Building on Bourdieu: The Role of School Culture and Peer Institutional Agents in Disadvantaged Students’ Attainment of Academic Success

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ABSTRACT
Using Bourdieu’s (1986) concepts of social and cultural capital linked to one’s habitus, this study explains why some historically disadvantaged students succeed in school while many others do not. This phenomenon refutes “reductionist” social reproduction theories, as well as Coleman’s “deficiency” model and concept of social capital that would instead predict that students from a disadvantaged background will not be academically successful. This investigation focuses on the role played by these students’ “institutional agents” – including peers and friends, as well as teachers, relatives and other adults. The study highlights some important factors that help explain why the disadvantaged students studied were academically successful.

CHAPTER 1
Introduction

The phenomenon

Over my seventeen years as an urban secondary English teacher at Dewey High School (a pseudonym), I witnessed a phenomenon that has gone unexplained. As is the case in many urban schools, many students were living in poverty, had siblings and parents who were either “dropouts” or unsuccessful in school; and for many, their families had also experienced a legacy of racial discrimination. Furthermore, many of these students came from single parent or guardian homes. Yet, unlike what happens in most urban schools nation-wide, most of these students were successful in their academic program and entered good colleges upon graduation – thus opening opportunities for social mobility for themselves. My purpose for this study was to investigate these student’s academic successes, in the quest to help other students situated within a similar social context.

My investigation explores “the how and why” some disadvantaged students attained the social capital necessary for academic success. More specifically, I ask: “How do academically successful disadvantaged students select and retain institutional agents that can contribute to their gaining of the social and cultural capital of schools that can facilitate their academic success and social mobility?” To that end, I employ Bourdieu’s (1986) concepts of cultural capital, institutional agency, habitus, and knowing the “rules of the game,” all linked to the attainment of social capital, to explain why these historically disadvantaged students have succeeded, while many others do not.

A brief introduction to social capital theory

Although both theorists use the term *social capital*, their conceptualizations of *social capital* are markedly different. Both Bourdieu’s (1986) and Coleman’s (1987) empirical contributions concentrate on understanding the relationship between educational achievement and social mobility; and, further, help to explain the reproduction of social inequality.

Both Bourdieu and Coleman acknowledge the positive instrumental role of social capital in maintaining and/or gaining academic success and social mobility. Bourdieu accounts for the reproduction of the elites through *social capital*, while Coleman uses social capital to explain the higher than expected achievements by disadvantaged children in Catholic schools (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). Coleman suggests that a positive school ethos (as in religious schools) compensates for disadvantaged students’ lack of economic and social capital outside school, and that families can also play a key role in this process. At first, Bourdieu’s social reproduction theory may seem to contradict the phenomenon under study—as it suggests that disadvantaged youth cannot succeed in school. However, I will argue that it provides the analytic tools to study why some disadvantaged students may attain the needed social capital, as it links the acquisition of cultural and social capital to one’s “habitus.”

The phenomenon I describe refutes current models of social reproductionist theories (Bourdieu, 1973, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 1983; Fine, 1991; Macleod, 1987) as well as Coleman’s work on social capital. Coleman and Hoffer (1987), in their theory of social capital (i.e., social networking that influences academic success and mobility), use a “deficiency model” to explain why many disadvantaged students are academically unsuccessful. They argue that these students’ families are both *structurally deficient* (single parent homes, the absence of a parent) and/or *functionally deficient* (that is, although the parents possess economic and human capital, they do not interact sufficiently with their children); as a result, *social capital* is not transferred to their children via intergenerational closure. Therefore, according to Coleman and Hoffer (1987), if “intergenerational closure” is absent, academic success and social mobility is not possible.

In contrast, Bourdieu’s (1977, 1986) theory of social capital is much more complex, and is embedded and interwoven within his social reproduction theory that differs extensively from that of Coleman’s (1987) notions of social capital attainment. First and foremost Bourdieu (1977,1986) envisions this process as incorporating *multiple variables* including:

1. *cultural capital* – i.e., the discourse, mannerisms and way of knowing how the “system” operates,
2. *habitus* – i.e., the learned attitudes, perceptions and behaviors towards one’s probabilities and possibilities of life trajectories, often learned in our familial and cultural context;
3. *institutional agents* – i.e., individuals who have the ability to directly convey, transfer and allocate institutional resources and opportunities, and therefore can help guide students to decode the cultural logic of the dominant class and to understand how “the system” works; and
4. *knowing “the rules of the game”* – i.e., having an implicit understanding of how “the system operates” and using that knowledge to benefit one’s own trajectories using reciprocity that are linked to one’s social, cultural and economic class status.
Secondly, Bourdieu suggests these social constructs are strongly influenced by the dominant mainstream cultural capital that perpetuates power networks.

Other researchers building on the concept of social capital of either Coleman or Bourdieu (1990-2006) primarily focused on the role of adults in a student’s attainment of social capital linked to educational outcomes. However, there has been a significant absence of research on the contribution a student’s peers may make to a student’s attainment of social capital. Yet, students spend more time interacting socially with their peers, both in school and at home (Locke-Davidson, 1996); furthermore, peer agency is an important element in the way a student constructs his/her attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors (Locke-Davidson, 1994). Therefore, I have chosen to include in my investigation peer interactions in the attainment of a student’s academic success.

**Research question**

**Theoretical framework: Proposed model for how disadvantaged students may or may not acquire social capital**

First and foremost, from my theoretical point-of-origin, aligned with that of Bourdieu, one must look at the reproductive processes embedded within our sociocultural context (macro) and within the structures of schooling (micro) linked to educational outcomes and social mobility. Second, these processes are complex and multidimensional (Ball, 2003; Brown, 2000; Bourdieu, 1998; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Dika & Singh, 2002; Lareau, 2000; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Reay, 2004). To understand and analyze these processes is neither simplistic, as Coleman (1988) suggests, nor smooth. Unlike other theoretical models of social reproduction and social capital, “Bourdieu’s method allows for a more fluid interplay and a better understanding of the relationship between structure and agency than do other theoretical perspectives” (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p. 37-38).

Consequently, to understand the phenomenon I observed—where disadvantaged youth have succeeded in school and have become socially mobile—I used Bourdieu’s theoretical model of social reproduction and his concepts of social and cultural capital linked to one’s habitus. Therefore, I examined these students’ successes (the phenomenon) by “flipping” Bourdieu’s (1973, 1977) social reproduction model explaining ongoing elite success to that of disadvantaged youth, in a way similar in concept to Marx’s “flipping” of Hegel’s notion of ideas determining social reality and the material world. Thus, I will use Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural, social capital, and habitus as analytical tools to explain how some disadvantaged students are academically successful and socially mobile.

I surmise that these students have been able to capture - or, for a better term, “decode” - the cultural capital of the dominant culture and to accept agency through an alteration in their habitus, such as accepting the help of trustworthy agents which in turn results in further changes of their habitus through gained mainstream institutional knowledge. Therefore, these students are able to gain the social capital of the dominant culture by networking (Lin, 1982, 1990, 1999a, 1999b) with those in power and by understanding, as Bourdieu (1992) calls it, “the rules of the game” that have often been obscured or misunderstood within their own social class’s social and cultural capital.
Although Bourdieu does not explicitly express the “variations in the ways in which institutional actors legitimate or rebuff efforts by individuals to activate resources” (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p.38), I postulate that there are two scenarios that could apply regarding a disadvantaged student’s ability to attain the cultural capital of the dominant culture and to access and/or interact with institutional agents that may or may not lead to her ability to gain the social capital of the dominant culture, as summarized in Diagrams 1a and 1b.

Both scenarios assume that all students experience the opportunity to attain the cultural capital of the dominant culture (for example, via observation and/or repeated contact and interaction within the “mainstream” context of school) and access, contact and interaction with institutional agents such as faculty, staff and peers. However, in one case (scenario 1, as depicted in Diagram 1a) the student rejects the institutional agents’ efforts and in the other (scenario 2, as depicted in Diagram 1b) the student accepts them. I contend that the reasons behind this critical decision have their roots in the student’s and/or the student’s family or cultural peer group’s perceptions of the institutional agents’ motives. These perceptions are connected with the student’s familiarity with the modes of discourse of the institutional agents, which in turn is linked to the student’s habitus.

**Diagram 1a.** “Failure” to attain the social capital of the dominant culture despite cultural capital and institutional agency

- Student attains the cultural capital of the dominant culture.
- Student is “sponsored” by institutional agents such as faculty, staff and peers.
- Student rejects agency due to factors such as resistance and mistrusting agent’s motives linked to one’s habitus (one’s embedded socio-historical cultural context regarding attitudes, perceptions and behaviors leading to life’s trajectories).
- Funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, & Gonzalez, 1992) or “Rules of the Game” (Bourdieu, 1998) are not transferred. Thus, the social capital of the dominant culture is not attained.

The scenario articulated in Diagram 1a explains why disadvantaged youth often fail to gain the social capital of the dominant culture. In this scenario the student will attain the cultural capital of the dominant culture, via observation and/or repeated contact and interactions in the “mainstream” context of school, have access, contact and interactions with institutional agents, but in the end the student does not gain the social capital of the dominant culture, due, in part, to the student’s and/or student’s family or cultural peer group’s resistance to authority, mistrust or miscomprehension of the institutional agent’s contact, sponsorship and/or intentions. Thus, the student rebuffs the institutional agent’s efforts and the funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanita, & Gonzalez, 1992) or, as Bourdieu (1998) calls it, learning the “rules of the game,” is not transferred from the institutional agent to the student. Therefore, the social capital of the dominant culture is not gained.
Diagram 1b. “Success” in attaining the social capital of the dominant culture as a result of cultural capital and institutional agency

The scenario articulated in Diagram 1b explains a student who attains the cultural capital of the dominant culture, accepts sponsorship of institutional agents and as a result gains the social capital of the dominant culture due to feelings of acceptance and trustworthiness of the institutional agent’s motives. I suggest that these feelings of acceptance and trustworthiness might have already been established by the student’s familiarity with the modes of discourse of the institutional agent via the student’s habitus (Ball, 2003; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Because the student trusts the institutional agent, she can acquire and access the funds of knowledge, or ways of knowing how “the system” operates.

Bourdieu (1998) often calls this process an understanding of “the rules of the game” (learning how “the system” operates, which is similar to the concept of the funds of knowledge) that are learned within the social field and transferred to one’s habitus. As a result, the student transcends his/her marginalizing experiences and overcomes the stigmas of the sociocultural and socioeconomic barriers, as well as linguistic and structural barriers. The student’s family shapes student’s reactions to these marginalizing experiences and community support networks (Garmezy, 1991; Moll, Amanti & Gonzalez, 1992) as well as the student’s habitus. Therefore, the transference of the “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, & Gonzalez, 1992) or “the rules of the game” (Bourdieu, 1998) from the institutional agent to the student is achieved. Accordingly, the student has attained the social capital of the dominant culture that can lead to social mobility and “success.”
CHAPTER 2

Social capital foundational research contributions

Bourdieu’s contributions: social capital

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) was the first sociologist to analyze systematically the concept of social capital. Bourdieu’s seminal work “The Forms of Capital” (1986), argues that the laws governing economic capital are also applicable to human social relations, which he calls “social capital.” According to Bourdieu, social capital is similar to economic capital in that it is accumulative, it can grow and replicate results and benefits in the social world, and it can also be changed into tangible resources or other forms of capital. Thus, social capital is the accumulation of social support inherent in an individual’s development of his interpersonal social networks that are often linked by social class and economic status.

Pierre Bourdieu defines the term cultural capital in three distinctive forms: the embodied state, the objectified state, and the institutional state. The three forms are:

[1] In the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematic, etc.; and in the institutional state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee (1986, p. 243).

The accumulation of an individual’s cultural capital in the embodied state can range from continuous knowledge transmitted to an actor through parents and communities since birth. The objectified state informs actors by access to tangible goods and resources such as books or works of art. The institutionalized state provides one the ability to access and gain the inherent culture of the dominant class from mainstream institutions such as schools or government.

Bourdieu’s “notion” of cultural capital emerged within his concepts of cultural and social reproduction theories based on his empirical research of reproductive structures within French educational institutions based on social class and “linguistic and cultural competence” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 59). Bourdieu states that the concept of cultural capital

[P]resented itself to me, in the course of research, as a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from different social classes by relating academic success, i.e., the specific profits which children from different classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions. (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243)

He also credits his hypothesis of the role of the educational system in the reproduction of the structure of the distribution of cultural capital to Durkheim’s (1933) insights in that educational institutions act to preserve and propagate the dominant culture’s accumulation of knowledge. Bourdieu suggests that by either knowing or decoding the cultural capital of the dominant culture, a student can gain the social capital of mainstream institutions (schools) via institutional
agency. The gaining of the cultural capital of the school will thus allow the student to obtain institutional agents within the structure of schooling that will promote and support the student’s attaining the social capital of the dominant culture often needed for academic success and social mobility that are learned within the social field and transferred to one’s habitus (Bourdieu, 1988).

As indicated by this brief summary, Bourdieu uses multiple variables such as cultural capital, institutional agency, habitus, and social field (characterized by “rules of the game” or “funds of knowledge”) that are intricate, complex and interwoven. According to Bourdieu (1986), the amount of social capital attained by a person relies greatly on the size of the network connections (Lin, 1982, 1990, 1999a, 1999b) that he or she can engage. The volume of capital—economic, cultural and symbolic—possessed by each person within a group is viewed as an investment to maintain one’s dominant position in society and to produce group solidarity. All these variables (cultural capital, institutional agency, habitus, social field, “rules of the game” or “funds of knowledge”) are needed to attain the social capital of the dominant culture.

Unlike other theoretical models of social reproduction and social capital, Bourdieu’s conceptual analytical tools allow for an improved understanding of the relationship between structure and agency than do other theoretical perspectives (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p. 37-38). Therefore, the phenomenon of disadvantaged youth who succeed in school and are socially mobile can be understood by using Bourdieu’s theoretical model of social reproduction and his concepts of social and cultural capital linked to one’s habitus. Next, I will address the contributions of Coleman’s (1988) theory of social capital to the fields of sociology and education.

**Coleman’s contributions: social capital**

Coleman (1988) situates the concept of social capital within communities, social or institutionalized groups (such as schools or churches) and between persons and family. Coleman suggests that the accumulation of social capital gives an individual the power to accrue social debts that also enhance feelings of anticipation and trustworthiness within the social networks one has formed.

An example of this would be an individual’s feelings of indebtedness and the anticipation of expectations in owing one’s network associates “a favor” in order to receive other “favors” or opportunities in the future. Coleman (1988) states that an actor repaying his debt will connect to other forms of support and resources possessed by new or other network associates and these additional social “connections” will identify his value and trustworthiness within the network. Therefore, an individual’s feeling of indebtedness within his social network creates a larger social network and these relationships are valuable and accumulative.

For Coleman (1987), students gain the social capital necessary for academic success primarily from their families. For a child to gain social capital from his family, he must be involved with what Coleman calls “intergenerational closure”. Coleman and Hoffer (1987) contend that although many students’ families may have the human capital that often leads to academic success, this alone does not guarantee that they will obtain the social capital. They argue, “certain kinds of social capital arise only in networks with closure” (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987, p. 70). Coleman and Hoffer (1987) describe a network with closure shown in a rectangle, which includes four persons in the “family” that are represented by the letters A, B, C, and D having relations in which “two can discuss a third’s behavior and develop consensus about what
is proper and appropriate behavior, that is, develop social norms” (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987, p. 70).

For example, A and D are parents of B and C. They all live in the same house and make decision across generations through discussion and consensus. Thus, Coleman and Hoffer (1987) state there is intergenerational closure. “But if A and D (parents), who have parent—child links to B and C (children), respectively, do not have links to one another (divorced, separated, single-parent households or aloof parenting), then norms to govern and constrain B’s and C’s action cannot develop” (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987, p. 70). Thus, there is no intergenerational closure and the student has not attained social capital.

Coleman (1987) explains social capital through one variable, intergenerational closure. Coleman’s (1987) use of a one variable explanation for the attainment of social capital of disadvantaged youth is highly favored in the United States (Dika & Singh, 2002). Research trends from 1990-1995 using the term social capital show Bourdieu’s and Coleman’s theoretical concepts relatively even. However, in 1996-1998, Coleman’s concept gained greater popularity and this trend continued in 1999-2001, focusing primarily on social capital (within and between-family) using large national data sets. “Research during this time frame clung rather tightly to Coleman’s conception of social capital, resulting in a focus on parents’ networks rather than on children’s or adolescents’ relationships” (Dika & Singh, 2002, p.38).

There are two possible reasons for the prevalence of Coleman’s (1987) concept in educational research. The first attraction may be his employment of only one variable (intergenerational closure). Secondly, some researchers have found (1996-2001) in measuring educational outcomes using survey-based, quantitative research methodology on large U.S. data sets such as the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88) and the High School and Beyond (HSB) data sets that Coleman’s concept of social capital works well (Dika & Singh, 2002). Having large data sets and using only one variable, researchers can quickly extricate data to support their hypothesis without having to elicit and collect their own large database. Despite its importance and influence, Coleman and Hofer’s (1987) work also presents some limitations. These limitations are important to recognize.

According to Coleman and Hoffer (1987), students who lack economic capital can only succeed if they possess “intergenerational closure”. Therefore, Coleman’s (1988) concept of social capital has only one variable and that is “intergenerational closure.” Furthermore, Coleman and Hoffer (1987), in their theory of social capital, also use a “deficiency model” to explain why many students are unsuccessful academically. They argue that these students’ families are both structurally deficient (single parent homes, the absence of a parent) and/ or functionally deficient (although the parents possess economic and human capital they do not interact with their children and therefore social capital is not transferred to their children via intergenerational closure). Therefore, according to Coleman and Hoffer (1987) if “intergenerational closure” is absent, academic success and social mobility is not possible. However, the phenomenon I witnessed refutes Coleman and Hoffer’s (1987) theoretical model.

Social capital foundational research: summary

In sum, both Bourdieu and Coleman agree that social capital is an important and valuable factor in attaining social mobility in that it helps to identify the principles of social structures that are used by actors to achieve their interests. These supportive social networks allow individuals access to institutional privileges and resources that permit possibilities of social mobility and
success (Dika & Singh, 2000). The processes of social capital attainment is not simplistic, but should be viewed as complex and multidimensional (Ball, 2003; Brown, 2000; Bourdieu, 1998; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Dika & Singh, 2002; Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Lareau, 2000; Lareau & Horvat, 1999, Reay, 2004; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Although I agree with Coleman’s contentions that disadvantaged students can attain social mobility through the acquisition of social capital, I suggest that Bourdieu’s (1973, 1977, 1986, 1992, 1998) theoretical model of social reproduction and his concepts of social and cultural capital linked to one’s habitus provides the conceptual and methodological tools for understanding this complex process, and I have used this model to inform my study and to develop the models presented earlier in Diagram 1a and 1b.

Research explaining disadvantaged students’ academic success

“Biculturalism”

Research studies concerning the success of disadvantaged students within the culturally different world of their schools identify critical steps in the process first decoding the cultural capital of the dominant culture, so as to become bicultural, and then gaining support through others, networking and attaining the social capital of the dominant culture. There are differing theoretical explanations regarding a student’s ability to be “bicultural.” The term biculturalism has been defined and used differently by researchers either to include only race and ethnic differences (Darder, 1993) or to also include social class in their definition (Nieto, 2000). Studies by Phelan, Locke-Davidson and Yu (1991,1993,1994, 1998) and their theory of biculturalism are contained within their “multiple worlds” research in which they identify six typologies of the processes a student incurs crossing cultural barriers and borders, enforcing boundaries, and/or creating bridges from one culture to the next.

Multiple worlds, social actions and institutional support

Phelan, Locke-Davidson and Yu’s research builds on their own line of research and social networking research of Nan Lin’s (1982,1990, 1999a, 1999b), concerning the instrumental actions that students can take in networking and gaining the social capital needed for academic success. In particular, they build on Lin’s descriptions of social actions of vertical and horizontal network linkages, allowing collaborative experiences that reinforce cohesion of a group and increase upward social mobility of an individual.

Institutional support/school mix effect

Lastly, the forms of institutional support reflected in compositional effect/“school mix” (Thrupp, 1999; Lauder & Thrupp, 2004) of the structure of schools (diversity of student population/“school mix”, school management, culture, curricula and instruction) that can further advance student’s abilities to be academically successful. The significance of class and cultural diversity within the student’s classroom is considered as a means to foster greater possibilities for disadvantaged students to access institutional agents and to decode the White middle-class culture of schools (Cochran et al, 1990; Coleman, 1988; Eaton, 2001; Orfield and Eaton; 1996; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Research suggests that for disadvantaged students to succeed, they must
learn to participate actively in the academic process communally, rather than individualistically (Moll, Amanti & Gonzalez, 1992; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001); and they must also learn to be able to live within “two worlds”, their own culture and that of the dominant, mainstream, White middle-class culture.

**Social capital research methodology literature review: 1990-2001**

**Overview**

Until 1999, most social capital research in education was quantitative, using predominantly logistic regressions to examine large national large data sets that are survey-based and embraced Coleman’s (1988) conceptualization of social capital. Researchers linked educational outcomes to “intergenerational closure” using a normative framework that relied on family structure, parent-child discussions, parent-school involvement and parental expectations.

However, a few studies used Bourdieu’s (1986) framework of social and cultural capital (McNeal, 1999; Smith-Maddox, 1999; White & Glick, 2000; and Stanton-Salazar, 2001) and others connected social capital to Lin’s (1982,1990) social networking theory (Smith-Maddox, 1999; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). A few researchers also began using qualitative research and mixed-methods analysis (both qualitative and quantitative and/or case study approach), although these studies primarily analyzed only adults’ perceptions, attitudes and behaviors regarding social capital attainment.

A predominant critique is that social capital research conducted during the period 1990-2001 lacks “theoretical refinement” and “relies too heavily on Coleman’s (1988) vague and metaphorical concept of capital” (Dika & Singh, 2002, p.40). Given the interdisciplinary nature of the concept of social capital (as it involves elements and aspects of economics, sociology, anthropology and education), and differing beliefs of what this concept suggests (e.g., Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988), research needs to move away from normative frameworks to those that investigate social capital via psychosocial outcomes (school and community engagement, peer interactions, institutional agency) and locus of control studies, using social network theories (Lin, 1990, 1999a, 1999b) and social reproduction models (Bourdieu, 1973, 1977).

A few researchers have begun to use Bourdieu’s (1977, 1986) model of social reproduction and his concepts of social and cultural capital, and habitus (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; Lareau, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001). It is from Stanton-Salazar (1997,2001) that I have developed my theoretical framework, from which I will construct my research design. To understand how and why my research methodology evolved, one must look to the history of social capital research.

**Social capital research: 1990-1995**

In the years 1990-1995 social capital research focused on predominantly minority and marginalized groups, such as a longitudinal study of Vietnamese students (Bankston & Zhou, 1995), a survey study of Mexican origin students, (Valenzulela & Dornbusch, 1994) and a mixed methods study (including surveys and semi-structured interviews) of Latino students in the San Francisco Bay area and San Jose (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). There was also a study of Southern (United States) students using the High School and Beyond (HSB) national data set (Smith, Beaulieu, & Israel, 1992) and a longitudinal study of the children of teenage mothers...
The conceptualization and utilization of social capital as an analytical tool varied greatly across these studies. Two studies (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995: Smith et al, 1992) used Coleman’s (1988) theory of social capital and measurements for analysis, such as intergenerational closure and religious participation. However, three other studies departed from Coleman’s theory, and looked at literacy and language skills as sources of cultural and social capital in Vietnamese students (Bankston & Zhou, 1995) and Latino students (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch 1995). In addition, Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) used Bourdieu’s (1977, 1986, 1992) theory along with Lin’s (1991) social networking and resource theory, that measures social capital attainment using the following indicators/measures: status of network members and number on non-kin network members. Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) looked for both horizontal and vertical linkages in social networking within and outside social class and community as an indicator of attainment of social capital in “power” networks. Valenzuela and Dornbusch (1994) used Bourdieu’s (1977, 1986) theory of social and cultural capital to measure academic achievement of both Anglo and Mexican high school students in the San Francisco Bay area.

Social capital research: 1996-1998

During this time, the trend towards Coleman’s (1988) concept of social capital became prevalent in research publications looking for educational outcomes, focusing on his one encompassing variable of “intergenerational closure.” Dika and Singh (2002) note that out of the nine studies of this time period, eight were survey designs, while seven involved national, primarily large-scale panel studies. These studies include High School and Beyond (HSB)(Lopez, 1996), National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) (Carbonaro, 1998; Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Pong, 1998; Sun, 1998; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996), the Panel Study for Income Dynamics or PSID (Hofferth, Boisjoly, & Duncan, 1998) and Kalmijn and Kraaykamp’s (1996) large-scale national survey longitudinal study of adults reflecting back to their experiences as fifteen year olds. The only non-survey-design was Bianchi and Robinson’s (1997) time-diary study design. All studies used regression-based analysis.

During 1996-1998, the literature in the United States concerning social capital supported Coleman’s concepts of intergenerational closure as an analytical tool. Investigations of parental behaviors and actions resulting in student achievement such as parent-child discussions, parental school involvement and parent expectations (Bianchi & Robinson, 1997; Carbonaro, 1998; Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Hofferth et al., 1998; Lopez, 1996; Pong, 1998; Sun, 1998; Teachman et al., 1996). However, one study did measure cultural capital, but the focal point remained the parent as the source of transmitting capital to his child (Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996).

Similar to Coleman’s concept of social capital, the focus of research in 1996-1998 centered on the parents’ networks and not the children’s or adolescents’ network/relationships. Furthermore, many of the studies used large-scale data sets that were “not originally designed to measure social capital” (Dika & Singh, 2002, p.38).

Social capital research: 1999-2001

Within this three-year time frame, the number of studies using the concept of social capital in educational research increased greatly, as there were twenty-two studies published between 1999
and 2001. Coleman’s (1988) theoretical framework remained popular. However, a few studies used Bourdieu’s (1986) framework of social and cultural capital such as McNeal (1999), Smith-Maddox (1999), White and Glick (2000) and Stanton-Salazar (2001); and with the inclusion of Lin’s (1982,1990) social network theory (Smith-Maddox, 1999; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). The emergence and popularity of Putnam’s (1993) concept of social capital (particularly in political science and economics) that evolved out of Coleman’s (1988) can be seen in both Fritch (1999a, 1999b) and Morrow’s (2001) studies.

Large quantitative studies persisted, specifically NELS (Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001; Muller, 2001; Muller & Ellison, 2001; Pribesh & Downey, 1999; Qian & Blair, 1999; Roscigno & Darnell, 1999; Smith-Maddox, 1999; Sun, 1999; Yan, 1999). Only one study used HSB (White & Glick, 2000), perhaps because the data were almost twenty years old. The National Longitudinal Study of Youth 1992/94 (Parcel & Dufur, 2001) and the National Youth Study (Wright, Cullen, & Miller, 2001), as well as longitudinal surveys (Dyke & Wilson, 1999) and a large-scale survey of Dutch adults remembering their experiences at age fifteen (N. D. DeGraff, P. M. DeGraff, & Kraaykamp, 2000) were also used. Furthermore, as in past years, these analyses were regression-based (OLS and logistic regressions). However, some single studies used the following methods: HLM (Sun, 1999), path analysis (Dyke & Wilson, 1999), and random effects/ANCOVA (Morgen & Sorensen, 1999).

What can be viewed as “new” during this time frame are qualitative research design methods and the use of case studies and mixed-method designs. The case studies (four in all) included interviews, focus groups, participant observations, ethnography, and document analysis (Fritch, 1999a; Fritch, 1999b; Kahn & Bailey, 1999; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Most studies focused on parents’ perceptions and viewpoints. Two studies interviewed students: one within a program evaluation (Kahn & Bailey, 1999); the other included a mixed-method analysis using both quantitative and qualitative designs for gathering data regarding social networking and institutional agency within the students’ schools, homes and communities (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Theme analysis appeared in some qualitative studies using Coleman’s concepts of trust, information channels and norms (Fritch, 1999a; Fritch, 1999b; Kahn & Bailey, 1999). Samples sizes of qualitative studies ranged from 18 to 95. The studies look again for indicators of social capital through Coleman’s (1988) measures of family structure, parent and teen interactions and discussions, parents’ desires for their teens’ academic achievement and/or occupational status, parent educational status, and intergenerational closure (Dyke & Wilson, 1999; Israel et al, 2001; McNeal, 1999; Muller & Ellison, 2001; Parcel & Dufur, 2001; Pribesh & Downey, 1999; Quin & Blair, 1999; Smith-Maddox; Sun, 1999; White & Glick, 2000; Wright et al., 2001; Yan, 1999). Some studies looked at teens’ interactions outside their home, including discussions and networking with adults about occupations and education (Dyke & Wilson, 1999), the students’ peer groups and their influence on the students’ academics (Muller & Ellison, 2001; Pribesh & Downey, 1999).

Some studies looked at the number of close friends who attended the student’s school (Morgan & Sorensen, 1999), the student’s discernment of “caring teachers” (Muller, 2001), and the student’s participation in extracurricular activities (Fritch, 1999a; Fritch, 1999b; Israel et al, 2001; Pribesh & Downey, 1999; and Sun, 1999).

Outcomes measures varied from educational achievement in the form of GPA (Israel et al., 2001; Roscigno & Darnell, 1999; Wright et al., 2001), an increase in math scores (Morgan & Sorensen, 1999), and standardized tests scores in science (McNeal, 1999), math (Muller, 2001),
math and reading combined (Israel et al, 2001; Pribesh & Downey, 1999; Roscigno & Darnell, 1999) and in four core subjects (Sun, 1999), which was similar to previous time frames.

Educational attainment (i.e. staying in, or dropping out of school) was also measured. Staying in school was measured by three studies (Israel et al., 2001; McNeal, 1999; White & Glick, 2000). In addition, students’ completion of high school was measured by two studies (Dyke & Wilson, 1999; DeGraff et al., 2000). Furthermore, Muller and Ellison (2001) also looked at the number of credits a student attained in math, whilst Yan (1999) looked at college enrollment. Two studies also used social capital to investigate occupational status and involvement in the labor force (Dyke & Wilson; 1999; White & Glick, 2000).

During this time period (1999-2001) social capital research increasing included qualitative methods—and several studies moved beyond the traditional attainment and achievement measures towards educational aspirations. Student’s motivation and/or school engagement was also viewed as an indicator of educational achievement. These studies included research regarding truancy (McNeal, 1999), school effort and time spent on homework (Muller & Ellison, 2001), a student’s study time and the importance of school in their lives (Wright et al, 2001), delinquent behaviors (Parcel & Durfur, 2001; Wright et al, 2001), and moral values (Wright et al). Lastly, another “outcome” associated with the attainment of social capital was linked to a student’s locus of control (Muller & Ellison, 2001).

Special populations and comparative studies were also popular during this time period (1999-2001). Special populations include: African-American adolescents, urban adolescents in Chicago and low SES White children in rural Appalachia. Comparative studies of social and cultural capital of Black and White students (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999) also emerged. Furthermore, Fritch (1999a) looked at how the differences in the type of school (i.e., public, private, small versus large), as well as the culture, structure, size, curricula and demographics, might influence social capital. In addition, as in previous years, differences of social capital between “native” and immigrant populations were explored (White & Glick, 2000). Lastly, two studies reflected social capital attainment on populations outside the United States: England (Morrow, 2001) and the Netherlands (De Graaf et al., 2000).

