerships. In the process of participation, their ultimate goals were to build positive relationships with teachers, thereby influencing teachers' instructional practices in favor of their children. With their relative capabilities of accessing institutional resources, they effectively activated social capital for instrumental purposes, depending on the perceived needs of the context. For instance, Monica avoided questioning the teacher further in regard to her daughter's TAG program qualifications, as she recognized the teacher's discomfort in addressing that issue. She explained her deliberate action: "I stopped mentioning that issue because there would be other chances at the right time. Teachers are vulnerable" (Interview, 4/14/2008).

To please their children's teachers, Eunmi and Monica often prepared small gifts on conference days in an attempt to express their appreciation for the teachers. They seldom challenged the school's decisions or pedagogical practices by overt confrontation, even though they clearly recognized the presence of uncaring, unfair teachers when they encountered them in schools. Monica described the strategic humility that helped her maintain positive relationships with the teachers:

American mothers fight with teachers and speak up until their voices are heard, even to the point of getting a teacher fired. But, I prefer a different approach, not because I don't have that power, but because I want to forge good relationships with the teacher. Of course, there are some racist teachers who degrade Asian people, but ... once someone is

assigned as my child's teacher, building a good relationship with the teacher is my homework for that year. (Interview, 4/14/2008)

Compared to Eunmi and Monica, David barely addressed his relationships with his children's teachers. His approach might be attributed to the fact that typically it was his wife's role to contact the school personnel, and his to attend school events. Nonetheless, David's attitude toward his children's teachers can be assumed to be respectful, because he agreed to participate in this study after Jamie, his daughter's paraprofessional, suggested that he become involved.

According to Bourdieu's theory, different forms of capital have various values according to the dynamic of the field governed by the "rules of the game" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In the context of school participation, supportive but not judgmental parental actions are considered desirable by many teachers (Griffith & Smith, 2005; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). These three parents not only grasped the underlying rules for interaction embedded in the school, but also maneuvered skillfully in relation to the specific field. They negotiated family-school partnerships by activating social capital in ways "legitimated and accepted by the school officials" (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p. 48) so that their intentional interactions would be taken seriously. Their survival experiences may have played an essential role in comprehending the capital valued in a given field, resulting in their successful navigation independent of an external agency such as the Korean mothers' meeting.

Team Worker: Eunjung, Junghee, Myungsook, and Nayun

The four parents in this category were in their mid 30s to early 40s. Except for Nayun, the average length of residence in the United States for the other three parents was 10 years. Eunjung came to the United States following her husband, who pursued his degree at an American college; she had a daughter in fifth grade and a son in third grade. Junghee immigrated

to the United States after her marriage to a Korean American, and had a son in first grade and a four-year-old daughter. Myungsook migrated to the United States because a Korean American pastor invited her and her husband to visit. Later, her family decided to immigrate. She had three children: a daughter in fifth grade, a son in third grade, and a two-year-old son. Nayun came to the United States two years ago with her family, and had two sons, one in second grade and another in first grade.

All four parents were housewives, and their husbands worked within the ethnic community as either employees or small business owners. Eunjung had no career experience and Junghee had had several jobs before marriage: kindergarten teacher, government employee, and flower shop owner. Myungsook and Nayun worked part time intermittently: Myungsook, who had been a middle school music teacher in Korea, offered private lessons for neighborhood Koreans, and Nayun held part time jobs until her husband became employed. Nayun had run a private English institution in Korea with her sister. All four parents had earned bachelor's degrees in Korea, and Nayun was enrolled in a graduate program at the time of the study.

#### *Consciously Active Participation*

The four parents' levels of school participation appeared to parallel their adaptation progress in the United States. As they went through the early stages of immigration and began making their home in a foreign county, their children reached school age, which posed other challenges for them. In the case of Nayun, her transition period was significantly brief; her two sons started kindergarten and first grade immediately after her family arrived in the United States. The years spent in her home country preparing for immigration may have made it easier for her family to adjust quickly in the United States.

While all parents tend to feel somewhat unprepared to help their children transition to school successfully, these four parents experienced American schools as completely new territory, which they had to explore without a road map. They had no prior knowledge of American schoolwork and curricula, nor did they understand the parental roles expected within the contexts of school. Learning by doing was the primary mode of their involvement practices. Despite a lack of knowledge about the schools and little confidence in their English, the parents participated in school events and classroom activities as much as they could, reading books for the children in the classrooms, helping teachers with their work, and attending classroom parties and school events. They described their active participatory behaviors as the product of “courage based on ignorance,” often accompanied by pretended competence. In other words, they tried to be consciously active in aspects of school participation, although they were keenly aware of their uncertainty because of their lack of knowledge about school culture.

In a review of parental motivation for educational involvement, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) identified three major constructs that influence parents’ decisions to become involved: parents’ role construction, sense of efficacy in helping the child succeed in school, and general invitations and demands for involvement from child and school. The pattern of consciously active participation appeared to be primarily influenced by the four parents’ role construction. The parents tried to extend their capability of participating in school activities on behalf of their children based on their beliefs about what they were supposed to do as parents in regard to their children’s education. In the case of Junghee, however, the third construct, demand from her son, was a central motivator for her to become involved in the school. She described how she volunteered to read books during story time in her son’s kindergarten classroom:

My son told me that other parents come to the classroom and read books. ... I've never signed up for that; then he asked to me, "Mommy, why don't you read books for my class?" He asked me again and again. (Interview, 12/14/2007)

In regard to the second construct, parents' sense of efficacy in helping the child's successful schooling, the four parents revealed low levels of confidence about what they did to support their children's success at school. The four parents mainly stayed at home in order to take care of two or more children, rarely speaking English unless necessary. Even Myungsook and Nayun, who occasionally worked as part-timers, used the Korean language during their work, since their customers were mainly Koreans. Eunjung made a joke about her poor communication skills in English during her initial phase of immigration: "When I first arrived in the United States, I couldn't speak any English. It was even hard for me to order food at MacDonald's" (Interview, 12/4/2007). She admitted that she lacked the ability to help her children with their studies, especially to help them with subjects requiring a higher level of vocabulary and comprehension:

I can make sure my children study hard, but it's impossible for me to help them with their studies. So I say to their teachers at conferences, 'Because of my limited English, I can't help my child. I don't know what to do.' And they said, 'Don't worry, that's my job'" (Interview, 12/4/2007).

These parents often felt frustrated by their inability to support their children in their studies, questioning their decision to immigrate to the United States. Junghee described the moment, while she was helping her son study, that she most regretted leaving her home country: "I just cried out. ... I had to look in the dictionary, even to teach first grade things. If I were in Korea, would I need a dictionary to help my child in the first or second grade?" (Interview, 4/22/2008)

Nonetheless, the four parents were voluntary minorities who chose to immigrate to the United States. According to Ogbu (1991), voluntary minorities perceive their hardships in adapting to the host society as temporary, sustaining a positive “dual frame of reference” since their current status tends to surpass the one they had in their home country (p. 11). Nayun spoke of her determination in confronting challenges she faced in her initial period of adjustment:

There was no one moment when I regretted coming here or when I became frustrated. ...

Of course, there were a lot of difficulties in adjusting to my new life. ... But I made my choice; I couldn't undo it. (Interview, 4/21/2008)

Specifically, all four parents sought a better education for their children, and this consideration constituted a basic dimension of their frames of reference. As addressed earlier, the three parents, except for Eunjung, had occupations related to education in Korea. They established their own criteria for evaluating pedagogical practices and educational systems between the two countries, which in turn reinforced their decision to remain in the United States. The four parents regarded the educational environment of American schools as far better than that of Korean schools: less competition, individually oriented instruction, and cultivation of creativity and self-confidence were primary reasons for this judgment. Myungsook explained her decision-making process about immigration after three years of temporary residence:

During the first and second year, I wanted to go back to Korea. ... In my third year I put the two countries into an indefinite equation, then concluded that it'd be better for my children if they were born and raised here. When they were grown, my husband and I could return to Korea to retire. Well, I don't know. (Interview, 4/26/2008)

The four parents' consciously active participation might represent their identity construction as voluntary minorities who endure a sense of inefficacy in the process of school participation and

continue to pursue their American dreams for their children's successful future in the host society.

*I am a Korean Forever*

In a study on middle-class Asian Americans of no less than the third generation, Tuan (1998) found that race and ethnicity, as silent factors, perpetuated the identification of Asian Americans as non-Americans, positioning them as oppositional to the ideal of Whiteness. Despite the relatively short periods of residence, the four parents were keenly aware of their racial visibility in the United States — that they could never be seen as “real” Americans within the biracialized White and Black society. Particularly, Junghee witnessed how her 1.5-generation husband failed to realize his American dream due to the glass ceiling of the American workplace and returned to working within the ethnic community. She hoped that her two children would be “Korea-oriented Americans” who could maintain their ethnic identity and pride as Koreans. To this end, Junghee taught her children the Korean language and history, purposefully showed Korean programs aired by satellite broadcasting, and planned to visit Korea with her children at least once every few years.

Similar to Junghee, the other three parents constantly spoke of their focus on nurturing their children's Korean identity by providing educational practices for their children. To cultivate their children's knowledge of Korean culture, they considered exchange study programs and relative visits during vacations while instructing their children to speak the Korean language. For instance, Myungsook asked her three children, born and raised in the United States, to speak Korean in their interactions with Korean people. She said, “If a child speaks to me in Korean, even though she can speak English very well, I feel respected by that child, so I used to teach my children to do the same thing.” (Interview, 4/15/2008). Demanding that her children use the

mother tongue with the same ethnic group, from her view, could not be regarded as “a double standard because Americans have their own decorum anyway.”

Korean immigrant studies have proven strong ethnic solidarity among Korean Americans and emphasized the historical role of Korean ethnic churches as social centers for promoting ethnic bonds and cultural traditions (Hurh, 1998; Lew, 2006). The social networks and relationships of the four parents showed similar characteristics. The parents had established extensive relationships with Koreans through associating with Korean ethnic churches, and benefited from the social and emotional support offered by fellow Korean immigrants. Particularly, Nayun’s family gained substantial help from a senior Korean immigrant couple when her family settled in this state. The couple helped them purchase a house and provided counseling related to their children’s education. Although her family had prepared for migration to the United States for years, social capital provided through the Korean ethnic community played a central role in their transplanting to the new country. In fact, her family was able to begin the process of becoming permanent residents by virtue of the sponsorship of the Korean store where her husband worked as a manager.

In addition to emotional and social support, social networks among Korean parents provided the four parents with a primary informational channel for gaining access to a variety of educational resources, which they would not reach otherwise. As previously mentioned, the four parents came to acquire existential knowledge about American schools and pedagogical practices by learning from their first-hand experiences, which often involved painful effort and challenges to their confidence. In contrast, social networks among Korean parents with children of similar ages, such as the Korean mothers’ meeting, constituted an efficient, less stressful avenue for obtaining information, as well as an alternative means to compensate for a lack of cultural capital

and English proficiency. Moreover, the perceived racial segregation among children in the upper grades made the parents regard social networking with one's own ethnic group as not only important but imperative. Eunjung revealed her preference for Koreans as her children's friends:

In middle or high schools, kids hang out with their own racial group. Well, until now, my children have had many white friends, but next year when my daughter goes to middle school, I hope she associates with nice, decent Korean friends so that I can also meet their parents. We are Koreans anyway. If something happens, I can easily talk with that mother without worrying about possible miscommunication. (Interview, 3/21/2008)

Eunjung's desire to have her children associate with "nice and decent" Korean groups resonated with the other three parents' careful school choices. Although they had a positive perception of the educational environment of the United States in general, the quality of the school and its surrounding community was the primary criterion for choosing where to live. Specifically, the socioeconomic status of the school community was a fundamental factor affecting their decisions. They believed that the community environment conditions children's peer groups, thereby significantly affecting their character development and academic attitudes. North Creek Elementary School was located in the city of Jackson, a place where middle- to upper-class families reside. It was an ideal community that, they thought, would ensure their children's healthy growth and protect their children from contact with youth subcultures they considered harmful. Myungsook described how her family decided to move to this city in search of a better educational environment: "Many Mexican families moved to my town. Among 18 students in my child's first grade class, seven kids went to the ESL class. Too many ESL students would not be good for my child's education. So, we moved" (Interview, 2/15/2008). She pointed out substantial differences between her previous town and this city in terms of behavioral issues

among students, attributing the good discipline of the North Creek Elementary School students to their middle-class family backgrounds.

An interesting point was that the four parents avoided the places where large numbers of Korean students gathered, particularly keeping away from those Koreans who had recently immigrated to the United States. They distinguished strictly between second generation and recent immigrants among Korean American children, prohibiting their children from interacting with groups of new Korean students. Even Nayun, whose length of residence in the United States was less than two years, revealed a similar negative perspective toward newcomer Korean students: “In my church, the Korean students who have come here recently affect other students in a negative way. They rarely study and they form their own groups, hanging around the neighborhood all the time” (Interview, 4/21/2008).

In sum, despite the four parents’ strong Korean pride and exclusive social ties with the same ethnic group, the signifier of group membership appeared to be conditional to status variables, such as social class and immigrant status. The perceived barriers to access to resource-rich networks within the mainstream society (e.g., language barrier and racial discrimination) affected the nature of their ethnic networking. According to Bourdieu, social capital is “the investment of the members in the dominant class engaging in mutual recognition and acknowledgement so as to maintain and reproduce group solidarity and preserve the group’s dominant position” (Lin, 2001, p. 27). The partial relationships with selected groups of Korean Americans might be a purposeful strategy that the four parents used to protect the relative privilege they were able to acquire, reflecting the insecurity inherent in their status as immigrants.

*Working Together to Make It*

Despite an average of 10 years in the United States, the four parents showed only a moderate amount of acculturation to the host society. They continued to use the Korean language, cultivate Korean-associated relationships, and maintain a subjective identity preserving their Korean heritage. Within the context of North Creek Elementary School, the amount of social capital the parents possessed usually depended on where they were located; presumably, associating with fellow Korean parents generated greater social capital that increased the possibility of successful capital activation in the process of school participation.

The formation of the Korean mothers' meeting is an example of purposeful action taken by a group of Korean parents in North Creek Elementary School. Eunjung and Myungsook played central roles in initiating and organizing the meeting and had actively engaged in the meeting's activities since the beginning. Nayun and Junghee joined the meeting as soon as they were able. Affiliating with the Korean mothers' meeting allowed the four parents to bridge the gap between them and the heterogeneous groups of Korean parents outside their immediate networks. Nayun, who was introverted, acquired new acquaintances through participating in the meeting. While she possessed a moderate ability to communicate in English, attending school activities alone made her uncomfortable; she could find relief in the new circumstances by virtue of the social capital provided by the Korean mothers' meeting. Similarly, Junghee appreciated the benefits of the Korean mothers' meeting in improving her connection to the school, a connection that might not have been possible in another area: "I know many parents in nearby counties, and they don't have school-related meetings like we have. ... They envy me: 'Wow, they have meetings like that in your school?'" (Interview, 12/14/2007).

