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Managing Parent Capital: Parent-Teacher Digital Communication Among Early Childhood Educators

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Managing Parent Capital: Parent-Teacher Digital Communication Among Early Childhood Educators

Lauren Erdreich

Abstract: This study deals with the perceptions of 'proper parental involvement' disseminated through digital parent-teacher communication in early childhood education, and its required uses of cultural and social capital. The article bridges between sociological literature on the implications of the digitalization of educational practices and on parenting and family-school relations from a cultural capital perspective. Qualitative data was collected through an on-line discussion of early childhood educators on their own uses of digital communications with parents. Analysis revealed that digital communication is unidirectional, preserving teachers' professional status and harnessing parents' cultural capital to complementary educational work. Teachers set up a culture of use that manages and limits parents' use of social capital and the expansion of parental social networks. The research points to discrepancies between the discourse of parental involvement and the profession of educating, the unutilized potential of digital media in parent-teacher communication, and the need for further attention to differences in parents' digital competencies and access.

Keywords: parental involvement, parent-teacher communication, cultural capital, digital communication, social capital

Introduction

This study deals with perceptions of ‘proper parental involvement’ disseminated in the digital communication between teachers and parents in early childhood education and the cultural and social capital such involvement entails. Early childhood education is an arena in which new parents are socialized into socially- and cultural-constituted perceptions of ‘proper’ parenting (Sitton, 2000; Allison, 1991; Bloch & Popkewitz, 2008; Markström, 2011). In their seminal book on *Parenting culture studies*, Lee et al (2014) point to the emergence of term ‘parenting,’ as marking an historical and cultural shift from ideas of childrearing to a focus on parents’ behavior and actions, particularly with a view that these actions must be carried out in a certain way in order to guarantee a child’s proper development and mental health (Lee 2014). Since the late twentieth century, definitions of what is considered ‘proper’ parenting have increasingly been defined within a social and political focus on parenting as site for regulation of children’s social and emotional welfare (MacVarish, 2014), and have increasingly found expression in formal governmental educational policies as well as in the instruments through which teachers carry out policies (DeFeo, Goncalves, & Romito, 2019). The use of digital media, as one such instrument, brings to the surface existing issues of what is considered ‘proper’ modes of communication, cooperation and collaboration between families and schools. By looking at how early childhood educators describe and justify their uses of digital and non-digital media in communicating with parents, we learn about the expectations and demands made of parents – in other words, educators’ perceptions of ‘proper parental involvement’ in the digital age. The analysis will show that these perceptions clearly demarcate expected uses of both cultural and social capital in the family-school relationship.

The study is based on analysis of a forum of early childhood educators who were studying for an M.Ed. in Early Childhood Education. These teachers brought years of experience communicating with parents both on- and off-line into their responses. This article describes the teachers’ uses of digital communication with parents and analyzes specifically their regulation of its use. The analysis will provide an interpretation of the capital required of parents to partake in ‘proper’ parent-teacher digital communication.

Digitalization of parent-teacher communications and cultural capital: a theoretical framework

This research bridges between two bodies of sociological literature – research on the implications of the digitalization of educational practices and

research on parenting and family-school relations from a cultural capital perspective.

Research on the digitalization of educational practices has explored questions about changing pedagogy and changes in the teaching profession. Researchers and practitioners almost unvaryingly accord that digital media is radically changing the face of teaching practices on multiple planes - planning, content knowledge, teacher-student relationship, pedagogical methods, and more. Though digital media have been lauded as increasing access to knowledge for all, sociologists have begun to express a burgeoning concern with the implications of digital media on equality and social inclusion in education (Colombo, 2016). These sociologists have focused on media literacy - the competencies required to access, analyze, and utilize digital media to its utmost (Livingstone, 2004; Williams, 2018). The concept of media literacy requires us to consider implications of the digitalization of educational practices on issues of social equality, both in terms of the social distribution of individual skills and competencies as well as the social construction of media literacy (Gui, Murru, & Scarcelli, 2017).

This paper turns attention to implications of the digitalization of educational practices within the realm of parent-teacher communication. Parent-teacher communications is an integral, albeit less-explored, aspect of the digitalization of education. In terms of educational practice, it is a means for coordination and cooperation between parents and teachers surrounding children's learning. From the perspective of media literacy in the workplace, parent-teacher communication requires of teachers' specific digital skills: those of compliance - the functional-operational skills necessary to get a job done, and those of competency - critical, creative skills that allow for workers to be inventive (Collard et al., 2017).