What predominates in this body of research (1992-2001) is Coleman’s (1988) theory of social capital as “instrumental in the development of human capital” (Dika & Singh, 2002, p.40) linked to one’s educational outcomes via intergenerational closure using a normative framework. Dika and Singh (2002) comment this form of research lacks “theoretical refinement,” and relies too heavily on Coleman’s (1988) “vague and metaphorical concept of social capital ”(p.40). They argue “the group of norms that motivate pro-academic behaviors—is indeed more prominent in research on educational attainment than frameworks focusing on relationships and networks that generate access to institutional resources” (Dika & Singh, 2002, p.41).

Using both Bourdieu’s social reproduction (1977, 9186) model and Lin’s (1990, 1999a, 1999b) social networking model, I would like to draw attention to Stanton-Salazar’s (1997, 2001) theoretical framework, which I build upon to develop my research design.

**Stanton-Salazar’s 2001 study**

Ricardo Stanton-Salazar’s study *Manufacturing hope and despair: The school and kin support networks of U.S.-Mexican youth* (2001) builds upon the research he and Dornbusch conducted in 1995 (*Social capital and reproduction of inequality: Informative networks among Mexican-origin high school students*). Stanton-Salazar’s (2001) research reminds us that the Latino
population is the fastest-growing ethnic group in the United States, “Yet, by most measures, particularly in educational achievement, Latino’s lag behind other groups” (p.3). Therefore, to understand the poor academic performance and social mobility of Latino youth, he directs his 2001 study to exploring a student’s social support networks, which he suggests “play a most definitive role” (p.3) in a student’s success or self-elimination. Stanton-Salazar (2001) remarks that his research is motivated by a desire to explore how several carefully selected tools of social network analysis might help us to better articulate the various and simultaneous ways class, gender, race and ethnic forces affect the daily lives of low-status adolescents, particularly in the development of adolescent relationships and social support. (Italics in the original text. p.5)

He further contends, I address how the structural effects of class, race and gender can be articulated not only in terms of the objective ecological conditions within which low-status youth live (e.g., poverty, racial segregation, resource-strapped schools), but also in terms of the coping patterns that develop in response to these conditions. (p.5)

Stanton-Salazar’s (2001) conceptual framework is similar to his 1995 study, in that he uses Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of social capital, social reproduction theories (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) and current research in social ties and adult occupational mobility models (De Gaff & Flapp, 1988; Granovetter, 1974, 1982; Lin, 1990). He states, concepts such as social capital, social networks and help-seeking orientation are key to the framework…and are strategically used to explain not only how most working-class Mexican-origin adolescents end up as working-class adults, but how some youth are buffered from the worst effects of class and racial oppression. (2001, p. 3-4)

A welcome addition to his framework is that he “focused “on the help-seeking and relational dynamics” (2001, p.5) embedded in an emic view of adolescents (i.e., from their perspective). Stanton-Salazar (2001) extends his conceptual framework by adding the notion “of the linkage between the structure and individual consciousness and to the problem of ‘internalized oppression’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant’s, 1992) or more simply phrased “how the dominated always contribute to their own domination” (2001, p.5). Although he contends that the oppressed are often inadvertently “complicit in their own oppression, we need to understand how this complicity is itself a product of the greater social structure” (2001, p.5-6).

Stanton-Salazar (2001) builds on the data from his previous study (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995) in which data were gathered in 1987-88 and consisted of 205 Mexican-origin students who attend predominately White middle and upper-middle class high schools in San Francisco and San Jose, California, as part of a district-wide desegregation program. Stanton-Salazar (2001) laments that in the earlier study the interview data (that they converted to quantifiable data), although “richly textured,” was “not systemically documented or transcribed due to our survey design and strict time constraint” (2001, p.7). However, he soon realized their loss and made a commitment to revisit the field with slightly modified research questions and the
creation of “a significantly different and mixed research design” (2001, p.9). Stanton-Salazar’s (2001) states that the data in his new study are from two distinctive research initiatives, each commenced by the author at a different research site and at a different time.

While a strong majority of students in this study reported school personnel as “promising sources of different forms of support” (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p.274) in the semi-structured network survey, the qualitative data told another story. Stanton-Salazar’s (2001) conclusions differ from those of his 1995 study. The use of qualitative research methods revealed new underlying information concerning a student’s feelings of social embeddedness and the actual transfer of quality institutional support. Stanton-Salazar writes:

Although a student may reveal a positive orientation toward the supportive potential of school agents, understood here as a fundamental dimension of positive social embeddedness, this does not necessarily guarantee that the student is enjoying the benefits of ‘social capital’—in other words, that he or she is embedded in secure relations with adults oriented toward ensuring the provision of quality social support (i.e., access to institutional resources, personal academic assistance, intimate counsel and emotional support). (p. 244, 2001)

He questions these positive orientations towards school personnel, contending that they do not always lead to help-seeking forms of behavioral social embeddedness. “From our measures of actual instances of help-seeking from school personnel, we saw that from one-third to one-half of Latino students were not actively seeking academic help” (italics added for emphasis, p.245). Stanton-Salazar brings up the notion of fool’s gold in that “relations perceived to be ‘supportive’ may not necessarily function as sources of authentic institutional support (e.g., reliable and high-quality forms of academically related information expertly tailored to the needs and aspirations of the student)” (p.245). Furthermore, Stanton-Salazar (2001) states that findings from his 1995 and 2001 studies suggesting that Spanish dominant students report a high perception of institutional support may be misleading. He questions

[W]hether existing ethnographic and anecdotal evidence showing positive levels of social-psychological embeddedness among Latino immigrants may be obscuring what is really happening, leaving educators and policymakers to wrongly assume all is well with this sector of the Latino student population. (p.245)

He suggests that Spanish-dominant Latino students “may strongly identify with their schools, while experiencing a form of network marginality that threatens short-term and long-term success within the school” (p. 245).

This leads back to Stanton-Salazar and other scholars’ (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Gee, 1989) general contention that the sustaining differences between disadvantaged students and their general absence in mainstream arenas, coupled with their inability to decode successfully the cultural capital of schools, often creates barriers in attaining and exhibiting positive help-seeking orientations. “In the final analysis, differential conditions and opportunities for learning to mobilize institutional support effectively may present another key dimension of the schools’ hidden curriculum” (p. 246).

It is the students who can decode the cultural capital of the school that are the only ones who understand the school’s hidden curriculum. Most often, these students are from the middle and upper-middle class stratification. It is further shown that “Although supportive relations
with school agents and positive help-seeking orientations do not guarantee school success among minority youth, such integrative processes would be expected to foster academic persistence and developmental resiliency” (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p.246).

However, for many minority and “low-status children, negative embeddedness during the elementary school years, especially the early development of negative help-seeking orientations, could greatly increase the likelihood of negative embeddedness in junior and senior high school” (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 246). The student’s mistrust for real possibilities (Ogbu, 1991) of advancement in school and work (life’s trajectories) can create the problem of internalized oppression (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Whereby, exclusionary forces operating within mainstream institutions work to disallow individuals the environment for the procurement of self-governing tendencies. These individuals develop social-psychological and behavioral defense mechanisms (Fine, 1991) that exacerbate their involvement within inequitable structural circumstances. “Institutional exclusions function to get the excluded and dispossessed to regulate and reinforce their own marginality” (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 247). These imposed exclusions also permit us to ‘blame the victim’ (Ryan, 1976).

In sum, Stanton-Salazar (2001) concedes that the uses of quantitative measures such as network surveys and questionnaires in measuring social capital and social support are imprecise measures of embeddedness, social capital, and social support” (p. 245-246). He contends that his use of network survey measures in conjunction with his help-seeking orientation and perceived support measures “may reveal many important things” (p. 246). First, these measures can “identify which adolescents are best prepared to facilitate social-capital formation” (p. 246). Second, these measures can also inform us as to which students have lost their trust in the power and capacity of institutional agents to make any real difference in their lives.

This study brings to mind the vexing concerns of perception versus reality. What appears statistically, may not indeed tell the entire story. This study is a cautionary one, in that researching social embeddedness, social capital, and social support networks requires a meticulous approach. This study reaffirmed my desire to design research methodology using both qualitative and quantitative measures (mixed-methods) similar to those used by Stanton-Salazar (2001) as well as the case study approach employed by Nieto (2000). Therefore, this study builds on Stanton-Salazar’s (2001) research and changes the focus from parent and adult institutional agency and supportive networks to students and their peers within and outside their social class and school. More specifically, I will look at social networking (Lin, 1991, 1999a, 1999b) through Bourdieu’s (1997, 1986, 1992) lens of social and cultural capital, via his social reproduction theory within the overarching linchpin of a student’s habitus as the key to a student’s acceptance or rejection of supportive relationships outside his or her social class and ethnicity.

CHAPTER 3

Research methodology

My proposition links the attainment of social capital of academically successful disadvantaged students through the agency of peer(s) and friend(s), and not solely their parent/guardian or other adults. It is my proposition that peer agency can significantly alter a student’s habitus (learned socio-historical-cultural context) thus allowing for transference of the “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti & Gonzalez, 1992) or knowing how to “play the rules of the game” (Bourdieu, 1992). The why, when, how and whom these students select and attain as their institutional agents is therefore of foremost interest in this study.
Therefore, I collected the following information about the participating students from Dewey High School IB Programme:

1. Information about their background (i.e., race/ethnicity; socio-economic status; family composition; personal history) so as to determine if, and why they would be considered “disadvantaged.”

2. Information about their academic success (through grades, college acceptance and other standardized measures of academic success as well as their own definition of what “counts” as success) so as to determine to what extent they could be considered as “academically successful.”

3. Information about their cultural capital and how it was acquired, so as to determine if and how they completed the first step of the process.

4. Information about the people who acted as institutional agents (if any) and why their agency was accepted, so as to better understand the role played by peers and adults in the process.

5. Information about what “funds of knowledge” and the “rules of the game” the students have acquired and how they acquired them, so as to determine whether, to what extent, and how these key elements were successfully transferred from the institutional agents to the students, and their possible relationship with changes with the student’s habitus as a result of their interaction with the agents.

In order to use multiple sources of evidence and different types of data to gather this complex information, I designed a number of quantitative and qualitative data collection tools—as listed in Table 3.1 and with data analysis strategies I employed.

Table 3.1: Main data collection instruments and their methods of analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection tool</th>
<th>Information collected</th>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>Type of analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Social Capital Participant Survey (See Appendix A.2)</td>
<td>• Family composition • Academic achievement of family members • Attribution of academic success/failure of family members</td>
<td>Quantitative survey data</td>
<td>Descriptive and statistical analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Network Participant Survey (See Appendix A.3)</td>
<td>• Perceptions about various institutional agents (teachers, peers, relatives and other adults)</td>
<td>Quantitative survey data</td>
<td>Descriptive and statistical analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Participants’ Written Questionnaire (See Appendix A.4)</td>
<td>• Past academic experiences • Definition of schooling success • Academic, cultural and social interests and hobbies • Influence of specific institutional agents • Future plans</td>
<td>(Qualitative) open-ended survey data</td>
<td>Case-study analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Participants’ Intensive Interviews (See Appendix A.5)</td>
<td>ALL OF ABOVE</td>
<td>Interview data</td>
<td>Case-study analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Archival records/school documents</td>
<td>• Past academic experiences • Academic performance</td>
<td>Document/Archival/artifact data</td>
<td>Case-study analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Focus group</td>
<td>ALL OF THE ABOVE</td>
<td>Interview data</td>
<td>Qualitative analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I wanted student participants for my case studies coming from varied social backgrounds such as a diversity of race, socioeconomic class status, parental/guardian status and gender to see if there were any significant differences between these groups and to also note social interactions (if any) between social classes and race. I also wanted to include students who were bilingual and those who had immigrant status. Furthermore, I wanted students who had siblings who were and were not academically successful, and some with no siblings at all.

The logic of this diverse selection was to weigh whether attaining social capital is exclusively set within the student’s home environment and is a product of Coleman’s (1988) intergenerational closure, that is whether disadvantaged youth can really only attain social capital when their home is not either structurally or functionally deficient (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987).

I was also interested to see if the “compositional effects/school mix” (Thrupp, 1999; Lauder & Thrupp, 2004) of the school and the diverse program population, as well as school management and culture, helped to influences students’ selection and retention of peer/friend agents.

In addition, since part of my proposition involves the effect of “school mix” and school culture on disadvantaged students’ acquisition of social capital, I also collected and analyzed information about River City, Dewey High School and the International Baccalaureate Programme (within Dewey High School). This included the demographic data on the city, school and IB Programme population, as well as other information about the rather unique instructional context my study participants had experienced.

Participants’ selection and data collection implementation

All Dewey High School students in the 11th and 12th grade of the IB Programme (N=112) were invited to participate in the study. Forty-one students agreed to participate in Phase I (N=41) of the data collection, which consisted in filling out the following surveys:

Phase I (N=41).
   A. Social Capital Participants Survey
   B. Network Participants Survey

Phase II (N=17) student participants were involved in the following data collection.
   C. Participant open-ended Written Questionnaire
   D. In-depth Intensive Interviews
   E. Student’s archival records/school documents

All Phase II student participants were invited to further participate in a Focus Group Session (Phase III). Eleven students volunteered to participate in the Focus Group, but in the end only six attended the session because of transportation problems.

It is important to note that after seventeen years of teaching at Dewey High School, I resigned from teaching in August of 2002 and recruited for this study students whom I have personal knowledge of and furthermore, the opportunity to observe many of the participants for two years (2000-2002) in my Pre-International Baccalaureate classes in English I and II Honors
(9th grade) and English III Honors (10th grade), and some of the participants were also members of my ninth and tenth homebase\(^1\) for two consecutive years.

My previous knowledge of these students and the trust we had built between teacher and student made it possible for us to be revealing, forthright, sincere and honest in my investigation of this phenomenon. As one reads the case studies, students revealed very private information that I believe that they would not have revealed to a university researcher/interviewer they did not know or trust. One of my students who was leaving the room after the Focus Group session pointed her finger at me, stared deep into my eyes, and stated in an emphatic voice, “You know Miss, we are only doing this (the study) because of you! We trust you and know you will not reveal our identities.”

In 2004, I recruited my participants among the students in the eleventh and twelfth grade in the International Baccalaureate Program that is within Dewey High School. Students’ were recruited via my visitation oral presentations and recruitment letter with contact information, benefits, and details of the study within a two-week timeframe. Students who submitted permission (consent or assent) forms, completed the Student Participants Questionnaire and the Network Survey under my supervision.

**Table 3.2: Phase I: Research data collection instruments: Quantitative data**

| 1. 11th & 12th Grade IB Programme Student Participant Questionnaire | Quantitative Survey Data (Statistical Analysis) | N = 41 |
| 2. Network Survey of Students | Quantitative Network Data (Descriptive & Statistical Analysis) | N = 41 |

The Student Participants Questionnaire asked specific questions regarding the student’s parental status, number of siblings, their parent’s highest educational attainment (human capital) and their siblings academic success or lack there of. In this questionnaire students were identified in the following categories:

- Does the student come from a single or dual parent or guardian homes?
- Does the student have a sibling (age thirteen or older) who is or is not academically successful?
- What is their parent’s highest level of educational achievement?

Furthermore, I determined the student participant’s socioeconomic class status by reviewing school documents/data of students who qualify for a free or reduced lunch, or receive other forms of financial assistance (indicating low SES). Therefore, this information indicated the participants’ economic class status as either middle class, or working class\(^2\) (economically disadvantaged).

Next, the Network Survey was given to all participating students, indicating their social network preferences through frequency of contacts of institutional agents (teachers, peers,

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\(^1\) Homebase is a forty-five minute period every morning where a teacher is assigned approximately twenty or more student to guide academically and socially through high school (9th-12th grade) and is a liaison and contact for parents/guardians and the student’s subject area teachers.

\(^2\) Working class throughout this dissertation will mean students living in poverty.
friends, relatives, or other adult community members) based on six questions regarding academic support.

In the Social Capital Participant Student Questionnaire, students were identified for the case study that represented the demographics of the student population (via percentages) in the IB Programme regarding race, class, gender and ethnicity. I wanted to recruit a diverse representation of students who had differing parental/guardian educational achievement; socioeconomic class status, came from either a dual or single parent/guardian homes, and may or may not be bilingual, and/or have immigrant or nonimmigrant status. The students also included those who had a sibling(s) that were successful or not successful; or participants who had no siblings at all.

Since I had a good range of student participants that closely resembled the overall demographics of the IB Programme, I invited all student participants in Phase I who wanted to continue in the study to Phase II. I informed students that in Phase II of the study they would need to agree to complete an open-ended Written Questionnaire and to be scheduled for an in-depth Intensive Interview that would last approximately 45-50 minutes. I had seventeen students volunteer to continue on into Phase II of the study and none of the participants dropped out.

Although, I realized by the ninth interview that my data had become saturated (no new themes revealed), I continued on collecting data because of my own curiosity, the enjoyment of hearing their “voice” and understanding what schooling success meant to them. Students also informed me that they were excited about the interview and I did not want to cancel this opportunity for them to reveal both their struggles and accomplishments. Many of them told me as they left the interview that they felt better and likened the interview to a “therapy” session.

Before I conducted my intensive interviews, I mailed to the students’ homes the open-ended Written Questionnaire (see Appendix A.4) The Written Questionnaire modeled in some aspects the questions I would ask in the interview. I set up the questions to investigate schooling history, cultural capital, institutional agency, habitus, social distinctions, extracurricular activities, knowing the “rules of the game,” and life trajectories to determine if the study participant had attained the social capital of the dominant culture. The responses to these questions also helped to guide the intensive interviews, thus making our time spent more productive.

The in-depth Intensive Interviews were scheduled and I either met students at the front reception desk or I went to their classrooms to escort them to the interview room. Once we were in the room, I gave the student copies of their responses to the Student Participant Questionnaire, Network Survey of Students and their Written Questionnaire. I followed my interview script that was constructed to investigate different aspects of my investigation such as cultural capital attainment, habitus, selection and retention of institutional agents as well as comprehension and enacting “the rules of the game.” However, I also interjected queries I had regarding their Network Survey and Written Questionnaire.

After the completion of the seventeen interviews, students in Phase II were asked if they wanted to continue on in the study to Phase III, the Focus Group session. Again, the invitation to participate in Phase III was open to all students who participated in Phase II. I informed students that we would discuss themes that I saw in the data. I wanted to hear from them what these themes might mean and to get further clarification. Eleven students came forward to participate in Phase III. All eleven students who wanted to participate came from working class families. I conducted the Focus Group discussion with only six case-study student participants from Phase
II. Although eleven had initially indicated they wanted to attend, the other five students either called my home or e-mailed me to state they had transportation problems or forgot to come.

In the focus group session, we discussed themes that emerged through the triangulation of the data (quantitative, qualitative and historical documentation of the students’ school records) and the significance and relevance of these themes. For the most part the session went well, the students were very animated and willing to discuss the themes; however, I had difficulty with the audiotape recorder. Therefore, some of this data was lost due to equipment and human failure (mine for not checking the equipment first). I attempted to reschedule another Focus Group session; however, it was by now July 2004 and many of the participants are Higher Education Opportunity Program3 (HEOP) students who were required to attend three to six weeks in college programs in the summer. As a result, I was unable to reschedule another session.

Main data collection instruments and their analysis

I will now more fully describe the design of the main data collection instruments used in Phase I, II, and III of my research.

Phase I: The Network Survey

The purpose of the Network Survey is to give a reference point to whom students’ select and retain for their institutional agents by indicating who supports and influences their ability to be academically successful by frequency of contacts. This survey helps identify in general who these individuals are by using the categories of: (a) teacher, (b) friend, (c) peer, (d) relatives, and (e) other adults [such as clergy, guidance counselors, coaches, etc]. Students indicate next to each category on a scale of 1-10, whom they felt supported and influenced their academic success by indicating the frequency of contacts regarding these agents and their perceived support by the student. The higher the frequency number indicates a higher level of perceived support.

As a result, I can rank these responses into categories according to the highest and lowest levels of perceived support, and determine who are those individuals that Phase I students contacted with more frequency. The identification of the selection and retention of institutional agents can also provide information on whom students believe exhibit virtues of: (a) trustworthiness, (b) accessibility, (c) and knowledge. This instrument is intended to provide general information as a starting point for further exploration and “talking points” with students regarding their individual choices and the general choices other Phase I participants choices to be further explored with student participants continuing on to Phase II of the study, in the form of follow-up questions based on the survey results in an open, unscripted section of the Intensive Interview.

Using the responses of the Network Survey and merging the results with the data taken from the Social Capital Participant Questionnaire (with added input of class and race), a new database is created to run descriptive statistics, Independent T-tests and ANOVA comparisons.

3 For low SES and minority students.
**Phase I: Social Capital Participant Questionnaire**

The *Social Capital Participant Questionnaire* provides me with data not found in the Dewey High School’s registrar data bank (which had only race and gender information)—including immigrant status, parental status, number of siblings, parental educational attainment (human capital) of my study participants. Social-class data is provided by a list of Dewey’s High School’s free and reduced lunch program. I then merged the variables of race, class, gender, and parental status into my *Network Survey* data and ran descriptive statistics, Independent T-Tests and ANOVA comparisons to see if there are any significant differences between race, social class, gender and parental status in the selection and retention of institutional agents. The other data obtained from the *Student Participant Questionnaire* is used as background information for the *Intensive Interview* probes and *Case Studies* reports.

**Phase II: The Open-Ended Student Written Questionnaire**

This research instrument is comprised of open-ended questions that elicit written individual responses regarding participants: (a) schooling history/experiences, (b) definitions of schooling success, (c) extracurricular activities, (d) social distinctions and interests that are similar and/or dissimilar between the student and their parent(s) and students and their friends, (e) knowing the “rules of the game” and (f) trajectories and goals within the next five years. The questions are formulated to first understand the student’s historical perspective regarding schooling experiences, therefore setting the context for the student’s early attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors (habitus) regarding school.

The first question asks students to give a brief synopsis of their schooling history by indicating the schools by their name, type, grade level, location, and grade(s) of attendance. These data provide a historical perspective regarding the student’s schooling history and provides data as “talking points” for the *Intensive Interview* so as to gather additional information efficiently. The second question in the questionnaire reads: “*What is your definition of schooling success? Please describe/define.*” This question is intended to provide information on the participants’ attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors (i.e., habitus) regarding attaining schooling success. The third question asks: *Have you in the past or present participated in extracurricular activities? Please describe and state how and why you became involved in that activity? (Sports, drama club, choir, etc.*)* This question provides information about three categories of my theoretical model: cultural capital, habitus and the selection and retention of institutional agents.

I will first explain how the question addresses cultural capital. Social class distinctions are socially constructed; therefore, I wanted to see if students select activities that Bourdieu (1992, 1998) would claim are more “high brow” and above one’s social class status as defined by the wider social context. Are the students exploring outside their own cultural capital? Do they transverse cultural and social class barriers and borders and transition towards a new social class status? Are they “bicultural” in the cultural capital sense of the word?

Secondly, the types of extracurricular activities and interests that students are involved in can indicate these transitions and can also indicate an alteration in their habitus. For example, do I decide to play tennis or be on the swim team (instead of basketball, football or soccer), even though no one in my family has played tennis or has tried out for the swim team before? Why did I decide to do this activity? Why does it attract me? Am I going outside my “comfort zone”
and trying a new activity? Do I apply to work in a summer program at a university research lab, even though my parent(s) did not graduate from high school? In doing this, what do I believe my life’s trajectories are? Can I graduate from high school and attend college? Do I make transitions to other activities that are outside my social class and culture? A student’s participation in extracurricular activities can also indicate a change in habitus (learned attitudes, perceptions and behaviors regarding one’s life trajectories).

Third, extracurricular activities can also create access to new institutional agents, therefore generating larger network possibilities. These activities bring new possibilities outside of school with fellow students from different localities and new adult mentors.

The fourth question: What are your academic, cultural and social interests?, (such as: music, literature/books/magazines, dance, art, health, church groups, museums, sports, festivals, movies, etc.) is intended to solicit information about cultural and class shifts and changes of one’s habitus using Bourdieu’s concept of social distinctions. What kind of music I listen to and books I read reveals much about my personal development. Am I exploring different interests and why?

Question five asks: When thinking about your friends, relationships and experiences with others over your life, who and what has influenced you the most to be academically successful? Cite at least three memorable incidences/experiences or people. This question identifies the student’s selection and retention of institutional agents. Who are these agents and what relationships do they have with the student (i.e., family, friend, peer, or teacher)? What have these agents accomplished through their actions or words that influenced the student to be academically successful? I also looked for horizontal and vertical linkages—if the institutional agent is an adult mentor outside the student’s social class and culture, this is a vertical linkage; if the student identifies a family member, this is a horizontal linkage. As Lin (1990, 1999a, 1999b) points out, a balance of horizontal and vertical linkages is most desirable.

The final question in the Questionnaire is: What are your plans for next year? This question solicits information about the student’s trajectories. Are they different than their parent(s)? Have they gained the cultural and social capital of the dominant culture by acceptance into university degree programs?

Phase II: The In-Depth Intensive Interview

In the Intensive Interview Script the following categories are addressed: historical perspective, habitus (attitudes, perceptions and behaviors) as well as community engagement and involvement, selection and retention of institutional agents, and trajectories and goals. Some questions address more than one of these areas and thus there are overlaps across categories.

Questions in the Intensive Interview script under the subtitle of Historical perspective are designed to solicit information concerning the student participant’s early schooling experiences—as these experiences are likely to have set the student’s learned attitudes, perceptions and behaviors (habitus) about school. Questions under the subtitle of Habitus: Attitude/perceptions identify alterations in habitus (learned attitude, perceptions and behaviors towards schooling and schooling success). Questions under the subtitle of Selection and retention of institutional agents target the selection and retention of institutional agents and their relationship with the student. Questions under the subtitle of Cultural and social capital attainment: habitus focus on the participants’ awareness of the “rules of the game” of the dominant culture, and changes in their understanding of them. Questions under the subtitle of
Habitus: School engagement/community involvement/behavior/actions identify the nature and extent of the participants’ activities and relations that might provide them access to more institutional agents therefore generating a wider social network. Lastly, questions under the subtitle of Trajectory/goals; social capital attainment: habitus, indicate social capital attainment and alteration in the student’s habitus.

I also added an insert to my in-depth Intensive Interview script on the subject of Lin’s (1990,1999a, 1999b) concept of horizontal and vertical linkages that reads:

If time allows and the interview ends early, I will explain about vertical and horizontal linkages in detail until I am assured the student understands fully the concept. I will then instruct the student to draw a diagram with horizontal and vertical lines to identify the student’s institutional agents full name and their relationship to them. This diagram will help draw out more details to their relationship, networking supportive capabilities and influence of their institutional agents, both within and outside their “community,” as well as frequency of contacts and how these contacts are maintained or are these contacts only “one time use.”

This is a very valuable tool; unfortunately, only five out of the seventeen students completed the chart or handed it in. In retrospect, I should have set aside another time, had all Phase II students create this simple graph at a one time sitting in a classroom, and collected them when they were completed.

Research design: analysis and reporting

Triangulation: rationale for using multiple sources of evidence

The strength of case study methodology is the use of many different sources of evidence. Multiple sources of evidence in case studies allow an investigator to address a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioral issues. Another important advantage is that it allows the development of converging lines of inquiry (a process of triangulation of data).

First, I looked for statistical significance, trends and patterns in the Network Survey and demographic data. I also used the Social Capital Participant Questionnaire and other important data from the school registrar and Dewey’s free and reduced lunch program to obtain familial and personal information about the student that would help identify the student’s social, cultural and historical context, thus shedding some light on the students’ early learned attitudes, perceptions and behaviors, regarding school (habitus).

Second, I merged the previously collected quantitative data to create a new data set that I used to run descriptive statistics, Independent T-tests and ANOVA comparisons to see if there were any significant difference with students’ selection and retention of institutional agents and their perceived frequency of support based on the variables of race, class, gender and parental status.

I then used both of the quantitative and qualitative data (generated by the Written Questionnaire and the Intensive Interview) to create case-studies for the seventeen Phase II participants. First, I created a qualitative coding chart that represented different themes I saw emerging form the data. I categorized these codes as: contextual, process, activity, strategy, event and method codes; as well as definition of situational codes, perspectives held by the subject,
subject’s ways of thinking about academic success and relationship codes and social structure. I used the qualitative coding chart to guide my case-study analysis of the open-ended Written Questionnaires, Intensive Interviews and Focus Group session. I also cross referenced these trends, themes and patterns by investigating each case study student participant’s archival school documents to either verify statements made by students or to guide questioning case study students in their Intensive Interviews. By triangulating my data in this way, I have attained the case study approach Yin (2003) suggests “[T]he case study, like the experiment, does not represent a ‘sample,’ and in doing the case study, your goal will be to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)” (p.10).

CHAPTER 4

Context of the Study and Participants

Overview

In this section, I will report information about the context of the study—i.e., Dewey High School and the IB Program in which my participants are enrolled—and the study participants themselves. This will provide information that can (a) highlight some important elements in the schooling environment that may have affected the participants’ attitudes, perceptions and behaviors, and (b) show the extent to which the study participants can be considered representative of the urban student population.

More specifically, I will start by reporting demographic information about River City, based on data collected during the most recent US census. These data show that River City presents many of the characteristics of other large urban areas in the United States.

The next section provides a brief history of Dewey High School, followed by demographic information about the current student population at Dewey High School. Once again, these data show some commonalities with other urban high schools in terms of race and social class status. At the same time, they also show a more diverse and balanced “mix” in terms of race/ethnicity and social class than most other urban high schools—an element that I believe played a role in the study participants’ academic success.

The most unusual characteristic of the study participants’ experience was probably their participation in the International Baccalaureate (IB) Programme offered at Dewey High School. Therefore, in this chapter I will briefly describe the history and key elements of this program, as well as report some demographic information about the students enrolled in this specific program within Dewey High School.

Finally, I will report demographic information about the students who volunteered to participate in the various phases of this study. While the decision of accepting any student who volunteered did not leave me any choice in the selection of participants, these volunteers ended up representing a considerable variety along the dimensions in which I was mostly interested—that is, gender, race/ethnicity, parental/guardian status, social class and immigrant/non-immigrant status.
Population profile of River City

My study was conducted in late spring of 2004, in northeastern United States. All of the following information is from the most recent data reported by the US Census Bureau’s 2002 American Community Survey Profile accessed on-line (http://www.census.gov/acs 7/22/04). The population of the River City (pseudonym) metropolitan area is 1.1 million, with 546,000 (52%) females and 513,000 (48%) males. In the metropolitan area the median age is 37.3 years, with 26 percent of the population under the age of 18 years and 13 percent 65 years of age or older.

Until the past ten years, manufacturing was the leading industry of employment in the area for over 100 years. However, recently River City has experienced considerable change in employment due to a combination of corporations “downsizing” and “out sourcing” jobs to foreign countries or other states with lower employee costs and taxation. There has also been a decrease in demand for River City products in a depressed economy, compounded by corporate mismanagement of “over-expansion” and “diversification” of some of the local corporations in the global markets.