Compared to Nayun and Junghee, whose children had attended the North Creek Elementary School for less than one year, Eunjung and Myungsook had a better understanding of school culture and associated social networks through their years of school participation. Greater immersion in the school community increased their sensitivity to the prevailing discourse of parent involvement that required parents to be supplemental in aspects of the school's educational functions. Eunjung found herself in tears whenever she heard the Korean national anthem and felt ashamed of the low levels of participation shown by many Korean parents at North Creek. Such a strong Korean identity motivated her to initiate the Korean mothers' meeting and helped her maintain her consistent commitment to the meeting despite her lack of confidence in leading the group:

At least someone who has time should not just let the school take care of his or her child. Wouldn't it be great if Korean parents volunteered out of Korean pride? ... If I were an American, I might not be involved as much as I am now. Because I'm a Korean, I hate people to think that Koreans do not volunteer, never attend the school events, and don't care. ... Because of that, I do my best. (Interview, 3/21/2008)

The two parents' high levels of commitment to the Korean mothers' meeting might reflect their desire to be included in the dominant discourse; by willingly conforming to the school's standard, they would move inside the circle of relationships, closing the distance as foreigners in the context of the American school.

Clearly, team worker parents were voluntary minorities who had willingly migrated to the United States and had specifically chosen North Creek Elementary School. They were satisfied with the quality of the school and the stable, middle-class neighborhood to which they belonged. Even if they perceived certain racist attitudes within the school context, they strived to fit into

the school community rather than to confront or to criticize it. Myungsook, who taught middle schoolers in Korea, revealed her trust that teachers would treat all students equally: “Teachers here don’t exert as much influence as they do in Korea. In most cases and especially systematically, it’s not likely that teachers would do their jobs unfairly” (Interview, 4/16/2008). In contrast, Junghee, also a former kindergarten teacher in Korea, strongly believed that her active participation would contribute to the teacher’s positive perception of her child. She encountered a discriminatory teacher when her son was in kindergarten, concluding, “Teachers are the same everywhere. The more I show up in the classroom, the more attention my child will get from the teacher” (Interview, 12/14/2007). Although the four parents, as team workers, sought the collective resources offered through ethnic networking, they were not a single entity with common interests; the purposes of their actions involved contradiction and incongruity that reflected the complexity of their relationships with the school.

#### Outsider: Hyunjoo and Jeeyung

The two parents in this category were in their early 40s and both had two children; Hyunjoo had two sons in fifth and third grades respectively, and Jeeyung had a seventh-grade daughter and a fifth-grade son. Hyunjoo came to the United States one year prior to the study, joining her husband who had worked at a branch office of a Korean company for a long time. She had a Master’s degree that she had earned in Korea and had worked at an elementary school as a special education instructor. She planned to stay in the United States until her children entered a university, yet was prepared to change her decision depending on her children’s adjustment to American schools.

Jeeyung migrated to the United States when she married her Korean American husband. Her family lived in a metropolitan area for 15 years and moved to the city of Jackson one year

prior to the study. Her husband had run a small business, and she had worked full time for a Korean company. After moving to Jackson, she quit her job and stayed at home. She had earned a Bachelor's degree in Korea.

### *Constrained Participation*

The two parents' participatory experiences were characterized by constrained ownership that impeded their active involvement in their children's education. Compared to other parents in this study, these two parents showed relatively passive participation in school functions, as well as less intensive involvement at home. As in the case of many immigrant studies, time constraints and language barriers were the primary factors hindering the two parents' active involvement, whereas each aspect affected the parents' relationships with the school differently.

In the case of Hyunjoo, her level of participation decreased drastically during her first year of living in the United States. In my first interview with her, Hyunjoo revealed a desire for active involvement and an optimistic outlook for successful adaptation to North Creek Elementary School. She immediately began volunteering in the media center of the school and enrolled in a college ESL program in order to improve her English proficiency. On registration day she felt neglected by teachers due to her inability to speak English, and her husband took charge of the conversations. As a former special education teacher, her professional pride was wounded, and she became strongly motivated to improve her English. Surprisingly, however, this motivation seemed to disappear by the time of the second interview five months later. She appeared to have lost her enthusiasm for learning English and relied completely on her husband or a translator when contacting the school. Except for volunteering in the media center, Hyunjoo rarely participated in school events or classroom activities, considering herself a stranger. With a mocking laugh, she explained why she was not willing to participate:

I won't do something I can't do well. Well, I think not everyone should get involved, but just people who can do things well. I'm not one of those people who do things well, so I can't participate much. Anyway, I work for the school as much as I can; I even volunteer in the media center. The simplest things, like arranging bookshelves, are always my responsibility there. (Interview, 5/8/2008)

The school's frequent requests for parental permission were another challenge for Hyunjoo. She often misunderstood written documents and therefore received confirmation calls from school personnel, which negatively affected her confidence in communicating with the school.

Simultaneously, she lowered the educational expectations that she had for her children because the pace of their adjustment was not as prompt as she had anticipated. While her two sons maintained relatively good grades, their English did not improve very much and this made it difficult for them to join the regular classes. Hyunjoo was disappointed by her children's difficulties in mastering English, yet was not able to help them in their studies. She repeatedly told her children: "I know nothing about these things, study by yourself" (Interview, 5/8/2008). She did not excuse her passive involvement, nor did she blame herself for her lack of confidence. Rather, she tended to separate herself from the context of the school in order to avoid frustration and intimidation caused by unknown circumstances.

As a former working immigrant parent, Jeeyung appeared to have developed a habit of passive involvement in school activities. Before moving to Jackson, her children attended an urban school located in a metropolitan area where the majority of the parents had jobs. Unlike North Creek Elementary School, which actively invites parents to engage in school activities, the prior school did not expect parental support for its functions, in which most parents were unable to participate due to a lack of time in any case. There, Jeeyung worked at an information

technology company as a telemarketer targeting Korean customers and rarely participated in school events or classroom activities. The low expectations for parent involvement held by the teachers of the urban school mirrored families' fast-paced city life; they were "busy and tired" and bombarded by demanding workloads. Moving to Jackson provided a turning point for Jeeyung and her family in that they could not only enjoy the improved quality of suburban living but also maintain the stability of daily schedules, because Jeeyung no longer worked outside the home. Reflecting on her experiences, however, Jeeyung admitted that she had used her lack of time as an excuse to justify her passive involvement. While her two children were in lower grades, she placed little value on parental roles in her children's education, assuming that education would be the school's responsibility. As her children grew older (one in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and another in 5<sup>th</sup> grade at the time of this study), Jeeyung began to regret her ignorance of the importance of the primary years in the development of her children:

Frankly speaking, I didn't participate actively because I was working. Well, that might be an excuse. ... I said I couldn't but, looking back, it wasn't that I couldn't — I just didn't. I'm ashamed of myself because I didn't do my best. For my children, the lower grades, even pre-k or kindergarten, may have been the most important periods, but I used my busy work as an excuse. I thought that I would really become more involved with my children after I got through the tough period and they were more grown up. (Interview, 12/16/2007)

Despite her regret, Jeeyung's level of participation in North Creek Elementary School appeared not to have significantly improved. She took part in a few collective volunteer activities initiated by the Korean mothers' meeting, such as a Korean food corner at the school carnival, yet often felt hesitant to participate in school activities independent of the group. In fact, she did not attend

any observed school events during my fieldwork, although she was keenly aware of the benefits of participatory experiences, including greater knowledge about the overall school system and extended social networks.

Lack of communicative confidence was another impediment to Jeeyung's active involvement in school functions. Through 16 years of living in the United States, Junghee had developed a relatively fluent speaking ability in English; however, her lack of confidence constrained effective communication when she interacted with school personnel. Specifically, she had several conferences with a regular teacher and a special education teacher regarding her son's intervention program because of his partial hearing loss. Although she appreciated the school's systematic support and medical services for her son, she frequently felt alienated when professionals engaged in professional conversations. As a parent, Jeeyung had essential knowledge about her son, who tended to use his hearing impairment as an excuse for his low commitment to learning. Thus, she purposefully delayed requesting special support from the school. She pursued her son's full engagement in learning regardless of available external aids, suspecting diagnostic intervention would decrease her son's motivation for learning. Jeeyung, however, never spoke of her opinions during conferences, mainly listening to the suggested solutions. Self-blame and resolution were the constant themes of her narratives in describing her involvement practices: "I'm ashamed, actually. I should have discussed my ideas, but there were not many chances to do it. I didn't participate in school events much, and I'll try to do better now" (Interview, 12/16/2007).

### *Belonging Nowhere*

With regard to social relationships, these two parents were to a certain degree confined to the margins of mainstream society. Although most of the Korean parents in this study perceived

the existence of a glass ceiling hindering the upward mobility of racial minorities, Hyunjoo and Jeeyung perceived their social marginality most clearly. According to Hurh (1998), the psychological adjustment of Korean immigrants to the United States tends to go through three stages: (a) the initial crisis stage (1-2 years after immigration), (b) the middle resolution stage, and (c) the later stagnant stage (after 10-15 years of residence). Given the length of residence, the majority of the Korean parents in the previous categories can be considered to be in the resolution stage, in which life satisfaction reaches its peak. In fact, several parents were optimistic about the future. In contrast, Hyunjoo and Jeeyung appeared to be in the initial crisis period and the later stagnant period, respectively. Self-deprecation and passiveness were frequently expressed in their conversations and actions. For instance, Jeeyung described her lack of confidence in her daily life:

I don't know why I don't have any confidence. Throughout my American life, I've always suffered, and still suffer, from my lack of confidence. My lack of confidence affects my language skills, my composure, my ability to contact teachers at the school, and even my relationships with my children. (Interview, 12/16/2007)

Specifically, Jeeyung began to recognize a growing communication gap between her and her Americanized children. Despite Jeeyung's instructions to speak Korean at home, her children were likely to respond in English, often resulting in one-way communication on the part of Jeeyung. Sometimes, she was embarrassed when her children seemed to doubt her understanding of written English and felt that her authority as a parent was threatened. Communication difficulties in particular hindered the relationship between Jeeyung and her teenaged daughter. While her daughter wanted to know about Jeeyung's youth, in-depth conversations about

personal matters rarely occurred between them due to her daughter's limited proficiency in Korean.

In addition, Jeeyung felt guilty when she perceived the relatively weak literacy skills of her two children, compared to the skills of children raised in American or English-speaking immigrant families. Growing up, her children tended to associate with Korean groups in and outside of school, thereby recapitulating her confined social networks bounded by the ethnic community. She wanted her children to establish relationships with diverse social groups and connect broadly with the mainstream society. To her, a sense of belonging appeared to be more or less ambiguous. She herself did not strongly adhere to her own ethnic group, but did not openly associate with other racial groups, either. She forged moderate networks with the members of a Korean church and the Korean mothers' meeting, yet maintained a certain distance from both groups. She was a reserved and quiet woman, often invisible to other members.

Similarly, Hyunjoo's social relationships were restricted to circles of intimate friends, who were members of her own ethnic group. She avoided contact with English speaking parents, including Asians, and had few acquaintances in the neighborhood. While she forged social relationships with some Korean parents at North Creek Elementary School and gained information about school matters, she rarely socialized with them, even if they were members of the Korean mothers' meeting. After attending the Korean mothers' meeting two or more times, Hyunjoo stopped participating in the meeting. Although she used the time conflict of her ESL classes with the mothers' meeting as an excuse not to attend, her perception of the Korean parents was negative, often hostile. She considered Korean parents too performance-oriented, competing with one another over their children's academic achievement. Particularly, she felt a significant disparity between her and those parents who had lived in the United States for a long

time. Due to a status difference — they were permanent residents and she was a temporary one — she perceived an existential gap between her and other immigrants, feeling that she could not belong to the immigrant group:

They [immigrants] are different from me. They think in different ways. The longer people have lived here, the bigger the differences become. They seem to be sort of stingy and cold-hearted. They draw lines everywhere, and they never let go of anything.

(Interview, 5/8/2008)

Hyunjoo spent her spare time with fellow parents in the ESL class, especially temporary residents similar to her. She always thought her family would return to Korea if her husband's contract ended, and she was concerned about successful resettlement in her home country. Her sojourner identity rendered her less enthusiastic about her current American life, and consequently, less stressed by the challenging situations she encountered. Hyunjoon described uncertainty in her and her children's future:

That's up to my children. I can't afford expensive university tuitions. If they are able to get scholarships, I will stay with them a few more years. But if not, we will need to get ready to go back to Korea. (Interview, 5/8/2008)

Her sense of belonging seems to be floating, moving back and forth between the host and home country.

### *Standing on the Margin*

The passiveness exemplified by these two parents' involvement reflected their alienated social relationships in the host society. They had relatively low aspirations for extending their social networks with Americans and ambiguous memberships with Korean groups. These two parents appeared to stand their ground on the margins, finding ways to negotiate contradictions

and complexities in their daily lives. In fact, Hyunjoo expressed her satisfaction with her current life and wanted her children to enjoy the lives given to them:

The school takes great care of me, even though I cannot speak English. I like my simple life here. It isn't necessary to struggle for success. Well, if we [she and her husband] looked up to the top, there would be many things we don't have. But we're satisfied with what we have right now. I hope my children can have similar lives, like the way we live.

(Interview, 5/8/2008)

Similarly, Jeeyung enjoyed her free time after quitting her job and appreciated the serenity of her solitary life: "I am afraid of losing this precious solitude. I have been too busy to be myself. I am so happy that I can finally read books without any disruption" (Interview, 12/16/2007). She hoped her two children would grow up as Christians and get along with the world without compromising their sense of humanity: "I hope my children can develop the wisdom to know the difference between true and false and will be people who can give something to others rather than take from them" (Interview, 4/20/2008).

The two parents' satisfaction with their lives affected the ways they interpreted and responded to their positions at North Creek Elementary School. On the surface, it seemed that they were likely to locate on the boundary of social webs, unable to obtain social capital either by linking to the school personnel or by bridging with other Korean parents. However, a deeper look showed a unique standpoint produced by their marginality in social structures. Unlike other Korean parents, who were eager to gain membership in either the mainstream society or the ethnic community, these two parents maintained neutrality in social networks by establishing a certain degree of independence from the collective discourse imposed by a particular social group. They tended to resist the status quo embedded in social groups and developed critical

perspectives on sources of oppression. As an external factor, their length of residence in the United States influenced the ways they interpreted reality; space determined the objects of their critiques.