Educational literature on parent-teacher digital communication espouses the unquestioned importance of parental involvement and focuses on the ways teachers can use technology to enhance communication (Ramirez, 2001; Olmstead, 2013). Existing research considers the advantages and disadvantages of different types of media in inviting opportunities for parent-teacher communication (Lunts, 2003; Telem & Pinto, 2006), and teacher and parent preferences for choosing and utilizing different types of technology (Palts & Kalmus, 2015; Thompson, Mazer & Flood Grady, 2015; Thompson & Mazer, 2012; Shechtman & Busharian, 2015). This literature has raised important issues in the use of parent-teacher digital communication, such as preferred topics for communication through e-mail, SMS, and face-to-face interactions (Thompson et al., 2015); how best to utilize digital communication with parents in order to enhance students' academic success (Gilgore, Peele & Risser-Kositsky, 2015); issues of time management for both parents and teacher caused by the nature of digital communication; successful implementation of

digital communication (Ho, Hung & Chen, 2013; Blau & Hameiri, 2012); the sensitive nature of written media; and the varying digital access of different parents (Thompson, 2008). Only a few of these studies have acknowledged that differential levels of web connectivity and technology usage among parents from different socio-economic strata or employed in occupations with or without constant access to e-mail, may create a digital divide between schools and parents from disadvantaged populations (Palts & Kalmus, 2015; Gilgore et al., 2015; Thompson, 2008). To these educational studies, this article brings a sociological perspective that focuses on the socio-cultural dimension of digitalization of education.

Parents and teachers have always communicated in some way or another, digital or otherwise. Indeed, the sociological literature on family-school relations from a cultural capital perspective while acknowledging parent-teacher communication as a crucial part of the family-school relationship, also critically addresses the ways in which class and culture impact upon parent-teacher interactions including communication. Such studies adopt Bourdieu's notion of "cultural capital" to the field of parental involvement, defining this as "micro-interactional processes whereby individuals' strategic use of knowledge, skills, and competence comes into contact with institutionalized standards of evaluation" (Weininger & Lareau, 2003, p. 569). These 'standards of evaluation' relate also to ideas about parents' engagement with their children's education, which are usually more appropriate for middle class parents and challenging for parents from disadvantaged populations (O'Brien, 2008; Possey-Maddox, 2013; Gillies, 2006; Crozier, 1999). Studies based in this perspective have shown that what is considered proper parental involvement is defined primarily by the interests of the schools and reflects and is catered to middle-class parents (Vincent & Martin, 2005; Fine, 1997; Crozier, 1998; Nir & Bogler, 2012). Teachers' own perceptions of what constitutes proper modes of parental involvement in education reflect these interests and shape their interactions with parents (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Crozier, 1999; Gillies, 2005; Lareau, 2000), whether in parent-teacher conferences (Walker & MacLure, 2005; MacLure & Walker, 2000; Walker, 1998), in on-going discussions of children's needs and difficulties (Gillies, 2006; Lareau, 2003), or in involvement in the classroom or parent-teacher organizations (Posey-Maddox, 2013; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999). This literature argues that parents whose values, attitudes towards education, ideas of the division of labor between families and schools, and even ideas of proper emotional support by families for children, mesh with those of the school, and who have at their disposal resources of time, money, and knowledge are equipped with the cultural and emotional capital that gives them a distinct advantage when it comes to what is deemed to be appropriate parental involvement (Lareau, 2003). Furthermore, in our neo-liberal age in which parents have been

gaining greater influence into education, teachers' perceptions of parental involvement often clash with parents', particularly middle-class parents' desires for involvement in professional and policy issues and for control and power within the educational system (Noy, 2014; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999; Addi-Racah & Grinshtain, 2016a; Addi-Racah & Elyashiv-Arviv, 2008). This view of family-school relations brings into question the true nature of family-school relationships and suggests that family-school interactions should be recognized as a power-laden arena for the dissemination and negotiation of social and cultural constructions of 'proper parenting. This complex view of family-school interactions has yet to engage with the growing use of digital communication and to explore its role in the dissemination of social and cultural constructions of proper parental involvement.

By looking into the everyday practices of digital communication carried out by teachers as part of educational practice we can identify the perceptions of parental involvement unique to the digital age; we can also question whether and how these perceptions reflect class or ethnic-based assumptions. Certainly, the ways teachers use digital media are shaped by larger socio-cultural conditions – teachers' own competencies, existing professional culture concerning parent-teacher communication, and existing conditions of social class and ethnic stratification (Capello, 2017; De Feo, Goncalves & Romito, 2019). Yet digital devices are not just technological tools; they can also introduce into the parent-teacher nexus particular ways of relationship, ideas of educational practice and its regulation or control, and definitions of appropriate roles and actions for parents (De Feo, Goncalves & Romito, 2019; Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007). In particular, digital media become a means for putting forward ideas and regulating the performance of what is expected of parents in the realm of schooling on a daily and intensive basis. Communication with parents proffers normative standards defined by educational professionals and thus framed as expert knowledge about expected normative or 'proper' parenting (Capello, 2017; Livingstone & Sefton-Greene, 2012).

Yet to understand these regulatory practices, we need to consider how they are shaped and performed with the space of digital media. Studies in social media logic have pointed to the performative nature of digital online environments and coined the term 'engineered connectivity' to signify the processes by which users, platforms, and social context mutually shape the types of networked publics and the character of prodUsers who participate in them (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). From this point of view, the relationships between senders and users, in this case teachers and parents, are engineered through performances within platforms of hardware and services that allow for the coding of social activity into protocols of exchange and set interfaces that guide 'proper' or acceptable connections between senders, users, and content (van Dijck, 2012). Sender and user agency can be limited, shaped or

facilitated by the power structure of the platform (how it situates senders and users and the interactions amongst them), the nexus (the norms of discourse or interpretation of text in the context of the platform), and by user reception (audience experience of text and the way they make it visible to others) (Mathieu, 2016). This article focuses on the reported performances of senders – the teachers, and attempts to understand how their performances in digital media set up a structure and nexus of ‘proper’ family-school relationships.