As noted in the US Census Bureau, the three leading employment industries in for the River City population of residents 16 years and older are: (a) educational, health and social services at 26 percent, (b) manufacturing at 19 percent, and (c) retail trade at 12 percent. Furthermore, occupations of those who were employed were: management, professional and related occupations, 37 percent; sales and office occupations at 27 percent; service occupation at 16 percent; production and transportation and material moving occupations, 15 percent; construction, maintenance occupations, 5 percent. Eighty percent of the residents employed were wage and salary workers; 15 percent were federal, state or local government employees and 5 percent were self-employed.

The median income of River City households in the metropolitan area is $43,524 (the median income in the northeastern United States is $46,742 as of census data: August 26, 2004). However, 11 percent were below poverty level (the national average is 12.5%, taken from the US Census data: August 26, 2004). Furthermore, 14 percent of related children under the age of 18 were below the poverty level, compared with 7 percent of people 65 years old or over. In addition, 8 percent of families and 27 percent of families with a female householder and no husband present had incomes below poverty level. Moreover, 17 percent of the households in River City received means-tested public assistance or non-cash benefits.

In 2002, the median monthly housing costs for mortgage owners was $1,006, non-mortgage owners $403, and renters $643. Twenty three percent are house owners with mortgages, 15 percent are house owners without mortgages and 52 percent are renters, who spent 30 percent or more of their income on household costs.

The population of River City itself (not the larger metropolitan area) is 219,773, of which 38.6 percent are Black, 48.3 percent are White; 12.8 percent are Latino; 2.3 percent are Asian; and 3 percent are individuals who describe themselves as derived from two, or more races. In 2002, the number of children living in poverty in River City was 77%. Furthermore, according to the Center of Governmental Research, River City was rated tenth among the worst US cities for elevated blood levels of lead under the age of six. Twenty-four percent of the elementary students in River City schools are lead poisoned.

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4 Elevated blood levels of lead are known to cause severe learning disabilities, mental retardation and death.
Moreover, a significantly large percentage of the City’s housing is vacant: 10,798 houses out of 99,789, equivalent to about 10%. Of the occupied housing, renters far exceed owners: renters housing is 53,252 (59.8%) while owner occupied housing is 35,747 (40.2%), as of August 2003.

A Brief History of Dewey High School

Dewey High School (a pseudonym) was built in River City in 1912 to serve the needs of an expanding city. The neo-classical brick and granite building was constructed in a neighborhood of large elegant homes and tree lined streets. From 1912 through the late 1950s, elite class and middle class white students from the neighborhood attended the high school. It was noted that the south end of the building was for women and the north end for men. There are two memorials in the building, placed at the center of the main hall. Carved in a large panel of oak are the names and military ranks of former Dewey students who died in military service during World War I and World War II with a prayer engraved at the top of the memorial and a request to “Remember Those That Have Fallen.”

In the 1960s through the 1970s, the school’s reputation for academic excellence and a safe and nurturing learning environment slowly but steadily declined. The school was no longer a desirable place to send one’s child. Because the demographics of the city were changing, and school choice was not an option for parents, many White middle class families that once dominated the neighborhood left for the suburbs, or sent their children to private or parochial schools. This history is not unique to Dewey High School; other local city high schools also experienced this phenomenon as well, especially after the race riots of the late 1960s in River City.

In the 1970s, Dewey High’s reputation reached an all time low, with poor attendance and low graduation rates. Dewey High was seen as a failing school that also had a reputation for violent behaviors of its students. Teachers did not willingly transfer to Dewey. Dewey was a very disruptive and chaotic place to teach. However, in the late 1970s the school district had a plan to “redefine” the school. They restructured and transitioned Dewey from a high school to a middle school. This restructuring resulted in the school reducing its student population and also creating magnet programs in the arts, humanities, and science and technology, respectively. Because there were three schools within the school, they called it Trinity (pseudonym) Middle School.

In the early 1980s with the excitement generated by the new programs, parents in the neighborhood and elsewhere around River City sent their children to Trinity. Furthermore, with encouragement from the principal and faculty, the parents became very active in the school and formed a Parent Association. Parents were so pleased with their children’s education that they put pressure on the school district to make the Trinity Middle School a high school. Dewey’s first high school graduating class was in 1986 and graduation took place in the auditorium.

Today as in the past, when entering the interior of Dewey High School, one notices the spacious main hall with two opposing attractive sky-lit stairwells. Roman and Greek statuary and friezes adorn the main hall and an adjoining auditorium. However, the stairwells are no longer segregated by gender and the main hall is colorfully lined with the flags of approximately 84 nations that represent the school’s historically diverse student population. Historical photographs of the early days at Dewey High School proudly hang on the walls of the school’s Gallery Room (connected to the main hall) as well as present day photographs of Dewey’s students visiting
France, Morocco, Italy, Spain, Africa and England with their teachers. Thanks to renovations that took place in the 1980s, the building still maintains a sense of pride and dignity and is clean and well maintained.

To date, the majority of students that attend Dewey High School are Black and the neighborhood has changed dramatically since 1912. Predominately progressive Black and White middle class and working class families hoping to reclaim and make changes in the neighborhood occupy the remaining and limited numbers of the “elegant” homes of the past. These families have been politically active and have made some major improvements in the area and many of their children attend Dewey High.

However, the greater majority of the neighborhood's residents are still living in “run down” housing (rentals and privately owned homes) and are living in poverty. To date, serious crimes (such as murder, “drive-by” shootings, robbery and burglary) have occurred in the area of Dewey High School over the past fifteen years and many urban parents choose not to send their children to the school (parents and students can choose the high school they attend in River City) because of the neighborhood’s reputation, fueled by “urban legends” and representation by the local media.

From the early 1980s through 2002, the school maintained a stable faculty and staff. However, due to recent state retirement incentives, district “buy-outs” and an aging teaching population, in 2002-2003 Dewey lost many teachers as well as the principal, who served from 1985-2002, and key administrators in the magnet programs. However, many traditions established in the 1980s remain, such as the reference by administrators, teachers, staff and students as “The Dewey Family”, and a morning announcement tag: “Have a great day, the Dewey Way!” The last statement is said at the end of the morning announcements and implies: work hard, do your best academically, and be kind and respectful to each other.

**Demographics of Dewey High School**

In the on-line published State School Report Card: Comprehensive Information Report (accessed on-line 3/18/04) data from the years 2000-2003 were the most recent school year available for Dewey High School. In Table 4.1 I have reported data about student enrollment in the school in this three-year periods. As reported in Table 4.1 during this period the school enrollment increased yearly with 1,071 students in 2000-2001; 1,130 students in 2001-2002; and 1,271 students in 2002-2003. The “pyramid effect” was present in all three years—that is, the upper grades had significantly less students than the preceding grades. This “pyramid effect” phenomenon is due to two factors: noncompleters (dropouts and students leaving for high school graduate equivalency diploma/GED programs) and students who repeat a grade (most commonly ninth grade).

**Table 4.1 Fall enrollment at Dewey High School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ninth</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenth</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleventh</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelfth</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ungraded secondary*</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total enrollment</td>
<td>1071</td>
<td>1130</td>
<td>1271</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Special Education students

The State Report Card document also provides data about the students’ racial/ethnic origin as reported.
Table 4.2 Dewey High School: Student racial/ethnic origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>2000-2001 No. of students</th>
<th>% of enroll.</th>
<th>2001-2002 No. of students</th>
<th>% of enroll.</th>
<th>2002-2003 No. of students</th>
<th>% of enroll.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian, Alaskan, Asian, or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black (Not Hispanic)</td>
<td>669</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (Not Hispanic)</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As noted in Table 4.2 the Black student population increased in the years 2000-2003 by 6.3 percent and the Hispanic\(^5\) student school population increased between the years 2000-2003 by 0.6 percent. Whereas, the White student enrollment decreased in the years 2000-2003 by 4.6 percent and American Indian, Alaskan, Asian or Pacific Islander decreased by 2.3 percent. In comparison the River City School District percentages of the total school population by race for 2002-2003 is the following: 14% White, 63.9% Black, 19.6% Latino and 2.1% is Asian. Dewey High School has 83.5% students of color and the district’s average of students of color is 84%, which is similar. The River City School District has a much larger percentage of Latino students, as where Dewey has a slightly larger percentage of Black students.

Information on Dewey High students’ socioeconomic status is reported in table 4.3. The River City School District total for 2002-2003 free or reduced lunch is 72.2%.

Table 4.3 Dewey High School student socioeconomic and stability indicators (Percent of Enrollment)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free &amp; Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Assistance</td>
<td>51-60%</td>
<td>61-70%</td>
<td>61-70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Stability</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in Table 4.3, students qualifying for free or reduced lunch fluctuated from 40.2 percent in 2000-2001, to 39 percent in 2001-2002 to, to rise to 44.4 percent in 2002-2003, which is an increase of 5.4 percent. Yet, these percentages are quite smaller than the city-wide average of 72.2% in 2002-03. Students receiving public assistance rose 10 percent from 51-60 percent in 2000-2001, to 61-70 percent in 2001-2002, and remained stable at 61-70 percent in 2002-2003. Student stability decreased by 4 percent in 2001-2002 and remained constant at 95 percent in 2002-2003. It is also noted that the average expenditure for each student in 2002-2003 at Dewey High was $12,552.

In 2002-2003 there were 95 teachers in total. However, 9 percent of the teachers at Dewey High taught with “no valid teaching certificate.” The number of core classes offered at

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\(^5\) The State uses the term Hispanic in reporting their data and I will retain their term when reporting their data. However, throughout my dissertation I prefer to use the term Latino/a, which I believe is a more accurate definition of ethnicity/race.
Dewey High was 243, and 87 percent of those core classes were taught by a highly qualified teachers (a term used by the State to represent a teacher certified to teach in the subject area).

Table 4.4 reports information about Dewey High School students’ graduation. It is worth noting that these numbers may include some errors/discrepancies, as explained by the State Education Department, due to change in data collection processes over this period of time (as discussed below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Grads</th>
<th>State Diploma</th>
<th>% of State Diploma</th>
<th>Total Grads</th>
<th>State Diploma</th>
<th>% of State Diploma</th>
<th>Total Grads</th>
<th>State Diploma</th>
<th>% of State Diploma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total number of graduates in this chart for 2002-2003 is 156. However, this number is off by two students, when comparing the number of twelfth graders in 2002-2003 in Table 4.1. Two or more events might have occurred. A student with not enough credits to be “officially” a senior enrolled in extra courses therefore earning enough credits to senior status in the beginning of second semester and graduating with his/her class cohort. Or, perhaps, two students from special education (un-graded secondary) earned diplomas and graduated.

In addition, the information produced by the State regarding Dewey High diploma rate (Table 4.4) has an explanation that is tagged to an asterisks after the term “Endorsed Diplomas”. It appears the State made an error in their data collection that would make it difficult, if not impossible, to compare and contrast graduation rates between the years 2000-2003. An asterisks attached in Form C (no page number given) provides a footnote that states:

Only students awarded local diplomas (including local diplomas with ‘State’ endorsements) are counted as high school graduates. Because of a change in data collection procedures by the State in the 2001-2002 school year, diploma counts and percentages of graduates earning State diplomas are not necessarily comparable between years. (High School Graduates and Noncompleters: footnote, Form C, 3/10/04)

Subsequently the data for 2000-2001 school year includes January, June and August 2001 graduates. The data for the 2001-2002 school year includes January and June 2002 graduates (excludes August 2002 in the school calendar year). The data for 2002-2003 school year includes August 2002 graduates, as well as 2003 January and June graduates. Therefore, without more explicit data retrieval notations, comparisons are invalid. Table 4.5 provides data of the 2002 graduation cohort at Dewey High.
### Table 4.5 Dewey High School Cohort Graduation Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1998 Cohorts</th>
<th>June 30, 2002</th>
<th>August 31, 2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduation Rate Cohort</td>
<td>Graduation Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Subgroup</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distribution by Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Small Group Total(s)</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distribution by Disability Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General-education students</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distribution by Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distribution by English Proficiency</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English proficient</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English proficient</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distribution by Income Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Disadvantaged</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distribution by Migrant Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant Status</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Migrant Status</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is of most interest in **Table 4.5** is that students who are *economically disadvantaged* have a higher graduation rate (of 65% in June 2002 and 71% in August 2002).

---

6 I accessed this information in March 2004; however, only the 2002 Cohort Graduation Rates were available. Information taken from State Ed, March 18, 2004, page 11.
than students who are not disadvantaged (who had a graduation rate of 64% in both June and August 2002). This is contrary to expectations and nationwide data.

The data in Table 4.5 reflects national trends with respect to gender and race differences. Female students have a higher graduation rate than male students (69% versus 61%). Regarding race, Black students (N=145) had a graduation rate of 63%, while White students (N=56) had a graduation rate of 75% and Asian/Pacific Islander students (N=19) maintained a graduation rate of 74%. Both the graduation rate cohorts for Hispanic (N=15) and American Indian/Alaskan Native (N=1) are not given a graduation rate/percentage status in the State reported data. Whereas the statewide graduation rate was 57.9%, Dewey High School’s overall graduation rate is higher at 66%. It is worth noting that the highest graduation rate is in the State of New Jersey with a graduation rate of 86.3% and the lowest graduation rates in the United States are in the State of South Carolina with a rate of 51% (Haney, 2003).

Unfortunately, information for noncompleter rates towards graduation, as provided in Table 4.6, does not provide a break-down by gender, race/ethnicity; socioeconomic status/income level; English proficiency or migrant status. A more explicit and detailed break down of who is a noncompleter would be more informative and helpful to identify groups needing more academic intervention and support.

**Table 4.6 Dewey High School Noncompletion Rates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of</td>
<td>% of</td>
<td>No. of</td>
<td>% of</td>
<td>No. of</td>
<td>% of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>students</td>
<td>enroll</td>
<td>students</td>
<td>enroll</td>
<td>students</td>
<td>enroll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education</td>
<td>Dropped</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Out</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entered GED Program*</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Noncompleters</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with</td>
<td>Dropped</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabilities</td>
<td>Out</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entered GED Program*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Noncompleters</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>Dropped</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entered GED Program*</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Noncompleters</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It also appears that in the school year 2000-2001 explicit data concerning student dropouts and those that entered GED Programs from General Education and Students with Disabilities were not collected separately, but lumped together. The total of seventy-eight noncompleters for 2000-2001 was the highest number as well as the highest percentage rate of 7.3% for the entire

---

7 The number and percentage of students who left K-12, diploma-bound systems and entered an alternative program leading to a high school equivalency. GED/Graduate Equivalency Diploma.
school. There was a total of 62 noncompleters for 2001-2002. Eighteen General Education students dropped out and 29 students entered GED Programs. Furthermore, 11 Students with Disabilities dropped out and an additional four students left to enter a GED Program.

The total 2001-2002-percentage rate of noncompleters was 5.5%, whereas, in 2002-2003 was the lowest overall all noncompleters rate percentage at 5.2% (yet this can be misleading). Furthermore, in 2002-2003, 34 General Education students dropped out (that is almost twice the amount of General Education students dropping out as of 2001-2002) and 22 left for GED Programs for a total of 56 noncompleters. Whereas, there were Students with Disabilities dropping out of school, with only three students leaving to attend a GED Program.

It must also be noted (see Table 4.1) that there were 176 twelfth graders in 2002-2003 (the year of the largest General Education noncompleters) and 164 twelfth graders in 2001-2002. Therefore, the total number of noncompleters percentages can be skewed from year to year when one takes into account that the percentage score is that of the entire school. In the year 2002-2003 Dewey High was significantly larger, with ninth, tenth and eleventh grade enrollments greater than in previous years.

Furthermore, students cannot enter a GED Program in this State until they are 18 years of age, and their ninth grade cohort has graduated. Students are also not allowed to drop out of high school until age sixteen. In addition, if their parent or guardian is receiving financial assistance from the government and their child drops out of high school before age eighteen, the parent/guardian no longer receives welfare or financial assistance. That is why I am dubious of the total number of non-completers percentage rate in 2002-2003 (by calculating the noncompleters against the entire school population). If one were to take a percentage of older students who are eligible to enter GED programs or to drop out, then the overall percentage statistics of noncompleters would be a valid and accurate representation. Thus far, according to Haney (2003) no accurate data of nationwide graduation or drop out rates are collected or retained.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.7 Distribution of 2002-2003 Graduates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information taken from Form C: State Ed (3/10/04).

Table 4.7 shows that a total of 96 percent of Dewey High 2002-2003 graduates attended college. However, of that total, it is noted that 41 percent of the students were attending a two-year college. On the other hand, there is no indication if the two-year college students are in a “two plus two” program. This program is often offered at State community colleges as a way for students to save money and decrease education costs by attending their local community college (as they can live at home and have inexpensive tuition rates) and taking coursework that is transferrable to a four-year college. After their completion of the two-year college, the student transfers to a four-year college and receives a bachelor’s degree. Therefore, because of financial concerns and economic disparity between urban and suburban school populations regarding economic class and race status, the distribution of urban Dewey student graduates can be
somewhat misleading if someone were to attempt to compare the distribution rates and students attending four year colleges and universities with other school districts in the State.

The International Baccalaureate Program at Dewey High School

In this section, I will briefly describe the nature and history of the International Baccalaureate Programme in which my study participants at Dewey High School were enrolled, as this program is not typical, especially in urban settings, and thus it may have had an impact on the participants.

The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) is a non-profit educational organization that was established in 1968 in Geneva, Switzerland. The concept of this academic program came out of the needs of elite class families, such as diplomats and high ranking corporate executives, as a way to have consistent schooling (curricula and academic rigor) for their children who move often across countries due to their parent’s employment. A sixteen member Council of Foundation governs the IBO. The Council of Foundation is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland and testing and evaluation headquarters are in Cardiff, Wales. The IBO offers three programmes to a wide variety of schools located throughout the world: the Diploma Programme, for students in the final two years of school before university; the Middle Years Programme (MYP) for students aged 11 to 16; and the Primary Years Programme (PYP) is for students aged 3 to 12.

There are 1,489 schools authorized to offer IB programmes—called IB World Schools—in 115 countries as of 31 July 2003. The IBO provides IB World Schools with: detailed curriculum guidelines for each program and subject area; teacher training workshops; online access to 3,000 education resources, subject area experts, and discussion sessions with teachers at IB schools throughout the world; external assessment of the Diploma Programme students’ work; as well as, procedures for school-based (internal) assessment of student work.

The International Baccalaureate Programme (IBP) was established at Dewey High School in 1999, after several years of planning, preparation and approval by the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO). Dewey High School, as well as other schools that are interested in offering the International Baccalaureate Programme, are given specific and stringent criteria to meet the demands of the highly selective and competitive International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO). The IBO does not accept all schools that apply and pay the initial fees.

There are also planned and unplanned IBO on-site visitations to applying schools seeking membership into the IBO. These visitations include document-based data collection, observations and interviews with administrators, faculty and students by IBO officials. If a school is approved, their approval is tentative for the first two years. Furthermore, the school (as long as it remains an IBO school) is under constant review and scrutiny of the IBO and is up for review, thereafter, every five years. After five years the school must again select from the menu of IBO approved curricula (that changes for all IBO schools), rewrite their curricula and send it to the IBO for approval.

In preparation for Dewey’s first class to enter the IB Programme in their junior year (2001), Dewey High School’s principal selected administrators and teachers to receive training at IBO training sites (within the United States, Canada, Mexico and Europe) for IBO certification in their chosen subject area or administrative duties. For example, I was sent by Dewey to receive my training and certification for the IB Programme for English A1 at the United Nations
School in New York, New York in the summer of 2001 and received my certification after an intensive week of coursework and demonstration.

The first Pre-IB class was admitted in 1999 (ninth grade students). Students applied to Dewey via examination (which was voluntary), recommendations by their teachers and counselors, transcripts, writing samples and submitted an essay stating their reasons for applying to the program. An Admission Committee established by Dewey and comprising teachers, counselors and administrators, then reviewed the data of applicants and selected students whom they believed would best benefit from the program.

The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme is for students in their final two years (11th and 12th grades) of school before they attend university. As entering Dewey High School students, IB candidates are accepted into Dewey High School as Pre-IB students. During the student’s freshman and sophomore years, their course work/classes are conflated (within a two year period, instead of four years) to meet all State requirements (exams and coursework) to receive a State high school diploma. By the completion of the student’s sophomore year, they have either met or exceeded all the State’s requirements for graduation. The Pre-IB student is then inducted into the official International Baccalaureate Programme at the beginning of their junior year.

It must further be noted and commended that “the mission” of Dewey High School and the school district was not to select “the chosen few” elites or extremely gifted students who would give Dewey an extraordinary graduation and IBO Diploma rating, but rather, to select qualified students from diverse backgrounds who would benefit from the academic rigor and intellectual pursuits that are supported and promoted in the IBP.

In contrast, a much wealthier school district in the eastern suburbs of River City, with a very large general school population, also has an International Baccalaureate Programme, but is highly selective; choosing only “gifted students” from their Gifted Program. The total number of students in their International Baccalaureate Program (11th and 12th grade) is less than thirty-five students. However, the school boasts a high rate of their students receiving IBO diplomas. Table 4.8 reports the demographics of the students enrolled in the Dewey High International Baccalaureate Programme in the school year 2003-04, when the data for the study were collected.

Table 4.8 Total enrollment in Dewey High School’s IB Programme 2003-2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th># of students</th>
<th># of Males</th>
<th># of Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian, Alaskan, Asian, or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data collected/produced in chart form by C.A.Martina. 9/14/04. Data supplied by the school registrar (3/18/04).

Table 4.8 shows that the greatest percentages of students in the IB Programme in 2003-04 were Black students. This nearly coincides with Dewey High School’s general population and that of the River City School District.
In Table 4.9 I have further delineated the IB Programme student populations by academic grade level, race/ethnicity and gender.

**Table 4.9** Enrollment (N=122) in Dewey High School’s IB Programme 2003-2004 by grade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>11th Grade</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>No. of students/2003-2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>American Indian, Alaskan, Asian, or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>72</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>72</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12th Grade</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>No. of students/2003-2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>American Indian, Alaskan, Asian, or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data collected/produced in chart form by C.A.Martina. 9/14/04. Data supplied by the school registrar (3/18/04)

The higher percentage of students enrolled in the IB Programme with respect to gender are females (58.1%). This percentage (in general) is also representative of the general Dewey High School population. However, what I find more intriguing is that Black females represent the highest percentage of females in the total IB Programme at 56.3%. Because this data is not reported by the State, I am unsure if there is a correlation with the general Dewey population, or if this percentage represents an anomaly.

In Table 4.9, in the eleventh grade, there are considerably more Black (N=41) and Latino/a students (N=7) and a very small percentage of Asian students (N=2). The White student population (N=19) is almost half that of the Black students (N=41) which differs significantly with the general Dewey population where White students equal one-third of the total Black student population. However, in the twelfth grade the Black student population (N=22) is not significantly larger than that of the White student population (N=19). This is a significant difference in comparison within the general Dewey student population. Furthermore, the Asian students (N=6) are represented stronger than the Latino/a students (N=3), which also differs from the general population and is opposite of the representation in the IB Programme eleventh grade.
The difference of White students in the eleventh grade (N=22) and twelfth grade (N=19) is similar and unremarkable.

Most importantly, these data show a more diverse and balanced distribution with respect to race/ethnicity than is usually the case in either urban or suburban schools. This “school mix” turned out to be an important variable in the study participants’ experience as discussed later in this paper.

Demographics of Phase I Participants

Table 4.10 shows how the students who volunteered to participate in the study were distributed with respect to race/ethnicity, grade, gender, parental/guardian status, income level, and immigrant status.

Table 4.10 Phase I: Participants’ (N=41) Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11th grade students</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th grade students</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental/Guardian status</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single parent/guardian</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual parent/guardian</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Level</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Disadvantaged</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immigrant/nonimmigrant status</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant Status</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non immigrant Status</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data collected/produced in chart form by C.A.Martina. 9/14/04.
As shown in Table 4.10, an equal number of Black (N=16) and White (N=16) students volunteered to participate in this study. These statistics differ from the general population of Dewey and the IB Programme population. In addition, a greater number of males volunteered for the study, and this differs from the general population of Dewey and the IB Programme population. There are four Latino/a students who represent forty percent of the Latino/as students in the total IB Programme and five Asian students who represent over ninety percent of the Asian students in the IB Programme. The three immigrant students are from the following countries: Albania, Cuba and the Philippines.

However, Table 4.10 does not capture an interesting piece of information about the participants, as many of these students are first generation Americans with their parents born in the following countries: Palestine, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Eritrea, India, Germany, Kenya, Japan, Guyana, China and Vietnam. In both formal and informal (off audio-tape) interviews and focus group discussions, these students have reported that they still practice customs and cultural traditions of their foreign born parents and maintain use of their parent’s native language in the home. These students have also reported that maintaining these customs and traditions are both comforting and at times difficult. Some customs, such as arranged marriages, dating and religious practices and the importance of the child’s birth position in the family related to the child’s responsibility to care for their parents are areas of contention and mediation.

Demographics of Phase II: (case study) participants

All 41 students who participated in Phase I of the study were asked if they would like to continue to participate in Phase II and 17 volunteered to do so. I decided to collect the full set of data for all 17 participants, although the case studies reported in Chapter 6 are limited to ten of the disadvantaged students in the group. Table 4.11 (on the following page) reports the demographics of all Phase II participants with respect to their race, grade, parental status, and income level and immigrant status.
Table 4.11 Phase II: participants’ demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase II: 2003-2004 Cohorts</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004 Dewey High School</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase II: IB Case Study Student Participant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th grade students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th grade students</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental/Guardian status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent/guardian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual parent/guardian</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Disadvantaged</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant/nonimmigrant status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant Status</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non immigrant Status</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As noted in Table 4.11, of the Phase I study participants, two out of the three immigrant students continued in Phase II, as did four out of five of the Asian students. Unfortunately, only one out of the four Latino/a students continued in Phase II. Nine out of sixteen Black students in Phase I of the study continued on to Phase II, and with a representational distribution of gender. Only three out of the sixteen White students continued in the study. More than half the number of economically disadvantaged student participants remained in Phase II of the study (fourteen out of twenty-three), whereas only one-sixth of the economically advantaged students (three out of eighteen) continued in the study. However, overall I was very pleased with the demographics of those that continued on in Phase II of the study, and in particular, with the number of students who are economically disadvantaged and who come from single parent/guardian homes.

Demographics of Phase III :IB Programme Focus Group study participants

Finally, Table 4.12 (on the following page) reports the distribution of the six students who agreed to continue in the study for Phase III—the Focus Group discussion.
## Table 4.12 Phase III: participants’ demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase III: 2003-2004 Cohorts</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2003-2004 Dewey High School</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase III: IB Focus Group Student Participants</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th grade students</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th grade students</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental/Guardian status</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent/guardian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual parent/guardian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Disadvantaged</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant/nonimmigrant status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant Status</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non immigrant Status</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data collected/produced in chart form by C.A.Martina. 9/14/04.

Two out of the six students were males and four females. Asian and Black females were equally represented. There was one White male and one Black male. All student participants who attended the focus group were economically disadvantaged. Two of the student participants came from dual parent homes and four of the student participants came from single parent homes.

There were five more student participants who initially agreed to continue in the study, but did not show up for the focus group. They included two Black male students, one White female student, one Black female student and one Latino male student. Furthermore, all these students also came from single parent homes and are economically disadvantaged. These students reported they did not attend the focus group session due to last minute difficulties regarding work or transportation.
CHAPTER 5

Quantitative survey results

Overview

In this chapter I will report results from the quantitative data of Phase I study participants. The main goal of this chapter is to provide information about the participants (N=41) responses to the Network Survey that can: (a) indicate student participants’ perceptions of support and frequency of contacts by institutional agents (b) identify what categories of individual groups do students perceive the most support i.e., teachers, friends, peers, relatives or other adults, and (c) sort the participants responses of N=41 by the variables of social class, race, gender and parental status to see if there are any significant differences in the student’s responses with respect to these variables.

I will start by reporting the descriptive statistics of Network Survey of Phase I students (N=41). I will then report these data by separating the responses by variables of social class linked to frequency of contacts and the selection and retention of institutional agents using an Independent T-Test; race linked to frequency of contacts and the selection and retention of institutional agents using One Way ANOVA; gender linked to frequency of contacts and the selection and retention of institutional agents using an Independent T-Test and parental status linked to frequency of contacts and the selection and retention of institutional agents using One Way ANOVA. Finally, I will summarize and discuss what the Network Survey data reveals.

Quantitative data of Phase I study participants: Network Survey of Phase I students

Phase I study participants (N=41) were asked six questions. The directions read:

Please indicate frequency of support out of scale of 1-10. For example: 10 being the highest level of support and 1 being the lowest level of support. If you indicate others, please define next to your answer their relationship to you or their job or occupation.

Martina, Network Survey of Students, 2004, p.1

I will report the results of these six questions using a chart of descriptive statistics and a narrative of the two highest levels of support categories of teacher, friends, peers, relatives and other adults. This is a quantitative way to see whom students select and retain as their institutional agents. Questions in the Network Survey ask whom students choose on a regular basis that supports their academic success with issues of trust, academic mentoring through example, problem solving, moral support and advice, decision making and personal needs that link these agents to a student’s habitus, as developed and nurtured within the structure of their schools (“school mix”/compositional effect) or within their social field.

What the Network Survey reveals

The quantitative Network Survey separated by the variables of social class, parental status, gender, and race, reveals that the student’s preferred choice of institutional agents who support their academic success is that primarily of friends and relatives, although in some categories, such as single parent status, working class and race (Latino/a and Asian) student
participants chose teachers first for academic problem solving, advice and guidance and academic role modeling.

I must call attention to a caveat that the difference in mean responses to various questions could be due to chance because of the small sample size. In some instances, there are no significant differences in how students responded statistically. Nonetheless, what Network Survey cannot reveal is who are their friends, relatives and teachers, and how do they influence and support the student’s academic success. For this reason I will move to the qualitative data of the open-ended Student Written Questionnaire and the in-depth Intensive Interviews of Phase II (N=17) merged in the form of nine Case Studies of the study participants who are working class and/or single parent status regarding those individuals (institutional agents) who are most influential and helpful in a student’s attainment for academic success. Out of fourteen possible Case Study candidates, I chose nine who are representative of the focus of my dissertation question.

CHAPTER 6

Selected Case-Studies

Overview

In this chapter, I will present nine case studies from Phase II (N=17) of my study. I collected data from all seventeen study participants, but will only report case studies of nine students who are also all from disadvantaged backgrounds because of race, social class and/or parental status. Nine, rather than more case studies are sufficient because these data were saturated—i.e., no new themes emerged from the analysis of the additional eight case studies.

Each case study will be presented using the following subtitles: (a) background, (b) schooling experiences/academic performance, (c) institutional agency, (d) habitus: definition of schooling success to maintain academic excellence, (e) habitus: extracurricular activities, (f) habitus: the “rules of the game” and (g) summary. In the summary I will link the case study students’ data to Diagram 1b in Chapter 1. Furthermore, I also include the responses of each case study student’s Network Survey results.

I will first begin with the case study of Whitney, then Ali, Malika, Antoine, Kim Sung, Rachael, Nathan, Taye and concluding with Grace. All of the students are living in poverty. Six of the students are Black, two are Asian and one is White. There are five females and four males represented and eight of the nine students represented come from single parent homes.

Case study student participant: Whitney

Background

Whitney can be considered a disadvantaged student from many respects: she is a young Black woman from a working class family, living in a single parent home and in poverty. Whitney has only attended River City public schools.