In Hyunjoo's case, she did not develop a substantial understanding of North Creek Elementary School and the host society due to her short period of residence in the United States. Instead, she, as a former educator who possessed professional knowledge about Korean education, provided a comparison between American and Korean educational systems:

To get an A in Korea, students have to cram for tests. But, here, my children can get an A as long as they follow the teachers' instructions. In Korea, students have to study hard and attend supplementary educational programs besides school. ... Well, there may be A+ and A- in American schools, but isn't it easy to get an A anyway? (Interview, 5/8/2008)

Hyunjoo resisted the competitive discourse of Korean American groups in relation to children's academic achievement. As noted earlier, she tried to avoid conversations with Korean immigrant parents that centered on their child's school performance. She admitted that her children's limited English proficiency prohibited her from confidently engaging in such academically oriented discussions. However, Hyunjoo pointed out that Koreans' obsession with academic success might not guarantee life satisfaction in the long term: "A college degree doesn't equal happiness. ... Americans may count on too many loans, but they seem to enjoy what they have and discover the beauty of small joys. Everything depend on how we perceive it." She added, "I wasn't on top throughout my schooling, but I live well enough right now" (Interview, 5/8/2008).

Unlike Hyunjoo, Jeeyung had lived in the United States for over 16 years. Her long residence appeared to have sharpened her critical awareness of racial inequalities embedded in

the host society. She instructed her children to confront prejudice and discrimination among peer groups in schools and reminded them of the fact that this country originally belonged to Native Americans:

Who came first to this country? We are all immigrants. They [European Americans] just happened to come before us. I tell my children: “You were born here. You are Americans, but your blood identifies you as Koreans. So, you need to know both countries. If a man had blond hair but only spoke Korean because he was born in Korea, how would he be perceived?” (Interview, 12/16/2007)

Jeeyung knew that her children would watch her when she interacted with Americans and tried to be a model for her children to show them how to stand up for themselves. Despite her inner anxiety, she consciously presented herself as a confident woman in interactions, initiating friendly but assertive conversations in public spaces. She believed that people could communicate with one another by using non-verbal signs such as facial expressions or body language regardless of the spoken language: “Smiling can close gaps between us. We can feel each other in spite of the challenges of communication through the spoken language” (Interview, 4/20/2008).

However, in North Creek Elementary School, she often encountered the school personnel’s hesitance and uncertainty in communicating with Asian parents. She felt estranged as though she had intruded into the established territory of a white dominant school community. While acknowledging the school’s challenges from the recent demographic transition, Jeeyung pointed out the implicit segregation along racial/ethnic lines that might reinforce the stereotype of “non-participatory” Asian families prevalent in the school’s discourse. She argued:

[Teachers and administrators need to] be more open-minded. It may depend on individual personalities. Some people tend to associate only with those similar to them, but that doesn't make them racists. We [Korean parents] perceive Koreans differently from other groups; they [Americans] act in the same way. We need to break down the wall by, first, expanding our [racial/ethnic] boundary. (Interview, 4/20/2008)

However, the two parents' conscious resistance to the dominant discourse and practice of parent involvement remained invisible to the other participants in this study. They were silent, often alienating themselves from social groups voluntarily or involuntarily. Their position in the context of North Creek Elementary School, therefore, can be considered that of outsiders.

### Chapter Conclusion

The cases of 12 Korean parents demonstrated the complex negotiations in which immigrant parents were involved in order to provide meaningful and successful educational experiences for their children in the host society. Based on levels of participation and possession of capital, the participation experiences of 12 Korean parents were categorized according to four types of interaction: cultural broker, solo navigator, team worker, and outsider. Each type of interaction reflected complex negotiations authored by the parents as they engaged in their children's education.

It is important to note that the parents' social capital generation was influenced by the extent to which their habitus fitted the field in which they were involved. Habitus refers to a set of dispositions created through social history and personal experiences (Bourdieu, 1977). These dispositions constitute a mutable mental structure that influences an individual "to act in a certain way, to grasp experiences in a certain way, to think in a certain way" (Grenfell, James, Hodkinson, Reay, & Robbins, 1998, P. 15). The more a match exists in social relations between

the habitus of an individual and the field, the more advantageous social capital she or he can access. From this conceptualization, levels of Americanization influenced the habitus of individual parents and determined the network orientations that would best fit their habitus. According to this view, more Americanized parents, such as cultural brokers, preferred to engage in social relations reflective of the host culture, compared to other groups of parents; in a similar sense, pro-Korean networks prevailed for the team workers, whose goal was to preserve Korean values and practices.

Additionally, the types of interaction reflected individual parents' purposeful actions mediated between social capital and the ethnic community. For instance, team worker parents, whose social advantages would be maximized in the field of the ethnic community, were deliberately engaged in collective actions with their own ethnic group when participating in school activities. The investment or purposive actions authored by these parents were directed at appropriating social capital inherent in the ethnic community. Similarly, cultural broker parents chose to operate social capital in ways that could link the ethnic community to the school.

Such purposeful actions involved complicated negotiations between individuals and the social world. One may select the sense of membership in social relations, but the nature of choice is inevitably shaped by social structures. Consider the independence authored by the two groups, solo navigators and outsiders. Both groups demonstrated neutrality in social networks, maintaining a certain distance from the host society and the ethnic community. Nonetheless, dissimilarity in social capital influenced each individual's negotiation with structural constraints. The solo navigator parents, for example, enjoyed autonomy that still accrued from social capital, and navigated social systems strategically. In contrast, outsider parents tended to develop critical attitudes toward social systems that stemmed from their personal experiences of marginalization.

In sum, the four types of interaction authored by the Korean immigrant parents reflect constant negotiations between competing meanings and actions. These negotiations reveal the immigrant parents' efforts to construct their and their child's spaces in the host society.

## CHAPTER 6

### UNPACKING PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The discourse on parent involvement is a product of social construction. As Cherryholmes (1988) insisted, “Discourse, a more or less orderly exchange of ideas, is a particular kind of practice, and practice is, at least in part, discursive” (p. 9). Various groups produce unique discourses that represent particular interests and ideologies, and that often privilege one kind of discourse over others. Because of power asymmetry between parents and schools, the discourse on parent involvement has largely prioritized classroom and school needs, their primacy being taken for granted in the school context (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; López et al., 2001). Immigrant families who have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds from the host culture are likely to be positioned on the margins due to a lack of knowledge about the dominant discourse of parent involvement (Bernhard, et al., 1998; Collignon et al., 2001).

In a different vein, a close social relationship within an ethnic group activates community forces that influence individuals’ interpretations and responses to the dominant discourse (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1995). Ethnic networking as community forces constitutes another avenue of collective discourse, which can counteract social reproduction or collude with the status quo within an institution. In either case, articulating particular discourses generated by different parties opens up a space for genuine discussion with regard to the definition of parent involvement and may lead to authentic participation.

To uncover the multiple discourses on parent involvement, this chapter examines two particular contexts: North Creek Elementary School and the Korean mothers’ meeting. Although

the two contexts are closely interconnected, a careful examination reveals competing meanings and practices over the discourse of involvement. In what follows, I first provide the broad discourse of middle-class parenting, which serves as an ideology of Korean immigrant parents in this study. Then, I explore the dominant discourse of parent involvement taken for granted at North Creek Elementary. In an attempt to illuminate the social capital offered through ethnic networking, I also examine community forces operating within the Korean mothers' meeting. Lastly, I analyze tension among the Korean parents as a means for understanding the underlying sources of complexity in Korean immigrant parents' social interactions.

#### Middle-Class Immigrants' Discourse on Parenting

Notions of ideal parenting are socially constructed and situated in a particular historical and cultural context (Chao, 2001; Lareau, 2002). The dominant discourse of parenting and parental involvement, however, tends to presuppose a universal model of child rearing that positions white, middle-class women as ideal mothers (Coll & Pachter, 2002; Prins & Toso, 2008). The "mothering discourse" created by psychologists, educators, and pop-media promotes middle-class mothers' parenting at home and their support for schoolwork. Such a discourse imposes a moral logic on parents by emphasizing that "being successful as mothers meant being attentive to schools and teachers" (Griffith & Smith, 2005, p. 40). According to this discourse, ideal parents demonstrate responsiveness by intensively investing in their children's education. The dominant discourse affects the ways parents think and act, and also influences how schools can function.

The Korean immigrant parents in this study shared perspectives similar to the dominant discourse that emphasize parents' supplementary roles in promoting their children's educational success. They were middle-class parents who possessed the economic capital to invest

intensively in their children's education. They coordinated daily schedules according to their children's needs and interests in order to provide extensive opportunities for academic achievement. Chapter 5 showed how individual parents were engaged in their children's schooling. Although outsider parents faced challenges in helping with schoolwork due to language barriers and time constraints, supporting educational success was most parents' primary goal. For instance, Eunjung, who had never worked outside the home, wished to have a career for her self-fulfillment. However, to comply with the notion of ideal parenting, she decided to postpone the actualization of her dream. She said she needed to take care of her children "until they become grown-ups" (Interview, 3/21/2008). She had enrolled her two children in several after-school programs, such as music and sports, and supervised their homework, if there were no other activities scheduled. Her children were both in the Talented and Gifted Program (TAG) in the school and "thankfully they did good jobs."

However, this notion of ideal parenting provoked guilt and self-blame among some Korean parents when their children were in trouble at school. Junghee expressed her strong despair and guilt when she learned from the teacher that her son's academic ability was lower than his grade level, a trouble, she thought, caused by her inadequate mothering. She had majored in education and taught kindergarten before her marriage and immigration to the United States. Her child-centered philosophy, however, was undermined by the dominant discourse on parenting that emphasized academic excellence measured by standardized tests:

I thought ... my son was going to be okay even if he didn't attend a preschool. ... He had allergies and missed his kindergarten class a lot. So he lagged behind in his grade level. I regret that so much. I should have prepared him for school. (Interview, 4/22/2008)

Since then Junghee had spent much time, energy, and material resources on her son's education:

“My husband even had to feed me because I had no time to eat.” She had been busy coordinating several educational programs her son was enrolled in. Several months later when I met with her again during a school activity, Junghee reported delightedly that her son had moved up to the grade level now.

The notion of ideal parenting constructed by the Korean immigrant parents reflects the Korean and American contexts in which they have been situated. Historically, Koreans regard education as a way to achieve success, power, and status (Sorensen, 1994). The Korean immigrant parents in this study tended to reflect this Korean value of educational success, regardless of their length of residence in the United States. For example, Diane, who immigrated to the United States with her parents when she was in middle school, admitted her parenting discourse was similar to that of traditional Koreans. Although she had greatly assimilated into American society and had a European American husband, Diane put a great deal of pressure on her two children to get good grades:

I am quite similar to Korean parents in terms of pushing my children. ... I used to say to them, “I did a good job even though I couldn’t speak English when I first came to the States. Why can’t you do better?” (Interview, 1/24/2008)

Although the middle-class discourse of ideal parenting prevailed among the Korean parents, their cultural assumptions about a proper family-school relationship differ from those held by middle-class European American parents. As noted in Chapter 4, the Korean immigrant parents tended to hold the Eastern Asian notion of separation between home and school, and believe that a school represents an authoritative and separate space marked by a clear boundary (Walsh, 2002). They complied with the school’s authority with a great amount of respect, whereas middle-class European American parents often intervened in educational practices for

the perceived interests of their own child. Moreover, the Korean immigrant parents' limited knowledge about normative forms of parent involvement prohibited them from claiming ownership over their participatory practices. Despite their active involvement at home, which was congruent with the ideal of parenting held by middle-class European American parents, the Korean immigrant parents appeared to depend on North Creek Elementary School when it came to educational interventions, similar to the practice characterized by working class and poor parents (Lareau, 2002).

### Hegemony in Parental Participation

The discourses of parent involvement are, by all means, socially and historically constructed in a given cultural context. At the North Creek Elementary School, Asian immigrant parents tended to be regarded as “non-participating” or “less involved” according to the school's normalized discourse on parent involvement. Although some differences between Asian notions of parent involvement and those held by the dominant cultural group were recognized (e.g., the negative view of parents' presence at school in an Asian context), little consideration was given to the different meanings and practices that different cultural groups might have about parent involvement. Language barriers disguised competing discourses on parent involvement among diverse cultural groups, and the school often used rhetoric of “reaching out” to parents considered passive and inactive. Mr. Kauffman, the principal, stated:

Some Asian cultures, they generally tend to bring their children to the school, and they don't come in or help the teachers, like what we expect, what we want here. So there has just been a kind of difference in the role of parents playing out at school. Here in North Creek, we want the parents to be part of the classroom. We've encountered a kind of resistance; that might not be as much as cultural, it comes from the language. ... Parents

feel they don't speak enough English to volunteer in the classroom. ... So we have to bridge that, getting the parents to be in here first, then, comfort will come. (Interview, 11/13/2007)

Undoubtedly, the level of English proficiency, as the principal noted, provides parents from different cultures with both a practical tool to navigate the host society and a psychological shield to adjust to their stress of crossing borders. Nonetheless, the notion of parent involvement held by the school administrator legitimized the hegemonic discourses of parental responsiveness to institutional needs. For example, the outreach programs, such as the international PTA committee, adult ESL class, and Get Smart about Culture program, at North Creek Elementary School have relied exclusively on parent volunteers. The emphasis on parent services for the school reflects the status quo of the discourses on parent involvement.

In addition, the meaning of "ideal" parenting promoted by the school personnel needs to be examined. Most extant literature normalizes the parenting practiced by middle-class European American samples. Being positioned as "other" groups, parenting practices of racial and cultural minority families have been interpreted as aberrations or deficits, not as "adaptive strategies responsive to unique environmental and historical demands" (Coll & Pachter, 1995, p. 3). Ms. Smith, the assistant principal, emphasized the need for increasing Asian parent involvement and described her idea for universal parenting:

We are reaching out to them whether they're Korean parents, Indian parents, Hispanic parents, whatever. Being a parent is universal, how I can help them grow as a parent and help their child grow as a human being also. ... We're absolutely different in some ways, yes, but I do still firmly believe we have general commonalities, absolutely, love of humans, absolutely, love of our children and the family. (Interview, 2/27/2008)

Cultural studies, however, reveal how parenting as a cultural practice is constructed by and evolves with constituents in a particular cultural and historical context (see Rogoff, 2003). Different cultural communities may have different ideals of good parenting, and as such, no one right way of parent involvement would exist. Although Asian parents in general and Korean parents in particular do not usually actively engage in school activities in the same ways European-American parents do, making a judgment about immigrant parents based on the school's standards may reproduce a deficit model that already prevails in the discourse on minority schooling.