The article begins by looking at how early childhood educators use digital communication in communication with parents and identifies the perceptions of proper involvement that this use requires. From this analysis, the article questions: What does teachers’ media literacy in parent-teacher communication entail? What sort of relationships between schools and parents do the particular uses of digital communication set up? What cultural and social capital does this communication required of parents for ‘proper involvement’?

Methods and context

This study adopts an interpretative description approach, presenting analysis of a forum of early childhood educators who were studying for an M.Ed. in Early Childhood Education in a college of education in central Israel. This approach, based in a social constructivist epistemology, advocates the use of naturalistic, contextualized research to come to broad theoretical understandings that can easily translate into practice (Merriam, 2002; Kahlke, 2014). The qualitative data for this study were not intended as research data, but as often happens in qualitative research, appeared as significant enough to warrant theoretical and analytical inquiry after the fact (Golden 2015).

Israeli society is highly diverse. The majority of the population is Jewish, with the remaining approximately 20% being Arab Muslim, Christian, and Druze. The education system is divided into four public sectors: Jewish secular, Jewish religious, ultra-Orthodox, and Arab. In these sectors, with the exception of the ultra-Orthodox, early childhood spans infancy to age eight with free education available from age three. The two years before kindergarten are defined as pre-K and pre-pre-K, reflecting an increasing emphasis on preparation for schooling (Sanpir, Sitton, & Russo-Tzimat, 2012). Within and across these sectors exist deep social gaps along socio-economic lines, between Jews and Arabs, between veteran populations and new immigrants, and between citizens and migrant workers (Khattab, Miaari, & Strier, 2016).

Since the 1990s, neo-liberal trends have prevailed within the Israeli education, including parents’ demands for greater control, choice, and involve-

ment in their children's education. Particularly middle-class parents are increasingly asserting their desires for involvement in professional and policy issues and for control and power within the educational system (Noy, 2014; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999; Addi-Racah & Grinshtain, 2016a; Addi-Racah & Elyashiv-Arviv, 2008). This growing neo-liberal trend is also accepted as best-practice as is evident in two recent reports commissioned by a government think tank on parental involvement in early childhood education and in middle school (Greenbaum & Fried 2011; Shechtman & Busharian 2015). Both reports emphasized the importance of parental involvement to children's success in school and focused analysis on how to facilitate productive parental involvement. The use of digital media in parent-teacher communication is almost ubiquitous across Israeli society (Addi-Racah & Yemini, 2018). Gaps in digital access are small and media usage extensive. 97.3% of households have at least one mobile phone, 78% have a computer, and 74.1% have internet access (ICBS 2018). Social gaps do exist though (see Table 1). Furthermore, social gaps in terms of digital competencies and types of media use are particularly noteworthy among the Arab population (Ganayem, Rafaeli & Azaiza, 2009).

Table 1 – Digital access per social percentile

Percentile	Computer (%)	Mobile phone (%)	Internet access (%)
General population	78.0	97.3	74.1
Upper	92.2	99.4	91.9
Seventh	88.7	99.0	86.8
Lowest	56.1	95.6	40.9

Source: Based on statistics from Household expenditure survey 2017 (ICBS 2018)

The current study was conducted amongst a class of forty-eight students. All were early childhood educators with a wide range of teaching experience in terms of years of teaching, grade level, affiliation of framework, and class-parents' socio-economic level (see Table 2 for details). Though this study is limited in the scope of its sample and the specificity of the Israeli context, it is not intended to be representative. Rather, the focus on a small group of students who are themselves early childhood educators currently active in the field, serves as a window into the experience of educators in the field and can highlight existing trends in early childhood educators' uses of digital media and their views of 'proper parental involvement.'

Table 2 – Profile of students' teaching experience (N=48)

Grade level	Years of teaching experience	Affiliation of educational framework	Socio-economic level of parents in educational framework (as per teachers' report)
Pre-kindergarten (24)	Up to 5 years (16)	Public secular (24)	Upper-class (3)
Kindergarten (9)	6-10 years (7)	Public religious (9)	Upper middle-class (17)
First and second grade (13)	Over 11 years (21)	Public Arab (5)	Middle-class (40)
Unknown (2)	Unknown (4)	Bilingual (2)	Lower-class (3)
		Other (2)	Mixed (3)
		Unknown (6)	Unknown (10)

Data for the study was collected through an on-line class discussion. The discussion served as the fourth class of a course on parental involvement. The participants were asked to watch a 20-minute lecture by an expert on technology and education, who presented findings from focus-group research with parents of middle school parents on the use of digital communications with teachers. The research was part of a larger effort of the Initiative for Applied Education Research, which provides Israeli decision-makers with scientific knowledge and was chosen as the most current research on parent-teacher digital communication available. The students were asked to respond in relation to their own use of digital communications with parents. The discussion was not intended as a research tool and therefore no measures were taken to ensure that the students' responses were not influenced by the concepts taught in class nor by the responses of classmates.