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8 I chose only nine Phase II study participants to report in case studies because of theme saturation. No new data in the remaining eight study participants was revealed. The eight remaining study participants are a mix of working and middle class and dual and single parent homes.
Whitney is seventeen years old and has an eight-year-old younger sister in elementary school. Whitney’s mother and sister moved to Florida in September 2003, because Whitney’s mother stated she “just had to leave River City.” She left Whitney behind to complete her senior year at Dewey High School. Whitney took her mother’s and sister’s departure in stride, although she stated they missed them very much, but also recognized that if she were going to college she would be leaving them. For her senior year at Dewey, Whitney moved in with her aunt, uncle, four-year-old male cousin and her grandmother in a small home on a quiet tree lined city street.

Whitney has experienced a less than ideal childhood. Her life has been unstable and chaotic. She experienced many inconsistencies such as where and with whom she lived. She reported that her father and mother’s marriage was tumultuous. Her parents argued often and separated several times before finally divorcing. There were also allegations of her father’s spousal abuse. Whitney implied that her father’s physical abuse of her mother caused her mother to have three miscarriages after Whitney’s birth.

Whitney and her mother frequently lived with her grandparents, moving in when separated from her father, after the birth of her younger sister, and, later, after her parents’ divorce. However, in spite of all her family turbulence and disruptions, Whitney still maintained excellent grades in school. Looking at her accumulative record you would never know there were problems at home. Reviewing Whitney’s accumulative academic file I noticed teachers would comment how she was “so happy” and “always had a smile on her face.” Little did her teachers know what Whitney was dealing with at home. She never brought her troubled home life to school.

Because of Whitney’s academic success, she states other students would depend on her to do most of the work, such as when her teacher would require students to do group projects. Her “friends” thought she could handle all the extra work, yet Whitney informed them “What do you mean, I have things to do too!” She further noted it was “around that time my sister was a baby and I had to help my mom out with her.” I asked; “You did child care then too?” She stated: “Yeah – I helped … well because … my mom and my dad divorced shortly after my sister was born.”

Whitney also reports that she has moved several times in seventeen years and that she does not want to ever move again. She thinks that in many ways her desire to be academically successful is to make enough money to build her own home. She says that her desire for a permanent home has gotten to be an obsession. She states:

I have this big thing with the house … I’ve never been in a house, that was mine …I want a house so bad … I’ve been in apartment, this apartment, that apartment, this townhouse, this apartment, this house that’s not my house it’s my grandmother’s house … this house is not my house, it’s my aunt’s house … this house is not my house it’s my stepfather’s house … I want my own home … I want my own. My mother never … my parents never bought a house that was theirs.

I asked Whitney how many times she had moved. She stated

Without counting … I’ve moved about 10 or 11 times …if not more … but … and I’m about to move again too … actually I’m moving again next month [OC: to take her personal belongings to Florida where her mother now lives] so it’s like I’ve moved around a lot … and I hate moving. If there’s one thing I know I hate
to do … I hate packing up and leaving … it’s not hard to leave the home … it’s the stress of packing up and leaving. I want something of my own and I told both my parents already, I have a dream that I want to build my own house and be able to get my house built so it’s just the way I want it and I don’t plan on leaving it any time soon … They’ll have to move me out kicking and screaming.

Whitney was to attend North Carolina A&T, which is a traditionally Black university in North Carolina. After the research project Whitney, Kim Sung and I went out to dinner. At dinner, Whitney stated she was not sure now if she wanted to attend North Carolina A&T, because she had appreciated the diversity of students at Dewey High School and was having second thoughts.

I received an email from Whitney in late July 2004, while she was visiting her mother in Florida. She stated she had changed her mind and wanted to attend a college with a more diverse student population. Fortunately for Whitney, a small Catholic liberal arts college outside of New York City who also offered Whitney a scholarship in April 2004 was still interested that she attend and they had maintained scholarship funds for her. She was very happy about her new choice. Later in her freshman year she emailed me and stated she was on the Deans List.

Schooling experiences/academic performance

Whitney strived for academic excellence at an early age and her elementary teachers remarked about her positive work ethic and her willingness to help them as well as other students. Whitney’s early academic performance was excellent and she was consistently praised for her efforts. Here are several excerpts from Whitney’s report cards and progress reports. In first grade Whitney’s teacher wrote in her progress report:

_Whitney is a very happy child. She gets along with everybody._ Whitney is very creative. She reads and writes well. I would like to see her write more in class. _Great helper._

In second grade, Whitney’s teacher wrote:

Whitney is an excellent citizen. _She gets along with classmates and adults._ She follows school and classroom rules and uses good manners. She has _excellent work habits._ She returns homework weekly, reports and monthly projects. _She tries her best, follows directions, is ready to work,_ and finishes her work on time. She is working at grade level in Language Arts and Mathematics’ and making very good progress. She is a pleasure to have in class.

With grades of A+s, As and B+s filling her report card in fourth grade, Whitney’s teacher wrote: “Whitney is a pleasure to have in class. _Her hard work is definitely paying off academically._” And finally her sixth grade teacher wrote prophetically:

_I continue to be pleased with Whitney’s academic and social growth. _She is responsible, courteous, mature and hard working 5th grader. She strives her hardest to work her best in anything she is doing—a very ADMIRABLE quality._
Please continue to be a conscientious student all your years through school. Your great efforts will pay off.

It is clear that Whitney obtained the cultural capital of the dominant culture in elementary school by her actions and academic success. She knows how to “fit in” and what is expected of her. She also befriends teachers as her institutional agents. It is also clear that she did not bring her troubled home life to school. Her teachers saw her as happy and socially engaged child willing to help others.

When I asked Whitney to recount her schooling experiences she stated:

**Whitney** I did it at Head Start\(^9\) on Hazelwood Avenue, it’s no longer there now. I remember just … I think I started school later than everybody else did, cause when I got there seems like everybody was already adjusted. … *It didn’t take me that long to get adjusted to it* and, I don’t remember being there for that long. I just remember the beginning and end, and I remember graduation and I guess my pre-school life was okay. Kind of like a day care, so it was really not school. …

Kindergarten I spent at 116\(^{th}\) Street Elementary School … … at the time … *me and my mom were living with my grandmother*. Actually I did very good … very, very good. *My teacher she like adored me* I guess, … *after I moved and I went to a different school*. *I went to 137\(^{th}\) Street Elementary School from 1\(^{st}\) to 5\(^{th}\) grade* and I was one of the top students … *I was a model student, on honor roll every marking period*. *My grades were very good … I was a lot of times above grade level*.

**Camille** Did teachers often say to other students, “Oh you should be more like Whitney?”

**Whitney** No – they [fellow students] *just could see that teachers gave me a lot of privileges. I would get a lot of privileges*.

**Camille** And why do you think that was?

**Whitney** *Good behavior … I think good behavior and rewards so … a lot of girls they just I don’t know … I mean I would get good grades and everything and then a lot of times they come to let’s see what Whitney’s is doing, so we can get some help, or people try to use me for that … and I experienced that in middle school too, you know.*

**Camille** Did you like giving them help or not?

**Whitney** *Sometimes I did, but after a while it got to be a pain … you only really want to talk to me because you want my knowledge.*

**Camille** They were just befriending you so they could copy your work?

**Whitney** *Yeah basically … and when you think about elementary school…* *I mean it’s not really that hard … Just do your work!* 

Whitney resented other students using her to garner her knowledge as their own. She was tired of carrying other students’ academics, whilst maintaining her own academic excellence through her work. In sixth grade Whitney was chosen to be in an academically accelerated

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\(^9\) Pre-school US government sponsored program for economically disadvantaged children
middle school program. However, she experienced a similar problem of other students using her knowledge as their own.

**Whitney**  *But in middle school it was kind of the same way, but I had a lot more friends this time.*

**Camille**  *Were you in the accelerated program?*

**Whitney**  *Sure was. The way I got into an accelerated program, which was kind of funny. I got the letter in the mail and they said because my GPA was like a 4.0 something in the 5th grade and everybody was “My gosh!”… My parents were “flipping out” because … “My baby she’s so smart!” and I’m like “Man, I’m not that smart” …*

She also expressed the school was much larger and that she had made more friends, but again she felt as if people wanted to be her friend so she would support them academically.

**Whitney**  *My academics stayed up obviously, since I’m in the IB program now. I had very, very good grades and until then I experience, people doing their usual using thing, saying well let’s work with Whitney because I know we’re going to get the job done.*

Whitney’s academic transition from Lincoln Park Middle School to Dewey High School was not as smooth as she had anticipated. She commented it was not the amount of homework, but more so the faculty and instructional practices. What was most disheartening was this was the first time she had ever received an “average” grade. She stated: “I mean it was a combination of different teachers, different teaching styles … the work seemed to be a little harder to me.?  It was the first year … my grades started out pretty good, I struggled a little bit … the first time I ever got a C in my life!  She also admitted this was the first time she ever had to work for good grades “where before, it was like basically sitting back and just doing it” as she smiled at me a Whitney snapped her fingers.

She had noted she was always able to get through her studies before, she thought “it’s not going to be so bad in high school.  But when I got here it was like IB smacked me in the face, it really did, and I got a real wake-up in 11th grade … well 9th and 10th they were hard, but they weren’t that bad.” She felt junior year was the big “wake-up” call. This was also a time when many students dropped the program. Whitney articulated the conversations she had with herself during these desperate times.

**Whitney**  *It was big. Like Whitney, “What are you doing?  “What’s up?” cause you got to go to college, you got to wake up and I was still kind of “laid back,” sitting back, “Yeah I can do this and it just comes,” but like…*

**Camille**  *So how did you negotiate that? How did you work yourself through it and not drop out like a lot of people did?*

**Whitney**  *Well I knew that in the end this was all going to pay off in some sort of way… I didn’t want it to be where I wasted 4 years of my life, or 3 years for that matter. All of my life, where I could be getting straight A’s and sitting on my behind and doing nothing. And I don’t … I’m the type of person that I don’t like to sit there and have easy stuff all through school.  

What Whitney also realized is that an education is not about grades, it is about learning.

**Camille**  *So the grades… you don’t equate grades with education?*
Whitney  

I don’t really think that grades are a reflection of your knowledge, because you can be really smart in a subject and get like C’s and D’s, but you really know the stuff. Maybe it comes with applying yourself? And I had to learn how to study.

Camille  

That you didn’t really need before?

Whitney  

Right. I had such a quick recall I think … or it was easier to remember … “Stuff” was just easier to remember.

Whitney acknowledged she had to change her study habits in order to survive the transition to high school and the IB Programme. In elementary school and in middle school she could find her way through challenges on her own recall or without much work. Similar to other students in this study, Whitney received her first low grades in the IB Programme. Now the challenges were greater, but she did not give up. She encouraged herself to meet those challenges and to be successful.

**Institutional agency**

Table 6.1 (below) shows how Whitney responded to her Network Survey.

**Table 6.1 Whitney’s Network Survey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
<th>A. Teachers</th>
<th>B. Friends</th>
<th>C. Peers</th>
<th>D. Relatives</th>
<th>E. Other Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Give me the moral support I need to do well in school</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Blank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I rely on them for advice and guidance in making important school-related decisions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Blank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are sensitive to my personal needs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Blank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are good at helping me solve school related or academic problems</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Blank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a trusting and good relationship with them</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Blank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They have shown me through their actions how to be successful in school</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Blank</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First of all, it is worth noting that Whitney gave overall high marks to all her institutional agents for the support they provided to her. As you can see from Whitney’s Network Survey, her relatives are very influential in her desire to be academically successful. She is also very forgiving regarding her chaotic and unstable childhood. She states her parents “put me through a lot” but knew that they always supported and were proud of her academic success. Her friends and teachers tied for second; however, in the Focus Group discussion she gives more homage and praise to fellow IB Programme students for her success. It is significant that although Whitney states she has had good relationships with adults as witnessed by both she and her teachers’ comments in elementary school, she does not attribute other adults such as mentors, her softball coach, Gospel Choir director or guidance counselor in her Network Survey or in her Intensive Interview as having any influence regarding her academic success. Her extracurricular activities did not expand her institutional agency with adults.
Whitney wrote in her open-ended *Written Questionnaire* about the importance of her relationship with her grandparents and parents. This is similar to the quantitative data in her *Network Survey*. Her grandfather’s death and the tumultuous separations and subsequent divorce of her parents made her “grow up” and mature quickly. Whitney wrote:

My grandfather who passed away when I was 12 influenced me to do well in school. He was always so proud of me and all the things that I have accomplished academically (sic). I know even now that he would be proud of me now. My parents individually and collectively have influenced my academic success. They both have put me through a lot, but even in the hard times, they always wanted me to do my best and never quit or give up.

For Whitney, it is not only the positive supportive experiences that encouraged her to be successful. Schooling success also provided her some element of control in her life. In her interview, Whitney also reveals the added weight and responsibility, as well as the honor of the possibility of being the first female college graduate in her family. She talks about the pride it will bring not only to her family, but also to her. In her interview Whitney’s states:

**Whitney** Yeah my mom and my dad divorced shortly after my sister was born…it was hard, you know, it was hard, but I was actually kind of glad that they were…Because before my mom was pregnant with my sister, my mom and my dad separated a million times…so it was either we’re with dad or we’re not with dad, we’re with dad – I lived with my grandmother a lot … you know, a lot.

**Camille** But you kept your grades up?

**Whitney** Yeah and everybody said that “You kept your grades up despite all the trouble you had at home,” and you know my father was abusive toward my mother, so that’s why we left [Whitney’s mother had miscarried three children after Whitney’s birth and her mother was pregnant again when Whitney’s mom separated from her husband] to keep her in a non-stressful environment, which would be fine at my grandmother’s house. Then when she had my sister, we moved back in with my dad and then like 3 or 4 months later we were back with my grandmother, and then they just offered a divorce and they divorced…. I was relieved because they used to argue all the time and it was like I was very happy that they let that one [marriage] go. But besides that “I think I done pretty good,” getting in Dewey! [Whitney laughs].

Later in the interview, I also asked:

**Camille** When you look at the people who influenced you … you say your grandpa did?

**Whitney** Yes… My grandfather passed when I was 11 years old … I was almost 12 and it hurt me so bad cause I … cause we took care of him … I was living at my grandmother’s at the time and we took care of him … He did not want to be in the hospital … When he died a coroner came … We took care of him ourselves…and I was there the day he died … The night he died. I was sitting right there … I felt like my world was coming to an end … I really lost it that night … I cried and then I cried inside…Because you know my grandfather and me were like really tight… and
I was the only child for about 10 years, so we had all the time together to be really, really close and he … I would come home with all these awards and doing all this great stuff in school.

Camille: Did you grandparents go to college?

Whitney: No, neither one of them … my grandfather was in WWII and he would have went to college, … he finished high school after he came back from the war. My grandfather was an extremely smart man. He could have went on to college …my grandma said he always regretted not going to college. He always was like, “I would have liked to go to college and be an English teacher” … and he could have been an English teacher, cause my grandfather was smart… My grandmother never finished … She never even went to high school. My grandmother stopped her education in around 7th grade cause her mother … her mother passed, when she was 16, but she had to, you know, her parents were getting sick, so she had to stay home with them even though she had a lot of brothers and sisters.

Camille: So you’re going to be the first college graduate?

Whitney: I am my grandmothers’ (both of them) their first granddaughter to go to college I’m her only grandchild that is going to college … the only one.

Later in the interview I asked Whitney:

Camille: When did you get the idea that Whitney could go to college?

Whitney: Oh man! … That I could go to college? … I think when I got here. [Dewey High Schools IB Programme]

Camille: Why?

Whitney: Cause you know you wait your whole life to get somewhere and then you finally get there and it’s like “Oh I’m here already” … that’s how I feel … like I waited my whole life … it seems like I waited my whole life to be in high school. And to be a senior and graduate and graduation is a couple weeks away now and it’s like what… I’m already accepted into college, and I’m really going to college. I have to remind myself every day that this really happening to me. This is a reality and I got to get it together.

Whitney was so focused on maintaining her goal of academic success that when she finally achieves her goal, she feels in a state of disbelief. She admits she has to remind herself to “get it together.” Afterwards, I discussed with her about setting new goals as a way to keep moving ahead and to think about her ultimate trajectory as added inspiration.

Habitus: Definition of schooling success to maintain academic excellence.

In response to her definition of schooling success, Whitney wrote her open-ended Written Questionnaire fragmented sentences:

To go through each grade and pass making average and above average grades. To complete each subject only one time. To complete each grade once and do well in all subjects.
This is a response I would have expected of a student who has not been very successful in school and was looking for the bare minimum of success, in the most simplistic terms. To find out how Whitney feels about her schooling success, I situated my question within the context of her younger sister, thinking that the advice Whitney would reveal to her sister would be her own axiom.

Camille  What advice would you give your little sister when she goes through her rigorous academic program?

Whitney  I’ll tell her that to stay focused ... it’s okay to have a social life, but don’t let your social life get in your way of schoolwork. And believe in yourself ... always ... Even though you will have a time when you’re going to feel like ... “Oh I can’t do this anymore” or just “I’m horrible, I suck at this” ... I’ve been there ... I’ve been in that situation where I can’t do this anymore ... Maybe I should just give up, but there’s always been that fire that says, you got to keep moving. You got to keep moving ... because you’ll never achieve anything if you just sit there and give up every time. And you know I tell her you just got to believe in yourself. And when it gets hard, just fight through it. I mean ... you know, get in there and just fight.

Later in the interview Whitney again reflects on what schooling success means to her. I ask her if she is a goal-oriented person and does she enjoy the challenges of learning more difficult concepts and material. Her response was:

Whitney  Sure and you know, like you said, it just challenges ... I didn’t want to sit there and just breeze through everything and get straight A’s and be like falling asleep in class ... it’s not my thing. I want to be challenged ... I’d rather fail at something challenging, than sit there and win over something that has no purpose.

Whitney has changed her definition of schooling success from receiving high letter grades in elementary school and middle school, to enjoying challenges and taking pride in staying enrolled in a highly academic and rigorous program. Schooling success to Whitney is not about easily won awards and accolades; it is about the challenges and the struggles to achieve a goal of something worthy of her efforts.

Habitus: Extracurricular activities

In her open-ended Written Questionnaire regarding extracurricular activities she wrote:

I have participated in many activities. In 4th–7th grade I played the trumpet in a marching band and I did this because being in a marching band taught me discipline. In 8th grade I was in a play and I did that because at the time I wanted to be an actress. From 9th-12th grade, I have been in Gospel Choir and I played softball for Dewey. I did these two things to keep me well rounded and to have something constructive to do after school.

Whitney responds that she and her parents (divorced) have similar interests, in particular music. I ask:

Camille  Can you tell me about your academic, cultural and social interests and tell me if you think they’re similar or dissimilar to your parent or parents.
Whitney  

I think music wise … we listen to a lot of the same stuff I think. It’s some of the “old stuff” … you know, there’s like music like jazz, R&B, the “old” R&B…and artists like Miles Davis and David Sanborn and… You know I like that type of stuff … I like the stuff that my parents listen to.

Whitney does not reveal in her extracurricular activities that she is moving out of her own cultural context or exploring another social class or cultural. She is involved in these activities to stay “well-rounded” and to do something constructive after school. However, her musical tastes are very sophisticated for a person her age, and something she can share with her parents. Unlike her peers, she is not listening to Hip Hop. Given Whitney’s troubled and unstable childhood, some semblance of stability and consensus with her parents can be comforting and enjoyable.

Habitus: the “Rules of the Game”

In our interview I asked Whitney what it meant to play the “rules of the game.” She responded:

Whitney  

If you’re a student … doing what’s expected of you as far as work and behavior wise … try to better yourself. Put a lot of effort into your work, so that you’ll be able to achieve a lot and in the end you’ll get good results. Be diligent in your work, yet be able to socialize, but not too much and …. come off as a person that is accessible. Try being friendly and wanting to help others, but not just giving them your stuff.

Camille  

What do I do to be recognized by the teacher?

Whitney  

I think standing out, just really standing out. Standing out as being a good person that’s willing to help others, but also on top of your own game, on top of your stuff … you get your stuff done when you’re supposed to get it done, you handle your business the way you’re supposed to handle your business. Get everything done and finished you know. And, you know, keep a good head on your shoulders, stay focused and stuff like that.

Camille  

Do you have to know when to be quiet and when to speak up?

Whitney  

Always … you always should know when to be quiet and when you have to speak up. You know you don’t want to ruffle too many feathers cause ruffling feathers is not a good thing sometimes. But you know, keep it … I mean and don’t keep stuff going … I mean you now have a lot of these disputes over stupid things, but some people just keep it going and keep it going…and you know when to stop.

Camille  

When did you figure that out Whitney?

Whitney  

In 8th grade.

Whitney proceeded to inform me that it was the trouble she was having with her best friend in 8th grade, coupled with her parent’s divorce, her mother’s remarriage and her extreme dislike for her stepfather that pushed her to learn the “rules of the game” in order to work with people under difficult circumstances and to be successful. I asked:

Camille  

So how did you transfer that to your schoolwork? You are academically successful, and you have survived through a rigorous program and you learned how to play the
rules of the game … so did you learn how to deal with adults because of this? Did you learn what to say to them and what not to say to them and to get them to notice you in positive ways

**Whitney**

I think *I’ve always been the type to get an adult’s attention because of my maturity. I present myself in a more mature way than a lot of people my age. Even when I was younger I’ve always been the mature … I think it was due to my home life because I was forced to kind of grow up a little earlier than everybody, and understand things. … I was my mom’s best friend … my dad’s side, I’m my dad’s best friend and I had to grow up …. I had to grow up and then learning how to speak to adults… I always respect people that are older than you … leaning how to talk to them in a t certain situation … it’s a situational thing for me.*

Through Whitney’s difficult home life she learned how to maneuver and negotiate her way with adults that made her life less troublesome. This was Whitney’s introduction to learning the “rules of the game” in order to be successful with the adults in her life. She transferred this knowledge to other adults in her life such as teachers, as well as her peers.

**Whitney**

And you know every time somebody tells me “You know, you’ve been through so much” … I feel like I deserve this … *I deserve to graduate… I deserve to go to college and graduate … I deserve to do this… I deserve this stuff, because I’ve been through so much. Experienced so much and have achieved so much and I want to keep doing that.*

**Camille**

Where do you see yourself in 5 years? … You’ll be through college.

**Whitney**

Well I’ll be done with undergraduate … I’ll be going to graduate school. I want to get my Master’s in business.

It is clear that Whitney has a set plan and a goal to attend college, go on to graduate school work in the field of business and become economically successful so she can afford to build her own home.

**Summary**

Whitney’s academic success and acceptance into university degree programs is in contrast to her parent’s educational achievements and human capital. Yet, in spite of living in poverty and chaotic childhood, Whitney is an academic success.

Her desire for a better lifestyle has inspired her to work hard and to set firm goals from which she does not divert her attention. I met Whitney’s grandmother the night when I picked her up at her aunt’s house to take she and Kim Sung out to dinner. She expressed how proud she was of her granddaughter and how delighted she was to have finally met me. She stated I had meant much to her granddaughter and they were pleased that Whitney had the opportunity to “tell her story” of academic success. Her family is very proud of her and will continue to support her in the best way they can.

Consistent with my proposed model of how some disadvantaged students *succeed in attaining the social capital of the dominant culture,* Whitney is “bicultural” in the cultural capital sense of the word. She quickly adapted in elementary school and adhered to the appropriate
discourse and mannerisms of the dominant mainstream culture that made her both academically successful and accessible for institutional agency of her teachers. As Whitney states, during this time period her “behavior” and doing what was expected of her was a key element to her success.

She trusted her institutional agents, stating she has always had a good relationship with adults, which she attributes to her strict upbringing and early maturity. In turn, as a result of the institutional agency of her elementary teachers’ recommendations, Whitney was accepted into an accelerated middle school program. In turn, relationships with her teachers and academic success in middle school resulted in her acceptance to Dewey High School’s International Baccalaureate Programme. Thus, the institutional agency she made with her teachers created social capital networks that were dynamic and dialectical, which placed Whitney into prestigious academic programs in River City.

Once in high school and experiencing the rigors of the IB Programme, Whitney finds that her “traditional routes” to academic success are not working as well. Her institutional agency with teachers is not the only path to success, she now needs to work with other students, to develop study skills and redefine what academic success means. Whitney’s disappointments with her average grades caused her to reflect and question why she was in the IB Programme and what she needs to do. She did not embrace defeat. She questioned, was it letter grades and GPAs that defines my success? On the other hand, was it the challenges of learning? She could have dropped out of the IB Programme but as she states, “that’s not who I am.” She redefines schooling success and her ways of learning. She has another alteration in her habitus.

It is also clear that Whitney knows how to play “the rules of the game.” She acknowledges that in order to play “the rules of the game” she has to be noticed and accessible, and provide in full what is “expected” of her. In turn, she will then attain her goals.

Whitney has attained the social, cultural and human capital of the dominant culture as evidenced by offers of academic scholarships and acceptance into university degree programs. She is also the first female on her mother’s side to attend college. Therefore, her habitus differs from that of her mother’s. She states that she realized that her goal of college attendance was achievable in high school.

In regards to “school mix effect,” I think the curriculum and instruction of the IB Programme challenged Whitney to rethink and redefine schooling success and how to meet her goals that initiated another alteration in her habitus. The pedagogical practices of IB Programme teachers, in which they have students critique and deconstruct knowledge, were a model on which Whitney could draw when thinking about her personal life. She asked why and what she was doing in the IB Programme in a very constructive manner that resulted in her reformulating how she could meet her goals and not drop out. The diversity of the school population also influenced Whitney’s final choice not to attend North Carolina A&T, but to attend a small liberal arts college outside of New York City, which would provide her access and immersion into a diverse population that she felt in retrospect of her graduation from Dewey was important.

**Case study student participant: Ali**

**Background**

Ali is a young man of Palestinian descent, who is a recipient of both suburban parochial (Catholic) and public urban education in River City. Ali comes from a working class dual-parent home; however, being devote Muslims, his father is the sole decision-maker in the home. Ali, his
parents and three siblings (two sisters and a brother) live in a small apartment above their small corner grocery store. Ali’s eldest sister is attending university and lives away from home. Ali is presently attending a state university in the Northeastern United States as a biology major and pre-veterinary student. He is also in the Reserve Officer Training Corp with the United States Marine Corps at his university, much to the dismay and discomfort of his parents, immediate family and friends. His aunt called him a “traitor” to the Palestinian cause, which has created a rift in family relations.

Ali came to Dewey High’s Pre-IB Programme in the year 2000. I taught Ali in my pre-IB English I and II Honors class his freshman year. I noticed Ali immediately. He was intelligent, articulate and insightful in his deconstruction of literature and his observations of human nature. He could easily link to the motivations of the characters in the epic poems, plays and novels we read in class. Ali also had a great command of the English language; his “grippingly” quick, dry wit and remarks in class would often bring tears of laughter to our eyes. He was refreshingly outspoken and honest. He had not yet learned “the rules of the game” regarding political correctness. His wit was much appreciated by me, but not by all his teachers, resulting in the IB Director’s formal reprimands and calls to Ali’s home.

In many ways, Ali is a “survivor” of the IB Programme and of his family’s mistrust of Americans and the American way of life. The Arabian community in River City is a very closed and insular community. Ali’s parents excluded his associations with those outside the Arabian community in River City. He was instructed to not associate with or befriend American students. Ali was defiant and emphatic with both his immediate family and relatives that he is an American. He repeatedly reminded them that he was born in the United States and has only experienced the American way of life. He stressed to them that he did not “feel” Arabian.

This internal conflict of cultural and national identity rose to such an extent that Ali ran away from home in the spring semester of his freshman year. As a result of his non-attendance and the less than sympathetic leanings of some of my fellow teachers at Dewey High School, upon Ali’s return to school three and a half months later, many teachers did not offer make-up work for the weeks he was away. As a result, he failed two courses. His GPA slipped below 2.00 and the IB Steering Committee, July 19, 2001 notified Ali that he was on “probation”, via a form letter. The letter encouraged Ali to leave the program unless he agreed to give up his lunch period the following year and retake the two courses. The IB Steering Committee strongly suggested he register for the regular program. Ali decided to stay in the IB Programme and took the two courses in tenth grade by forfeiting his lunch period.

In October of 2001, a month after September 11th, Ali was back at school and was also working in his father’s corner store. Many of River City’s urban corner stores are owned and operated by families of Arabian decent. Everyone in Ali’s family is expected to work in the store if they are living at home. Ali told me he has worked in his father’s store since he was nine years old and that it often interfered with his time to study, which meant he often would work on his homework past midnight. In tenth grade Ali was working in his father’s store when it was robbed. Ali’s guidance counselor sent a memo to all Ali’s teachers. It reads:
October 10, 2001

Ali came to see me yesterday and told me that his parents’ store, at which he works, was robbed on Sunday evening. Two men came into the store before closing and held both Ali and his mother at gunpoint. Needless to say, it was quite a traumatic experience for Ali.

Ali did not come to me asking for sympathy, and quite honestly, he was hesitant about letting me alert his teachers of the incident. Nonetheless, I feel it is appropriate to let you know in case Ali seems to be a little less than himself. He also has had students make comments to him about “his people” in regard to recent terrorist attacks. It is a great deal for this young man to endure all at once.

If you could offer Ali support during this time it would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you

Neither of Ali’s parents graduated from high school, however, Ali’s older sister is attending an internationally renown university in the northeastern United States known for the university’s cutting edge research in technology sciences. When Ali enrolled at Dewey High School in the year 2000, his sister was attending another high school in River City and would often attend parent-teacher conferences when I was Ali’s English teacher in ninth grade. She would ask questions for her father, who was also in attendance and take notes on Ali’s academic and “social” progress. Asking questions such as: Was he respectful? Did he do all his work? Did I think he was working to the best of his ability? What could they encourage him to do more of? They were very involved in seeing that he would be academically successful and his sister led the meetings.

Ali would often say to me the next day that his sister acted as though she were “the parent” and would come home and inform him about what was said and what he needed to do, according to his teacher’s comments at the parent-teacher conference. He simultaneously resented and appreciated her involvement. Ali has great respect and admiration for his sister’s independence and defiance of the traditional working class Muslim woman’s expectations of an early and arranged marriage and a limited education.

Schooling experiences/academic performance

When I looked through Ali’s academic accumulative file, I did not find his reports cards or his attendance at a Catholic private elementary school in the suburbs. I do have his River City school reports card and progress reports from Hawthorne Middle School. I noticed that his GPA in middle school was never below 3.39 and his grades were A+, A, and B+. He did have a C+ two marking periods in 7th grade English but received an A in his final marking period with a 90% on his final exam. Comments from his teachers were (a) is a pleasure to have in class, (b) is
capable of doing advanced study, (c) shows commendable effort, (d) good participation in class and (e) exhibits good attitudes and motivation.

I do however see a discrepancy of his final grade in eighth grade English of a C+. Ali received all A+s in his marking periods for English, but received a 75% on the final exam. His teacher’s calculations were off by one whole grade. According to River City School District grading policy the lowest his teacher could move his grade to a B+. I am surprised neither Ali’s administrator or guidance counselor picked up this grading error. It seems unjust.

I asked Ali about his early schooling experiences. He stated after his birth, his parents returned to Palestine where Ali lived for about a year. When he returned, Ali went to Head Start and also public school for two years. His parents then made a decision to send him to Catholic school. Ali’s states his transition to school was difficult because of his cultural isolation in his home:

Ali After I was born. I was sent back to Palestine right away. Because my mom wanted to have me there. But, I guess I came early, so I stayed there for I think a year and I came back here and started Head Start. But inside the house it’s like being in Palestine, because my parents are like really old fashioned. Arabic is spoken in the house and do they associate with other people that are Palestinian.