Further, the dominant discourse on parent involvement did not appreciate other forms of parent engagement, such as home-based involvement. This discourse influenced the Korean immigrant parents' perceptions about parent involvement. For example, Diane, a Korean English bilingual who socialized primarily with Americans, expressed her sense of relief while witnessing improved participation by Korean parents at North Creek Elementary School:

I felt sorry before because people said, "few Koreans participate in the school even though there are so many Koreans here." ... If I saw Koreans, I would turn to others [as if I asked] what they thought about those Korean parents' presence. [I would say,] "Wow, here's Koreans." (Interview, 5/1/2008)

Similarly, Eunjung, an active volunteer as well as leader of the Korean mother's meeting, criticized some groups of Korean parents who did not participate in school activities as actively as she did: "Many people think they cannot speak English and won't be involved in the school, even if they really want to. That's true to some degree. ... But honestly they also think, 'well, that's not my business'" (Interview, 2/1/2008).

As shown in the aforementioned two Korean parents' accounts, the normalized notion of parent involvement produced a hierarchy in social positioning between families and reproduced inequalities by reinforcing the notion of ideal parenting promoted by the dominant cultural group. During my conversations with European American parents in this study, Asian parents tended to be relegated to powerless positions. They viewed Asian mothers as needing to "build confidence that makes it easier for them to volunteer in the classroom" and "be part of their kid's education" (Interview with Mrs. Baldwin, 3/5/2008). However, Mrs. McGraw, the chair of the international PTA committee, challenged the stereotype of "passive" Asian families held by many Americans at North Creek including teachers and administrators:

We [Americans] have many nuances in our culture that we just take for granted. ... We have culture too. They [Asian families] are trying to adjust, and I think the hardest one is that teacher is saying, "They're not trying." I haven't yet met *a* parent at this school who *isn't* trying to adapt to being in the United States. They are *all* trying. (Interview, 2/20/2008)

As noted in chapter 4, Mrs. McGraw considered the recent demographic change at North Creek an opportunity for increasing cultural diversity in the school. Except for Mrs. McGraw, however, the other European American parents emphasized the need for Asian parents' active participation in the school, which contributes to sustaining the tradition of a strong PTA. In this way, the hegemonic discourse on parent involvement has lived on in the community of North Creek Elementary School.

#### Ethnic Networking as a Community Force

A close social relationship within an ethnic group activates community forces that influence individuals' interpretations and responses to the larger system forces. As a product of

sociocultural adaptation, community forces involve a set of specific beliefs, values, behavioral patterns, and strategies to cope with adverse societal treatment (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1995). Studies on ethnic minority immigrants have identified benefits from social capital through ethnic networking, which ultimately serves as an external agency for better adjustment to and academic achievement in the host society (Lew, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 1998; Zhou & Kim, 2006). However, close social relationships within a homogeneous group might operate a controlling mechanism that forces the members to conform to the group's norms.

In what follows, I examine ethnic networking among Korean parents in the context of the Korean mothers' meeting. By analyzing the ways in which the meeting operates community forces, I ask whether ethnic networking counteracts the social inequalities or colludes with the status quo in North Creek Elementary School.

#### *Social Capital in the Korean Mothers' Meeting*

Coleman (1988) explained the social capital inherent in the structure of relations and suggested three forms of social capital that can be useful resources in achieving individual interests: (a) obligations and expectations embedded in trustworthiness of structure; (b) information channels; and (c) norms and sanctions that contribute to common good. While all social relations are likely to produce social capital, a high degree of closure within a social structure facilitates trustworthiness which in turn engenders mutual obligations and expectations among the members. Additionally, social capital embedded in a dense community operates sanctions and develops norms that guide and control its members' behaviors and activities (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987).

From this perspective, the Korean mothers' meeting exemplifies a dense ethnic community that generates social capital effectively. As noted in Chapter 4, the meeting aims to

provide collective ethnic agency that helps Korean parents better participate in North Creek Elementary School. Based on reciprocal relationships, the members of this meeting supported one another in volunteer activities and took part in the school events as a group. For instance, Eunjoo volunteered for the Get Smart about Culture program and gave an origami lesson to three third-grade classrooms. On her presentation day, Eunjung and two other Korean parents accompanied Eunjoo and assisted in her instruction by helping the children fold paper properly. Each presentation lasted for 30 minutes, during which the three assisting parents were continuously engaged in their supporter roles as Eunjoo provided the class with a mini-lesson about paper-folding activities. After the three presentations were completed, one of the assisting parents said that she would participate in the Get Smart about Culture program and asked the other parents if she could do this origami lesson in her daughter's kindergarten classroom. The following is a vignette of this incident:

Eunjoo said to the kindergartener's mother that another poster board about learning origami kept in the PTA storage room would be more appropriate for kindergartners than the one she used today. All four mothers moved to the storage room and examined the poster board together. While looking at the material, Eunjoo suggested sending an email to the classroom teacher. She explained to the mother with a kindergartner in detail how to write an email to decide the presentation date. She also recommended using double-sided colored paper to help kindergarten children easily distinguish each side of the paper.

(Field notes, 11/19/2007)

The four parents participated in the Korean mothers' meeting and maintained collaborative relationships with one another while volunteering for the school and classroom activities. In the context of the Korean mothers' meeting, it was not uncommon for one the members to substitute

for another in volunteer activities when a schedule conflict arose. Specifically, many members of the Korean mothers' meeting volunteered for Parent Assist Learning Service (P.A.L.S.), which assisted teachers once or twice a month by providing copying, cutting and pasting, and laminating services in the copy room. Three groups of two to three parents took part in the P.A.L.S. as teams; if a parent could not be available on her scheduled date, other parents on her team substituted for her or sought help from other members of the Korean mothers' meeting. On one occasion, I participated in the P.A.L.S. activity on behalf of a parent who had a time conflict. Later, the parent invited me to lunch in order to repay me for my help.

Along with mutual support, the Korean mothers' meeting provided members with an effective information channel. During the approximately two hour-long monthly meeting, members shared their first-hand knowledge about concepts specific to American schools (e.g., ability grouping) but foreign to them, and provided feedback to one another. A variety of information on school matters and educational programs was exchanged and discussed (e.g., academic glossary, after school programs, summer camps, and school events). Eunjung described how information gained through the Korean mothers' meeting was helpful for her in clarifying messages from the school:

If you got a letter from the school and didn't know what it said, you could ask someone who had already experienced it: "What am I supposed to do about this?" No matter how fluently you speak English, sometimes you still cannot figure out what a message from the school means until you talk with someone about it. (Interview, 12/4/2007)

Particularly, parents who were new at North Creek Elementary School appeared the greatest beneficiaries from the information channel available through the Korean mothers' meeting. Many new parents participated in the meeting when they learned about it via the school's

newsletters or contacts with other Korean parents. Circles of acquaintances played an important role in linking newcomers to the Korean mothers' meeting. For example, Hyunjoo, in her first year of living in the United States, heard about the meeting from her friend whose neighbor was a member. This member introduced Hyunjoo to other Korean parents, including Eunjung, the leader of the Korean mothers' meeting. These acquaintances led Hyunjoo to join the meeting, although she became distant from the meeting after several months.

Social capital offered through the Korean mothers' meeting reinforced cultural norms and values that promoted active engagement of the Korean parents in North Creek Elementary School. As discussed earlier, historically Koreans value education and respect schools' authority. As representatives of the Korean community at North Creek, the members of the meeting were frequently required to demonstrate Korean pride by showing active participation in the school. Throughout the year, the members organized their participation in several school-wide events, such as Treats for Teachers, Taste of North Creek, and the Korean food corner of the fall carnival. Most of the members took part in these events as a group; even parents who would otherwise not have participated joined by volunteering along with other members. Simultaneously, strong co-ethnic ties provide members with moral and emotional support that compensate their unfamiliarity with the host society (Lew, 2003; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Junghee, one of team worker parents, spoke of her sense of belonging to the Korean mothers' meeting that was grounded in shared norms and status as parents:

There would be many places you could meet Korean people, such as a Korean church, but it's important to share something together. Because the Korean mothers' meeting is for mothers with their child in North Creek, the members have similar ideas and concerns, so it's easy for them to get close to each other. (Interview, 12/14/2007)

The existence of the Korean mothers' meeting positively affected the school's general perception toward the Korean group. Eunjung, the leader of the meeting, explained how ethnic networking through the Korean mothers' meeting could empower the entire Korean group within the school context: "This meeting offers a good opportunity to improve the overall image of Koreans. For instance, the ESL adult class — the school began that class to support our participation as we volunteered together and made donations to the school" (Interview, 12/4/2007). To certain extent, the function of the meeting appeared to buttress Korean parents' disadvantages as a minority immigrant group, improving their positioning within North Creek Elementary School. In Chapter 5, the case of the team worker parents demonstrated the benefits of the social capital offered through the meeting's collective ethnic networking.

#### *A Controlling Mechanism of Community Forces*

As a collective frame of mind, a cultural context operates community forces that affect individuals' beliefs, values, behavioral patterns, and responses to social systems (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). In the East Asian culture from which the Korean parents came, interdependent ways of being are strongly encouraged. Individuals are understood to be interdependent with others; therefore, fitting in with others and fulfilling obligations in various interpersonal relationships is regarded as an ideal construal of self. To maintain harmonious relationships with others, a high degree of self-control and self-discipline is required; personal desires, goals, and emotions are subject to control. In contrast, the European American notion of control implies an assertion of self (Shweder et al., 1998).

From this interdependent construal of self, opposing collective modes of discourse implies standing out from the group, immaturity, and selfishness (Markus et al., 1997). As a community force, the Korean mothers' meeting appeared to valorize collective harmony rather

than individual conspicuousness. Throughout my fieldwork, disagreements or conflicting ideas were seldom mentioned in the context of the Korean mothers' meeting. As described in the section on methodological challenges, for instance, during the hour-long focus group meeting, Eunjung, the leader of the Korean mothers' meeting, was the predominant speaker. Based on the questions provided in advance, she presented her thoughts and ideas about the vision of the Korean mothers' meeting, while the other members listened attentively to her without any questions or suggestions. She did not even ask other members to raise questions or share different ideas after her presentation. However, she did emphasize how her leadership intended to focus on collective decision-making without letting the group be dominated by one person:

Mothers in this school are nice, no one stands out from the group.... This meeting is to support and help the school, not to exert individual power or lead the group arbitrarily. I thank the mothers for their collaboration and understanding of this. (Interview, 2/1/2008)

Similarly, the way the members perceived and responded to the discourse on parent involvement reflected a communal control imposed by the collective orientation of the Korean mothers' meeting. During the meeting time, the members were frequently instructed: "This meeting is not a separate Korean PTA; it is not appropriate for us to exert any control over the school" (Field notes, 4/23/2008). Supporting the school, specifically by active volunteering, was the ideal of good membership. Overt demands for an individual child's interest or disagreement with the school's decision was considered immature or selfish and likely to be met with disapproval by the members.

Given their middle-class status and strong academic focus, it is possible that some Korean parents would have wanted to influence or control their child's school experience through the collective agency of the Korean mothers' meeting. However, opposition to the

normalized discourse implies that one would stand out from the group, including the larger school community and the Korean mothers' meeting. Kim, Kim, and Kelly (2006) reported that for Koreans, having the intuitive ability of what Koreans call "noon-chi"— sensitivity to others' unspoken feelings and intentions — is necessary and desirable in that "it helps one discern where one stands in relation to a specific person or situation" (p. 153). With "noon-chi," an individual develops a keen awareness of and sensitivity to other people's nonverbal cues (e.g., gestures, facial expressions, voice, intonation, speech patterns, and body language), which helps him or her to decide the appropriate protocol and manner for interpersonal relationships in a given situation. Eunmi, one of solo navigators described in Chapter 5, was able to navigate the school independently but maintained positive relationships with the Korean group. She described her acceptance of collective norms when participating in the Korean mothers' meeting: "If there are orders from the top, following the rules is a shortcut to peace. Well, you do feel bad sometimes though" (Interview, 2/27/2008).

A controlling mechanism of community forces affected the ways in which the Korean parents perceived inequalities embedded in the hegemonic discourse on parent involvement at North Creek Elementary School. Prioritizing the institutional goals, the hegemonic discourse became a form of discipline in which a system of self-regulation operates and disciplines individuals (Foucault, 1995). According to Anderson (1988):

The discourse of participation tends to be absorbed into a managerial bias and institutional logic in which it advances the apparently neutral and supposedly agreed on purposes of the organization. ... In most management and leadership models, participation is not used to create or challenge goals but to incorporate members into existing ones. (p. 579)

In the context of the Korean mothers' meeting, control did not come from outside but was created by and regulated among the members themselves. As in the case of the team worker parents, Korean parents associated with the meeting were satisfied with the quality of the school. They desired to become part of the school community and conformed to the discourse of parent participation that both the school and the Korean mothers' meeting normalized. Even if the existing discourse might maintain and justify Asian families' marginalization within the school, a disciplinary mechanism of community forces tended to exert a "value-laden system of control" that suppresses individual agency against the institution (Barker, 1993, p. 434). Moreover, a majority of the meeting attendees were housewives with limited exposure to the mainstream society. They rarely experienced significant discrimination as minorities in the United States, resulting in a lack of awareness of social inequalities existing in American schools, including North Creek.

A controlling mechanism of community forces often silenced those members who disagreed with the normalized discourse of parent involvement. Chapter 5 showed how outsider parents' critical perspectives remained unrecognized by other parents. Jeeyung, for example, sharply criticized the status quo that prevailed in the school's atmosphere, yet she never articulated her ideas in the meeting:

They [the school staff] should take the current demographic change as it is. ... Yes, Asians don't volunteer as much as whites do. I don't want to blame other Asians because I am not active enough either. ... I feel bad. I've got to do more. ... But, they can see this change from a different perspective, in a broader outlook. Now, many ethnic groups are coming here, which means the city is getting bigger and more money is coming in.

(Interview, 12/16/2007)

Jeeyung's silence mirrors the contradictions and complexities in immigrant parents' social interactions, ultimately situated between the particular group of parents and the broader school community. To explore the underlying sources of the complexity, the following section investigates tension among the Korean parents associated with the Korean mothers' meeting.