Following Murphy & Dingwall's (2007) model of non-anticipatory regulation for ongoing ethical practice, student participants received an email after course completion that asked for consent to use of forum posts. All agreed. Their names and any identifying factors have been changed to ensure anonymity.

Responses posted in the forum were analyzed through categorical analysis (Creswell, 2013) on two levels – uses and regulation of digital technology and perceptions of parenting reflected in digital technology use. Categories that arose in the analysis included: types of technology used in communication with parents and their particular uses, adaptations made for different populations, ways and means for regulating parents' use, assumptions about parents use and access to technology, demands made of parents through digital technology, and 'proper' teacher-parent relationships.

Table 3 provides a description of all the communication media that the teachers mentioned when asked about digital media. All the teachers except one, described digital communication as part of their daily communication with parents. Since they volunteered information about non-digital media,

we can understand that these teachers considered their uses of digital media as part of a repertoire that includes both digital and non-digital communication. An obvious shortcoming of the study is that we do not have the parents' perspectives, which would provide a fuller picture of how uses of digital communications shape parenting practices and belief. Further research could explore how teachers' perceptions and expectations of parents are received or resisted. From the data we can however consider the perceptions of 'proper parental involvement' teachers disseminate in their uses of digital media and also their attempts to regulate its performance.

Table 3 – Teacher-reported usage of digital and non-digital technology

Media	Reported usage (N=43)	Usage profile
Email	33	Reports of activities at school primarily through a weekly, bi-weekly or monthly schedule, sometimes with pictures. Requests for parents to save dates for events and sign up for meetings, to send their children equipped for activities, or to make minor but mandatory contributions such as bringing food or materials for special activities, or to volunteer to serve as a parent escort on fieldtrips.
WhatsApp ¹	32	Same as above AND Reports of activities on a daily basis. Real-time reminders of above requests. Communication with individual parents about children's accidents and health. Quiet or broadcast groups are used for teacher communication to all parents. Private teacher-parent communication is sometimes allowed.
Institution website/app	15	Reports of school activities through weekly schedules. Mostly used by first and second grade teachers who also post homework assignments.
Telephone	28	Discussion of specific problems or issues related to a child. Setting up meetings.
Notes sent with children	14	Same as for email but used to accommodate parents with lesser digital access or in need of translation.

¹ WhatsApp is one of the most popularly used social media in Israel. Broadcast groups allow the administrator to send messages to a group; when a participant replies only the administrator receives the reply.

Face to face meetings	26	Discussion of a children's development or difficulties. Including annually scheduled individual meetings with all parents and meetings with individual parents as needs arose.
Teacher-parent meetings	8	Usually conducted at the start of the year, used as a way to introduce teachers to parents and to set out rules and regulations.
School events	9	Parents were invited to trips, holiday performances, and birthday parties as a means for partaking in school life.

The table presents nuanced differences but mostly basic similarities in usage across three major platforms (WhatsApp, email, and school websites). A closer look at digital communication as a growing part of parent-teacher communication reveals two major themes connected to the performance of teacher/senders:

1. Digital communication is for the most part unidirectional, maintaining an aura of participation while preserving teacher's professional status and harnessing parents' cultural capital to complementary educational work.
2. Teachers use various methods to set up a culture of use that manages and limits the use of social capital among parents and thus the expansion of social networks among parents.

These themes will be described and illustrated in the following sections.

Harnessing parents' capital to complementary educational work

Most parent-teacher digital communication was unidirectional with teachers reminding parents to send their children with daily supplies or special items for parties, informing them about upcoming events, and in first and second grade notifying about homework to be completed. As Gali² put it, "My goal is sharing and notification through pictures, activities, general information and videos." The following examples illustrate this type of unidirectional communication:

My primary connection with parents is by email. I update [them] about what we are learning, things they need to bring, holidays, school outings, ask for parent escorts... (Margalit)

² All names are pseudonyms.

Once a week I send an email with the weekly program and relevant announcements and updates for the week. I try to make the program general and not to go into detail, in order to leave myself room for dynamic changes; in the same email I summarize the week that passed.

(Anat)

The weekly program mentioned above is a popular mechanism of unidirectional communication, and is sometimes sent by WhatsApp or posted on a school website (Kurtz, 2014). Similarly, Ganbook, a platform several teachers mentioned, especially designed for early childhood educators and authorized by the Ministry of Education is designed so that teachers can send pictures and notices to parents easily and parents can easily access them through a phone app. Parents can “like” a photo, but not post a response or query to the teacher or other parents.