Ali states in Catholic school in the suburbs he felt “otherized” because he does not perceive himself as White, or Christian. He was attending a predominantly all White and Christian school, and he felt out of place. Ali expressed that students and teachers at the school were polite and kind in his presence, but he thought their kindness was “fake.” From Ali’s early schooling experience in Catholic school and the teachings of his parents not to trust Americans, Ali did not trust anyone, and kept to himself and was not social.

Camille I can see that you had some interesting schooling experiences, you went to a Parochial Catholic school? And how was it when you were in Parochial school, were they sensitive to your needs?

Ali No, not really … I was interested in learning and I did better than the majority of people when it came to like religion classes, actually kind of funny, cause you know it’s not my religion, but they used to make us go to church and stuff like that.

Camille Why did your parents choose the school?

Ali My parents didn’t want me to go to public school.

Camille Did you think you got a good education?

Ali Yeah, I mean I think I did get a pretty good education there cause when I hit middle school, pretty much all of middle school was really easy. Some of the math that I did in 6th grade I was doing in 7th and… it was pretty good, but like looking back on the whole thing I didn’t like it. It was really “fake.” For instance, classmates, they’d smile in your face and everyone would call each other friends and do that whole “You want to come over?” and all this other stuff, but then when they weren’t together or when you catch them out in other groups besides people that they’re usually with.
Camille: Did they treat you like you were a foreigner even though you were born in this country?

Ali: Yeah, when the teachers for some reason made it a habit to keep reminding everyone that I am Muslim … “Well Ali why don’t you tell us your perspective, you’re Arab or you’re Muslim.” I didn’t think it was necessary the way they … It just felt like they were pointing me out from like everybody else. Like I’d, I’d always have a different opinion because I was Arab or Muslim or, both…In Catholic school my grades were pretty good, B+, A … Yeah I was pretty dedicated to my schoolwork.

Camille: Well did that carry on into junior high? …

Ali: I think 7th grade I was really into my schoolwork but not because I liked it … I used it as a way to isolate myself from people.

When Ali entered a city middle school he was shocked by the high number of Black students, the kind of language he was hearing (abusive and foul), as well as the student hall and cafeteria topics regarding sexual acts. He was slightly offended and very intrigued. The language and topics were not part of his secular home life.

Ali: I wasn’t used to the diversity of a public city school… I know in Catholic school it was like predominantly White, and that was it.

Camille: Okay and now you have an interesting mix of different races and cultures?

Ali: Well not only that, but it was mannerisms and the way people went about things. I know in Catholic school the majority of kids were polite, … even when they were together and there was no people like you’d have your spats and people would say stuff and, that wouldn’t be deemed appropriate. But like in middle school it was like a thousand times worse. I was just like “whoa” … Like some of the topics and conversations that they were having were just way out my league.

Camille: Was it out of your league and was it offensive to you?

Ali: Umm … honestly like it wasn’t really offensive, … cause I was actually interested in some of the stuff they were talking about. I won’t lie to you, we don’t talk about stuff like that at home.

Later in the interview concerning Ali’s schooling experience, he talks about choosing to apply to Dewey’s IB Programme.

Camille: Did you choose it or your parents chose it?

Ali: No my parents didn’t choose it. My parents wanted me to do something really easy, so I could get good grades and keep going.

Camille: So grades were important to them and I see that you defined education differently – “there’s grades and then there’s an education.” That’s an interesting way to define it … I like that.

Ali: I was… random about things. I was just like oh IB program and the counselor approached me about it, and I know your grades are pretty good and you should try it out. And I was just like okay, signed my name on the paper and they sent it in. I
really didn’t know anything about the IB program besides “It’s hard, and I think you can do it”, and I was “Oh really. Okay” … You, sign your name and the next thing I know, you’re accepted and I came here.

Camille  What do you think about the experience here?

Ali   Umm … I liked it I think overall. Yeah for the most part, I liked it a lot better than the middle school. Middle school was rough for me. I had a lot of problems there.

In middle school, Ali quickly learned he was defined as White, in a predominantly Black urban middle school and that was not a good thing according to his peers. He needed to be tough in order to survive, and began to fight students who would tease him. Ali states:

Ali   Like I said, the defenses threw up and I started becoming really witty with comebacks…. People would say “stuff” and I wouldn’t say anything at all, but then … after a while you kind of get sick of it … I never really liked getting pushed around. Well it was a mixture of fists and words, cause sometimes words just didn’t work.

He found quickly that these actions were not appreciated at home or in school. He then decided to fight with his words and his wit only. He also “changed” his ways when he came to Dewey High School.

Camille  So 9th grade you still had this kind of energy, you had the armor up somewhat. Why did the armor come down?

Ali   It never really came down. I think it stayed up …that’s when I pretty much didn’t really talk to anybody, but a few people… I don’t know why, when I came in 9th grade, I was like… I’m not going to talk to anybody. My serious goal was to not make any friends at all. I didn’t want to talk to people at all, but some people just managed to get in.

Camille  Why was that? Did you think getting close to people would ruin your academic possibilities by distractions, or what was it?

Ali   I didn’t want to get hurt … cause I had friends in elementary school, found out later that they weren’t friends at all …and the same thing happened in middle school where a lot of the people I considered friends were just like … it was just fake.

Camille  That happens to a lot of us … That’s part of growing up.

Sometimes one’s schooling experiences and the people that we befriend and “network” with us can change our attitudes, perceptions and behaviors about schooling and ourselves. Such is the case with Ali. Later in the interview, Ali reflects to a tumultuous time in his life concerning his parents’ attitudes, perceptions and behaviors towards Americans, and why he ran away from home in 9th grade and returned. He also informs me how coming to Dewey High School changed his life.
Ali
When I hit high school… why am I even going to bother with it, making a few so-called friends and then just having them later on just tell you like, you know…?

Camille
Do you have friends now? I mean what changed?

Ali
Oh yeah … it was pretty much them. I give my friends credit, the ones I consider friends... I give them so much credit cause I was really rude to them too! For some reason, they just kept coming back, and then I was just like why are they being so, you know, like persistent … and then I just let them in I guess, and then I was just like, you know what, they’re not that bad and then it kind of stayed … they just kind of stayed with me.

Later in my interview with Ali, he makes reference to when he ran away from home and why.

Ali
Yeah I came back and that’s when I met like that one person Malika. She was a median between me and my family … They [his parents] were driving me up the wall … Like the whole cultural conflict … American … Like my parents were telling me you’re not American, you’re Arabian … but like I didn’t feel it that much. I was born and raised here, and like the people you talk to and all the stuff you see … So, … It just didn’t fit. It was just hard to find…which one am I? I like “bolted.” I need a step back, without any kind of motivation whatsoever, where it was just me … you know, you eliminate the things that were putting the force on you, so that you can actually think about it yourself, without anyone trying to sway you…and then after I thought, I’d pretty much figured it out, I came back.

In Ali’s case a change in schooling experience results in a change in attitude, perceptions and behaviors towards school via his friends that differs from his family. Ali’s habitus is altered.

Institutional agency

Table 6.2 shows how Ali responded to his Network Survey.

Table 6.2: Ali’s Network Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
<th>A. Teachers</th>
<th>B. Friends</th>
<th>C. Peers</th>
<th>D. Relatives</th>
<th>E. Other Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Give me the moral support I need to do well in school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I rely on them for advice and guidance in making important school-related decisions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Are sensitive to my personal needs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Are good at helping me solve school related or academic problems</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I have a trusting and good relationship with them</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. They have shown me through their actions how to be successful in school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ali’s responses to his Network Survey are all outliers, with not one category scoring above a five and most categories receiving a score of 1. Overall, Ali’s institutional agency looks bleak and nonexistent. Fortunately, these quantitative data do not reveal an accurate picture of Ali’s support. His qualitative data refutes his quantitative data, as you will read in the following pages.

Ali wrote in his open-ended Written Questionnaire about the power and influence of his friends in supporting his academic success. He wrote:

Academically speaking I would have to say Malika has influenced me the most because she seems very dedicated to her work and encourages me to be the same. The encouragement and the fact that she cared pushed me along. I would have to say my life was most influenced by Mai Ling and Malika towards the end of freshman year.

In our interview, I probed further and asked about the importance of his friends Malika and Mai Ling. I inquired:

Camille: Who would you say, inspired you the most do you say academically, was it Malika?
Ali: Well Malika and Mai Ling; we are pretty close.
Camille: Friends from the beginning?
Ali: Yeah … freshmen year … cause they were there for the whole runaway thing. So they helped me out with that.
Camille: I was terrified and they told me, “Don’t worry we’ve got it taken care of.”

I also asked about his relatives’ influence regarding academic support. Ali’s parents encourage him to be academically successful, because neither of them graduated from high school. Ali looks up to his eldest sister and has her determination not to be stereotyped, or to follow the more traditional Arab lifestyle.

Ali: Like my parents, they put pressure to do academically well. I think that’s because neither of them … like my mom didn’t graduate from high school because like the conflict [His mother was living in Palestine] that they were having back home and there was a fear of getting raped while they were walking to school, so she got “pulled out”…My grandfather told her she couldn’t go anymore, cause he didn’t want nothing happening to her. And my dad was … he was really immature … I would say that’s like the only word I could think of, and he was very easily swayed by what other people say.

Camille: They didn’t want that to happen to you?
Ali: No –for instance, when … my dad didn’t finish junior high, he dropped out … but it was because, for one, his parents didn’t really put much emphasis on school, and another reason was because he was too busy like trying to impress his “friends” you know, and so he had to “act cool” and he just dropped cause he never did any work.
Camille
Now you have a sister who I met. [Ali’s sister used to come to parent-teacher conferences with her father to hear how Ali was doing in school. She would often ask all the questions about Ali’s school work and behavior, and would take notes.] And she’s very successful in school, but you also say that you have a sibling who’s not successful. Who is that – can you talk about it?

Ali
My second oldest sister…honestly … she’s like my dad, I would say. The second she hit junior high, it was all about what people say, so she doesn’t do work and she gets in trouble a lot, cause she’s always trying to defend somebody. …She’s really vain and she’s all about her image.

Camille
Why do you think you and your sister a [university]…are successful?

Ali
I know my sister at university … I think her drive is to beat the stereotype of Arab growth, like getting married early and not going to college for … and all that … at least from like the Palestinian growth … from our place. And I think she’s just like trying not to get married … That’s like me!

Camille
Be a professional student?

Ali
Yeah …she’s doing actually pretty good … She’s really determined with her work and she’s got her Co-Op right now … She’s making pretty good money [ students at Ali’s sister’s university have a program that they work with a corporation over the summer and get paid to “intern”] !

Habitus: Definition of schooling success

For Ali schooling success can have two meanings. One is more traditional and is the way schooling success is “measured” in schools today. The other is more personal and is more about challenging one to go beyond the innate knowledge and traditional schooling curricula and strive for more academic challenges. Ali wrote in his open-ended Written Questionnaire:

Schooling success to me has two meanings. Grades and Education.

*Grades* are a defining factor in school. They are used to determine your intelligence and how well you are doing in all your classes and they help determine your future (i.e. college). So the higher your grades, the more successful you are at school (sic).

*Education* is another term that I would use to define schooling success. The harder the classes you take, the more successful you are at school because you are challenging yourself and completing harder level of work than others in your class.

Like other case study student participants, Ali’s definition of success changes to the axiom of the more rigorous the academic program, the more successful you are in school. This “new” definition of schooling success is more about the intrinsic processes of attaining a good education and less about the extrinsic superficial rewards of high letter grades.
Habitus: Extracurricular activities

Ali wrote in his open-ended Written Questionnaire about his extracurricular activities and academic and cultural interests. He wrote:

I use to participate in a sport- swim team. I joined the team at first to strengthen my body and to get more in shape and later felt a need to help the team. I think I chose swimming because I wanted a change. I was tired of doing the same thing every day and swimming added an extra challenge and stirred up my schedule. It was also a great stress relief from the work I do in school and the stresses I have at home.

I joined chorus because I thought it was fun- I enjoyed singing while in the shower, so I was like why not take it a step further and actually get taught how to better my singing. I found that I am quite an effective baritone/bass singer. I also did it to avoid going to some classes. Since every so often we were pulled out of class to practice. This interruption in the everyday schedule made things less stressful and a lot more fun.

I enjoy going to museums and looking at fossils of dinosaurs and looking at pottery and other artifacts that had belonged to ancient civilizations. I enjoy all sorts of music. Techno, Classical, Rock, R&B, Rap, Soft Rock, Opera/Vocalists, and Country are just examples of the genre of music I enjoy. I enjoy dancing at home and at school dances and anywhere else it’s permitted. I find it quite fun. I find festivals very interesting too. I like seeing all the different types of people and crafts that are usually found at them.

Movies are also a very favorite pastime. I enjoy watching pretty much any kind of movie, especially ones that deal with the supernatural (although have very human problems/situations and contain some sort of moral or macrocosm).

Ali’s extracurricular activities represent a wide variety and depth of interests. It is apparent that he is exploring outside of his culture and social class. I asked Ali if his parents had similar interests. He was very blunt about his interests and those of his parents as not being similar.

Camille You like to be challenged. You also enjoy an amazing amount of different kinds of music and museums; you like dinosaurs and fossils, and pottery and artifacts, and movies are your favorite past time too! Is this similar to your parents?

Ali No – umm … actually not at all!

Feeling uncomfortable, Ali then changed the subject somewhat, and stated the only similar interest he and his parents share is that he does well academically.

Habitus: the “Rules of the Game”

Ali, like many other student participants, is apologetic for knowing the “rules of the game” and has ethical problems with them. He would like to challenge and contest these “rules”, but also understands there is a “time and a place” to oppose them. He knows “the rules,” but is
not totally accepting of them. I asked Ali:

Camille       Do you know how to play “the rules of the game”?  
Ali             I think so … but…

Camille       You were resistant for a while?  
Ali             Yeah … I think I still am … when I think of rules of the game, they’re all unwritten … there’s not a lot of written rules in the game. So I figure if they’re not written then they can be challenged, or they can like be broken, because they’re not written – so they can’t tell you it’s set in stone. I have to be accepted into like a social category … or I know they’re socially set up, but a lot of the time I look at the people who set them up, or who might have influenced it and it just doesn’t fit everybody. So some of these rules I … I know when to be quiet and I know when not to be pretty much [outspoken] … cause I figure there’s no point in getting in trouble and then … cause that would … you know, it’s live to find another day kind of thing. So you know when to be quiet, you can start up again later, but with more back up.

Later on in the interview, I asked Ali about his trajectory and how that differed from his parents.

Camille       When did you believe that your goals were obtainable?  
Ali             I think … middle school, I used to always say, “I’m going,” … but I think I really felt it in middle school, because I had a few teachers who used to say that all I’d ever be was a corner store owner like my father, or like all the other Arab people. Yeah it was messed up … And I’d tell them like “That’s not true, that’s not going to happen you know. Like I have plans and blah, blah, blah” … and they’re just like “Yeah” … and they kind of give you that “Okay I believe you honey” kind of thing, but like it’s really …

Camille       So because they dismissed you, it really got you angry and you said I’m going to show you? So do you think that spurred some energy underneath you?  
Ali             Yeah, but like the whole thing is… I really didn’t want to end up in the store …[Ali’s father’s store has been robbed several times in the past two years and working there is dangerous. Several Arab owned corner stores have been robbed and their owners killed.] They made me work in the store. Well, I mean like it provides food for the family and you know you live comfortably, stuff like that sure … but…it’s like “a slave job,” cause I never used to see my father at all. I’d wake up and he’d be at work, and I’d go to sleep and he’d be at work. And like on birthdays he’d come and wake us up while we were sleeping and say “Happy Birthday,” … I don’t talk to him very much.

Camille       So you want this different for yourself…. College affords you possibilities …. Are you thinking about it will also afford you a different lifestyle?  
Ali             Yeah –
Summary

In following Diagram 1b, Ali is “bicultural” in the cultural capital sense of the word. He attained the cultural capital of the dominant culture through his early schooling experiences in an all White, predominately middle-class Catholic school. His immersion in a school with students of the dominant culture, as well as the role modeling of his peers, led to Ali’s understanding and “ways of knowing” regarding the discourse and mannerisms of the White middle class. Unlike other case study student participants, Ali did not gain the cultural capital from contact with teachers or other adults. It is mainly through his observations and social interactions with his peers in a suburban Catholic school that he obtained his understanding. He does articulate these differences of class and culture when he transfers to Hawthorne Middle School to continue his education in River City.

Ali also did not accept institutional agency from his teachers in elementary school or middle school. However, by his teacher’s comments in his progress reports in middle school, it appears they had a positive viewpoint of Ali’s academic potential and were supportive. What hindered Ali’s from gaining institutional agency at this point in time was (a) his inability to trust anyone due to his parent’s teachings and his early schooling experiences regarding “so called friends”, (b) his inability to trust his teacher’s motivations regarding sponsorship, (c) his meritocratic notions of being able thus far to be academically successful on his own and, therefore, the feeling that he does not need anyone’s support, (d) his family whom he trusts in middle school does support his desire to be academically successful and this suffices his needs.

It is only out of the persistence of his friends Malika and Mai Ling in high school that Ali begins to trust people’s motivations and allows his friends to be his institutional agents. Another force that changed Ali’s outlook was the academic rigor of the IB Programme that made he and all the study participants rethink and redefine their definitions of academic success. Ali had very high grades until he came to Dewey High School. He, like other students in this study, was shocked at the lower letter grades they received in the IB Programme compared to their early schooling experiences.

Once Ali accepted sponsorship from Malika, he also gained her social capital (networks) thus increasing his institutional agency. He then became a part of her study group where students collaborated their academic efforts and knowledge to complete projects and internal assessments. He met other students whom he began to socialize with and joined extracurricular activities such as the swim team and choir. Malika’s easy relationship with adults and teachers was also transferred to Ali, as witnessed by his visit to his guidance counselor in tenth grade, in which he revealed the robbery of his parents store and students comments about “his people” and the recent terrorist attacks. Having known Ali in his freshman year, I know that this was a giant leap of faith and trust in adults outside his home.

It appears his habitus was altered several times. The first time was when teachers in middle school made comments about Ali becoming a corner grocery storeowner. This stereotype and condescending remark spurred Ali on to defy their prediction of his trajectory and state he was attending college after graduation from high school. He set this goal and he worked to see it to fruition. The second time Ali’s habitus is altered is when he defied his parents proclamations of his “true” identity and ran away from home to work through his cultural and national identity, only to return to his family’s acceptance of Ali’s identity as an American. The third time Ali’s habitus was altered is when he accepted Malika’s institutional agency via their friendship based on trust. The fourth time Ali’s habitus was altered is when he redefined what it means to be academically successful and therefore continued in the IB Programme with average grades that
mean more to him than an easy A in another less rigorous academic program.

Ali’s acceptance and attendance to the state university is evidence that Ali has the social, cultural and human capital of the dominant culture and is in sharp contrast to his parent’s social, cultural and human capital and life trajectories.

I also believe Ali benefited from “school mix effect.” The diversity of the IB Programme student population, unlike his experiences in elementary and middle school where one race and/or social class dominated, situated Ali in a student population that has a diversity of race and ethnicity, as well as social class. The only similar factor of the student population in the IB Programme is their previous academic success, their intelligence and willingness to cooperate with their teachers and with each other.

The IB Programme curriculum and instruction also had a great influence on Ali’s academic success. Receiving letter grades and GPAs that were outside Ali’s status quo, due to the academic rigor of the IB Programme, caused Ali to redefine what knowledge attainment means at a very personal level and not that of the popular culture that identifies success with high letter grades and GPAs.

The IB Programme teacher’s pedagogical practices of encouraging students to contest knowledge in constructive ways in the course work brought more enjoyment to Ali, who naturally enjoys contesting and debating, as witnessed in my classroom experiences and observations of him. It is unclear if the school culture (the Dewey family) was an integral part of Ali’s academic success. Nor do I believe the administrations “mission” was adhered to when Ali was asked to leave the program because his GPA had slipped below 2.0 due to his months of absence when he ran away from home and some teachers unwillingness to allow make up work to be completed and handed in for a grade. My contention is that the IB Steering Committee knew of his extenuating circumstances and should have taken that into consideration before sending him a cold and impersonal form letter stating he should drop from the program. Since then, the administration has changed at Dewey and the new IB Director is very motivated to keep as many students in the program. She encourages students to stay in the program and makes it difficult for them to drop. This has been a very good change.

Case study student participant: Malika

Background

Malika is a young working class Black woman, living in poverty and coming from a single parent home. She is also a recipient of public urban education in River City. She came to Dewey High’s Pre-IB Programme in 2000. She was a student in my Pre-IB English I and II Honors class. Malika is presently attending a small, academically strong, Catholic college in the northeastern United States on a full academic scholarship.

Malika lived at home with her mother. She is the youngest child out of four children and has three older brothers, who no longer live at home. She and her mother have a very close relationship. In her interview Malika states:

My mom had her first child when she was 15 and then my other brother when she was 16, so she never finished high school, but she always instilled the values in me and my brothers to finish. My older two brothers, I think one graduated and
the other one he went to 11th grade and then dropped out. I think it’s partially because my mom was so young and her mother didn’t talk to her [about sex] … it was different because my mom started talking to me [about sex] when I was about 6 or 7.

Malika also told me that her mother reserves one night a week that she and her mother have dubbed “Girls Night In.” This is an evening set aside that she and her mother, aunt and female cousins to talk about men, relationships and sex. They watch movies, play games, eat popcorn and pizza and discuss whatever is on their minds. She also states there is a code of confidentiality in that “nothing leaves the house.” Therefore, their discussions are open and frank. Feelings of trust, sisterhood, sharing, giving advice and guidance flow forth and she and her cousins look forward to these evenings. She also acknowledges she is fortunate to have this kind of relationship with her mother. She states:

I have a lot of friends who can’t talk to their parents and I just can’t see why they can’t … I don’t see why you can’t talk to your parents, but I guess every parent is not the same, everybody doesn’t have my mom or hasn’t grown up the way I’ve grown up!

She understands not all young women experience the closeness that she and her mother share. There are also overtones in her discussion that lead to her mother’s fear of possible sexual abuse by a male family members. Malika states:

My mom has always separated me from my brothers in a way, because you know a lot of stuff happening and she’s always sheltered me from them because, you know, anything can happen regardless of who you are. You know, who in your family, you never know. So, I was never allowed to play with them … I wasn’t lonely, but I always found stuff to do. She wouldn’t let me sit on my brother’s laps, not even my dad’s … and it was just something that … because a lot of the girls in my family, were molested and stuff… my mom didn’t want that to happen to me! So, she sheltered me in a way to keep that from happening.

Because Malika was not allowed to play with her brothers and her mother protected and sheltered her from the “neighborhood” experience of street savvy youth [she was rarely allowed to play with kids in the neighborhood, unless she was supervised by her mom] her mother enrolled her in many extracurricular activities when she was young. Malika indicates: “She [her mother] stayed active, especially in Dance Patrol. She stayed active helping. You know we had practice three days a week, so she was there at practice, helping out.”

Malika mother’s actions have had very strong influence on Malika. I called Malika’s mother and asked if she would fill out a Written Questionnaire and if I could possibly interview her in person or on the telephone. She said she would think about it, but she thought she had not done anything that was “special” in raising her daughter. She also lamented that her writing skills “were not very good” she stated: “You know I didn’t graduate from high school.” She was feeling she wouldn’t be able to explain herself well. All I could think of when she said that was her negative schooling experiences. Did she think I was another teacher with a red pen in hand, ready to mark her Written Questionnaire? However, she did not pass these negative experiences on to her daughter. I told her, I was not interested in the technical aspects of her writing in that I was looking for her content in what she had to say about her daughter. She stated she would wait until Malika returned from her six-week college’s Higher Education Opportunity Program that
was mandatory for her daughter to attend [offered to historically disadvantaged students by either race or social class] and stated Malika would help her write the responses to my questions. She was very polite, but I never received anything from Malika’s mother. However, I have heard from Malika via e-mail in November 2004, stating she “loves college” and wants to change her course of study to speech pathology. She emailed me again in 2006, and is pursuing her degree in speech pathology and would like to get together over the holidays. She loves college and is involved in student government and started her own group for minority students at her college. I would not have expected anything less of her. She is a born leader.

Schooling experiences/academic performance

Malika is a very intelligent, articulate and caring individual who is liked and respected by her teachers and peers. I appreciated her candor and frank discussions in class, relating the text (epic poem, novel or play) to current social and political issues. She is a “dynamo” in group work and collaborative assignments. I would sit back and watch Malika organize her group by their strengths (which she had already observed and analyzed) and her group presentations were well organized and comprehensive. I often would choose her group to go first, because I knew it would be done well and would set the tone for the other groups to follow. She has such impeccable leadership skills, so highly developed and refined, that people do not realize they are being led.

When I asked student participants in their interview about their schooling experiences, I would ask them to recall their experience in K-12. However, Malika wanted to tell me about preschool first, as did some of the other study participants. Malika’s leadership skills, love of school and her relationships with her teachers are witnessed at a very early age. Malika made those vertical linkages to adults outside her social class and culture early and easily and has maintained them. When I read Malika’s academic accumulative folder, the only negative comment was that she was “too talkative.” This is probably why she also mentions she spent time “in the corner.”

Camille
Describe to me you schooling experiences from pre-school to present … telling me how you were perceived in school by your teachers and you attitudes and perceptions of school. Start from kindergarten.

Malika
I can start with pre-school if you like? I have a few memories about pre-school. I had not necessarily a lot of friends, but I don’t know I just like to be around the kids. And I remember we used to have this little boat…. We had an actual boat! And I would be the one to get all the kids to come in and play “Row, row, row your boat” with me. I’d get them singing the songs and stuff. That was one of my favorite things in pre-school … When I started kindergarten … my teacher was Ms. Gardener, and I still talk to her to this day. All my teachers, I still have ... I still keep in contact with her, we still talk, I go visit her and I don’t know, it’s always been the same. I’ve always liked to help the teacher. I was the one to teach other kids to do their A, B, C’s and help with the cards, and help with the reading time. You know, of course, I was in the corner a few times.

Camille
Did you like to be the leader?

Malika
Yes, I did! … I always liked to be the leader. I don’t know, not too many of the other kids took the initiative, to say, “Well let’s play this,” or anything. So I always
liked to do it, and that was one of my biggest things. I don’t know, it just made me happy when she [the classroom teacher] comes to me. It was the same -- my 3rd grade teacher lives down the street from me, I see her every day. We still talk. She wrote me a recommendation. All my teachers I’ve been close with. Even my 1st grade teacher, we go out to lunch.

Camille So you weren’t shy about having relationships with adults?

Malika Oh, I love adults.

Malika’s perception is that she had very positive early schooling experiences. Her first grade teacher wrote: “Malika is a good student who enjoys school. She is doing well in reading and math.” However, in third grade Malika’s report card is filled with As, Bs and a few are C+. In the first marking period her teacher writes: “Malika is an enthusiastic worker. She is making good progress. Malika needs to follow grammar and punctuation rules.” In her second marking period her teachers adds: “She has improved in many areas.” In the third marking period she remarks: “Malika needs to be more responsible for homework. Malika is being distracted by outside interests. Encourage her to strive for excellence.” [This is also the times when Malika spent time in the corner on punishment]. And in the final marking period her teacher writes: “Malika is a wonderful, loving young lady. I have enjoyed having her in my class. She has a lot of potential. Best wishes for continued success.” Her third grade teacher also sent the following remarks home, dated November 1, 1994.

Malika strives very hard to do her best at all times. She concentrates on her work and is very neat with her work. At times she is too talkative with her neighbors around her. She is very cooperative in the classroom and is always willing to complete assigned tasks. Conference is requested regarding Malika’s progress at this time.

The teacher requested the conference not about Malika’s academic progress, but about her talkative, socializing behaviors in the classroom. Malika also commented about the narrow curriculum and the lack of student diversity in elementary school and middle school. She stated:

Malika I realized after being in IB, coming from another school, my grades were not as good … I was the third in my class and this was a breeze – so when I came to high school I got a “reality check” … because my school was a predominantly Black middle school and when I came to Dewey I thought “Oh there’s some more people in the world!” … I see more diversity here. I see more people – I like this! And then you learn to learn about other cultures and stuff whereas … especially elementary school, all they taught us about was Africa … I mean I can tell you everything about Africa, but I can tell you nothing about Europe and China and Japan or South America. [Before she attended the IB Programme].

The rest of her schooling experience in middle school went well. She attended Martha Washington’s accelerated academic program and was encouraged by her guidance counselor to apply to the IB Programme. Malika’s interest and ease with talking with adults is evidenced in her early schooling experiences and in her Network Survey responses regarding institutional agency.
Table 6.3 (on the following page) shows how Malika responded to her Network Survey.

Table 6.3: Malika’s Network Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
<th>A. Teachers</th>
<th>B. Friends</th>
<th>C. Peers</th>
<th>D. Relatives</th>
<th>E. Other Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Give me the moral support I need to do well in school</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I rely on them for advice and guidance in making important school-related decisions</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Are sensitive to my personal needs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Are good at helping me solve school related or academic problems</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I have a trusting and good relationship with them</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. They have shown me through their actions how to be successful in school</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Malika’s responses in her Network Survey are not always similar to her responses in her Intensive Interview. In her Network Survey she ranks her relatives first (primarily her mother), teachers second and other adults third and her friends ranked fourth. However, in her interview she states her friends were her most important academic influence and teachers second. Although other adults ranked high, she does not mention them in her Intensive Interview.

When asked in the Written Questionnaire: “Who in your opinion has influenced you the most academically? (Siblings, friends, peers, relatives, and/or an adult mentor: such as a teacher, coach or clergy, etc.) Explain and cite examples.” Malika wrote:

I believe my peers have influenced me the most. Although the teachers have been there to teach me, I learn better from my peer study sessions. I find when you are surrounded by people who have the same goals and ambitions as you do, you are more apt to have the drive to get your work done and strive for more.

In our interview, Malika talks about the inspiration and support of her fellow classmates in the program and that being in the program has been more “than just academics.” She also reveals the formation of an “informal” study group that met every Tuesday and Thursday at the main public library in River City to help them “stay focused” and to complete projects.

Malika also takes pride in the “Peer to Peer” mentor program she and twelve other IB students created to help middle school students see there is a better way to live one’s life than “having sex and standing on the corner.” She also befriended Ali, who was taught not to trust anyone by his family and his negative experiences in a Catholic elementary school.

Having known Malika for six years, none of her actions are unexpected or unusual. She is, and continues to be, a loving, caring individual. Looking through her cumulative record, she was leading her class back in kindergarten and in elementary school. Her former elementary teachers commented on her leadership skills and willingness to help others. Not surprising then,
as now, Malika is well liked and respected by her peers. Her name comes up often in interviews and in informal conversations. Fortunately, no one has been able to squash her enthusiasm for reaching out to others and organizing activities and services that benefit all. I asked:

Camille …Students in the IB program … have you found other students to be supportive of your work, to help you … Has anyone here helped you, or you talked about study groups … Did you form the study group? Can you tell me a little bit about that? Why you did it and who they [OC: the students involved] were?