### Tension in the Ethnic Community

The Korean mothers' meeting can be characterized as an avenue of collective ethnic networking that provides Korean parents with an information channel and mutual support grounded in shared cultural beliefs and values. It ultimately functions as a means for improving individual mothers' efficacy in parental involvement. Nonetheless, inevitable tensions existed underneath the seemingly collaborative relationships among the Korean parents. Each tension had different sources of competing meanings and values, which were mediated by power relations (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994).

#### *We Are Not the Same: Gaps between Oldtimers and Newcomers*

Length of residence in the United States affects immigrant parents' relationships with schools, which reflect the extent to which they obtain cultural capital congruent with the school culture. The longer their residence extends, the more immigrant parents become adjusted to the host culture and gradually overcome language barriers and cultural unfamiliarity when involved in school and classroom activities. Eunmi, who had lived in the United States for 11 years, explained how she initiated friendly conversations during parent-teacher conferences. She purposefully delayed sensitive questions about her child until general discussions were done. She thought this rapport building was likely to alleviate tension stemming from competing ideas between her and the teacher.

Newcomers, on the other hand, tend to exercise cultural capital specific to their home culture, which often engenders problems and misunderstandings in their interactions with the school community. Particularly, competitive educational environments in Korean society rendered recent Korean immigrant parents overly concerned about their children's academic achievement. These parents' concern is understandable because their motivation for immigration had likely been to seek better educational opportunities for their children in the United States. While parents in the North Creek Elementary School tended to invest intensively in their children's academic success, the Korean parents who had lived in the United States long enough to understand American parent involvement practices frowned on the excessive academic focus shown by some new Korean parents. Presenting teachers with expensive gifts, a practice of many parents in Korea, was seen as one of the characteristic behaviors of newcomer parents, and provoked a strong negative reaction among long-resident parents.

Such dissonance in cultural capital between oldtimers and newcomers resulted in conflicts among the Korean immigrant parents when it came to legitimate ways of parental involvement in the school. Myungsook, one of team worker parents, in her eleventh year of living in the United States, spoke of her disagreement with some parents' confrontation with school decisions:

People say that some mothers push the school to get their child into advanced courses or the TAG [Talented and Gifted] program. But in my mind, that is wrong. Schools in this county do not welcome Korean mothers because they demand too much: "Why does my child not get into the TAG?" "Put my child into advanced classes." But they never come to school to volunteer. (Interview, 2/15/2008)

To Myungsook, involvement practices deviating from conventional forms of parental participation not only indicated one's ignorance of American culture, but also threatened the reputation of the entire Korean community. As discussed earlier, individual parents' demands in the interest of their child were considered unreasonable, inappropriate, and selfish because the goal for the Korean mothers' meeting is to support the school.

Excessive academic focus and the resulting competition among the Korean parents drove some Korean parents to distance themselves from the Korean group, specifically from the recent immigrant parents. As described in Chapter 5, Eunjoo, one of the cultural broker parents, often felt discomfort with newcomer Korean parents even as she played a leading role in helping them adjust to the school. She described one experience she had with a newly arrived Korean immigrant mother:

I met someone who just came from Korea at the school. We chatted together, and she immediately started asking, "Are your children in the TAG? Do they do well?" ... I've never heard questions like that about my child from American parents. It was rude.

(Interview, 1/11/2008)

In addition, covert competition among Korean parents tended to alienate those whose children were not academically successful from the majority of the Korean groups in the school. Even among the newcomer group, gaps between children's academic performances affected the parents' social relationships with the ethnic community. Hyunjoo, who had lived in the United States less than one year and was one of outsider parents, described her feeling of marginalization from the Korean group. As mentioned in Chapter 5, besides a status difference — she stayed in the States temporarily and others were permanent residents — Hyunjoo perceived achievement gaps between her children and other Korean students at North Creek. Her

two sons, one in fifth grade and the other in third grade, were enrolled in the ESL classes because they were considered far behind the children of many other Korean parents in English communication. Admitting her sense of inferiority, Hyunjoo pointed out implicit competitions among Korean parents regarding their children's academic achievement: "Korean mothers seem too obsessed with being excellent; well, [they are] kind of desperate. ... They compete with each other, wanting to send their child to the Ivy league. I'm not buying into that" (Interview, 5/8/2008).

Nonetheless, recent immigrant parents' dedication to their child's academic success made some early immigrant Korean parents reflect on their parenting style, adapted to the American emphasis on children's independence and self-reliance. Particularly, Diane, who had lived in the United States about 30 years, admired one recent Korean parent's mother's strong commitment to her child regardless of challenges she faced, including the language barrier and her lack of knowledge about the school system:

In terms of commitment to their child, people who just came to the United States seemed to do much better. Sometimes, I'm thinking, "Oops, what am I doing for my children?" When I see what she does for her child, supporting her child as much as she can, I regret that I haven't done more. Should I do more? (Interview, 5/1/2008)

As one of cultural broker parents, Diane frequently aided new Korean parents regarding school matters. Like other cultural broker parents, she perceived certain differences between her and newcomers, yet she maintained a positive perspective toward the new group. She thought her long years of residence in the United States had weakened the influence of valuable aspects of Korean traditional culture on her, including communication in Korean. To some extent, Diane's

decreased Korean cultural knowledge and familiarity with the host society positioned her as somewhat distant from the Korean group, preventing tension from intra-group competition.

*One Korean Community, Many Subgroups: an Ethnic Network*

All social relationships contain conflicts and complexities rooted in differing status and self-interest. Although the Korean mothers' meeting constituted an effective avenue of involvement, inevitable tensions existed underneath the successful collaboration among the members. Monica, one of solo navigators who did not participate in the Korean mothers' meeting, doubted the successful work of the meeting: "Whenever Korean mothers get together, they form cliques" (Interview, 1/30/2008). She had had negative work experiences with Korean parents and described Koreans as being "too hard to get together." The problem of subgroups within the Korean community was also an issue for team worker parents. Junghee, an outgoing attendee of the meeting, described similar experiences of alienation from the close circles established by some groups of Korean parents: "There are some mothers who always form a group. They never let someone else get into their territory. Well ... I've never experienced these cliques in Korea but here, I've seen that it happens among Korean parents" (Interview, 4/22/2008).

Loyalty to the ethnic group appeared to be one factor determining one's social inclusion into the majority of Korean parents. Specifically, there was tension between assimilating into the host society and maintaining ethnic solidarity among the parents affiliated with the Korean mothers' meeting. Korean immigrant studies have noted strong ethnic ties and networking among Korean immigrants in the United States (Kim et al., 1993; Min, 2001). Most Korean Americans, whether immigrants or their descendents, tend to interact primarily with members of their own ethnic group. Although they become Americanized socially and culturally, they appear

to retain strong Korean-American identities and social networks within the ethnic community. Consistent with this phenomenon, Korean parents associated with the Korean mothers' meeting tended to interact primarily with their own ethnic group, speaking Korean with each other even when participating in school events.

Some members, however, preferred associating with Americans to being with Koreans, and actively forged social relationships with American parents. Interestingly, during their school participation as a team, the members of the Korean mothers' meeting were divided into two large groups, depending on their language preference for communication: one group of Korean-speaking parents and one of English-speaking parents. A new parent was categorized as either Korean- or English-speaking, although Korean was used exclusively in the Korean mothers' meeting. Even English-speaking parents whose abilities to speak Korean were relatively limited, were expected to use Korean. Eunjung, the leader of the Korean mothers' meeting and one of team worker parents, revealed her antagonism toward using English during social interactions among Korean parents:

Honestly, she [another Korean parent who speaks English fluently] is disgusting. Why does she speak only English and try to look as if she is a native? She is a Korean and can speak Korean. She came to America as an adult. (Interview, 2/1/2008)

To these parents, speaking Korean meant being Korean, regardless of where they lived, and was a symbol of their ethnic solidarity.

Many subgroups within the Korean community posed a significant challenge for the Korean parents in taking leadership positions. To the Korean parents, being a leader implies a twofold responsibility: (a) to meet the different needs expressed by each subgroup and (b) to stand out from the collective group. As discussed earlier, the meeting's focus on collective

harmony often operated as a controlling mechanism constraining the members' autonomy independent of the group order. Some parents took risks and resisted collective pressure, but some wanted to be one of the group members rather than confronting the group. Eunjung, the leader of the meeting since she established it two years ago, expressed difficulty in selecting the next leader for the group:

My child is in the fifth grade, she's going to go to middle school soon. I can't take this leader role forever. I hoped that different people would rotate the leader role for one year, but no one would volunteer to do this ... "I can't because so and so, I have no time."

Even in my church choir, nobody wants to be the leader. (Interview, 2/1/2008)

Hesitance among Korean immigrant parents about taking leadership roles might reflect another side of ethnic networking where individual performance has been less valued than collective accomplishment.

*They Are Lucky People: Limitations of Ethnic Collaboration*

Most parents associated with the Korean mothers' meeting attended regular monthly meetings to gain easy access to valuable information and social support through ethnic collaboration. However, the within-ethnic-group collaboration through the Korean mothers' meeting appeared to be less attractive or even negative to some parents due to the meeting's limited functions. Some parents stop attending after one or two meetings; only about one-third of the parents listed in the meeting directory have attended meetings. Jeeyung, who described herself as an introvert and one of outsider parents, attributed this low level of participation to the informal nature of the meeting:

In fact, there are many people who did not participate in the Korean mothers' meeting.

Let's just say, they expect the meeting to be a kind of PTA, but many times, the meetings

tend to be off track, just chatting, and become meaningless and waste time. (Interview, 12/16/2007)

In addition, the Korean mothers' meeting failed to attract a broader parent group from outside the immediate networks. Although the meeting agenda was announced through the school's newsletters, the weekday morning meeting schedule made it difficult for working parents to attend. Indeed, no participating parents of the meeting worked, although a few had part time jobs. Interestingly, most of the parents affiliated with the meeting revealed their satisfaction with the meeting schedule and the exclusion of fathers. As mentioned in Chapter 5, fathers' lesser involvement in education has been taken for granted among many Korean families. Although some mothers welcomed the idea of inviting fathers to the meeting, the morning meeting time generally precluded this as a possibility. Additionally, the exclusive use of the Korean language provided another impediment that prohibited non-Korean parents' access to the meeting. For instance, David, who did not participate in the meeting and is the only father participating in this study, explained how inaccessible the Korean group was to his Chinese wife, including the Korean mothers' meeting:

One day, my son showed me the school newsletter and said, "Daddy, you are a Korean."

I read it and came to know about the Korean meeting within the school. ... My wife used to attend a church before with which some Koreans were affiliated. However, when Korean women get together, they prefer speaking Korean to English. So, my wife couldn't communicate with them. (Interview, 3/5/2008)

Nonetheless, in general, most of the participants associated with the Korean mothers' meeting perceived the function of the meeting positively and appreciated the benefits gained through the collective ethnic networking. They felt comfortable with their fellow Korean

immigrant parents, and to some extent, hesitated to extend their boundaries of interest. On some occasions, a few parents wanted the meeting to reach out more broadly to all minority parents through systematic work such as translation services, home visits, and joint meetings with other minority groups. For example, Myungsook, a team worker parent and active member of the meeting, revealed her concern about the limited function of the gathering: “The meeting focuses only on things related to the school, and, honestly, we do not move beyond what we are given” (Interview, 4/16/2008). From her point of view, the exclusive meeting announcement posted through school newsletters implied the school’s high expectations for the meeting; the school personnel might consider the Korean mothers’ meeting an intermediary channel to the entire Korean community. However, she rarely shared her ideas for change with the other parents, even when the meeting’s vision was the topic for the focus group. Interdependent ways of being appeared to be embodied in Myungsook, who constrained herself from resisting the collective mode of discourses in public; after all, she was a team worker parent whose advantages were maximized through within-ethnic-group collaboration.

Jamie, the Korean paraprofessional, described her impression of Korean parents who actively participated in the school through their association with the Korean mothers’ meeting: “They have money, so they don’t need to work. They are educated, so they know about school systems and can interact with teachers. They are lucky people” (Interview, 4/6/2008). Jamie’s comment suggests that the Korean parents who can attend the Korean mother’s meeting may be less vulnerable to structural impediments (e.g., language barriers, time and economic constraints) than others might be. They were capable of accessing and obtaining benefits from the within-ethnic-group collaboration; in other words, they were a select group among the minority parents in the school.

## Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presented the multiple discourses on parent involvement generated by two particular contexts: North Creek Elementary School and the Korean mothers' meeting. The discourses on parent involvement were socially constructed in either context. The Korean parents participating in the Korean mothers' meeting were middle-class mothers who strongly identified with the notion of ideal parenting promoted by the dominant cultural group of the host society. In spite of cultural differences between their ethnic community and the school, they actively played supplementary roles in the institutional functioning.

Additionally, this chapter showed how ethnic networking interplayed with individual parents and affected their relationships with the school. As an avenue of social capital, the collective networking of the Korean mothers' meeting provided the members with effective coping strategies to compensate for their unfamiliarity with American schools. It ultimately operated community forces that promoted better participatory practices among the participants. However, community forces appeared to discipline individual mothers by imposing the dominant discourse of parent participation on them. There was tension underneath the collaborative interactions among the members of the Korean mothers' meeting, reflecting different sources of competing meanings and values in relation to parental participation.

## CHAPTER 7

### DISCUSSION

#### Summary of Findings

This study contextualized the involvement experiences of Korean immigrant parents and their ethnic networking in an elementary school. The purpose of this study was to examine whether Korean immigrant parents as a group create effective social capital conducive to authentic participation in the school. By using a critical ethnographic case study, this study conceptualized the process of parent participation as a complex negotiation authored by immigrant parents in the contexts of North Creek Elementary School and the Korean mothers' meeting.

The very act of parent participation requires a specific understanding of the context in which parents and other school actors are situated. All social interactions involve simultaneously contested meanings and actions, mediated by power asymmetry (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). At North Creek Elementary School, the dominant discourse on parental involvement, which prioritized school and classroom needs over other forms of involvement, affected the participatory experiences of Korean immigrant parents in several ways.

First, increasing Asian populations and the resulting challenges prompted several initiatives intended to sustain the tradition of active parent involvement in the school community. Korean families, who comprised approximately 11% of the total population of the school, had contributed to creating this new context; simultaneously, the ways in which they participated in the school had been subject to criticism due to the seemingly passive participation of Asian

families in the school's functioning. Historically, Korean families place a high value on their children's academic success, and they invest intensively in education. However, structural and cultural barriers impede many Korean immigrant parents' active involvement in school functioning, and they are thus labeled as being "respectful but less involved" by school personnel.

Second, the commonly shared challenges against active involvement motivated some Korean parents to pursue the collective agency offered through ethnic networking. In spring 2006, a group of parents organized a Korean mothers' meeting in an attempt to help Korean parents actively participate in the school functioning at North Creek Elementary School. As a collaborative mode of participation, the Korean mothers' meeting provided members with an informational channel and collective support, which promoted their efficacy in parent involvement.