The nature of communication in these examples shares several characteristics: the teacher holds full responsibility for the curriculum and for providing information about curriculum and about the children’s daily experiences, parents are to comply with the needs of the school and to take an interest in their child’s day at school, and children are not participants in the communication. Note that these characteristics are not arranged by the architecture of the platform but by the way teachers use content to set up a sender-user relationship. Only Ganbook has an interface that limits the parent audience to expressive reception – the confirmation of content through agreement (Mathieu, 2016). Yet even the teacher above who posts a more general weekly schedule, does so in order to allow herself room to maneuver, and not as a means for inviting input from parents. At least within digital communication, parents are not asked to be involved in planning, to share experiences from home, to raise problems or ideas etc. ‘Proper involvement’ entails provision of what is termed ‘complementary educational work’ (Griffith & Smith, 2005): making sure that the children get to school on time, fed, properly equipped, having done homework, as well as in a state of emotional well-being. This expectation does not include any sort of governing or decision-making role for parents, an aspect of parental involvement highly recognized in the literature as well as by the Israeli Director General Code regarding parents and schools and by the policy that parents can determine 25% of the curriculum (Bauch & Goldring, 1998; Fisher, 2009). ‘Proper involvement’ includes awareness of what one’s child has done at school, but not an invitation to interfere or to contribute of one’s own volition.

Taking into account the vast literature that documents that middle-class parents are better equipped with proper capital to conform to teachers’ expectations of the provision of complementary educational work, we need to ask ourselves if digital media are just another powerful means for reproducing inequalities through parental involvement. The work on “new literacies”

provides an inkling of hope that this may not have to be so. This work argues that digital media have created social practices that are more collaborative, participatory, and less author-centric (Knobel & Lanishear, 2014), implying that parent-teacher communication that uses digital media in such a way, could create new practices of communication with the potential to compensate for social inequalities. The teachers who participated in this study did express an awareness of, sensitivity to, and compensation for the disparate digital access and competency of parents from different social groups, yet they still did not describe uses of collaborative practices.

Teachers who worked with upper-middle and middle-class populations, based their communication practices on knowledge of parents' digital access and competence:

I'll point out that this type of communication is accepted by all the parents at my school and I haven't encountered any antagonism; all the parents are middle class, working academicians, with basic technological knowledge or more, so usually this communication is not a problem for them. What has happened every once in a while is a technical failure of some sort so I've used additional channels to get across the message. (Hedva)

It is clear to Hedva not only that the parents of her students enjoy a high level of digital competence, but also that this characteristic is related to class. She enjoys the privilege of utilizing a variety of types of digital communication. At the same time, teachers of similar populations recounted the potential conflict and stress that the digital competency and web-connectivity of such parents can put on teachers.

I try not to "bludgeon" the parents out of respect for their time...the use of [digital] communication at preschool has become so intensive and oftentimes burdensome on the work of preschool. Every activity is documented and every child at each activity, some of the parents pressure [teachers], 'take pictures for me', 'send them to me', 'I didn't see my child' etc. etc. I think that the regulator, the Ministry of Education, should make an educated decision, on the basis of existing studies, and set a framework for communication. As it is, any additional means is unnecessary for the parents and the teachers. (Carmel)

We hear from her that parents' desires to know about what is going on during their child's day at school are not necessarily instituted by the teacher; certainly not all practices of parental involvement are created solely through digital communication. Yet since digital communication is an increasingly central and frequent means of communication, I am concerned to see which perceptions are encouraged within digital communication. Carmel understands the growing intensity of this type of parental digital communication, and calls for institutional regulation. In her complaint about

the stress of parental demands roused by the possibilities made available by digital media, she frames the problem as a conflict with the professionally determined educational work to be accomplished at preschool - maintaining "the work of pre-school." For teachers like her who work with middle- and upper-middle class parents, parents' digital competence and web-connectivity shape digital communication as an efficient venue for regulating parents' involvement as the provision of complementary educational work. Unidirectional communication is a means by which teachers maintain control over education - both furthering their own professional role and communicating to parents that theirs is to provide emotional capital through a primarily supportive and affective role (Erdreich & Golden, 2016).

Teachers who had mixed-class or immigrant populations in their preschools and kindergartens described much more nuanced uses of digital media in communication with parents. Several teachers of lower-class parents made greater use of Whatsapp than email for sending newsletters and notices, based on knowledge of these parents' lesser access to email but ownership of smartphones. All the teachers who worked with lower-class populations made use of a non-digital medium to augment (or replace) the use of digital media described above. Two teachers who worked with lower-class Arab populations, replaced digital communication with print communication specifically for parents who they knew did not use or have access to digital technology. Other teachers had to consider not only digital competence, web connectivity, and parents' access to digital devices, but even that parents and teachers did not share common language skills to communicate through this media.

Listening to two such teachers, we can hear their awareness that the types of media and methods of use must be adapted to the class and cultural make-up of parent groups.