Malika Well when we started our study group, we started mostly in the 10th … Ninth grade year we had physics and Ms. Wheeler started the Saturday study sessions and Pamela Scott [upperclassmen] took me “under her wing” and really helped me. By me seeing an older girl who was doing good things, she was always positive, always had a smile on her face and I loved her spirit. So, I kind of took from her, that positive energy and just kind of put it in myself as well. In fact, everybody loves her, everybody sees that she’s smiling. She doesn’t have to be boggled down with a lot of problems that we cause for ourselves, as students. So, she’s happy and that’s all I wanted to do was to be happy. So, being in the study group not only just helped me academically, but socially and within myself. I found something out more than just academics. But as time went on, we started going to the downtown library on Tuesdays.

Camille And you do that on your own?

Malika We had to … if you wanted that project done … and I remember saying, “I need to get it from somebody.”

Camille Who was in the group?

Malika Well, it was a few of us. It was Chelsea Valenzuela, Mia Ling Smith, and Willow Burton, sometimes Ali would come, Ali Muhad. There was a few of us … it’s not that far back, but I can’t even remember … but each time it would change … we would all go and everybody knew where to meet on the top stairs [4th floor public library] on Tuesdays and Thursdays and … whatever project was due we would just work until 6:00PM, or whenever the library closed. So I mean that’s when they really started, our peer sessions … Well, last year, actually started a program at Martha Washington Middle School called “Peer to Peer” … and that’s where we mentored the younger kids.

Camille The students from Dewey did that?

Malika Yeah and there was twelve of us here and it was pretty much the people that I saw would show these younger kids that there are good things to do… You know, there are good people out there, there are other things to do, other than sex and standing on the street corner…You know, and that’s where I see a lot of them headed for some reason. So I felt that doing that would give them some initiative to say, “I can do this! I can stand alone!”

Camille Do you think Pamela Scott in a way kind of inspired you too, because you thought, wow, she inspired me, maybe I can inspire these youngsters?

Malika Yes exactly … I just love that when I see positive people, because I find that
sometimes when you’re around negative energy it just transfers right into you …

Camille: But it’s interesting that one of your very close friends is negative energy. So why have you opened the doors to Ali?

Malika: Well … I think Ali is a little misunderstood. To a lot of people he may seem like he’s always negative … but he’s really not. I figured out his secret … and I told him I wouldn’t tell anybody, but I’ll tell you. He’s really caring. I think he’s one of the people I was talking about who doesn’t want to be hurt, or scared of not having friends, because he tells me and Mai Ling all the time we were his closest friends, and he’s never had friends like us and I just … I love him … I told him he would be … I’m losing my words … I just can’t explain Ali.

Camille: The kind of relationship that you have is different?

Malika: Yeah – it’s different than any other relationship I’ve ever had with a person, because we started off as friends for some reason. In physics, he was one of the people in our study group, so we both struggled. So we’re like, I don’t know what Ms. Wheeler is talking about, but we’re going to help each other out … and we helped each other out and when he took his “little break” from school [Malika is referring to when Ali ran away from home for four months and went to Texas and Mexico.]

Camille: Yes, I remember that … but you kept telling me, “It’s okay, I got it handled.”

Malika: “It’s okay,” he told me. He was leaving, and I don’t know for those days he was gone, I really realized how much, how big a part of my life he was … He was a big part of my life and I missed him so much, and then when he called me and told me he was ready to come back, I can’t explain how I felt. I was screaming, … and I called his parents and they were happy. Ali … he’s afraid of being hurt. He will come across as being negative and you know try to show that he doesn’t care, but he really cares a lot about all of us.

Camille: How do you feel about your peers here? … About this experience? Do you think it was worth being in the IB program?

Malika: *I think the only thing that was worth being in the IB program was the relationships that I developed with friends and with teachers and everything.*

Camille: Well wouldn’t you have been able to develop those experiences in another program?

Malika: Well yeah, … We know when a certain person has a look on their face, maybe if Chelsea comes in she looks sad, we know, “Okay just give her some room,” or if you know Ali comes in, maybe he wants to be consoled, so just kind of … I don’t know, it’s little stuff like that to me that makes a world of difference. I know people that are not in the IB program and the seniors that are not in the IB program they don’t have the bond that we have developed. I mean I’ve talked to a lot of girls on the step team, a lot of girls off the step team, cause I know quite a few people outside the IB and the relationship is just not the same. Their focus is not the same … as all of our focus.

Camille: …Do you support each other to stay focused?
Malika: Yes … I think we have because once … you know, usually “Okay guys we have to do this!” so … one year it was Whitney, me and Bruno and Willow. We all said, “Okay we’re going to make each other do this!” … You know, cause we were all getting lazy … we’re going to make each other … “There was no ‘if, ands or buts’! …So, we said, “I don’t care if you get mad, I don’t care what happens, you are doing this work!” … “Do it!” … So, we’d call each other on the phone, “Stop watching TV and do your work … okay?” “Okay, I got to do it” …

Malika also spoke of the importance of the love and support she receives from her mother.

Camille: How does your mother support your academic success?

Malika: …In elementary school we used to have a thing called “terrific kid” and “perfect terrific kid” … and every year I was both, you know, a few times a year and so I don’t know that kind of just gave me the incentive to want to keep on doing good things, because if you get good results, then you know you’re going to naturally keep wanting to get those results, and my mom was just always there. Always, no matter what she always said “Malika you can do it!” and she didn’t even really have to make me, I just loved school.

The data from her interview reveals the sustaining support of her mother and the newly formed support and networking with her friends has influenced her academic success. Her habitus is altered when she no longer works on the individualist meritocratic notion of success, but initiates and forms a network with her friends and peers to achieve their ultimate goals of graduation and acceptance into university degree programs.

Habitus: Definition of schooling success to maintain academic excellence.

Malika, in the spirit of many study participants, views her personal work ethic, heartfelt commitment, goals and trajectory more important in her definition of schooling success than grades, GPAs or the expectations of teachers and family members. She writes:

SCHOOLING SUCCESS is when a person gets a goal in which they try their hardest to achieve it. I do not believe a GPA accurately shows the amount of effort put forward by a student. I believe personal goals are a lot more important than those set by teachers and family members. One would only obtain total success if their hard work is from the heart.

Malika understands that the goal of academic success is personal, and can only come from the individual who is working towards that goal and not from the perspective or influence of one’s family or teachers.

Habitus: Extracurricular activities

Malika wrote about her love to stay active and involved. Her mother also participated in enrolling Malika into after school activities. She wrote:
I always participated in extracurricular activities. I am one person who loves to stay involved in different types of activities. When I was three, I began Dance Patrol. Dance: African and Modern. Also, I like tap, ballet, jazz and acrobatics. Peer Mediator, cheerleading, Step Team, chorus, and band and in the Magnolias (An African-American dance and story telling troupe) and Project Pace. My mother was the one who enrolled me in dance classes. In middle school, I played tennis and volleyball and was President of the school newspaper. In high school, I joined the Step Team and worked on the Year Book. I also initiated a program called “Peer to Peer” at Martha Washington Middle School.

When I asked students if their interests were similar to their parent(s) Malika wrote in her Written Questionnaire:

My interests are very similar to my mom. I think this is due to the fact that my mom started talking to me about life’s issues at a young age. Issues such as my period, sex, school and being a young lady were (sic) all talked about at about the age of 7 or 8. Cultural aspects such as the music my mom used to listen to versus what I listen to now has (sic) been helpful in my understanding the roots of music and it allows me to compare the difference in the generations and what was popular in their time.

I also asked students about their academic and cultural interests. Malika wrote in her Written Questionnaire:

My academic interests are classes such as Theory of Knowledge [a mandatory course in the IB Programme that runs from their junior through to their senior year] that allows me to be free with my opinion. I like to read books mostly by African-American authors because I find myself bonding with the characters created in the stories. I listen to a lot of Hip-Hop and R & B music. This music is very upbeat and nice to listen to while doing homework because it keeps me awake.

Many of Malika’s friends are also Hip Hop and R &B fans. I did not realize how popular R & B is with young adults.

Habitus: the “Rules of the Game”

In Malika’s Written Questionnaire, in response to the question “Do you know what it means to play by the “rules of the game?” If you do know, please explain,” she wrote:

I believe it means to play fair and do things according to how they are meant to be done (sic). In order to get ahead in life, one must complete all the necessary steps and never cheat anyone out of anything because it will not get you far in life.

To the follow–up question, “How did you learn this? By observation or interaction with parents, siblings, friends, peers, relatives and/or other adult mentors such as teachers, coaches, clergy, etc?” she responded:
I learned this by watching all my surroundings. I notice there are people in my own family who do not play by the rules of the game and therefore do not have much success due to that.

My final question was “Can you tell me when (time) this occurred in your development (age/grade)?” She wrote: “There is not a definite time because I have always been very observant, but I would say about 8th grade, when I really began to analyze it.”

When I asked Malika in the Intensive Interview if she knew what are the “rules of the game” she responded:

**Malika**

*I’ve been very observant forever. I just like to watch people and see what makes them work and how their lives are and, maybe I’ll ask some questions just to see how they will respond* to little things. I don’t know that’s just been me. Well I can remember … as early as 8th or 9th grade when I first started being able to analyze … just sat back and watched it, but I never quite understood. *I guess sometimes you have to experience things on your own* and something as simple as having a friendship or talking to other people and seeing them try to be vindictive to others, trying to hurt somebody else. Little things like that and it’s like, you can’t do that if you expect a certain outcome, and even if someone, you know, treats you a certain way, you don’t do that because regardless you don’t want to be treated that way. *Sometimes you have to step outside of your pride, outside of what you’re used to doing to have a great outcome and try to think on a different scale if you’re not having good results with what you’ve been doing.*

Malika, unlike other students, has more of an “ethical twist” on knowing how to “play the rules of the game.” She has the understanding that “you have to complete all the necessary steps… you have to think of the overall outcome and … you have to be ethical” and honor those you work with or…. she warns your indecent behavior and attitudes will impede your progress and you will not get the “outcomes” you expected. Malika also stated she learned this by observation around 8th or 9th grade by watching those who were successful and those who were not and analyzing those processes.

**Summary**

Consistent with **Diagram 1b**, Malika is “bicultural” in the cultural capital sense of the word. She has attained the cultural capital of the dominant culture through her early contacts and interactions with her elementary teachers (that she still maintains).

This quickly led to Malika accepting institutional agency from her teachers. Through her observations of them and analyzing their responses to her inquiries she was able to judge if she could trust them or not. She also expanded her adult contacts through her many extracurricular activities that continued to aid her understanding of the discourses and mannerisms that were preferred by the dominant mainstream cultural capital of schools and beyond. This in turn, made her more “attractive” to other knowing adults (teacher and mentors) who further sponsored her. This became a cyclical pattern. The contacts and sponsorship of her teachers and mentors help altered her habitus by developing attitudes, perceptions and behaviors about school and mainstream culture that were different from what her mother experienced.

Malika is a person who maintains she has always been observant and asks questions to get to know her possible institutional agents, to see if they are trustworthy. She stated:
I’ve been very observant forever. I just like to watch people and see what, makes them work and how their lives are and, maybe I’ll ask some questions just to see how they will respond to little things. I don’t know that’s just been me.

In turn, what Malika had gained—i.e., the cultural capital (way of knowing, discourse and mannerism to success) such as her ways of knowing how the system operates (the rules of the game) and her repeated contacts with her multiple institutional agents is transferred to her friends and peers through the social network she formed (the study group).

I believe the study group formation was brought on by the “school mix effect” due to the rigor of the IB Programme’s curriculum and instruction and Malika’s trustworthiness and leadership skills. The students were put into a position to collaborate and network their knowledge and resources to be academically successful. In turn, Malika attainment of the social capital of the dominant culture and her collaboration with fellow students has further contributed to her agency by providing her with additional institutional agents. For Malika the diversity of the school population was a plus. She enjoys being with people outside her own social class and culture as evidenced by her close friends.

**Case study student participant: Antoine**

**Background**

Antoine is a young Black male, who has been a recipient of public urban education in River City throughout his schooling career. Antoine comes from a working class, single parent home and has lived in poverty. He has three stepbrothers and two stepsisters from his father’s and mother’s previous marriages who are much older than Antoine. Both of his parents graduated from high school and attended either trade school or a community college (two year associates degree program). Antoine indicates his parents met and married in Washington, D.C., but moved to River City because his parents believed the schools would provide Antoine with a higher quality education.

He lived with both his parents until he was eight years old and his parents divorced. Antoine remarks about the impact his parents’ divorce had on him, which he believes made him more adaptable because he “lived” in so many different homes with different people. He worries about his ease in making transitions to these different social contexts and sometimes wonders whom he really is. Antoine states:

My parents divorced they split up … right after my 8th birthday, and so like that was a hard transition, because they were going through a divorce. So every summer, I would stay with my godmother who stayed way on the east side on Market Square off of Bonaparte Boulevard, so it was like … I really think I’m kind of multifaceted, cause I’ve stayed literally every place in the city … I stayed. Everybody asked “How do you know where Antoine is?” … I’ve stayed everywhere in the city.

Camille  You think that’s why you’re so adaptable?

Antoine  I think I’ve seen so many different people and just like second nature to me…The hard thing I think about that is finding out who you really are and being able to adapt like that so easily and realizing when am I being real with myself. So I think
that’s the most important – *I got to be real with myself.*

He then lived with both his mother and father sharing custody. This resulted in Antoine moving weekly. He would spend some days of the week with his father and other days of the week with his mother and summers with his godmother. Although his parents were divorced they were very involved as a couple in Antoine’s academic performance.

His father remarried in the spring of 2000. In 2001, Antoine moved in with his father and stepmother, because he and his father thought it was important for Antoine to be with his father in his high school years. His father died in the summer of 2003, months after being diagnosed with colon cancer. He did not tell Antoine of his illness until July and died in August 2003. His father’s reason was that he did not want to distract his son from his studies. Antoine stated he saw his father looking tired and losing weight and thought something was wrong, but because his father had always been so honest with him he didn’t take his concern further.

After his father’s death, Antoine began his final year at Dewey High School and lived with his stepmother for a few months until she left River City to “leave behind the memories” and be closer to her parents (she was much younger than Antoine’s father who was in his late sixties). As a result Antoine moved into an apartment with his twenty-year-old male cousin and completed his senior year at Dewey High School. Antoine is presently attending Morehouse College in Atlanta Georgia on a full academic scholarship.

*Schooling experience/academic performance*

As many of the study participants have expressed, Antoine appreciated the small size of his elementary school, its “family feel” and the high expectations of his teachers and parents. He replies:

**Antoine**

I attended 137th Street Elementary School, for grades 1 through 3, and I think because it was such a small school, and it fit into the community, it kind of got that “family feel,” and so I guess a lot of people really expected a lot out of me, because they thought I had a lot of potential, and so that’s what really drove me through my schooling career, was other people’s expectations for me.

In Antoine’s academic accumulative file, his teachers express praise for Antoine’s school work but were less than satisfied with his behavior, which seems to have been an ongoing problem throughout most of his schooling career (K-10). However, Antoine was placed in academically accelerated programs since fourth grade. Therefore, although he was a discipline problem, the River City School district adhered to his placement in appropriate academic programs. His first grade teacher writes:

Antoine is going great in all subjects. He is a smart boy. Very creative. However, at times he interrupts the class and is not focused. I think this can be alleviated with more supervision.

In fourth grade, Antoine attended another elementary school in River City to be part of an accelerated program. His teachers remarked:

Antoine is an excellent speaker and has the potential to be an outstanding student. He needs to take his time with his work and follow directions. Antoine must also
use his time more productively. He is working on self-control and has made some improvement in this area.

Antoine’s mother responded to the teacher’s comments and wrote:

I have spoken to Antoine regarding rushing and following directions, hopefully there will be improvements in both areas. He has been contending with a lot emotionally. I have requested through the vice-principal for him to have visits with a counselor there at school thus allowing him an opportunity to ‘vent’ some of these problems. Please notify me or his father (sic) of any problems he may be experiencing there in school. As always, you have both of our full cooperation whenever needed.

Antoine’s GPA was rarely below 3.5. He was an excellent student through out his schooling. His report cards were filled with A+s, As and B+s; however, he still had problems with his behavior and his teachers continually commented that he needed improvement in “self control.”

In middle school Antoine would get comments such as (a) participates in class discussion, (b) show commendable effort, (c) is a pleasure to have in class and (d) needs to stop socializing at inappropriate times.

Antoine was suspended in middle school for three days for fighting and two days out-of-school suspension at Dewey High School for a food fight in the cafeteria, with an additional punishment of Saturday school detention and five days out of the cafeteria. Antoine had associates (a term used by students defined as “these are people you ‘hang out’ with, but they are not necessarily your friends”) from his neighborhood that attended Dewey and were not in the IB Programme. He enjoyed their company, but they were not the best “role models” for him.

Institutional agency

Table 6.4 (below) shows how Antoine responded to his Network Survey.

Table 6.4: Antoine’s Network Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
<th>A. Teachers</th>
<th>B. Friends</th>
<th>C. Peers</th>
<th>D. Relatives</th>
<th>E. Other Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Give me the moral support I need to do well in school</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I rely on them for advice and guidance in making important school-related decisions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Are sensitive to my personal needs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Are good at helping me solve school-related or academic problems</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I have a trusting and good relationship with them</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. They have shown me through their actions how to be successful in school</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Antoine’s quantitative *Network Survey* indicates his family strongly supports and influences his academic success. His peers and friends were a close second. He also indicates receiving support from other adults, but does not identify them in his interview, nor were his teachers mentioned.

Antoine wrote briefly in his *Written Questionnaire* about the people who support his academic success. He wrote simply in fragmented statements.

- My father’s passing. Self-motivation, and expectations of friends and family.

However, during the interview Antoine was not brief. He was very expressive, forthright and explicit. He credits his academic success on his self-motivation first, his good relationship with his father, and the importance and influence of his friends and peers. I asked:

**Camille**

*Were you always a good student?*

**Antoine**

Yeah … so it was like people always expected the best from me at all times, so if I let a grade drop from an A to a B, I had a lot of explaining to do. *I felt that pressure that I always had to be on top of everything.* I think self-motivation started kicking in and doing things cause I wanted to, *cause I wanted to learn.*

**Camille**

*So you didn’t have those external forces any more…You didn’t feel accountable to anybody, but yourself at this point?*

**Antoine**

*I just do it because it is a personal reflection of me …* that’s how I see it now.

**Camille**

*When did that realization become strong?*

**Antoine**

About 4 months ago …[The interview was conducted in May 2004. months ago ]it was no longer about making anybody else happy, but just me.

**Camille**

*Do you think it was part of maturity? Do you think that you matured faster because of the recent events [Antoine knows that I know his father recently died] going on?*

**Antoine**

Yes – and I didn’t have a choice … either you know, “step up” or “fall back.” It’s like I can hear him talking [his dad], if I do something I know I’m not supposed to do … I can hear him say something like he usually said. I know better, so I’m not really doing what I should do so. He’s about right there where my shoulder is, you know. [OC: Antoine gestures with his right arm and points to his left shoulder] I can hear him talking to me … it’s just like … I think it’s just because I remember everything he told me … and so I’m able to tell myself you know, “that’s not right. He was older when he had me… He got to go through those times again when he was raising my brothers. He got to re-write some of the bad things he did, live them over, and do them right this time.

**Camille**

*How about the expectations of people in this program? … Have you felt the sense of family with other students in this program and they expect you to do well too?*

**Antoine**

Yeah … a few of the students I’ve known since 4th and 5th grade.

**Antoine**

They *are like family* cause we … we know each other’s parents. We’ve been in the
same classes, some of them since 4th grade, so in the exact same class every day, every year, you know friends at school, you know who’s face you’re going to see… So it’s that comfort zone, you know what I’m saying… It’s like even though there’s a whole bunch of new people in high school, I got my same friends.

Camille: So did they tell you sometimes if they saw you “slacking off” you really need to work or get to work?

Antoine: Yeah… that’s the one good thing I think all my friends have… and so they make you responsible for what you do… They don’t take responsibility for what you do. If they see that you’re really not trying, they have to let you go on and do your own thing. That’s one thing I respect a lot about my friends, they don’t force me to do anything because it’s my life. That’s the only thing I really respect about them. If I like some people I know, they can do it their own subtle way, you know, say something… I’m like, “You know I can hear you”, “You’re slacking right now!” so I mean I know I need to “step it up” a little bit. So it’s like your expectations are really high up on a totem pole, but then again it’s like everything I do. I want somebody… I want to be proud to show it off to anybody. …You know, so it’s just like whoever… I just want to be proud to show my work off… just they don’t even know who I am… just having them associate my name… you know what I’m saying… the quality work.

Later in the interview Antoine talks about the academic influence and support of his best friend Alex, who is another IB Programme student who has a similar back ground as Antoine’s. Alex is also from a single parent home and living in poverty. However, Alex, unlike Antoine, never knew his father. Similar to Antoine, Alex also received a full academic scholarship to a research university.

Camille: So what are you going to do when you leave these folks at Dewey? Can you tell me who your circle of friends are and if your academic and social interests are similar or are they…

Antoine: My best friend in school is Alex… me and him are like. Me and him are like distant cousins. I’ve known him since 7th grade and from the first time we met we were automatic friends. I’m saying he turned me on to stuff like alternative music, and I turned him on to things down south… it was an exchange of ideas, but at the same time you always had that common ground that we could both come to… We were both from the single parent homes, low income… we both knew how to relate that to each other. And then… and we both had that ambition to do something better than all of our predecessors had… so it was just like… me and Alex… I wish he would have got that full scholarship to Morehouse too… we’d surely been roommates, like the type of motivation and inspiration you see if that’s been right there and you always know he’s doing his thing it makes you want to do what you got to do.

Habitus: Definition of schooling success to maintain academic excellence.

In Antoine’s response in his open-ended Written Questionnaire regarding his definition of schooling success he wrote simply: “My definition of schooling success is achieving the best grades that I am capable of.” In our interview Antoine did not specifically discuss his definition
of schooling success, but expressed that he felt he was academically successful by achieving goods grades and his acceptance to and receiving full academic scholarships to universities. He was very proud of his accomplishments.

Habitus: Extracurricular activities

Antoine was also brief regarding his extracurricular activities. He wrote:

Junior Varsity/Varsity (9th-12th grade) football—All my life I have loved the sport so playing is second nature.
Junior Varsity/Varsity Track—I ran indoor track to stay in shape for football.
My interests are sports (football, track) singing and math and computers.

Other students, outside the IB Programme who did not know of his academic excellence, would consider him “a jock”. I think he reveled in the perception these students held for him. He was handsome, outgoing, friendly and very popular. It does not appear that Antoine is exploring outside his culture or social class. He also implied his interests were similar to his father’s.

Habitus: the “Rules of the Game”

I remember Antoine one day in my Pre-IB English Honors III class boldly stating to all the students that he knew how to play the “rules of the game.” Antoine, like several other former students has been an inspiration for this study. I would often watch Antoine and marvel at how he could easily fit and adapt to any social context. He is truly one of those individuals that easily and effortlessly transverses across cultural borders. He is truly “bicultural” in the cultural capital context of the term. I asked Antoine if he knew what it meant to play the “rules of the game.” He responded:

**Antoine**

To me the rules are just like the lines in a square. So the rules … *it means those set boundaries they have for you, what things you can’t … really “push the envelope” only so far. So that’s what the rules of the game … it’s like limitations to me.*

**Camille**

In 10th grade, we were talking a little bit about “fitting in”, and you said, “Miss I know how to play the rules of the game!” And you stated, “That’s why I’m successful” … and I wonder why you think you’re successful now? … So what are they? And how did you learn this? … When did you figure out?… Did somebody tell that to you or did you observe it?

**Antoine**

*I’ve only had two members in my family to ever even go on to college okay … my sister, she didn’t finish, my cousin Kim graduated from Florida State. When I was younger I was always “I got to go to college” cause I saw all this potential wasted a lot of my family on both sides. I can’t end up like everybody else did, so to me it was, “What can I do to just elevate myself to the highest level?” What can I do to be “the greatest me I can be?” And so, sometimes I just ask questions or look at what other people do, cause I have a lot of friends who went to Dewey before I even went here.*

So, …I ask them, “How do you write college essays?” You know what I’m saying? … “Where do you get college applications?” “Who are good references?”
So it’s like questions I asked, and things I saw other people doing, and just “tricks” I picked up from other people.

Also I’m a good like judge of character … in other words “I know how to play the rules” … It’s just I know what to say to somebody to make them like me. I think I’m a good judge of character and with talking to a person for 5 minutes.... I had one conversation with a person, our whole conversation I was just testing.

Camille Information gathering?
Antoine Yeah.
Camille To use it for the next meeting?
Antoine Exactly.

Antoine had previous institutional knowledge through his social connections with upperclassmen who attended Dewey. He was making a vertical network linkages, in that these student were able to help Antoine through his questions. Antoine did not want to be like the majority of his family members … he decided he would be different and expressed that difference was a good thing. I asked:

Camille Did anybody give you a hard time about being an excellent student? You have to be pretty strong in your convictions with your social and family circles to think and express being different is a good thing!

Antoine …It’s like I have different personalities, it’s like I can adjust … if I need to “really buckle down” and get down to my work I can do it. But if I’m with my friends and we’re joking around, like at a party, so it was just like a lot of friends … and even “associates” [associates is a term students use to say that you “hang with them” but they are not your friends] I have outside of school, they saw that and– “he’s cool.” Like I can chill with people on Russell Street. [Russell Street is outside the school. The “gang-sta” types often hang on the street corner across from the school in the afternoon. I saw Antoine “hanging with the bad boys” in 10th grade and approached him about the “hoods” he was hanging with.] I saw that, I mean I was amazed by that … I observed that and I said, “This kid can be with everybody.”

Camille So it seems like you learned how to play not only the rules of the game in the classroom, but you learned how to play them in life too. You learned how to kind of blend and weave and be with everybody and not be ridiculed.
That was … that was always one of my fears, being ridiculed because I was such a sound … a serious student. It “wasn’t cool,” it was like nobody else was really doing it. You know what I think is if no one else is doing it, it’s “not cool.” You know, … but that was the thing about my neighborhood… it was a quiet, nice neighborhood … Okay we called it “just the ghetto” … not quite the suburbs, not quite the ghetto … Everybody’s parents would say, “Come in the house and do your homework before you go to school, before you go outside.” So everybody had to at least go in the house and do something, or make like they were doing homework … so when you came outside … – so when you go outside and say, “I just got through doing my homework” it wasn’t that big a thing.

I later asked Antoine about his ability to retain his many personas to adapt to his differing cultural and social contexts. I wondered:

Camille Who’s the real Antoine?

Antoine The real me? It’s just me sitting back and just laughing and joking with you … that just me … that’s how I am. When I’m at home, I’m just laughing and doing all types of voices. I’m silly really. I’m like a big kid.

I also asked Antoine out of concern, if it was time to stop his association with the “bad boys” now since he was going to university. I also asked him what he hopes Morehouse will provide for him.

Antoine First and foremost, I think it was a good move on my parents, they both came up to River City, they were from Washington, D.C., and they both came up to north east … I think that was the best move possible. The only thing about it being down south, growing up might be a lot different. I don’t think I would be as well off because down south the school systems are worse, neighborhood situations are worse. So I don’t think I would have had the opportunities I have right now. However, … I just love the people down there … love the atmosphere and at Morehouse, I think I can make that transition from a young black man, to a black man. I can really learn how to carry myself with the utmost confidence.

Camille You are talking about other people role modeling? The upper classman?

Antoine Exactly.

Camille And your professors? Probably you won’t be “hanging out” on the streets and doing “the homeboy” thing any more?

Antoine Naw – that’s why –like people ask me all the time if I go somewhere … “Where the hell you been at?” … … It’s just crazy cause to leave the life I left behind and see a lot of people who are doing the same things that I was doing … and see people catching like “15 to life.” [going to prison.]… Seeing people who ain’t coming back at all … Going to so many funerals is like …

Camille You feel really fortunate you escaped all that?

Antoine Yeah – it’s just like I can’t go back.

It is clear Antoine has understood “the rules of the game” for a very long time He
acknowledges he learned them through observation and by asking questions. He also created a device where he would ask people questions to see their likes and dislikes and attempt to “give them” what they wanted so he could succeed. Unlike other student participants, Antoine does not bring up ethical issues but does state similar to Ali that “the rules of the game” are confining and there are limitations to what he can and cannot do.

I believe, similar to Whitney, Antoine had to grow up quickly because of his parents’ divorce, which led to Antoine living in multiple “homes” around River City either with his mother, father, godmother, his father and stepmother and finally his cousin. He was forced to quickly adapt to any situation and to “fit in” with the adults with whom he was living by abiding by their rules and modus operandi, as well as the appropriate discourse and mannerisms of his social context. He then carried this knowledge into all aspects of his life and would fit in so easily that Antoine worried about his true identity and would remind himself who he really is.

Summary

Consistent with Diagram 1b, Antoine is certainly “bicultural” in the cultural capital sense of the word. He has attained the cultural capital of the dominant culture through his early observations of other students in his accelerated school programs who were successful in school. Some of his institutional agents were his friends and peers in school, as well as his parents.

Antoine had to adjust to different social and living situations at a very early age and learned how to play “the rules of the game” out of necessity. Although Antoine excelled in academics, he also had an interest to be accepted by those individuals who were not excellent students academically or socially. His adventures with “street life” often spilled over into his school records as evidence in his school suspensions and reprimands for his need for self-control.

His friend Alex, who grew up under similar circumstance (single parent and living in poverty) but who did not have the desire for the “street life”, also inspired Antoine. I credit Alex for much of Antoine’s success in high school. They always had a quiet competition regarding their academic success. I also remember when Antoine was suspended from Dewey for the food fight and returned to school two days later, I heard Alex saying and shaking his head, “Man, what was you thinking? You shouldn’t waste food that way,” and then laughing. Antoine got the point loud and clear.

He admits his father and mother exerted much time and energy to keep him on “the right track.” However, as he has matured he is now internally motivated and is confident he will make the right choices to reach his goal of graduating from college and having a well-paying career. Antoine attained the social capital of the dominant culture as evidenced by his acceptance into university on a full academic scholarship.

I believe “school mix effect” was an essential part of Antoine’s success. Throughout Antoine’s schooling career his academics were excellent, but he also had leanings towards the “street life.” Being in an academically accelerated program with a rigorous curriculum was what Antoine needed to challenge his energies in a positive direction. His peers and his friends in the IB Programme acted as role models of success and encouraged him to do his work and be responsible. He respected them and witnessed their drive, which in turn encouraged Antoine to maintain his academic focus. He wanted to be recognized for his accomplishments as well.

The pedagogical practices of the teachers in the IB Programme that encourage student to contest knowledge within their course work has spilled over into many of the students’ private lives by having them also question their own motivations and purpose for academic success and attaining their goals. In many ways it has made the students more critical, questioning and
reflective. These are all attributes young people need when making important decisions and forming their identities.

I also think that the Administration “mission” was a reason for Antoine’s success. They did not give up on Antoine and knew he would best benefit from the program even though he was not always the “model” citizen.

**Case study student participant: Kim Sung**

**Background**

Kim Sung can be considered a disadvantaged student from many respects: she is a young woman of Vietnamese descent coming from a working class and single parent home, and currently lives in poverty.