Finally, communal norms shared by the members of the Korean mothers' meeting reinforced the dominant discourse promoted at North Creek Elementary School. Also, the interdependence-focused relationships valued in the Korean mothers' meeting operated a system of self-discipline and controlled individual members' resistance against the status quo. Nevertheless, underlying tension revealed contradictions and complexities in Korean immigrant parents' social interactions, mediating between the ethnic group and the broader school community.

To a great extent, the cases of 12 Korean immigrant parents illuminated a complex negotiation authored by immigrant parents in an effort to provide meaningful and successful educational experiences for their children in the host society. The practice of parental participation involves a dynamic, interactive process between parents and school actors (Barton et al., 2004). Based on their respective levels of participation and capital possession, the Korean

immigrant parents were engaged in four types of interaction: cultural broker, solo navigator, team worker, and outsider. Each type of interaction demonstrated the characteristic involvement commonly authored by the group of parents, which mirrored their complex negotiation in multiple contexts.

### From Disciplinary to Authentic Partnership

Research on parent involvement has noted that immigrant parents from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds show less active involvement in school activities than their “mainstream” counterparts (Edwards & Dandridge, 2001; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). According to Bourdieu, schools operate institutionalized structures in which the symbolic values of the dominant culture are imposed and reproduced (Bourdieu, 1994/1998; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Lee and Bowen (2006) noted significant differences in levels of parent involvement in schools among groups with different socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity. Based on Bourdieuan theory, these researchers argued that “different levels of parent involvement may reflect differences in parents’ habitus for educational involvement, while different effects of parent involvement may reflect differences in levels of cultural capital” (p. 199). Immigrant parents from diverse backgrounds may differ in terms of educational habitus, and few are likely to possess cultural capital congruent with that valued by the institutions (Carreón et al., 2005; Li, 2006).

Many studies have identified structural barriers (e.g., language barriers, time constraints, and lack of knowledge about school culture) that impede minority immigrant families’ active participation in schools (Lee, 2005; Perreira et al., 2006), and this study was no exception. Despite their middle-class socioeconomic status, the Korean immigrant parents in this study interacted with the school staff in ways similar to working-class and poor parents, characterized

by a marked distance between home and school (Lareau, 2002). The Eastern Asian notion of separation between home and school conflicted with the family-school partnership promoted at the American school and positioned the Korean immigrant parents unequally within North Creek Elementary School.

However, ethnic collaboration like that of the Korean mothers' meeting could be an effective means of empowering immigrant parents to become involved. In this study, many parents participating in the Korean mothers' meeting counted on collective ethnic networking in order to overcome challenges against active engagement in the school. By involving themselves in ethnic networking, the parents were able to access an extensive informational channel, as well as mutual support grounded in shared cultural beliefs and values. As an avenue of collective ethnic networking, the Korean mothers' meeting constituted a unique field of educational involvement, which could counteract social reproduction within the school.

Nonetheless, the collective mode of participation of the Korean mothers' meeting became a form of discipline when communal norms shared by participant parents operated a system of self-regulation rather than promoting individual agency against the institutional status quo (Foucault, 1995). While the social control exerted by the Korean mothers' meeting improved participatory practices among the Korean immigrant mothers, it appeared to monitor individual mothers by imposing the dominant discourse on these parents. Here, the regulation "embodies forms of unobtrusive or nonovert control in which control no longer appears to come from outside the organizational members' sphere of activities" (Anderson, 1998, p. 580). The cultural value of a collective orientation tended to frame individual members' actions and meaning making processes by operating a disciplinary or regulatory mechanism. For instance, Eunjung and Myungsook, who played leading roles in the Korean mothers' meeting, strongly identified

with the dominant discourse of parent involvement at North Creek Elementary School. They constantly strived to fit the school's standard, explicitly emphasizing joint conformity to the school among their fellow members. Similarly, other members were likely to identify with the collective goals regulating the Korean mothers' meeting, which in turn normalized the discourse prevailing in the school.

While the findings of this study encourage ethnic communities to examine their internal control mechanisms, such as value orientations and enforced conformity, it is far more necessary and urgent that schools reflect on their taken-for-granted notions of parent involvement. Research has challenged the dominant definition of parent involvement, which is deeply rooted in the middle-class, European American discourse on participation (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; López et al., 2001; Valdes, 1996). Definitions of parental involvement have centered on classroom and school needs, and have become too natural for teachers and administrators to be conscious of (Griffith & Smith, 2005; Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

As research has shown (e.g., E. Kim, 2002; Siu, 2001), Asian families are engaged in a variety of educational activities in and outside of the home in order to promote their children's learning, whereas they are less involved in volunteering or decision making at schools. At North Creek Elementary School, regrettably, the American notion of parent participation was privileged over other forms of involvement such as home-based learning. Although some differences between cultures were recognized by the school personnel, little consideration was given to "funds of knowledge" that different cultural groups might bring to the school (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzáles, 1992). For instance, the school personnel readily acknowledged the high value Asian families placed on education and their intensive investment in their children's learning. Nonetheless, Asian families were still regarded as "non-participating" or "less

involved” according to the normalized discourse of parent involvement. Despite their strong academic orientations, Asian families were placed on the margin when it came to legitimate forms of involvement that emphasized parental responsiveness to institutional needs.

Then, a question about parent involvement arises: Who is served by parent involvement, and toward what end? In an evaluation study of 41 parental involvement programs aimed at school-aged (K-12) children in the United States, Mattingly, Radmila, McKenzie, Rodriguez, and Kayzar (2002) concluded that the programs did not necessarily improve student learning or change teacher, parent, and student behavior. Although schools continue to increase parent involvement by planning and implementing various programs, the conventional “get them to the school” events are unlikely to build trustful relationships among educators, families, and students (Allen, 2007). Epstein (1995) suggested a model of school, family, and community partnership that would promote interactions among these parties and success for all students. Building respectful and trustful relationships among school staff, families, and community members plays a crucial role in creating and maintaining supportive environments for student achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Building trustful relationships requires a genuine dialogue between people. Paulo Freire (1970/1993) defines dialogue as “the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world” (p. 69). Naming is a transformation of the world that leads us to be fully human, and through which we engage in true communication. Dialogue involves love, humility, faith, hope, and critical thinking. Unless school staff, families, and community members critically examine the injustice embedded in the school community and constantly challenge the status quo, it might be impossible to create an authentic partnership that is beneficial for all students. At North Creek Elementary School, there was a clear boundary around what classroom practices

parents were able to access. Teachers' professional knowledge and authority were protected by educational jargon and bureaucratic systems. The classroom doors were rarely open. Families were frequently invited to volunteer for the school and classrooms, yet classroom visits were strictly limited by a pre-appointment policy. The demographic change within the school was considered an opportunity, but an intimidating one for the teachers. The school used the rhetoric of diversity without genuine recognition of cultural differences. Parents were only welcomed as partners if they played supplemental roles in the school's functioning.

In such an environment, the Korean immigrant parents tended to fall into self-blame, comparing themselves with idealized middle-class European American parents. They rarely attempted to position themselves as equal to teachers due to their cultural value of respect for educators. Their active involvement, both in the classroom and at home, in enriching their child's learning did not receive much recognition, even as these families' strong academic focus was taken for granted. If administrators and teachers were to consider both cultural differences and individual needs and carefully examine the Korean parents' apparent conformity to the school agenda, the disciplined participation sustaining the status quo would be challenged, and reconstructed toward authentic partnerships between families and the school. The current hegemonic discourse on parent involvement needs to be revisited by moving our attention from how to promote parental support for school functioning to the ways in which alternative avenues of parent involvement are recognized and liberate parents from internal and external constraints.

#### Self Centered Model Minority

"North Creek is a nice microcosm of the world. We have so many countries represented here. So many cultures are represented here, and all those kids get along" (Interview with Mr. Kauffman, the principal, 11/23/2007). Mr. Kauffman described the school as a microcosm of the

globalized world in which people work together regardless of race, nationality, or culture. In the globalized world, however, inequality still exists, and North Creek Elementary School was not an exception, at least in terms of race-based family-school relationships. This study revealed how Asian families were perceived as strangers or problems in the dominant middle-class European American discourse of parent involvement. They also showed the ways in which Korean parents respond to this raced discourse; instead of critically recognizing or resisting institutional inequalities, the middle-class Korean immigrant parents tended to buy into the dominant discourse imposed by the school.

It is important to note that the Korean parents in this study were privileged in many aspects of their lives. They possessed substantial economic capital to help their children succeed in school. Their children were able to participate in a variety of extracurricular activities and tutoring services if necessary. They also possessed a level of cultural capital congruent with that valued by the dominant cultural group. They had sufficient time to navigate the institutional structure either individually or collectively. Simultaneously, it was also true that they as immigrants were the oppressed in some other aspects of their lives. Most of them directly or indirectly experienced discrimination in their everyday lives and understood the challenges of participating in school.

Nonetheless, the Korean parents rarely spoke for others, particularly for those who were not as visible at the school as they were. Although some revealed resentment against the derogatory label of Asian families as non-participating, many accepted their disadvantages as “just the way it was” and even allowed themselves to be co-opted in sustaining the status quo. For example, some members of the Korean mothers’ meeting regarded those invisible others as

selfish, irresponsible, or shameful. What might have led some Korean immigrant parents to assist in the oppression of the oppressed? As Freire puts it:

The oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or “sub-oppressors.” ... Their vision of the new man or woman is individualistic; because of their identification with the oppressor, they have no consciousness of themselves as persons or as members of an oppressed class. (Freire, 1970/1993, pp. 27-28)

I argue that the model minority stereotype came into play among the Korean parents in this study. The image of Asian Americans as the model minority began to appear in the popular press during the 1960s in the midst of the civil rights movement. A 1966 *U.S. News and World Report* featured an article lauding the success of Chinese American: “At a time when it is being proposed that hundreds of billions be spent to uplift the Negroes and other minorities.... The Nation’s 30,000 Chinese Americans are moving ahead on their own — with no help from anyone else” (“Success Story,” 1966). While other racial minorities are stereotyped in negative ways, Asian Americans are portrayed as achieving success in the United States through hard work and family cohesiveness. The academic success of many Asian American students has contributed to popularizing the model minority image of Asian Americans, leading some scholars to attempt to identify elements accounting for that success (e.g., Schneider & Lee, 1990; Sue & Okazaki, 1990). However, critics argue that the model minority stereotype has been used to support the ideologies of meritocracy and individualism, a hegemonic device that maintains the status quo. Lee (1996) claimed:

[T]he model minority representation is dangerous because of the way it has been used by the dominant group. The model minority stereotype is dangerous because it tells Asian Americans and other minorities how to behave. The stereotype is dangerous because it is

used against other minority groups to silence claims of inequality. It is dangerous because it silences the experiences of Asian Americans who can/do not achieve model minority success. (p. 125)

In many respects, the Korean immigrant parents in this study appear to fit well into the image of “model minorities.” Even when they encountered discriminatory incidents, they moved forward on their own or with help from their own ethnic group in many cases. In Chapter 5, I shared narratives of how some of these parents had suffered from a lack of confidence but maintained faith and hope in their American dreams. Although the alleged success of Asian Americans as model minorities has been rejected by many empirical studies<sup>14</sup> (e.g., Chun, 1995; Lew, 2004), overall, the Korean immigrant parents were successful in providing their children with enriched learning environments through either active participation in school or engagement in learning at home.

Further, many Korean parents, specifically members of the Korean mothers’ meeting, appear to embrace and even emulate the model minority representation. They were eager to be part of the school community through “hard work, uncomplaining perseverance and quiet accommodation” (Suzuki, 1995, p. 113). As discussed in the case of team worker parents, they perceived North Creek Elementary as an ideal place for promoting their children’s learning. They chose to reside in the city of Jackson because of its safe, class-based stability. There were few temporary residents and poor families in the school and the community. Most Korean parents in this study did research to select the best school for their children. They knew that student achievement correlates strongly with family background, particularly class status. Because many families consciously chose this particular school in this particular neighborhood,

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<sup>14</sup> The image of model minority success is also questioned in this study, given the second-class citizen position occupied by Asian families in North Creek Elementary School.

the hegemonic discourse on parent involvement might have been accepted as the norm within the school community. Similarly, the parents participating in the Korean mothers' meeting might have willingly complied with the normalized discourse as this could, they believe, sustain their child's educational success.

Therefore, the question must be asked: Whose interests are served and whose voices are excluded when the Korean parents of this study strived to live up to the model minority standard? Chapter 6 showed how the participants in the Korean mothers' meeting were a select group of people. The attendees of the meeting were less subject to structural impediments than others might have been; they were largely middle-class, full time housewives. The primary function of the meeting was to make it easier for the members to participate in North Creek, responding to the school's demands given. Working or non-participant parents tended to be excluded from collective intra-group support, and interracial networking with other minorities in the school rarely occurred. After all, what was sought or gained through ethnic networking was the relative privilege of a select group of parents. The Korean middle-class parents of the meeting were self-centered model minorities; they had no voice, not because they could not have one, but because they were unaware that they had opportunities for consciously engaging in the transformation of inequalities existing in a hierarchal society.

Human beings often reproduce social inequalities, yet critical reflection on what makes us fully human can address injustice, thereby inviting us to participate in courageous actions for social change. The fact that Jamie joins the Korean mothers' meeting as a bilingual liaison might open a new space for the Korean parents' "conscientisation" (Freire, 1970/1993); her more critical awareness of disadvantaged groups at North Creek might challenge the status quo sustained by individualism within the meeting.

## Implications

### *For Schools*

The findings of this study offer several implications for schools. First, it is important for administrators and teachers to examine their “taken for granted” notions of parent involvement. The current definition of parent involvement prevailing in most schools is grounded in the middle-class, European-American discourse on participation. The findings of this study showed how the school staff normalized a notion of parent participation that emphasizes parental responsiveness to institutional needs. Despite programs intended to involve parents of diverse cultural backgrounds, the focus on parental support for school functions maintained the status quo. In order to recognize the hegemony in parent involvement, the school staff should critically reflect on their own assumptions about the normalized notion of parent involvement.