Mostly, for every announcement I send by email, I make sure to print out and post it on the parents' board at preschool, because there is a group of parents who don't have a computer at home and don't get emails...there are parents at my school who can't read Hebrew (English/Russian speakers), and so sometimes I have to explain to them what is written or explain in English so they'll be updated. (Margalit)

The population I work with, some of the parents have smartphones and WhatsApp, but a big group don't and they don't have email for me to send them summaries. So personally I am not for communication through technology. I prefer to send a summary page to the parents once a week and I post announcements at the preschool entrance. For some of parents who aren't in touch with the school, I call them by phone (some don't answer or change numbers and don't bother to update the teacher), but most are from the same family and live in

the same neighborhood so it's possible to reach the parents through relatives. (Hala)

Both Margolit and Hala have come up with creative adaptations of digital communication to the needs of the parents of their students. These adaptations take into account the cultural capital parents may have that does fit with school-sanctioned ideas about complementary educational work, but that can only be tapped into with different methods of communication. Platforms are chosen on the basis of web-connectivity with parents and not for the potential of sender-use relationship, which essentially teachers strive to maintain. In Hala's case for instance, she utilizes the network of patrilocal extended family common in Arab towns like the one in which she works. At the same time, the expectation of the provision of complementary educational work still remains not only a fundamental expectation of parents but also a criteria of judgment of proper involvement.

Only Yali, a teacher of students whose parents are largely migrant workers and asylum seekers, adapts both her uses of digital media and her expectations of proper involvement to the cultural capital her students' parents can provide. Yet even so, we still hear her struggling with a universal ideal of 'proper involvement.'

During my first year the fact that I didn't have a way to communicate with parents and send them information was really difficult. Moreover, to understand that the children have another role in the family and it's to pass on information from school; that role can sound unconceivable for someone who doesn't know this population. One has to understand that this is a population trying to survive, who doesn't feel part of Israeli culture, and the creation of an emotional bond with them is of utmost importance. This is my second year with the class and I feel I've succeeded making a connection with the parents. They can trust me and believe I will do the best for their children. That helps me maintain contact with them, to communicate more, to invite them to parent days and meetings and know they will come and I won't sit by myself in the classroom...I try to include them in everything connected with the daily management of the class, and ask the children to tell them what we're doing and I send completed work and projects home with the children. So I can't say there is technological communication with the parents of my class, but there is a connection that centers around sending information and messages and is more appropriate for the population I work with. (Yali)

At first glance, we hear Yali adopting the unidirectional perception of parent-teacher cooperation, "I don't have a single way to get them information," and posing it as a technical hurdle. Like other teachers of working-class or immigrant populations, Yali could not permit herself to rely solely on digital media for communication, but not only because of parents' levels of digi-

tal competence and web-connectivity. She mentions possible reasons these parents 'left her alone' during her first year – language difficulties, a sense of not belonging, preoccupation with daily survival, and lack of faith in her ability to school their children. Her efforts were not only not digital, they were also not solely focused on relaying information, but rather on creating trust and personal connection between the parents and herself. Though she is concerned with garnering approval for how she educates their children 'and know they will come and I won't sit in class by myself', she is not concerned with recruiting the parents to providing complementary educational work. She has realized that parents are not equipped or available to help with homework, and so she gives homework only occasionally and at a level that the children can complete alone. Though she does include the parents in what goes on in class, she often uses the children to communicate to the parents.

Yali's story is especially informative as it reveals how both perceptions about parental involvement as well as uses of digital media must be deconstructed in order to facilitate parent-teacher communication with parents from unique social groups. By comparison with her example, we see how deeply the unidirectional uses of digital communication used by teachers of middle-class populations are rooted in notions of cultural and emotional capital that these parents can be expected to provide. Digital communication that is focused on sharing assumes a certain foundational connection between home and school. The invention of new practices that strive to compensate for social inequalities requires of teachers a media literacy based in creative competencies that are open to changing the very nature of parent-teacher communication.

Regulating social capital to a culture of use

Almost all of the teachers described ways by which they clarified and reinforced their chosen digital media and its uses in parent-teacher communication. We can identify three main methods for what I call instilling a culture of use. A culture of use, similar to the idea of protocols (van Dick, 2010) entails the regulatory provisos teachers erect in order to maintain their own professional digital well-being (Gui, Fasoli, & Carradore, 2017): setting up initial guidelines, putting in place structural measures to avoid conflict, and using disciplinary measures to maintain proper communication. The culture of use ensures that social capital of the parent network is channeled to the teachers' definitions of educational goals and needs.

At opening parents' meetings, teachers explained the media available for communication, when, how and what it should be used for.

Communication with the parents in my preschool is conducted through various communication channels that I present and explain to the parents at the parents' meeting. (Shiri)

At the start of the year I hold the first parents' meeting so parents can meet the teacher personally... at this meeting I update them about the communication channels that will serve to connect us...it's very important to set clear borders right from the start and be sure that involvement remains involvement all along and doesn't turn into interference... (Tamar)

The teachers who described guidelines invariably presented them to parents as set decisions on netiquette codes; they did not allow for discussion with parents about a proper culture of use. This does not mean that they were insensitive to the communication needs of individual parents or to the digital competency and access of parents from different groups, as we saw in the previous section. Rather, these initial guidelines, laid out by the teacher, put into place the unidirectional nature of digital communication previously described.

These guidelines also set up the teacher as the hub of the teacher-parent network, emphasizing the social network as not only unidirectional on an individual basis but also within the group.