Her mother and father immigrated to the United States from Vietnam in 1984, with Kim Sung’s older sister and brother. Kim Sung was born in the United States; however, her biological father abandoned the family shortly after Kim Sung was born. She does not know or is the family aware of his whereabouts. Her mother is the sole supporter of their household; she is a seamstress, working for an international fine men’s’ clothing company. Kim Sung’s mother is over fifty years old, has a limited proficiency in English and no formal education. Both Kim Sung and her older siblings, however, are currently attending prestigious colleges.

I picked up Kim Sung one night to take her out to dinner. Her neighborhood is littered with broken glass and trash. There are many dilapidated and abandoned buildings (both commercial, industrial and residential) in this once vibrant Victorian neighborhood that is close to the city centre. Some homes have been neglected for many years having large areas of peeling paint, resulting in exposed and weathered wood, along with broken windows, unhinged doors, unkempt yards and sagging porches. Her neighborhood would appear totally abandoned, if it were not for the many Black male residents (between thirteen and thirty years of age) “hanging out” in large numbers on street corners and sides walks. These groups of young males spilled out into the streets on the warm summer night, defiantly impeding motorists’ passage. Some were openly gambling (throwing dice) on the sidewalk as others watched “the gamblers” drinking alcohol or soft drinks. Kim Sung reports that her family was robbed at gunpoint the night they moved into their home. The robbers took their computer and audio equipment and taunted her older brother; they left them physically unharmed, but very frightened.

Kim Sung’s home is partially painted (part of the house is painted beige the other remains white). A silver colored chain link fence with a gate encloses her narrow yard. Her mother enjoys gardening and growing their own food and has many potted plants near the house and around the yard filled with tropical house plants, set out in the summer to gain strength and growth in order to endure the long house-bound months of winter in River City. Tomatoes plants and peppers are growing on the south side of the house and a long a trellis, built by Kim Sung’s mother transverses along their property border growing thick green leaves and vines of green and yellow squash that obscure their view of their neighbor’s cluttered yard.

Kim Sung comes from a very traditional Vietnamese family. She and her mother, as well as her aunt and uncle are all living together in their single family home. Kim Sung’s brother and sister are living on the university campus in the same town, much to Kim Sung’s mother’s disapproval. Traditional Vietnamese customs and culture are adhered to and only Vietnamese is spoken in the home. Kim Sung laments that it has been very difficult living in her home with
“three oppressive and traditional Asians.” She misses her brother and sister’s ability to diffuse and delegate the adult family members’ attentions and demands. She is happy to be leaving her home.

As the youngest female child in a traditional Vietnamese family, it will be Kim Sung’s duty to take care of her mother for the rest of her life. This “pull” from the past haunts Kim Sung. She wants to honor her mother, but also be like other American students, she would like her independence. For example, when she was recruited and received full academic scholarships to several Ivy League universities, Kim Sung chose Dartmouth because her mother would not move there with her, as there would be no work for her mother.

Schooling experiences/academic performance

Kim Sung’s academic performance has been consistently good throughout her schooling – although she did not always perceive it this way!

When reviewing Kim Sung’s academic cumulative files, I noted her teacher in kindergarten remarked: “She expresses herself very well in English. She enjoys writing and drawing in her journal.” Her teacher also commented: “Kim Sung enjoys math activities, which involve more abstract thought. She enjoys puzzles and games, activities which involve measurement, sorting, categorizing and patterning.” I asked Kim Sung:

Camille How do you feel about your schooling experiences?
Kim Sung From the beginning, it wasn’t too bad, but I feel it structured into this long path that I can’t really explore much—but I think I was in a remedial class in kindergarten. I don’t think the school is actually part of the district anymore… and that basically everyone that was there was like either an immigrant or slow in some way so …

Camille Do you think they put you in the class just because you were an immigrant?
Kim Sung Yes.

Camille When did you come to the U.S.?
Kim Sung Oh, I was born here, but my mom kind of didn’t tell us or allow us outside much, so I basically knew Chinese and Vietnamese and a little bit of English.

Camille So maybe it’s because you were deficient in the English language, so they put you there? And how did that make you feel? Did you feel out of place there?
Kim Sung Just a little … I don’t know, we had our little groups like any people do … I don’t know, there were some people that I would have preferred not to be near that … it wasn’t too bad, I had my closer girl friends.

In first grade, her teacher wrote: “Kim Sung continues to do a super job! She grasps new concepts easily and is always willing to help others.” Another entry in the second marking period the teacher commented: “Kim Sung’s report card is a reflection of her excellent work and attitude towards school. I am very proud of her!”

In third grade, Kim Sung’s teacher commented: “Kim Sung is a fine, hard working student.” Furthermore, in fourth grade with her report card overflowing with grades of A+’s, A’s
and B+'s her teacher made the following statements: “Kim Sung is an exemplary student.”...”What a report card!”, and “Reach for the stars Kim Sung!” However, Kim Sung has a different perspective of her early schooling experiences. She complained of her difficulties with English (although her report cards do not evidence this claim) as the curriculum as being too “childish” and not related to the adult world (for which she seems to have had a great interest at an early age). I asked:

Camille:  That was kindergarten? And then you … I think you have here that you went on to 74th Street Elementary School and you were there for grades 1 through 3?

Kim Sung:  I always had a problem with English. [although this is not evidenced in her report cards]. I think I got like an unsatisfactory in ESOL class before and that was kind of scared the “crap” out of me. So I mainly focused on English from then on out, but … not really, I mean like I saw that there were people who were good writers, but there were a bunch of people who were a lot better at writing and the humanities than I was. I didn’t care too much though…I don’t know.

I examined Kim Sung’s sixth grade report card and noted that her comments matched her lack of enthusiasm for learning. Here is a succession of comments from her teacher, her mother and Kim Sung. Kim Sung’s teacher wrote on her report under Teachers Comments:

Kim Sung is making excellent progress in all areas. She tends to be very quiet, and I hope she will make an effort to participate more in discussions. She seems especially interested in science.

Kim Sung’s mother responded under Parent Comments:

I’m glad Kim Sung is good in Science, but I want her to improve.

Kim Sung responded under Student Comments:

I’m not that wild about my grades. I’m like a genius gone mad. I didn’t even get on honor roll this year and I really tried. I’m going to try to “boot up” my grades in Speaking and Listening and Social Studies for the next semester.

Continuing in our interview regarding her schooling history, Kim Sung remarks:

Kim Sung:  When I was in elementary school I didn’t see the point in doing it. [school work] I mean … it was nice … I was in an accelerated program, but I didn’t really see any point to what I was learning. … I couldn’t really relate it back to what I knew or life actually, but when I got into middle school it seemed to make a little bit more sense. … I was getting older, I knew what was going on, and they had us begin with a lot of courses that seemed to go with like more of the adult world. Like technology, music, and art …

When Kim Sung came to Dewey High’s Pre-IB Programme in the year 2000, she was ranked number one or two in her class until the winter of her senior year, when instead she was ranked third. This was at first a devastating blow to Kim Sung. She wrote me a long e-mail stating how this was very troublesome after all the work she had invested. I wrote her and called her (when she did not respond to my e-mail, which is very unlike Kim Sung) and we talked about her class rank and what that really meant to her and why.
We then explored more important issues about her academic trajectory. As she had been “courted” and received full academic scholarships to several Ivy League universities, I asked her to think if her GPA and class rank defines her academic success, worth and who she is. She came to the conclusion that she had gained so much more from her education than class rank. She received and accepted (early decision) a full academic scholarship to Dartmouth and she was happy that she had prepared herself to be good student. This, she acknowledged, is a more accurate picture of who she is: responsible, hard working and intelligent. Once she overcame this hurdle she started to “loosen-up” and have fun in learning (as reflected in her definition of academic success) – a change in habitus I will comment on in more detail in a later section.

**Institutional agency**

*Table 6.5* (below) shows how Kim Sung responded to her Network Survey.

**Table 6.5: Kim Sung’s Network Survey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
<th>A. Teachers</th>
<th>B. Friends</th>
<th>C. Peers</th>
<th>D. Relatives</th>
<th>E. Other Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Give me the moral support I need to do well in school</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I rely on them for advice and guidance in making important school-related decisions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Are sensitive to my personal needs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Are good at helping me solve school related or academic problems</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I have a trusting and good relationship with them</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. They have shown me through their actions how to be successful in school</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These responses show that, while her *relatives* (brother and sister) have a high degree of frequency of support for Kim Sung, her *teachers* are ranked first. However, there is some discrepancy between these quantitative data and what transpired in her interview. Her teachers are not mentioned as much in her interview, although recognition of their role can be seen again in her *Written Questionnaire* response, where she lists multiple extracurricular activities that were often initiated, inspired or mentored by her teachers.

Kim Sung’s perception of the role played by friends is dissimilar from most of the other participants, as she ranked peers and friends consistently last. This might be in part to her aloof behavior. She was often misunderstood by some students as being a snob (she had a more harsh term that some people thought she was a “bitch”), because she is quiet, observant, in deep thought and loses awareness of those around her. Yet she was able to get into a very healthy collaboration and competition with other students in the IB program, as touched upon in her interview (and discussed a little later in this section).

It is also worth noting that in the category *Other Adults* Kim Sung writes: “mentors/former employers-lower than most other groups, because I do not see them that often” and she included me in the “other” category, because I had resigned from teaching and yet we
were still in contact with each other. Interestingly, in the interview she apologized for the relatively low number given to this category, but does not discuss her mentors further.

The importance of Kim Sung’s relationships with her siblings, teachers and friends as institutional agents is more defined in her interview. Kim Sung openly speaks about her sibling’s role in her academic success and motivation. She is motivated to be academically successful through her competitiveness with her older siblings and classmates.

**Kim Sung** But that was really when I started motivating myself, [in middle school] plus *it’s easier to compete with my brother and sister* than … For a period of time I was taking the same math that my brother was, and the same science, because I was in an accelerated program and he wasn’t.

**Camille** Okay – so you have these two older siblings and you felt a bit of a competition with them?

**Kim Sung** Yeah – ever since I was little, they were like *clearly, like the best in everything* … *I was a little bit slow actually* …[I looked in her cumulative record and Kim Sung was placed in a special kindergarten for foreign students because she did not read or write English well. That is her misinterpretation of “a little bit slow.” There is no record of Kim Sung having learning difficulties]. I don’t know, like they were always saying that *my sister and my brother were really smart* but … my brother not as much, because he had more problems with English than I did….but … when they gave us math problems, my sister would just do them really quick, and she still can do it …and she actually finished AP Calc. [Advanced Placement Calculus course] before her junior year of high school!

**Camille** – And what are the two of them doing now?

**Kim Sung** They’re at the University of River City. My sister is, I think a molecular genetics major and my brother might be in bio-medical and electrical engineering. I’m not sure.

**Camille** … You said [OC: In her *Student Participant Survey Questionnaire*] one sibling is doing well, and the other one isn’t doing as well.

**Kim Sung** My brother … he’s kind of disenchanted and disillusioned by what IB becomes. Yeah – he expected to go to some Ivy League [universities such as Brown, Harvard, Stanford and Yale] and he didn’t. [He received rejections.]

**Camille** You chose the path to go to Dartmouth … Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

**Kim Sung** Sure … it’s partly because *I’m a little bit competitive* and it’s *like a little bit better school*. [Kim Sung is being polite and humble and knows what she said in an apologetic tone, is an understatement].

Later on in the interview, Kim Sung went back to her siblings and teachers as role modeling and being an important influence regarding her academic success. When I asked when did she start competing with her siblings, Kim Sung responded:

**Kim Sung** … Probably more like 6th grade. *My brother had just gotten into the accelerated program, but we were taking the same Latin* [language
class]…with the same teacher and my teacher, our teacher was Mr. Douglas, he …always talked about me…I don’t know why, but I just went overboard with starting Latin. I just thought that every extra thing could do possible… My teacher always bragged to his class about me. Like I don’t know if that was a good idea, because a lot of the 7th graders were a little angry.

In the interview, I also spoke with Kim Sung about her existing and long lasting relationships with teachers and adults that have also influenced her academically. She also stated she became more interested in school when students began to learn more “adult like things.” She thought elementary school was dull, repetitive and useless. I asked:

Camille.  You said in junior high, things started to turn around. [her interest in school] What happened there? You think it was more “adult like things?” When you think about your friendships, or people you like to talk to… did you like to talk to adults more? Would you like to do more adult like things than you did childish things?

Kim Sung Yeah – I like talking to adults. It’s fun, like when I’m in school. I generally don’t talk to my friends that much. … Like in class and when we have free time I do, but when there’s like really not that many people around, I have conversations with teachers and …not so much the administrators.

Camille So how do you choose these adults that you want to speak to, … How did you pick them?… How do you decide to talk to one, over the other? . You don’t talk to the administrators? …

Kim Sung Well that’s because like the administrators are generally the people who like give us all these rules, and the only good teachers, maybe the teachers are like covering up that they’re like making up some rules by themselves. But like generally it’s always the IB guys [IB director and other administrators] that are like doing something, so you have to talk to them and that is just a big pain. It goes back to that whole restriction thing … It’s like the teachers are restricted in what they can do to, like testing days … So they’re sort of in the same boat as we are and they’re feeling just as frustrated … They don’t have enough books or things like that and… the administrators … I don’t see them that often, so it doesn’t seem like they’re doing much. So, I’m kind of confused how they justify their paycheck. But like the teachers, they’re out there every day, they’re like working at least five periods a day, with the students directly and teaching them, having them like learn for themselves, just helping them along.

Kim Sung also talked about her competitiveness with her fellow students. Kim Sung also indicated she enjoys teaching fellow students that are challenged by the curricula. She stated that this does not only make her happy that she is helping someone learn, but that it also reinforces her knowledge and use of the topic or equation.

Kim Sung I just like just being around my friends sometimes, like I see that they’re having trouble with these concepts that I didn’t think were too bad, and it’s partly like another competitive thing, like I still have to beat my sister and brother and these other smart people who like all of a sudden showed
Camille: Like Jane and Liam? [students ranked 1st and 2nd in the IB Programme 12th grade class. Kim Sung was ranked 3rd.]

Kim Sung: Yes. But, it was especially bad cause like freshmen year Liam was in my physics class and he like beat me by at least one point every single test.

Camille: Well, just one point?

Kim Sung: – Even on the final! [Kim Sung states this with emphatic desperation and whines a bit].

Camille: So do you have this interesting relationship with Liam and you still feel like you compete with each other, or that you … Do you ever go to him for help? Or does he ever come to you and discuss anything? Or do you ever talk about academic things together?

Kim Sung: Not so much in the last three years. Freshmen year we had a couple of classes together, so it was a little bit easier. I did in computers. We worked on a program. The last three years we haven’t had that many classes together. Freshmen year I remember he asked me about a lot, but that’s about it. Sophomore year there was really no classes, except math and that was just a joke anyway. We had Mr. Golden, and he was pretty much a pushover, and you didn’t really have to pay attention. I mean they were in the back of the room playing chess.

Camille: So sometimes helping your peers … and I’ve seen you do this… where you help others students … has that also helped you by helping them? [Kim Sung would often come to my homebase in the morning and work with others students either on the chalkboard or on my overhead projector working on a math or physics problem.]

Kim Sung: It kind of like gives me a boost … I know what I’m doing, and I can explain it to other people, and that’s when you know for sure that you actually know something….and it’s nice though helping other people. You know that you don’t need as much help as they do, so like when you help them they get so happy when they understand it. I remember, I drew this picture of passive psychosis for Amy and she was like, “Oh it looks like a smiley face or an egg!” or something … It’s like it helped her remember and …

Camille: And then she remembered it …

Kim Sung: Yeah … it helped me remember it too! I guess.

When I asked Kim Sung to create a graph with her horizontal (within one’s own socioeconomic class and culture) and vertical (outside one’s socioeconomic class and culture) linkages to see those individuals who have influenced her academic success, her graph clearly indicated more vertical linkages, than horizontal. Her vertical linkages are with current teachers and administrators (eleven in total, including myself) and three White middle class students (one male and two females) of which, two were the Valedictorian and Salutatorian of her graduating class.
Two other students, she has indicated by a diagonal vertical line. They are two Amer-Asian students (one male and one female). The male is upper middle class, while the female student – like Kim Sung – is working class but received many full academic scholarships to Ivy League universities and is attending Vassar. On Kim Sung’s horizontal line she indicates her linkages with students that are of her same class, but differing culture. Kim Sung has four female White students residing on the left of her horizontal line and four family members to the right (her mother, aunt and brother and sister) and another female student in the IB Programme who is an immigrant from China. She also reflected in the interview that she selects “like minds,” befriends adults outside of her culture, race and social class (vertical linkages) and those that she believes have more knowledge, as institutional agents.

I know from experience that Kim Sung retains her institutional agents. She befriended me in her freshman year at Dewey when she was a student in my English class. Kim Sung would stop by my room during her lunch period (that coincided with mine) and talk to me about her observations, activities and her desires for academic excellence. After I resigned from teaching she would e-mail me often, and would send me hand written letters, Christmas and birthday cards. To date, we have maintained our relationship for six years. I still hear from her via e-mail from Dartmouth every month and last fall in Scotland where she spent a semester at the University of Edinburgh. Last month she called me at work to talk about her summer studies and what she is studying in her junior year at Dartmouth.

Habitus: Definition of schooling success

One important aspect of Kim Sung’s habitus (i.e., learned attitudes, perceptions and behaviors) that changed over time has been her definition of schooling success. In her Written Questionnaire, Kim Sung defines schooling success as the retention of knowledge and being able to apply that knowledge years later; she also believes both teachers and students should engage in a “fun environment”, in that way both students and teachers benefit from the educational process:

My definition of schooling success is when students are learning in a fun environment and are actually retaining what they learn years after they learn it. The material they learn should also be related to the real world so that students will know that they are learning things for a purpose and can actually use it later on in life. I also believe that teachers should enjoy their time teaching, so everyone benefits. Students learn better when they are comfortable and happy.

This definition of academic success is very different from the way she defined her success in the past – that is, through grades and GPAs. I believe that she came to this realization after her disappointment of being ranked third in her class. Once she looked at what she had gained through all her hard work, and what knowledge attainment is all about, her definition of schooling success dramatically changed to the enjoyment of learning and the use of knowledge. Knowledge is now seen by Kim Sung as a way to reach her personal goals and trajectories. Knowledge attainment is no longer about competing with others, but fulfilling her dreams and
ambitions. She is now self-motivated and no longer needs an external motivator to maintain academic excellence.

**Habitus: Extracurricular activities**

When asked Kim Sung to list her extracurricular activities in the written questionnaire, she provided a long list of activities that put her in the position to create networks with the dominant class:

- **Girls varsity tennis**: because of my brother and sister were on teams and I wanted to know how to play too! I joined when I saw my sister and brother playing really well and not being able to do so myself. **County Math Team**. I like math and thought it would be fun. Science Olympiad. Love science thought it would be fun. My teacher is the coach from my astronomy class. Thought I give it a go. **National Honor Society** (a teacher chose me). I joined to give back to the community. **Homework Academy**. A teacher asked me. I could really help people who need a little extra support in their studies. **Tutoring at school 116th Street Elementary School** (elementary school through NHS. Thought I could help). I joined **Year Book Committee**; I wanted to see what was behind putting a yearbook together. **Student Government** election in homebase. I won and thought I could change some things in school. **PRISM** (science and math competitions). **Masterminds** (like the US TV game-show Jeopardy). **Project SEED**. Referred by my chemistry teacher. He didn’t want “my mind to go to waste” over the summer. Work in research at “two local universities” (name withdrawn to protect student’s identity) in 2002 and 2003. Worked there because of my sister was a part of this program two years ago and talked about it a lot. Wanted to know why she liked it so much, so I submitted and application/interview. Impressed the professor there and still work there on occasion.

It is particularly important to note that Kim Sung mentioned here that her siblings often first initiated her interests and involvements, and that she was also inspired to join activities by her teachers’ recommendations and requests. Kim Sung’s sister and brother led the way to Kim Sung’s attitudes about extracurricular activities and being more gregarious. Her brother and sister’s positive experiences in extracurricular programs at universities and in sports easily transferred to Kim Sung curious and competitive mindset that wanted to try everything her brother or sister had experienced. Through her extracurricular activities, Kim Sung placed herself into academic circles (networks) by working at two local universities that have nationally recognized science programs. She was preparing herself for her transition to university life. She networked with graduate students and with professors who either informed her on “the rules of the game” in academia or whom later wrote college recommendations for her.

To confirm that Kim Sung’s cultural capital and social class distinctions differed from her mother’s, in the interview I asked if she had either similar or different social and cultural interests. First generation American students cultural and class shifts are more evident for student participants whose parents are working class, since these students’ academic interests often link them to university degrees that will greatly increase their possibility of social mobility (i.e. the “American Dream”) and into a different social class than their parents. Kim Sung shows a
marked difference concerning her interests, and those of her mother. Kim Sung embraces American culture and finds “strange,” “annoying” and problematic her mother’s ethnic cultural traditions and interests.

Kim Sung has moved away from both her mother’s Asian influences regarding Vietnamese culture, customs, traditions and music. She enjoys American music and the cultural lifestyle of independence from parental control as one matures to adulthood. I asked Kim Sung:

Camille When you think about your mom and you, are your cultural, social and intellectual interests the same or different?

Kim Sung I think they’re different? I’m more of an American, I was born here, raised here, learned from American schools … umm … she still has a couple of ideas that are a little strange to me. When I’m older [her mother has told her] I’m going to have to ask her if I can do something like … I think my cousin in Hong Kong just got married and he was asking his mom if he should get a dog … so it was like yeah “You should be like that too!” I was like; “I’m an American now!”

Camille Now is that for all your siblings, or is it just for the youngest one?

Kim Sung I think for everyone … We were just having a conversation about it Sunday [Kim Sung had shared with me earlier that week that her mother wanted to go with her to college] and… when I was little, I said “Mommy can you keep living with me and help me keep my house clean?” … Maybe that wasn’t such a good idea now! [She laughed].

Camille Well, we have all promised that once … I know it comes back to haunt you later on. You talked about some of the things that you are interested in and I want to go back to those. Do you like… it seems like Latin class was good for you and you like ancient civilizations, Greek, Roman, Chinese, Egyptian… does your mother have any interest in that?

Kim Sung She likes like Asian culture…I don’t think she knows that much about anything else though.

Camille As far as music, what kind of music do you like to listen to, or concerts do you like to go to versus your mom?

Kim Sung I kind of like rock, a little bit that’s not “heavy death metal” or anything like that … like Lincoln Park is okay I guess, Matchbox 20, I can listen to pop and stuff like that …is pretty good. My mom generally listens to Vietnamese or Chinese music. It’s really funny like when we get like DVD’s or something and she’s singing along to it … it’s so cute! [Kim Sung laughs].

Camille But none of your siblings are listening to Vietnamese music?

Kim Sung No – we didn’t like it too much when we were little … the Vietnamese women are generally very whiney sounding and the guys kind of sound a little gay. It was like a little too high pitched for us I guess?
Habitus: the “Rules of the Game”

Kim Sung understands and enacts the “rules of the game.” She admits that one has to do “certain things” to be recognized and to also gain and maintain success by those in power. I asked:

Camille Can you tell me what your definition of playing the rules of the game?

Kim Sung I think like you have to do certain things to succeed in life, that you also have to like maneuver your way around other people, so that you’ll be the one who’s successful. I mean you can help people out too and still have everybody like you I guess, but it’s sort of like Social Darwinism a little bit if you want to survive you’re going to have to know how to play the game.

Camille And when did that occur to you? – When did you figure that one out?

Kim Sung I’m not exactly sure – maybe bio class – I don’t know or in Mr. Douglas’s class in 6th grade.

Summary

Kim Sung’s academic success and acceptance into many prestigious university degree programs is in sharp contrast to her mother’s educational achievements and human capital. Yet, in spite of their poverty and cultural isolation, both Kim Sung and her siblings are attending esteemed research universities in the northeastern United States.

Her siblings, however, have transferred their human, cultural and social capital to Kim Sung through their competitive spirit and wanting a better lifestyle. Kim Sung is the “little sister” who wants to prove herself “better” than her siblings, and she has. Her brother acknowledge to me that he is very proud of her, has witnessed the long hours she has worked to attain her goals, and thinks she is brilliant.

Consistent with my proposed model of how some disadvantaged students succeed in attaining the social capital of the dominant culture, Kim Sung is “bicultural” in the cultural capital sense of the word and has secured and retained some very influential and supportive institutional agents – i.e., her siblings, friends, teachers and mentors—who have altered her habitus overtime. Early in her formal education she was informed, through observations and interactions with her teachers in elementary school, of the discourse, mannerisms and ways of knowing how the cultural capital of the dominant culture operates, which would allow her to “fit in” and become available for more recognition and adult mentoring. Although her school records show otherwise, Kim Sung shared in her interview that she did not enjoy elementary school, thought she was a poor student and that the curriculum was “childish” and dull. She certainly had a negative attitude about learning and it appeared she was going through the actions of being a good student because of her mother’s high expectations that were not necessarily hers.

It is only when Kim Sung and her brother (her sibling/peer institutional agent who focused and supported her desire to compete and share knowledge) are in a similar “accelerated program” that she rallies to compete with him academically and begins to see the point of school (from her perspective). It is through her familial trust in her brother (his trustworthiness) and her competitive spirit that enable to continue and expand her agency with her brother and her teachers. She is reinforced by her efforts in receiving public praise by her sixth grade Latin teacher and begins to enjoy learning more “adult like things” in middle school. To Kim Sung, the curriculum and the teacher’s public praise helped find the “point” of school.
Her habitus is altered in that she does not go to school anymore to please her mother and get good grades. She goes to school to please herself and to compete with her siblings and eventually with other students. For Kim Sung, school is now an interesting and challenging venue that allows her to receive praise and accolades. This in when Kim Sung is able to create and sustain social capital networks where she in turn receives reciprocity and rewards that are dialectical and dynamic.

During this time period she has also learned and enacted “the rules of the game”, whilst also moving toward a trajectory that is very dissimilar to her mothers. She is heavily involved in many activities that create more opportunities for institutional agency and social capital networks outside of school and her family that will support her success. She also reciprocates what she has learned by teaching her fellow students concepts they find difficult. She concedes “teaching” other students helps her own attainment and retention of knowledge.

Her final alteration in habitus is when she stops seeing schooling success as competing with others, class rank, grades and GPAs (through her disappointment of only being ranked third in her class) to the realization that learning, retention and use of knowledge can and should be enjoyable. Kim Sung’s educational journey follows the model articulated in Diagram 1b. She has created social capital networks that have furthered her academic success and trajectory to Dartmouth, which will ultimately support her social mobility.

However, I do not think Kim Sung benefited from “school mix effect” as much as the other case study students in regards to the diversity of the school population. She mostly competed with herself and with the valedictorian and salutatorian of her class. She was not a part of the “study group” per se, but she would help them if they required her assistance. I do however think the rigor of the curriculum and the instructional practices at Dewey, along with pedagogical practices that encouraged Kim Sung to contest and debate in class, made learning more enjoyable and therefore continued her interest in learning.

Case study student participant: Rachael

Background

Rachael can be considered a disadvantaged student from many respects: she is a young Black woman from a working class family, living in a single parent home and in poverty. Rachael has six siblings, although three of her older siblings are presently living on their own. Rachael has attended both public and parochial schools in the metropolitan River City area. Rachael’s mother received a three-year registered nursing degree from the River City Psychiatric Hospital and works in the medical field. However, as a registered nurse with three children living at home, and helping to support her eldest daughter and grandchild, their financial status is poor and they are in need of public assistance.

I asked Rachael’s mother: “Who in your opinion (excluding yourself) has influenced your child the most academically?” Her mother wrote:

Rachael seemed to have a “love” of learning. My parents taught us about the world “along the way” during our everyday life and the teachers all remarked that the children (including Rachael) were so informed about so many things. She also has had some remarkable teachers who nurtured her love of learning.
I also asked: “Why in your opinion is your child academically successful?” Rachael’s mother wrote:

(1). Her personality that lends itself to be attentive to detail and organization.
(2). Her desire to be successful.
(3). Her gift of above average intelligence.

Rachael’s home is within a half-mile walking distance from Dewey High School and Martha Washington Middle School. Rachael’s mother writes, “Our family is regular church ‘goers.’ Along with active youth ministries and groups.” Rachael’s mother also states she and the children enjoy reading, playing tennis and bicycling as well as enjoying many genres of music and playing instruments and singing together. It sounds like Rachael single mother puts much time and energy into her children.

I taught Rachael in my ninth grade English I and II honors class in 2001. Rachael is witty, intelligent, highly competitive, honest and energetic. She “lights up a room” when she enters and it is difficult not to take notice of her. Rachael is presently a senior at Dewey High School in the International Baccalaureate Programme and is applying to universities for the fall of 2005.

Schooling experience/academic performance

Rachael started her education in a public city elementary school and found her schooling experience positive. She performed well academically and “fit in” socially. I asked:

Camille Tell me a little bit about your schooling experiences from K through 11.

Rachael At 129th Elementary Street School, I remember that I started off in kindergarten and the teacher of the school year put me in one of the mixed grades where like half the class was in kindergarten and the other half was in 1st grade. So from then on I was always in one of the mixed classes until about 3rd grade when I switched schools… I figured then I was smarter than most people because the students that were in the higher grades in my class had me help them do their homework. So I liked doing their homework better … So I knew I was kind of smart back then.

Camille Did the teachers praise you? … Did they tell you good work Rachael?

Rachael School was my favorite thing in the world. Like I was bad at home but school … I remember thinking like how can you be bad at school cause my brother was … I was just like how do you do that? It was just something that I didn’t understand and I don’t know how they can be.

Camille Because school was easy to you? Do you think it was that?

Rachael It was easy … my brother I found out like a couple years ago, he has like a learning disorder…I didn’t have that, so it was like … school was easy and it was fun and I loved like all my teachers. One of my teachers had one of my older sisters in her class when she was younger and so she had a special love for me and … school was special.

I was apparent from Rachael’s accumulative academic file that her teachers did love her too! In her River City School District Parent and Teacher Comment Card dated November 1994, her
teacher wrote:

Rachael is doing a wonderful job. She is very serious about her work and assumes responsibility for her learning. Rachael reads with fluency and has good comprehension. She has good critical thinking skills and makes predictions and draws conclusions. Rachael is a very thoughtful participant in class discussions. She writes good stories at considerable length. Her writing is well organized. Rachael uses math concepts to solve problems. She is excited about participating in class discussions.

The same school year her teacher wrote:

Rachael has had an outstanding year. She is very serious about her education and approaches her learning with maturity. Rachael shows leadership qualities and is a good role model for her fellow classmates. She has good decision-making qualities. Rachael has done extremely well academically. She is an avid reader and also reads challenging books for a variety of purposes. In math, Rachael has good computational skills and concepts. She has reasoning skills to solve problems easily.

However, her academic folder does not contain her grades or records from her years at a Catholic school in the suburbs. Rachael’s mother decided to send her to a suburban Catholic school. It is here that Rachael claims she “came out of her box,” and her highly competitive spirit (similar to many student participants) emerged. It was also here that Rachael experienced identity problems that would carry over to her later schooling experiences in public middle school.

Although Rachael admits her schooling experience at Saint Gabriel’s was for the most part positive, she also informs me that when her mother had taken a lesser paying job and therefore could not send her child to a private school, Rachael transferred to a public city middle school in her neighborhood.

Her return to public city schooling was a tense experience for her. She stated when she first attended the school she was afraid of “city kids” and city schools. This was ironic because Rachael is Black and lives in the neighborhood where she was attending public middle school.