Second, schools should initiate a genuine dialogue to connect effectively with families from diverse cultural backgrounds. A great deal of research indicates that the discourse of parent involvement is a social construction in a given cultural context. Parents from various cultural groups may define ideal parental roles in their child’s education differently from school definitions of parent involvement. For instance, Asian families tend to participate in various educational activities in and outside of the home, whereas they are less involved in volunteering or decision making at school (e.g., E. Kim, 2002; Li, 2006; Siu, 2001). However, the school staff in this study gave less recognition to Korean immigrant parents’ active involvement in their children’s learning at home. If schools utilize many ways of communication, such as dialogue journals, discussion groups, parent-teacher-student conferences, oral and written family stories, and classroom projects using family funds of knowledge, teachers and families will be able to

learn from each other regardless of their differences (see strategies suggested from Allen, 2007; Kyle et al., 2002).

Third, an authentic partnership embraces shared power in family-school relationships. Swap (1995) emphasized “joint problem solving” between parents and educators at every level of decision making (p. 58). The Korean immigrant parents in this study were unlikely to be engaged in discussions about the curricular, assessment, and instructional methods that most influence their children’s learning. Administrators and teachers need to examine carefully the causes of reticence and conformity in family-school relations and initiate joint decision-making with parents in order to address the long-standing power asymmetry in family-school partnerships and move toward an authentic collaboration.

Fourth, schools need to be aware of cultural differences among parents and provide culturally relevant ways to involve parents in and outside of the classroom. Parents from cultures that place less emphasis on parental participation may be overwhelmed by the pressure to participate in an unfamiliar system. Providing translation assistance can show schools’ respect for different cultures and help parents feel welcomed by the schools. As revealed in this study, maintaining their native language is important for some parents as a means of sustaining their ethnic identity and pride. Bilingual support and adequately translated materials help parents learn about American schools without threatening their ethnic identities (Lew, 2006).

Fifth, systematic support for parental collaboration within and across race/ethnic groups is critical to developing the school community. For instance, the Korean parents in this study were hesitant to take leadership roles (e.g., chairs on the PTA board) independently due to their cultural value of collectivism. Encouraging co-chairing or mentoring between parents might help these parents develop leadership and promote collaboration among parents across cultures.

However, more important is to increase connections between different groups of minority parents; as the findings suggest, a lack of interracial/interethnic relationships might reinforce the self-interested action of a group, rather than encouraging the collective pursuit of the well-being of the entire school community.

Lastly, the findings of this study warn us not to generalize about a particular ethnic group. As minority populations in the United States increase, schools become places where diverse cultures and nationalities co-exist. Celebration of diversity, however, tends to define an ethnic/national group as one entity, ignoring complexities within the group. Research indicates significant variances within the same ethnic community, which often result in differential effects on educational performance of second-generation children and youths (e.g., Lew, 2004; Louie, 2001). In this study, the gaps between the Americanized parents and newcomers reveal dissonance in cultural capital regarding legitimate ways of parent involvement. Tension embedded in an ethnic/national group mirrors variations within the group as well as contradiction and complexity situated between individuals and the broader society. Schools' awareness of differences within the same ethnic/national group may prevent stereotypes and deficit-based approaches that often prevail in family-school discourses.

#### *For Immigrant Studies*

The findings of this study also contain several implications for immigrant research, particularly for Asian American studies. First, the findings show the potential role of ethnic communities as agencies for social capital that can be effective in empowering marginalized individuals and groups within institutions. In this study, the Korean immigrant parents were engaged in collaborative networking within their own ethnic group in order to promote their active involvement in the school. When an ethnic group establishes a strong social network

within organizations, ethnic ties can enable the group to enhance access to information channels and institutional resources (see Lew, 2006). Specifically, it is notable that the Korean mothers' meeting benefited not only its members, but also other Korean families in the school community. Because many attendees of the meeting established social networks with Korean groups in multiple ways, resources shared in the meeting became informally distributed across groups of Koreans in the community in a kind of three-way communication. In the field of immigrant research, a growing number of studies have examined the function of an ethnic enclave and its benefits for immigrants and their children (Lew, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 1998; Zhou & Kim, 2006). More research is needed to develop an integrated framework that can create and sustain effective forms of three-way communication between families, school, and ethnic community. Lin (2000, 2001) claims that ethnic minority families need to extend their social relationships outside immediate networks by linking to the rich resources embedded in the mainstream society. The application of an integrated framework within immigrant studies can provide insights into how to find effective ways to connect immigrant groups with the mainstream society and improve partnerships among families, school, and community.

Second, in the past decades, much research has examined the model minority stereotype that "focuses narrowly on the stellar academic achievement of Asian Americans and discounts other realities" (Coloma, 2006, p. 7). Chun (1995, p. 99) critically questioned the indicators of success for Asian Americans: "If college graduates of a minority group make, say, as much as high school graduates of the majority group, is college gradation a sign of success or an indictment of wage inequality?" Similarly, this study showed how the low levels of social capital owned by immigrant families might marginalize them in the schools despite their children's academic success. Chapter 5 described family stories complicated by various factors, such as

immigrant status, identity, linguistic competence, and cultural values, which affected individuals' social networks and positions in social structures. In many cases, the children of the Korean immigrant parents in this study were academically successful in school, and the children's high achievement might have motivated their parents to become more actively involved in the school than they might otherwise have been. However, the children's high academic achievement did not necessarily improve their parents' relationships with the school personnel. Rather, it was the activation of social capital that likely determined the parents' inclusion or exclusion of family-school relationships (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Such inequalities in immigrant families' relationships with school might lead to the creation of self-centered model minorities motivated to protect their relative positions in a hierarchical society. Examining the mechanism underpinning the model minority stereotype is an ongoing task for researchers whose goal is to pay attention to other issues that are overlooked in educational studies.

Finally, heterogeneity among the cases in this study demonstrates that a more intersectional analysis is required to examine the ways race/ethnicity interacts with other social markers, such as class, gender, age, sexuality, migration, political affiliations, and religion. It is an oversimplified assumption that people of a particular ethnic group have one universal identity and all act in a similar way. Feminist researchers have challenged the notion of identity solidarity along the lines of gender, race, or ethnicity that neglects heterogeneity and inequalities within and between groups (e.g., Gilbert, 1994; Jones, 1995; Sherif, 2001). An inquiry into idiosyncrasies of identity and the intertwined dynamics of social markers will shed light on the areas of complexity and ambiguity that often threaten the mental and psychological health of immigrant families.

### Limitations of This Study

There are several limitations to this study. The primary limitation was the exclusion of children's perspectives when examining issues embedded in family-school partnerships. The ultimate goal of building partnerships between families and school is to create educational environments that support children's learning and success in school and in the future. Although most of the participant parents appeared to provide their children with a variety of educational opportunities in and outside of the home, not including children's views placed limits on conducting a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of relations between families and school with regard to children's learning.

The second limitation was related to the selection of participants. The Korean immigrant parents who participated in this study were exclusively middle class. Examining the contextualized experiences of middle-class immigrant parents may be a merit of this study in that the issues of this social group have been overlooked by researchers, policy makers, and practitioners. As discussed earlier, however, class influenced the ways in which these parents perceived and interacted with the school, particularly their responses to institutional inequalities. Exploring multiple perspectives held by families from diverse class backgrounds could provide a more nuanced analysis of class and race in relation to parent involvement. Although in this case it was almost impossible due to the middle- and upper-middle class composition of the selected school's population, including working class families and dual-earner parents would have revealed more diverse perspectives and issues stemming from participants of different class backgrounds.

The last limitation was related to the range of ethnic networks examined in relation to parental participation. On the surface, the Korean mothers' meeting appeared to constitute a

single ethnic network. Membership was unified by shared ethnicity and interests. Based on Coleman's (1988) social capital theory, the functions of the meeting were examined through individual parent interviews and observations from different settings (e.g., the meeting place, the school cafeteria and media center, the classrooms, and local restaurants). A careful examination, however, revealed multifaceted social relationships among the members through other factors, such as church affiliation, their children's after school activities, and grade levels. For instance, Eunjung and Myungsook both attended the same Korean church, enrolling their children in a soccer team together. Eunjung's son and Eunjoo's daughter had been classmates in the first grade; Diane's daughter and Jeeyung's son were in the same fifth grade classroom. Such social interactions outside the contexts of the Korean mothers' meeting would affect the dynamics of group interactions and modify the functions of ethnic networking. Horvat and her colleagues (2003) examined informal parental networks in order to analyze class differences in family-school relations. If this study had explored the ways in which ethnic networks came into play beyond the context of the Korean mothers' meeting, the social capital embedded in ethnic networking could have been more fully understood in multiple contexts.

#### Future Research

This study has generated many topics for future research on the discourse of family-school partnerships. If we are going to discover ways in which schools can connect with families from diverse cultures by utilizing ethnic networks in communities, I believe that exploring community-immersion programs has considerable merit. A careful examination of community-immersion approaches would provide educators with insight into how to integrate diverse community resources, including ethnic networks and funds of knowledge, into curricular activities in the school.

Additionally, the findings concerning the hegemonic discourse prevalent in a school recognized for its strong parent involvement help us realize how far we still have to go to build a true partnership between the school and families from diverse backgrounds. In a racialized society, developing inclusive and socially just practices is critical to creating spaces for authentic dialogues among constituents. If we aim to challenge the deficit-based approaches prevailing in the discourses on minority education, there is potential in employing transnational approaches that transcend national boundaries. Class and race are relative concepts determined by sociohistorical contexts, and a transnational analysis will help educators move beyond ethnocentric pedagogy.

In addition, a group of Korean parents desired to be model minorities requires a thorough examination to the internalized mechanism of social reproduction in schools. A lack of critical awareness might produce a self-centered minority group, leading to their co-optation into the status quo. If one of the goals for our future research is to provide powerful education for all children, including those from racial and cultural minority groups, critical research for identifying the sources of internalized oppression should be continued as long as we hope to create a just society.

Last, ethnic networking shown by the Korean parents questions what advocacy research aims to achieve. Before beginning my fieldwork, I had a strong desire to underscore the potential of ethnic networking in empowering minority groups in the United States. However, my overt advocacy paradigm became problematic as I encountered the self-centered orientation of the meeting. I found myself ambivalent, resistant, and even opposed to challenging the status quo of the meeting due to my loyalty to the group. I was also anxious about my epistemological legitimacy, admitting my ideological sensitivity to social inequalities. If one of the goals for

research is advocacy, constant self-reflection on the researcher's ideology and value will be critical to uncovering and dealing with dilemmas that he or she faces when pursuing the research goal.

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## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## Interview Protocol for Korean Parents

### Participation in school

1. Can you give me an example of your involvement with your child's school or teacher? What aspects of the interaction worked well? What kinds of difficulties did you experience?
2. What are some differences between Korean schools and American schools?
3. What characteristics (e.g. leaderships, teacher qualities, curriculum, and so on) have contributed to your successful relationships with school?
4. What characteristics have hampered you in effectively participate in school affairs?
5. Have you received support from the teachers when you have been involved in your children's school? If so, what kind of support have you received?
6. What recommendations would you make for teachers working with Korean families and children?
7. What recommendations would you make for other Korean parents so as to work successfully with teachers and schools to support their children's education?
8. What meanings does parental participation have for you?

### Social network

1. Can you name the children whose parents you would recognize and chat with if you ran into them in the grocery store? How did you get to know these parents?
2. Have you received support from other parents when you have been involved in your children's school? If so, from whom, and what kind of support have you received?
3. Do you know any professionals (e.g. teacher, psychologist, lawyer, doctor) whose first names you know? What are your relationships with and how close are you to these persons?
4. With whom and where do you spend your free time?

### Interview Protocol for Non-Korean Parents

#### Participation in school

1. Could you please give me an example about your involvement with your child's school or teacher?
2. What aspects of the interaction worked well? What kinds of difficulties did you experience?
3. What characteristics (e.g. leaderships, teacher qualities, curriculum, and so on) have contributed to your successful relationships with school?
4. What characteristics have hampered you to effectively participate in school affairs?
5. Have you received support from the teachers when you have been involved in your children's school? If so, from whom, what kind of support have you received?

#### Relationships with Korean parents

1. Please describe your general relationships with the Korean parents in the school.
2. Overall, how do you think about the Korean parents' participation in school activities?
3. What recommendations would you make for teachers working with international families and children?
4. What recommendations would you make other international parents so as to work successfully with teachers and schools to support their children's education?
5. What meanings does parental participation have for you?

## Interview Protocol for Administrators and Teachers

### Relationships with Korean parents

1. Could you please give me an example about your working with Korean (Asian) parents?
2. What aspects of the interaction worked well? What kinds of difficulties did you experience?
3. What are some differences between Korean parents and other American parents?
4. What aspects do you consider and focus on when interacting with Korean (Asian) parents?
5. Overall, how do you think about the Korean parents' participation in school activities?
6. What recommendations would you make for the Korean or Asian parents?

### Family-school relations

1. What types of parents or which families pose the greatest challenges for you as an administrator (a teacher)?
2. What school aspects have helped you build collaborative relationships with families, particularly Korean or Asian parents?
3. What school aspects have hindered you from building collaborative relationships with families, particularly Korean or Asian families?
4. Where would you want to see improvement in terms of family-school relationships?

## APPENDIX B

### FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

1. What are the goals of the Korean Moms' Meeting?
2. Who are the actual or potential participants of the Korean Moms' Meeting? Who else could potentially be affected by the meeting?
3. What are some ways that the Korean Moms' Meeting can help Korean parents better participate in school activities? How does the meeting accomplish this in an efficient way?
4. What are challenges and problems faced by the Korean Moms' Meeting?
5. What support does the meeting need, and from whom, to get this done?
6. What resources are available to create, maintain, and help the meeting succeed?

## APPENDIX C

### CASE DESCRIPTION

### 1. David

David is a Korean father in his middle 40s who has lived in the United States for 14 years. His wife is Chinese whom he met during his working at a company in China. He came to the United States following his wife as she pursued her Ph.D. degree in the United States and earned his master's degree in computer science. He worked at an American company as a web master for 5 years, and then began his own business in wholesale beauty supplies targeting Korean retailers. He experiences invisible discrimination from his workplace and wants his two children to be cosmopolitans, rather than developing a specific ethnic identity. While he tries to be involved in school events as much as he can, he thinks that this state, this school particular, tends to demand financial aids from parents, unlikely schools in the state where he lived before. Because his family has moved to this state recently, his and her wife's social relationships with neighbors are relatively limited. He rarely socializes with Koreans, except for business related gatherings, and values family oriented individualized ways of life. He places high expectations on his children's academic performance and plans to send them to Ivy League universities. He criticizes Korean Americans' tendency to work within ethnic enclaves and attributes it to the first generation's lack of knowledge about mainstream society. He considers America as a county full of opportunities and wants his children to enjoy better life chances and success in the mainstream society.