When I set up a group, its solely a broadcast group, where all the group sees what I write but the parents' answers are only seen by me, this is to prevent parental fatigue from too many messages and to prevent a sort of hyper-criticism around certain topics in which everyone feels the need to express their opinion. If the parents also want to set up a parents' group that's fine with me but I'm not party to it. As for the claim that they'll be hyper-critical there and can cause damage - I believe in my work methods and I'm always transparent with parents and willing to listen intimately to any claim or request. (Shachar)

Just as Shiri sets herself up as the hub of communication for 'presenting and explaining' and all further responsive communication is bounded to the channel between her and each parent, so does Shachar. However, she also acknowledges the existence of a social network among parents and keeps it at bay. In this way teachers manage the public of parents, using the platform of a WhatsApp broadcast group to construct a hierarchy of a central sender and separate, individual users. Addi-Racah and Yemini (2018) found that parents do utilize class WhatsApp groups to express their views on school-related issues. However, these groups are parents' groups in which the teacher is not usually a member, relegating parent expression to amongst parents and not amongst parents and teachers. Though Shachar is willing and open to conversation with individual parents, she is wary of inter-parent communication as potentially volatile and disruptive to professional educational

processes. The structural measure of the broadcast group limits parents' use of social capital – the resources and connections available within the social network (Addi-Racah & Grinshtain, 2016b) – in any way that will disrupt the educational path she believes in.

The broadcast group is one of several structural measures that teachers put in place to regulate parents as a social network. Like guidelines, such measures were put in place at the beginning of the year, but unlike guidelines, which put the responsibility for proper communication in the hands of the parents, these measures digitally bounded the communication parents could have with the teacher or each other. Through such measures these teachers set themselves up as the hub of the social network – the point of connection between school and home, with each home-school axes being preserved separately. This structure leaves no room for the creative, cooperative work made possible by digital social media.

Disciplinary measures were put into use when guidelines were not followed or structural measures were flouted. Some teachers used passive tactics such as sticking by the guidelines and not answering inappropriate communications:

I limited the group to teacher announcements only; parents who responded to my announcement did not get a response from me. Thus the parents started following the group rules and respecting my request. (Ofra)

Other teachers used more active tactics of explicitly reprimanding or reminding parents of the guidelines.

There are parents who still send me WhatsApp messages. If it's something specific and not during school time, I answer and write please to only correspond with me by email so that I can keep track of things. (Miri)

It's happened that people responded, questioned or complained in the general WhatsApp group and I have to re-clarify that there is no responding in the general group. If I feel someone continues to respond even with 'thanks' and icons, I clarify by personal WhatsApp that the group is a quiet group and that if he doesn't stop, I'll have to remove him from the group. (Galia)

Teachers' clarification of the nature of use clearly marks the boundaries of proper digital parent-teacher and parent-parent communication. Teachers are certainly dealing with the 'norm of availability' created by cellphone use, which situates teachers as obligated to be constantly available to parents (Kurtz, 2014). In other words, digital media has placed the teacher within the social network of parents as a resource parents feel entitled to use to their child's advantage. The response of setting boundaries, which is also reflected

in the methods and reasoning behind instilling a culture of use, understandingly serve to protect the teacher from this burdensome demand.

In their research *The Class: living and learning in the digital age*, Sef-ton-Green and Livingstone (2016) found that though digital connectivity can link home and school, teachers and young people often have an interest in keeping the two separate and thus choose how to utilize or not utilize digital technology to do so. The same can be said for teachers and parents. In their work on elementary and secondary school teachers, Addi-Racchah and Grin-shtain (2016a; 2016b) found that in order to reduce conflict or stress with parents, teachers use their own cultural capital of professional capabilities as well as their social capital, in the form of support and connections from their colleagues at school, to reduce conflict or stress. In the case of early childhood teachers, we hear the same concern over potential conflict as well as the use of cultural capital of professional capabilities, like Shachar who confidently 'believed in my way'. The three methods for instilling a culture of use – guidelines, structural measures, disciplinary measures - do not capitalize on the teachers' own social capital in any way, but rather struggle to control the social capital of parents. Early childhood educators who for the most part work alone, do not have readily available social capital within their preschools and kindergartens. Instilling a culture of use erects protective boundaries around their professional capabilities, but also limits the possibilities for cooperation and sharing of social capital available within the parents' social network.

Not surprisingly, the methods described above were recounted from teachers working with middle- and upper-middle class populations. Such parents have much social capital at their fingertips, and powerful social networks can be put into motion by moving fingertips over keypads. Perhaps this perception of parents shapes how teachers use communication to regulate parents. In the eyes of the teachers - the representatives of the school - proper involvement is an individual endeavor; it is centered on one's own child, conducted in cooperation with school professionals, and does not involve people in one's social network. However, with regards to parents with different types of social capital, this individualized view of proper involvement may fail to tap into a rich pool of resources. If for instance, we recall Yali's story, we should consider the potential of social capital for migrants. Studies outside of education has shown that digital technology can be a source of social capital for migrants - a venue for the establishment of new networks and exchange of information and thus a means for bridging social inequality (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014; Alam & Imran, 2015; Vancea & Boso, 2015). Perhaps parent-teacher communication with such groups should be focused not on individual parents' cultural or social capital, but on finding ways to instill protocols that would encourage the establishment of a net-

worked parent public around issues of schooling and encourage the flow of social and cultural capital within this public.

