This paper examines the cultural shaping of the ways in which parents become involved in their children's schooling. We ask: how is the proper comportment of parents in schools created in and through the encounter between families and schools at an early stage of children's education? The paper forms part of a wider study comparing middle-class mothers' involvement in their children's education in three social groups: Jewish native-born Israelis, Palestinian Israelis, and Russian immigrants to Israel. Here we focus on participant observation of Jewish native-born mothers' involvement in their children's schooling. Our findings present a group of well-endowed parents and look at the power of the school to shape parental involvement in line with cultural ideas. Our focus on the middle class is particularly instructive because even in a context in which parents are less constrained and have the resources to act relatively freely in relation to their children's schooling, modes of parental involvement continue to be shaped, and curtailed, by the local cultural ethos.

Recent sociological research highlights the lack of fit between schools and families and foregrounds the ways in which class and culture structure parental involvement in children's education (Gillies 2005; Griffith and Smith 2006; Heath 1983; Kusserow 2004; Lareau 2000, 2003; Reay 2000; Reed-Danahay 2000; Vincent and Ball 2007). This body of literature assumes that cultural capital is something "ready-made" which both sides – families and schools - bring with them to the interaction. Although the class and cultural aspects of home-school relations have been well-attended to, this is usually as to how the class and/or culture of particular families differ from the norm of the school. This literature assumes that if marginalized groups had the cultural capital to act in culturally appropriate ways, they would do so. We use ethnography to unpack the idea that cultural capital is something that social groups bring with them to their encounter with school but, rather, aim to show how this is shaped, and given particular cultural form, in the very encounter itself. Parental involvement, we claim, is not only about shaping children's chances for success; rather it is a salient and powerful venue for communicating culturally appropriate ideals for proper parenting. We illustrate some of the ways of creating parental habitus: the school's cultivation of "proper" disposition and comportment for parents, the power of emotional community, and the recruitment of key cultural symbols. We propose taking up this lens toward a culturally cognizant way of understanding parental involvement.