### 2. Diane

Diane is a Korean mother in her early 40s who came to the United States when she was a sophomore in middle school. Since then, she has lived in this state with her family and married her American husband who was one of her college mates. She has two daughters, and worked full time at a computer marketing company until she had the second daughter. Currently, she works at home part time for the same company and her parents live in a nearby town to help her childcare. Because of her job and two children, she tends to be selectively involved in school activities, although her work schedule is flexible enough to attend some classroom activities. She considers school involvement as one of her parental responsibilities and tries to become more actively involved at school. She values education and places high expectations on her children's academic performance. While she maintains her Korean identity and close relationships with family members, her contact with Koreans has been very limited. Most of her friends are Americans and the language spoken at home is English. She wants her two children to be proud of their half Korean heritage and tries to teach them the Korean language by attending a Korean church. Affiliating with the Korean mothers' meeting allows her to access ethnic networks where she can develop mutual relationships with other Korean parents. Because of her challenging experiences in adjusting to American schools at the beginning of immigration, she is empathetic to newcomers' hardships and desires to help Korean parents' better engage with the school by offering bilingual support. She views Korean parents positively because of their willingness to support their children's education despite certain language barriers. Nonetheless, she has few Korean parent friends due to her shyness and age gap from the parents.

### 3. Eunjoo

Eunjoo is a Korean mother in her late 30s who has lived in the United States for 16 years, although she went back to Korea and stayed there for six years. Because her father was a renowned scholar, she frequently visited America with her father. She attended a medical

graduate school in the United States, went back to Korea, and married her husband who had also studied engineering in an American graduate school. In 2000, they came back to the United States with their two children, as her husband worked for a Korean company in the United States as a residential manager. They have lived in Northeast states, and moved to this state five years ago. Now her husband owns a restaurant. Since her first son entered kindergarten, she has actively participated in school activities, including participating in classroom activities, volunteering at school events, and translating for Korean parents. Through active involvement at school, she is able to gain a broader understanding of educational development and enhances her sense of self-fulfillment. She develops friendly relationships with school staff and other American parents, whereas she distances herself from Korean parents except for a few close parents who share similar study experiences in the United States. She feels uncomfortable with recent Korean immigrant parents because of value differences between her and them, such as respect for individual rights or academic focus in child rearing practices. She plays an intermediary role between the Korean mothers' meeting and the school, and for that reason, she regularly attends the Korean mothers' meeting although she does not have an individual need for support from the meeting.

#### 4. Eunjung

Eunjung is a Korean mother in her late 30s who has lived in the U.S. for 12 years. She came to the United States with her husband who had decided to study at an American community college in search of a better life. She never works outside the home and values family times because her husband, a manager of a Korean beauty supply company, used to be away from home for his business travel. Now she is in the process of gaining U.S. citizenship. She has been called an English name inside the school but used her Korean name among the Korean groups. She initiated the Korean mothers' meeting with Myungsook two years ago and serves as a leader thus far. While lacking self-confidence in speaking English, she actively participates in school activities. She attributes her active volunteering to her patriotism for Korea, which would help Korean parents to be exempted from being labeled "not participating." She views the school very positively and wants to be part of it even though she recognizes her minority status. Collectivism has dominated not only her leadership for the Korean mothers' meeting but also her view on the meeting's role within the school community. She maintains a collaborative network with Eunjoo even though she does not have an intimate relationship with her outside the Korean mothers' meeting. As a leader, she energetically devotes herself to the Korean mothers' meeting despite the burden and stress from responsibility and a low commitment of other members. Due to her focus on family and gendered parental role, her boundary of ethnic networks tends to be limited.

#### 5. Eunmi

Eunmi is a Korean mother in her early 40s who has two daughters, one six grade and another second grade. After marriage, she came to the United States following her husband who worked at an American company and lived in a West state for 10 years. Her family went back to Korea in 2002 as her husband changed his work at a Korean company, and then came back to the United States one year ago. When her first child entered preschool, she was very actively participated in the school, including school events and classroom activities. While she gained valuable knowledge and understanding of American schools through her participation

experiences, she encountered challenges from cultural differences and language barriers, and became less involved at school than she had been before. She emphasizes the importance of bicultural knowledge in order to succeed in a global society and wants her children to be familiar with both Korean and American cultures. She positively views the functions of the Korean mothers' meeting that closely connects with the PTA and suggests that Korean parents should collaborate with American PTA and conform to a hierarchy within institutional organizations.

#### 6. Hyunjoo

Hyunjoo is a Korean mother in her early 40s who came to the United States one year ago with her two sons and husband who works for a Korean company in the United States as a residential manager. Because her husband has stayed in this state for ten years, she could easily settle in America. She attended an ESL program in a community college and maintains close relationships with the parents in the program. After finishing one semester, she quit the program and receives private tutoring from a 1.5 generation Korean American, along with other two close parents. As soon as she had her children transfer to this school, she signed up for the international committee and volunteered at the media center. She gained valuable information from other Korean parents, including fellow company families and Korean parents enrolled in the ESL program. She considers the parents in the Korean mothers' meeting as less helpful due to their differences in immigration status. She plans to stay in the United States until her children enter university, while her decision mainly depends on her children's successful adjustment to American schools. Compared to the first interview, her levels of educational expectation toward her two sons have become lower after five months. As she has difficulty in communicating with teachers and frequently experiences misunderstandings due to miscommunication, her aspiration for better involvement at school through improved English proficiency is significantly shrunk. She criticizes the overly academic focuses and competition within Korean parents, including mothers in the Korean mothers' meeting. She stopped attending the Korean mothers' meeting and rarely interacts with other Korean or American parents in and outside school. She attributes such gaps between her and other Koreans to their different immigration statuses and her sojourner identity as a temporary resident in the United States.

#### 7. Jamie

Jamie is a Korean mother in her early 40s who came to the United States when she was a senior in middle school. She lived in nearby states before and moved to here in this state ten years ago. She is a single mother with one daughter in first grade. She was a former elementary teacher before becoming pregnant and resumed her teaching job when her daughter entered kindergarten. Currently, she works at the school as a kindergarten paraprofessional. She devotes herself to conducting effective mothering role and spends most of her free time with her daughter. She taught basic educational curriculum to her daughter at home in order for her daughter to be prepared for kindergarten. Her daughter is very brilliant and already in the TAG program. She wants her daughter to be viewed as American, not Korean, and expects her to accomplish a successful, respected career in order to overcome her minority disadvantage from being an Asian female in American society. Since she is working at the school, she can be easily involved at school events or volunteering. She rarely contacts Korean parents and has little understanding of the functions of the Korean mothers' meeting. Her friends have been mostly Americans and she

avoids socializing with Koreans due to cultural differences and communication difficulty. As a bilingual, she plays a critical role in connecting the school with Korean parents, including translation services or bilingual support for better communication. She is satisfied with her contribution to the school and her help for the parents who face challenges to being involved in the school. As the school plans to assign her to be a parent liaison for the Korean parents, she hopes to reach out more broadly to Korean parents who tend to be marginalized within the school contexts due to time constraint and language barriers.

#### 8. Jeeyung

Jeeyung is a Korean mother in her early 40s, who has lived in the United States for 16 years. She came to the United States in order to marry her husband who was a Korean American. Her family lived in New York and moved to here one year ago in search of a better suburban life. Her husband runs a wholesale business and she worked at a Korean telecommunication company as a full-time sales representative. After moving here, she quit her job and stayed at home with her two children, a seventh grade daughter and a fifth grade son. She regrets her lack of confidence in life, including school participation, and attributes her passive involvement at school to busy work schedules. She is grateful for the school's systematic support (e.g., special education, translation service) to her son, who has a hearing loss and receives special education, whereas she criticizes that individual-orientated American schools tend to predetermine children's developmental levels from early ages. She also desires that the school's staff openly embrace the influences of demographic change on the school, such as decreased volunteerism, rather than assuming Asian parents are less involved than their American counterparts. The Korean mothers' meeting helps her to become more actively involved at school by allowing collective participation in school activities, although her level of individual participation does not appear to be much improved. Because of her introverted personality, she avoids chatting among members of the Korean mothers' meeting and addresses possible non-participants for the meeting who are less interested in attending parental social. Except for meeting times, she rarely forges social relationships with the parents in the Korean mothers' meeting.

#### 9. Junghee

Junghee is a Korean mother in her early 40s, who has lived in the United States for 9 years. She came to the United States in order to marry her husband who was a Korean American. She had various occupations in Korea such as kindergarten teacher, local governmental employee, and flower shop owner. Her husband operates his family business, a club, after quitting ten years-working as an engineer in an American company due to invisible discrimination in promotion. She maintains a strong attachment to Korea and emphasizes the importance of raising her children to be Korean, although they were born and live in the United States. As her son enters the school, she realized her need for improving her English in order to better communicate with teachers. She used to rely on other Korean parents or her husband when communicating with teachers. She heavily pushes her son, who was left behind in his grade level, by hiring tutors or sending him to several after school activities. She views the function of the Korean mothers' meeting positively and hopes to expand its boundary by including non-participant Korean parents who have valuable knowledge and information. She has various social relationships with non-Korean neighbors but her intimate networks are mainly Koreans.

#### 10. Monika

Monika is a Korean mother in her early 50s who has lived in the United States for 22 years. She came to the United States in order to marry her husband who was a Korean American. She owns a profitable gift shop as well as working as a part time DJ at a Korean radio station. Because she and her husband earned master's degree, she expects her three children to advance to graduate school and wants them to be successful Americans. She strongly believes in positive impacts of parental involvement on teachers' perspectives toward children and has been participating in schools in multiple ways, including teaching assistance in classrooms, organizing international days at a school level, and being a member of school business partnerships. While she used to intervene in schools in search of favors for her children, she frequently encountered conflicts with other American parents, even with Korean parents. She considers such tension would reflect power relations in and between groups within the school contexts. She tends to be less participatory in school activities than she was now that her children are growing up. She has little contact with the Korean mothers' meeting because she had negative experiences with active members in the meeting when preparing for the international day several years ago. She suggests that strong leadership and collaborative ethnic support are necessary in empowering Korean parents' involvement at the school. Nonetheless, she considers that young Korean parents are unlikely to cooperate and support a leader due to different self-interests and competition.

#### 11. Myungsook

Myungsook is a Korean mother in her early 40s who has lived in the United States for 11 years. She came to the United States with her husband through an R visa and decided to live in the United States for their children's better education. Now she is in the process of gaining citizenship. As a former music teacher in middle schools, she tutors music lessons part-time and has three children. Her parenting focuses on nurturing good character through Christian beliefs. At the same time, she has her children learn the Korean language and tries to provide vicarious experiences of Korean culture. She initiated the Korean mothers' meeting with Eunjung and participates actively in the meeting. While addressing the English barrier to getting involved in the school, she actively participates in school activities and observes classrooms in order to gain an understanding of American schooling. She has various social relationships with American friends and obtains educational information through her networks with American and Korean parents. During her participation in school activities, she becomes aware of power relations among parents, and recognizes certain cultural differences about how parent involvement has been viewed and has impacted children's academic achievement within the contexts of American schools. As a close friend of Eunjung, she critically reflects on the current operation of the Korean mother's meeting and desires to expand its functions in order to reach out more broadly to parents. However, she does not want the Korean mothers' group to be separately positioned within the school because she emphasizes open relationships with other non-Korean parents.

#### 12. Nayun

Nayun is a Korean mother in her middle 30s. She came to the United States two years ago, following her husband who had dreamed of studying abroad since he was in university. Because of the practical difficulty of pursuing study as well as having a family, she and her husband

decided to immigrate to the United States. They prepared to immigrate for four years and came to the United States through a travel visa. To apply for citizenship, her husband works at a Korean grocery shop as a manager and she infrequently works as a part-time employee at Korean shops. She also works on her master's degree in theology. Initially, her family settled in New York but moved to this state in search of a better educational environment. She majored in education and ran a private English institution with her older sister in Korea. Because of shyness and unfamiliarity with the school and parents, she participates less in school activities in this state than she did in New York. Attending Korean mothers' meeting makes easier for her to get involved in the school and to forge social relationships with Korean parents. She emphasizes the importance of educational environments on children's success and is satisfied with the school's quality in terms of staff, parents, children, and curriculum.

## APPENDIX D

### CONSENT FORM

## Consent Form for Parents

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in a research study titled "An Analysis of Ethnic Networking of Korean Immigrant Parents in School Participation" which is being conducted by Ms. Minjung Lim, from the Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Kyunghwa Lee, Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education, University of Georgia. My participation is voluntary; I can refuse to participate and stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of this study is to examine ways in which Korean immigrant parents collaborate with each other to participate in their children's education in school.

The benefits from my participation could include the increase of my critical insights into collaborative support in the process of parent participation by reflecting upon my own relationships with other parents and the school. I might also share my concerns about and hopes for family-school relationships.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

- Interviews about my participation in my child's school activities and my social networks. I will be interviewed 1-2 times in Fall 2007-Winter 2008, and each interview will take about 1-1.5 hours.
- Follow up interviews. I may be interviewed 1-2 times in Spring 2008 if needed. Each interview will take about 1-1.5 hours.
- Interview will be audiotape-recorded.

No discomforts or stresses, no risk, and no deception are expected.

Individually identifying information will be confidential unless otherwise required by law. My identity will be coded with a pseudonym. All the data including the recordings and transcriptions will be securely kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office at University of Georgia and that no one but the researcher and the advisor will have access to the tapes. Also I understand the audiotapes will be kept for a period of ten years and destroyed thereafter.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at xxx-xxx-xxxx. I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### Consent Form for Teachers and Administrators

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in a research study titled "An Analysis of Ethnic Networking of Korean Immigrant Parents in School Participation " which is being conducted by Ms. Minjung Lim, from the Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Kyunghwa Lee, Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education, University of Georgia. My participation is voluntary; I can refuse to participate and stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of this study is to examine ways in which Korean immigrant parents collaborate with each other to participate in their children's education in school.

The benefits from my participation could include the increase of my critical insights into what teachers and administrators can do to further support immigrant parents' involvement in school. I could also share my concerns about and hopes for family-school relationships.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

- Interviews about my perceptions and relationships with immigrant parents. I will be interviewed 1-2 times in Fall 2007-Winter 2008, and each interview will take about 30 minutes-1 hour.
- Interview will be audiotape-recorded.

No discomforts or stresses, no risk, and no deception are expected.

Individually identifying information will be confidential unless otherwise required by law. My identity will be coded with a pseudonym. All the data including the recordings and transcriptions will be securely kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office at University of Georgia and that no one but the researcher and the advisor will have access to the tapes. Also I understand the audiotapes will be kept for a period of ten years and destroyed thereafter.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at xxx-xxx-xxxx. I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date