Conclusions

From analysis of how these teachers attempt to manage parents' cultural and social capital within digital communication, we can take several lessons about the perceptions of proper parental involvement in the digital age, how digital communication is shaping the teaching profession, and perhaps the need for further attention to differences in parents' digital competencies and access.

The nature of digital media creates a hyper-communication that puts teachers in a bind. They find themselves navigating this new reality, working to create practices of professional digital well-being that will elicit the support they need from parents in educating children. They do so in the face of a parenting culture, particularly among the upper- and middle-class, that desires constant information about their children's education and holds teachers up to a standard of constant accountability, and which is intensified by the availability of digital media. At the heart of middle-class parenting culture lie deeply ensconced neoliberal ideals of parental involvement that emphasize the rights of parents to shape the social and cultural values to which their children are socialized. Working within this context, the teachers in this study adopted a unidirectional communication in their digital media use that maintains an aura of participation, while preserving the teacher's professional status and placing parents in a complementary and affective role. Digital media was used to notify parents about what is considered proper capital according to the teacher's goals and means of education and to elicit parent contribution in this regard.

Teachers are certainly agentive users of digital platforms; utilizing platforms to their own aims, and establishing and maintaining protocols that invite parents to be expressive-receptive users at best or to seek connection within a networked parent public outside of teacher-parent digital communication. Within this communication, teacher-parent connectivity takes on the shape of the spokes of a wheel, with the teacher at the center and unidirectional spokes of connection between her and each individual parent. This connectivity is created with a context of power-relations – we hear teachers trying to maintain their professional capital and to keep the powerful social capital of middle-class parents at bay. The ability to use platforms this way may be even an important creative competency for teachers working with powerful, middle-class populations.

The incongruity between the existing digital communication and the middle-class, neoliberal ideology of parental involvement reflects the same

discrepancy that Nir and Bogler (2012) found between the declared ideology of wide cooperation expressed in formal Ministry of Education documents and the limited practice of cooperation observed at the level of schools. This discrepancy should not elicit a criticism of teachers, but perhaps should alert us that the discourse of partnership does not sit well with the professional work of educating. Perhaps, it is time to change the discourse of parental involvement and be more forthright about the expectations teachers have as professionals about parents' supportive role in their children's education. Such a discourse would still express respect for parents' and their desire to be involved in their children's lives, but would also emphasize the boundaries around the professional business of educating children. At the same time, parents could be compensated by being given more of a voice about the goals of education, perhaps through social media networks and forums of exchange.

Interestingly, while we did see how teachers strive to make accommodations to parents with differential digital competency or access, they did so in ways that still maintain and reflect the same perception of proper parental involvement. Similar to Mathieu's (2016) account of health and lifestyle Facebook groups, teachers' uses of digital communications maintain a normative discourse, in this case of 'proper parenting' within education and specifically that reflects class based ideals. The culture of use or the protocols instilled in, around, and often regardless of the platforms chosen, regulates that these ideals are contained and maintained. In their digital communications with teachers, parents are not invited to contest, offer alternatives, or go out of the bounds of this supportive, affective role. While this culture of use allows teachers to manage the social capital of middle-class parents and shape connective relationships as teacher-parent, it excludes parents from other social groups who do not answer to the middle-class ideal. This culture of use also precludes the creation of cross-sectional connectivity amongst parents.

The teachers in this study were sensitive to differences in parents' digital competence, web connectivity, and even basic literacy or language skills when making decisions about digital communication. At least amongst these teachers though, we did *not* witness creative competencies that worked to create a digital well-being culture specific to these parents with perhaps alternative perceptions of proper parental involvement. In other words, teachers are using digital communication in a way that, while serving their professional goals, does not utilize the full social potential of digital communication and only marginally taps into creative competencies that could allow for variations in perceptions of 'proper involvement.' This is a crucial awareness and sensitivity that could be developed further through creative uses of digital media. Maintaining a culture of use could include built-in

structural venues for agentic participation – not just structural methods for keeping social capital at bay. This is a venue that warrants exploration especially as pertains to parents from marginal groups. We could explore not only how digital communication can be catered to parents who are less connected or competent, but also how it can be used differently with different groups of parents and perhaps for different purposes. For instance, by exploring how parents from these groups engineer connectivity across other platforms or how these parents perform care at a distance (Hjorth & Hinton 2019), schools and teachers could learn about these parent publics are engineered and consider how to connect with them through these other platforms.

Educators could consider how social media can be used to help parents support each other, how apps and digital platforms can be used to channel parent contributions to the entire class and not just their individual child, how schools can tap into social networks (religious, cultural, NGO) outside of school, and more. Adopting this attitude, the digitalization of education could become an opportunity for teachers create and expand perceptions of ‘proper parenting’ that are more varied and inclusive.

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