Camille How about your schooling experience, how was your education?

Rachael At Saint Gabriel’s? I thought it was easy. It was always easy … except … I like played around a lot during school … I like came “out of my box” and was more like outgoing, laughed a lot in class, kind of the clown, but still had the highest grades. But there was like this one girl and this one guy that had higher grades than me, and I didn’t hate them, but I secretly disliked them somewhat, because I don’t like not being on the top.

Camille So you’re competitive?

Rachael Very competitive!

Camille When did you notice you were competitive?

Rachael I would say about 4th grade I started doing that… and also because it’s a suburban
school … I guess people out there have a fascination with Black people and they thought I was fascinating. I’m half Black and half White.

Camille

Rachael

Now, I identify with both … But it was different there, because a lot of the people were White and then there were some that were Black, and the Black ones identified with White people, but they also … It’s kind of confusing … but they also had their own Black culture at the same time, and since I came from a public school, I knew a lot about that, so that was what I knew, and that’s what I stayed around with.

Camille

Did you like the diversity? Or was it a bit much?

Rachael

I would say neither … I didn’t know anything about diversity cause at 110th Street School, I didn’t realize anything about race or color or anything, I just knew these people were popular, these people weren’t… and I was more focused, I was just enjoying doing school work.

Camille

When did race identity come into play?

Rachael

At Saint Gabriel’s… they were like … a lot of like Black people would say, “Oh, she must be White because she says this” … and then a White person was like, “Oh they’re loud, they must be from the ghetto.”

Camille

So everybody was playing up to the stereotypes?

Rachael

No it wasn’t like that because one of the people that I disliked that was really smart was a Black guy, but the girl was White and blond.

Camille

These students were like your competitors?

Rachael

Rivals! I don’t think they saw me as a rival though.

Camille

You then went on to junior high … Did you go back to the city at some point? You went to Martha Washington? – Tell me about that experience.

Rachael

Martha Washington– My mom switched jobs and she didn’t get paid as much, so we switched back to the public schools and that one [school] was close to my house, so I went to Martha Washington, and I was frightened to go back to Martha Washington, because you know, the stereotypes that I learned at Saint Gabriel’s…so I was … I thought I was going to get “jumped” and…

Camille

Oh that’s funny! [I am laughing.]

Rachael

Ha ha – It is funny! … I thought I was going to get like shot walking through the streets, even though I lived there my whole life! [Rachael is laughing.]

Camille

But that didn’t happen?

Rachael

… It didn’t happen. … The street I lived on was a dead end street, so there wasn’t a lot of traffic or anything down there, and it was pretty quiet … You could hear gun shots down the street, but I think I was used to that … I grew up with it …

Camille

I lived on Russell Street [When I first started teaching in the 1980s I lived in an apartment on the same street as Martha Washington Middle School and Dewey
High School and in the same neighborhood as Rachael] for a while and I heard them [gun shots] in the night too!

Rachael I got used to it … I actually found a shell near my house once … and I don’t know … I thought, at the same time like being at Saint Gabriel’s, you’re scared of those type of things, but like you actually walk around like, “Oh yeah, I’m Black, I’m Ghetto, I’m ….” You know what I mean?

Rachael’s transition to Dewy was less eventful. She had matured more and was excited about coming to the IB Programme.

**Institutional agency**

Table 6.6 (on the following page) shows how Rachael responded to her *Network Survey*.

**Table 6.6: Rachael’s Network Survey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Frequency of support out of a scale 1-10</th>
<th>A. Teachers</th>
<th>B. Friends</th>
<th>C. Peers</th>
<th>D. Relatives</th>
<th>E. Other Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Give me the moral support I need to do well in school</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Blank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I rely on them for advice and guidance in making important school-related decisions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Blank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Are sensitive to my personal needs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Blank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Are good at helping me solve school related or academic problems</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Blank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I have a trusting and good relationship with them</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Blank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. They have shown me through their actions how to be successful in school</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Blank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Rachael’s response to her quantitative *Network Survey*, she chose teachers as supporting her most to be academically successful, her friends second and her relatives fourth. There is no indication that other adults supported her schooling success. However, her responses in the *Network Survey* do not match her open-ended *Written Questionnaire*, but they do match her in-depth *Intensive Interview*.

In her *Written Questionnaire* Rachael wrote about the tragic influence of her sister, and the undying support of her mother and fellow IB student/boyfriend. She wrote:

*My sister has influenced me to be successful. She was smart in high school, and she was going to join the ROTC at Cornwall High. But, she got pregnant. She always tells me, although she loves her daughter like nothing else, my niece has made life 100 times harder for her. She moved out of my mom’s house and lived on the street for a while. She’s been raped. Her baby’s father went to jail.*
She was a teenager taking care of a baby by herself. By herself she got an apartment, and later she got married. Now she’s divorced with two more kids. She put herself through college. She said that was the hardest thing she had to do. She tells me all the time that she doesn’t want me to end up like her. She supports me and always tells me not to take the easy road out because it won’t end up easy at the end. She reminds me that there is an order to life, and she did things in the wrong order, and she shows me the right order.

My mom has also [been] supportive of me. She knows what my sister went through. And I can tell she’s really proud of me. I can feel it. I know I’d be really disappointed if I let her down. I’m the first of her kids who understand how important education is at a young age. I know she has big plans for my life and I want her to always be proud of me. Even when she’s tired she comes to all my awards ceremonies, inductions and sports games. She tells me all the time that her goal is to make sure I know I have her support. I wouldn’t want to waste those things.

My boyfriend has been supportive of me. He’s also an IB student and has been struggling with whether or not to stay in it. But even though he didn’t know what he’s doing with his life, he was always there to support what I was doing with my life. I always had someone to ask the tough questions and a shoulder to cry on when there were too many projects at one time.

In Rachael’s *Intensive Interview* she talks about the defining influences of her teachers’ perspectives and their recommendations, and the awards given to her in junior high school that changed her perceptions and attitudes about herself (habitus), as well as her pride in entering the IB Programme at Dewey High School and the feelings of both the intentional and “unintentional” support of her siblings. Rachael states:

**Rachael**  
*My teachers were like, they encouraged me a lot at Martha Washington…They were like, *you can do it*…and the application to get into the IB program, you have to have three recommendations, and one of my teachers didn’t turn his into the person. So, they gave it to me to turn it in. *I read it, and it was very encouraging to me to hear what they actually thought about me.*

**Camille**  
That was one of those defining moments where it’s truly nice sometimes to hear what other people’s perceptions are of you. You…changed your attitude about yourself. Did that give you more confidence when you read that?

**Rachael**  
It did, cause that was like my favorite teacher, my social studies teacher, I had a crush on him too!

**Camille**  
So it meant a lot because you respected the person?

**Rachael**  
Yeah … and he actually gave me a plaque at the end of the school year for having the highest GPA in the class, and I worked a lot for that too. I wrote a lot…and then getting into the program [OC: the IB Programme], *It felt like it was something prestigious to me…and like I got into some elite, exclusive thing and it made me proud* because a lot of my older family, like they always tell me that to not “screw up” the way they did, so…
Camille: They want you to learn from their mistakes and not repeat them?
Rachael: Right.
Camille: So they’re supportive of you … You said your sister has been very influential by saying, “Look what happened to me … don’t let this happen to you” … hoping you’ll do the things that she wishes she had done… *Who else has been supportive of you?*

Rachael: *My mom a lot, cause she’s kind of the same way … she wants like a lot for me.*
Camille: Hmmm – are you the baby?
Rachael: I’m the 5th out of 7.
Camille: How is that being in a big family?
Rachael: Umm … it’s not really that bad, … my three oldest … are like in their late 20’s, so they don’t live in the house with us anymore. My older brother, …he’s 19 now and he’s in college, but he’s the one with the learning disorder … so like I help him with his homework … the fact that he asks me for help with his homework and he’s two grades higher than me that helps my self esteem and my confidence in my own work, plus I get good grades for him … he doesn’t so much support me … except in the ways that he doesn’t know that he does, like asking me for help, because I think he’s kind of jealous that I’m the younger one and I’m doing better than he is. He doesn’t see it the same way as my older ones do, where like they want better things for me. He wants it more for himself.

Later in our interview, Rachael indicates that the support of her peers has greatly influenced her academic success.

Camille: So it’s helpful to have a boyfriend [Jorge is Rachael’s boyfriend] in this program because he understands what you’re going through and as do the rest of your peers? Do you have a healthy competition with each other? Do you try to help each other out? Do other people help you out?

Rachael: A lot with the other people in the IB program … cause we have like, there’s five IB homebases, so we know where to find each other all the time and … when we have projects, we have like a lot of projects this year … the different groups that we have like vary from month to month and so we get to be with each other, that I think probably wouldn’t get that if we were doing stuff by ourselves all the time. Because it would be a lot of time that we don’t have for free time so we always have something to get done during homebase. We go to each other’s homebases and “Oh can I see your Spanish homework?” and have conversations at the same time. While we do that during class time, when we have projects and we have to be in groups. We do the same things…

Camille: Do you have in-school study groups?
Rachael: Yeah – it’s funny like when you go to the library [the downtown main public library] on Saturdays you’ll find like 5 or 6 [Dewey IB Programme students].
Camille: IB students?
Rachael: Yeah – it was funny, cause we did that.
Camille: Is this the top of the stairs at the public library? [the 4th floor of the public library.]
Rachael: On the third floor.
Camille: I know that’s where the seniors went?
Rachael: Well, the seniors do on the 4th floor. But the juniors do it on the 3rd floor. [Where study groups meet.] It’s pretty funny, cause I went there one day and like three people came up and sat with me, and then later more people come, cause we all got the same project to do and we all got to be at the library to get our books and stuff so … It’s funny like our “hangout spot” is the library.

*Habitus: Definition of schooling success to maintain academic excellence.*

For Rachael schooling success is a person attaining their life goal, by using the knowledge they mastered in a formal schooling context.

Schooling success is measured by what a student decides to do with their life using the skills learned in school. If a person were to spend years in college and got great grades all through their life and yet ended up living in a bad apartment with next to no money, all the schooling would have been a waste. However, if for some reason that situation is what someone dreamed of doing (such as missionary work) then that is success. It is not a schooling success unless that person went to school to learn social skills and language. If a person ends up where they wanted to be as a result of schooling they’ve acquired, they are a schooling success.

Rachael believes she has attained schooling success because she plans on attending university in the fall of 2005 and is confident that she has the grades and the knowledge to make her goal a reality.

*Habitus: Extracurricular activities*

Rachael is involved in a wide variety of extracurricular activities and interests
In her open-ended *Written Questionnaire* Rachel wrote:

*Gospel Choir*

I joined the gospel choir because I was coming to a new school, a public school where I thought you couldn’t even talk about religion, and I needed some form of worship. Gospel choir involved some of my favorite things to do; singing and praising God all while having fun and earning CAS credit [Creativity and Action Service].
Volleyball

My older sister played volleyball in high school for Cornwall. I loved and adored my sister, and wanted to be just like her so in seventh grade I joined the volleyball team. At the beginning of my eighth grade year I didn’t know I was going to Martha Washington until the day before. So, I missed the sign up for volleyball. In High school, I wanted to start-off with something that would immediately give me a group of people who would be my friends. I fell in love with volleyball like my sister did and I have been playing ever since.

Indoor Track

A friend of mine, that year, who runs track a lot, persuaded me to do the same. The first 3 days I almost threw-up, and my dehydrated throat closed on me somewhat. I almost quit. But, I didn’t want to be a quitter, and I didn’t like the feeling of going home when I knew I could be doing something worthwhile. During the season, I learned new things about my body and I discovered weight lifting/training.

Softball

In eighth grade my gym coach noticed that I had a good arm. She encouraged me to try out for softball. She said she would help me with my batting, but they could use someone like me on the team. So I played and I loved it. Once I learned to play the sport, I learned to like watching games and they didn’t seem so boring.

My interests:

Right now the thing I love most to do, but don’t get enough time to do is sleep. I have never been so sleep deprived in my life. I really like to work out. I learned in Biology why working out is so healthy for your body, your mind and your spirit. It is a good stress reliever, also it feels good when you can look at another person and say, I’m stronger than him/her. I also got involved with a group of my friends who work out too and we have improved our relationship while we improve our bodies.

I try to go to festivals because I think it’s important for me to try to have fun. As a teenager, I have to act like a teenager sometimes. I went to the Puerto Rican festival this past summer. I was planning on going to the Azalea and Greek festivals, but my teachers have been loading us up on homework.

Every so often me and my boyfriend or me and my friends, or me and my family go to the movies. It’s just for a cool place to hang out without much work. And I love the museum, but I never get to go.
Rachael has a wide variety of extracurricular activities in sports, community festivals, and entertainment and in the arts and still has a desire to “act like a teenager.” Rachael is very involved and active and this creates more opportunities for agency with adults and with her peers.

_Habitus: the “Rules of the Game”_

Camille Did you ever hear this term – I know how to play the rules of the game, I know the rules of the game. It’s not just about getting the grades, but other things that I do that help me be academically successful. Do you know what I’m talking about … have you ever heard anybody use that term

Rachael No.

Camille Okay … are there things that you think you do in class besides doing the work that might help you get academic recognition other than just handing in work, are there other things that you do?

Rachael I’m not sure what it is I do, but I guess I’m a leader.

Camille You have leadership qualities?

Rachael Well I know that I was before I came … like at Catholic School I was a leader and I knew I was. I had like cliques and people following me doing whatever I did. But like at Martha Washington, I was in the back because I was scared. So my personality I guess it changed. At Dewey I’m more outgoing, more myself than I was at Martha Washington, but I’m still not where I was at Catholic school, but I think that it’s more about I matured than being scared. So I think that I’m not as much of a leader now as I was before but I guess it must be like more in a way that I don’t know about. Like having … I know I’m in the top 10% of my class and I got awards for that and I got leadership awards … like the National Youth Scholarship for Leaders or something … I got a lot of things that came in the mail that said I was a leader, so I guess I am.

I do not think at this time Rachael knows what it means to play “the rules of the game.” I do however believe she enacts “the rules of the game” with her social network of peers and friends in The IB Programme and at the library when they are working on projects together to attain high grades. She may not know what this term means but she does reciprocate favors and knowledge for what she “takes” from her teachers and friends. Reciprocity is part of the “rules of the game”; therefore I think Rachael is an unknowing player.

I also asked Rachael about her trajectory and her plans for next year (her last year attending Dewey High School). She wrote:

Next year, I’ll be a senior, so I hope to finish the year off with a bang. I will be applying to some colleges. (Coincidentally the University of River City is my first choice.) I hope to have a job so that I can be more independent, while still not having to live on my own. I plan to catch up on all the things I missed out on this
year, like festivals, clubs, parties, and more working -out. Hopefully, I won’t let my grades slip at all and the year will be a lot less stressful than this one was. I’ll be starting my first year in college and I hope to make the most out of the whole experience. Hopefully, my having been in IB will pay off, like all the teachers say. The next year looks bright for me.

Summary

Consistent with my proposed model of how some disadvantaged students succeed in attaining the social capital of the dominant culture, Rachael is “bicultural” in the cultural capital sense of the word. She gained the cultural capital of the dominant culture at a very young age with her many and varied social interactions with her teachers and her supportive and knowing mother at home. This in turn made Rachael more attractive to her teachers and other knowing adults, and therefore she continued to gain more agency.

It is not clear by her words if Rachael knows how to play “the rules of the game,” although her actions speak louder than her words. In Rachael’s acts of reciprocity with her peers and teachers and knowing when to lead and when to “stand back”, I believe she has understood these rules under a different subtext. I believe she has gained the human, cultural and social capital from her teachers, friends, peers and her mother. Although her family lives in poverty, her mother works hard to give her children every academic opportunity she can such as private schooling, when it must have been a great hardship on the family.

The “school mix effect” also influenced Rachael’s ability to be content with her schooling and education. She clearly enjoys the challenging curriculum and instruction, the pedagogical practices that encourage her to contest knowledge and not accept the status quo. Rachael also appreciated the school culture that views the students as family. The diversity of the student population regarding race, class and ethnicity is also viewed as a plus. Overall I think Rachael benefited from the IB Programme and “school mix” effect; however, I think she would have been successful at any school. She is extremely competitive and has always enjoyed learning.

Case study student participant: Nathan

Background

Nathan can be considered a disadvantaged student. He is a young working class Black male, living in a single parent home and in poverty. Nathan has been a recipient of public urban education in River City his entire schooling career. He came to Dewey High’s Pre-IB Programme in 2000. He was a student in my Pre-IB English I and II Honors class and a member of my homebase for two years (9th and 10th grade). Nathan is presently attending a small, community college in the northeastern United States, much to his disappointment. His attendance at a community college in no way reflects his academic or intellectual abilities, but rather his mother and sisters’ reliance on him for emotional and economic support. Therefore, he has chosen to stay in River City to financially support his mother and sisters and sacrifice his own needs and wants.

Nathan lives at home with his mother (single parent home), his two sisters and his twin sister’s baby daughter. Nathan’s mother has a two-year associates degree from a community
college. Nathan reports that his youngest sister, who is in high school, is with a “bad peer group and has poor and defiant behaviors in school.” He is the eldest son out of three children and works after school at the Children’s Museum. Nathan and his mother are the only members of the family who have worked to support the household. Nathan’s sisters could work, but choose not to. Nathan’s parents divorced when he was eight years old. Nathan stated at that time his mother exclaimed he was now the “man in the family.” It is unfortunate that he has maintained this role not only for his family, but, as revealed in this case study, still maintains the needs of even his friends over his own.

Nathan and I would talk every morning during homebase about his life. He would always have a cheerful good morning and I would reciprocate by asking him how he was doing. He would state aloofly, “Okay” with a sigh, which was my prompt to say, “Not Okay?” He would then tell me what was going on in his life.

Nathan was one of the students who inspired this study by his academic excellence and his unfortunate circumstances of poverty, single-parental status and neglect. I was in awe regarding how successful in school Nathan was and how he coped under such difficult circumstances. He came into homebase within the two years I was his teacher with multiple Change Of Address slips so that I could pass this information on to school authorities. He must have had at least seven address changes within that two year time period, almost one every academic quarter. He stated that they were moving due to eviction. He would be out of school for two days to help pack, move and unpack.

He emphatically stated he “hated moving.” He also said to me “I hate those people.” I inquired who he was talking about, and he stated his family was “those people.” He informed me in ninth grade that his primary motivation for academic success was that it would afford him the opportunity of a better life than his family and extended family’s and that he wanted to be away from them. He felt in ninth grade they were depending on him too much. His nickname in homebase was “Cinderfella” because students who knew him well exclaimed he did everything in the house including cooking and cleaning.

However, I find it interesting that Nathan never introduced me to his sister, who was in the same grade he was but in another magnet school program in Dewey High School. I also never met Nathan’s mother in person for parent–teacher conferences, but did speak to her often over the phone about his academics, retrieving homework for him if he was ill, or about other personal issues that arose. His mother has been very concerned about him but he is very resentful towards her.

In contrast, Nathan had very good relationships with his students, peers and teachers. He is often mentioned in positive terms as a friend upon which students could rely and who made them feel important.

One such student is Caroline, who wrote in her Written Questionnaire and stated in her Intensive Interview that Nathan’s academic support has meant much to her over the years. Caroline is a student who immigrated from the Philippines to the United States when she was in elementary school. She wrote about the strength of her mother, the support and failures of her father, and the support of a long time school and IB student friend, Nathan, who has influenced her academic success. In regards to Nathan, Caroline wrote:

My friend, Nathan: He has always told me (and still does) that one-day, I will make a name for myself.
Caroline informed me in her interview that she continues to receive unsolicited support and encouragement from Nathan since their friendship began in junior high. His support, she states, means much to her, because he is very honest and sincere.

Schooling experience/academic performance

I asked Nathan about his schooling experiences; however, he was not as explicit as previous case study students. He was a difficult interview, which was surprising considering our previous relationship. I asked Nathan:

Camille: I would like you to describe your schooling experiences from pre-school to present ... I know you’ve written down here you started at 134th Street Elementary School and now you are attending Dewey High School. Tell me about your schooling experiences, your successes, your perceptions and attitudes about school from the beginning. What was it like when you first started school?

Nathan: Hmm ... I'm trying to remember ... kindergarten was scary, meeting new people and I was the shortest kid, like they were huge growth spurts or something, I don’t know. I was very intimidated in kindergarten, so I was quiet and timid and that lasted a long time. Yeah, I didn’t get ... like get out of that “shyness shell” until like middle school.

Camille: So teachers didn’t really recognize you that much in elementary school? However, according to his River City School District Elementary Report Card Grade 1 and 2 it appears by his teachers’ comments he was social and enthusiastic in class.

Nathan’s first grade teacher wrote:

Nathan is an exemplary student, he is reliable and responsible. His attitude is always positive and his nature is both helpful and patient.

She also wrote:

Nathan is a very mature young man. He is enthusiastic, productive and very well-mannered.

Nathan: Only I was recognized for being smart and finishing my work before the class and then watching them do the work and then getting mad ... That’s the only time I was recognized ... so

Camille: You were angry because it took everybody else so long? ... Did teachers praise you?

Nathan’s second grade teacher wrote:

Nathan is a very capable student. He does well in math and seems to enjoy this class. He has good attention and finishes his assignments on time. He is very cooperative when working in a group and is respectful of adults. He is responsible regarding homework and class work. Nathan’s writing is improving, but he still writes very phonetically. He is a joy to have in class.
Nathan’s mother responded:

Nathan’s progress is very encouraging. He trys (sic) very hard (sic). I have Nathan writing stories at home, so he can improve on his writing, so far so good he is coming along, it is nice to here (sic) a very nice comment about Nathan, I will make sure he keep (sic) up the good work.

His progress in third and fourth grade was similar with teacher comments such as:

Continues to be a fine student and a helpful member in our class. Excellent student and role model of behavior for his classmates (sic).

Nathan was also in an academically accelerated program in middle school and was on the honor roll several times. However, his recall of his academic success was not as “glowing.”

Nathan

Yeah … but the praise well it wasn’t good from the other students’ point of view, watching me getting praised while they’re sitting there doing their assignment and I’m not doing nothing … I’m like sitting there playing a game on the computer while they’re doing the assignment.

Camille

So they would say things like “Why can’t you all be like Nathan, who’s finished his work!” And so that put you in a bad social situation?

Nathan

Yeah … that still goes on … Even now!…It goes on now … I just happened like a week ago … like I did all my work for like history, it was due like … well it’s due today, well this week … I had it done like May 1st … I had it all done and I even did extra credit stuff and then she called me like 2 weeks ago … “Why can’t you guys be like Nathan who … he’s the only one out of both classes who’s done with all his work and I even have a grade for him”… So everyone is like good, “goodie two shoes” and all that stuff … it’s not so good.

Camille

But is there a part of you that kind of deep down likes the praise, likes recognition?

Nathan

It’s not that it’s more difficult it’s just the people with you, while your studying made it difficult. Classroom, home … yeah it didn’t make a difference … It didn’t help the situation … It didn’t help it at all.

Similar to other students in the study, Nathan finds the IB Programme more difficult. I think the added competition, along with his responsibilities at home, made his academic experiences more challenging. His GPA remained high, however, in spite of his discontentment with his study situation. Much of his success is due in part to his own motivation and the encouragement and support of his institutional agents such as grandmother, friends, mentors/teachers and peers in the IB Programme.
Institutional agency

Table 6.7 (on the following page) shows how Nathan responded to his Network Survey.

Table 6.7: Nathan’s Network Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>A. Teachers</th>
<th>B. Friends</th>
<th>C. Peers</th>
<th>D. Relatives</th>
<th>E. Other Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Give me the moral support I need to do well in school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I rely on them for advice and guidance in making important school-related decisions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Are sensitive to my personal needs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Are good at helping me solve school related or academic problems</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I have a trusting and good relationship with them</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. They have shown me through their actions how to be successful in school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What his survey reveals is that Nathan’s relatives and other adults appear to support his academic success somewhat more than his teachers, friends or peers, although not by much frequency. In viewing Nathan’s Network Survey it would appear he does not have much support from any one group; however, in our interview he reveals a different perspective.

In Nathan’s open-ended Written Questionnaire he gave preference to his teachers/academic mentor as the institutional agents who supported his academic success and his own “fear of failure.” He wrote his response in this order:

1. While in FIRST [national pre-engineering robotics after school program] one of the mentors, who happens to be a teacher at Dewey helped me when I was slacking in class by keeping me motivated.
2. Not to be arrogant, but myself. Throughout life no one ever motivated me to do well. I grew up in a negative environment and all I had was my studies to keep me positive. I motivated myself to do good, so I could praise myself in the long run.
3. Failure has motivated me to be academically successful. As I watch others struggle academically in class, I struggle to do well, so I do not end up “in their shoes.”
In my interview with Nathan, I ask him about his responses to the Network Survey and the Written Questionnaire.

Camille: I notice in your Network Survey you talk a lot about those who were not supportive, and you write in your questionnaire that you really depended on yourself. There is one person though, you said, “gives me moral support I need to do well in school,” and you put a number 9 for support and frequency on others … and who are those others? … They seem to be the highest.

Nathan: I’ll try to remember. An older teacher … it’s like people I don’t see on a daily basis … but when I do see them it helps me the most. I can see them for like an hour, but after the hour it’s like thank you, you relieved a lot of stress for me. One of them works here… Mrs. Polaski. Sometimes when I just can’t take it or … we have like a 20-minute talk and like when I’m done, I feel relieved, like the burden is gone. I mean … the way she goes about saying it … she looks directly at me, she’s focused on me the whole time throughout the conversation and any question I ask, she always has an answer right there to support her so … She only does that for me … No one else gives me any support, they only listen to what I have to say, but there’s no help.

Camille: There’s no help? You did have friends high, for the good relationships, but then … your relatives were higher than anybody else, showing you through their actions how to be successful … so it wasn’t the teachers?

Nathan: No the … the relatives … not the immediate family, but the outside family … there’s maybe one or two who show me support for… my academics. My grandmother mostly … she’s the only one to … like praise me for anything … she bought me a plaque for coming in like 3rd place … even the little awards, anything I got, … she would call me, “I head about you in the newspaper.” … “I saw you on TV.” … And she gives me a card.

Camille: So she really makes an extra effort to support you?

Nathan: Even though she’s not going to be here for my graduation, she already has like a message already recorded for me to tell me after I graduate … so … she’s the only one who shows me support for academics.

I saw Nathan at a graduation party and I did learn that his grandmother came to his graduation after all. He was very happy. He also talks about his friends in the IB Programme.

Camille: You’re good friends with Malika, Taye, and Ali. do you like the same kind of music, do you like to do things together?

Nathan: Yeah, we try … like me and Ali … like when I see him getting stressed … I don’t know what’s wrong with me, when I try to hold people above my interests … I’m a caring person. I hate that about myself … but if you look in my yearbook they call me Mr. Negative or maybe they’ll call me the Black hole … cause I’m never positive … I’ll always find something negative about the situation… When he [Ali] gets upset or something, I say “Hey lets go to the mall” …we’ll plan a day and we’ll all “chill out” and I’ll do whatever they want to do… “Oh I’m fine whatever
you guys want to do” … So if you want to go to arcade, I don’t play the game and just watch him play and “Oh you’re doing good!” even though I have no idea what he’s playing” … So like we go to the mall or go out to eat … I order, we talk about stuff … those are like the only moments where I feel like a little bit happy. It’s fine, but I don’t really show … I’m still timid.

Camille

Because if you showed it you might get hurt? Do you kind of consider them a little like family?

Nathan

In middle school, in 8th grade with the accelerated program kids. So you always saw the same kids every single day, so the bond grew … Cause every year you’re always with the same core … I’d say like 5 or 7, so every year you bond like one step closer.

Camille

And everybody is competitive and everybody works really hard and all of a sudden you’re probably not perceived as a nerd, because you’re surrounded by them.

Nathan

Yeah. That’s a good thing! Yeah – like with awards ceremony, even though I got like one measly math award, I sat through “the trip” for every IB kid who got an award. Like IB we’re taking over. I’ve never seen like a family member come to something special for me … I’m the only one out of the middle school 6th grade [that did not have a family member come to support Nathan’s performance]. I did a play Annie and I played 6 characters in that show! I got like an award for it! And we did the show for like 3 days and not one day, no one ever came for me. Or any event … I get jealous of it now. I would say, “Mom I’m doing my thing.” She would say “I don’t have time right now”, so I’ll get dropped off or I catch the bus or something, which I still do now!

Camille

But was she working that she couldn’t come?

Nathan

Yeah … “working” or “tired” or … and then when my sister graduated from the middle school last year, she was in choir too and then when she had one performance, they took an initiative and they went … So when I went and I just clapped and thought “Why am I here, no one came for any of my stuff??” Why, you never came to my things?… I said that out loud … Shouldn’t have said that. I got yelled at and all that stuff.

Camille

So the people that supported you are the people in this program? People in this school? Some teachers and the students, so that’s a core family? How are you going to maintain those relationships after graduation?

Nathan

Yeah. Like Ali… I’ll keep tabs on him to make sure he’s right in the right direction.

Camille

And Ali won’t be leaving town, he’s going to the state university, so he’ll be around. He’s going to live in the college dorms.

Nathan

He doesn’t want to be at his house … Ali comes from the same environment … we come from the same environment … doesn’t like going home … like I make an effort to stay after school for something ever since … cause I don’t want to go home where I’ll get yelled at for something, not doing something or “clean this” or “clean that.”

Camille

I remember you were “Cinderfella” you know you had to…
Nathan  Yeah, I still do it now … *I come home from work at like 8:00* … I expect like one dish to be clean … it’s a 90 degree kitchen and *I have a whole stack of dishes or like cleaning up wise in the house* … sisters … *one of my sisters clean up but the other one she’s like 16 and like mother refuses for her like to clean because she’s like she’s been like the youngest even though she’s not the youngest* … when she cleans up stuff it can be like half done and I’ll tell my mom and mom will be like “Why don’t you clean it?” … and I’m like but how come when I was her age and it was half done you used to stand right there and watch me clean it until it was clean. So *I look back and I’m like oh whatever, I’ll go to my room, turn up the music, I don’t even watch TV half the time anymore there’s nothing on interesting for me to watch.*

Camille  Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

Nathan  *I don’t know.* . *Not at home?* Every day I come home I’m like “Oh I don’t want to go in this house,” … or “I can’t wait to get out” … that’s my favorite saying every time I’m sad.

Camille  I remember you said that in 9th grade.

Nathan  I just can’t wait to get out of this house.

Camille  The “mind is a terrible thing to waste” Nathan. So you’re going to be out of the house.

I furthered explored Nathan’s friendships to see if he had issues with trust that are impediments regarding social capital attainment. I asked him about his close friendship with Taye.

Camille  Can you like share everything with him? … You’re like really close friends?

Nathan  *I don’t share anything with him, but he shares things with me!*

Camille  Do you share anything with anybody?

Nathan  *No, I don’t share anything with anybody!*

Camille  Why is that?

Nathan  *I have a trust issue … I don’t … I don’t want to say something and then like it might get twisted the wrong way, because that happens too often.*

Camille  Did you get hurt before in the past … had that happened, and so you said “Oh no I’m not putting myself through that!”

Nathan  *I let them open up to me, but I won’t open up to them. The closest he [Taye] knows about me is my mom’s name and all the siblings I have … He doesn’t know anything else… But, I know everything about him … things if his grandmother found out she would like kill him …*

Camille  *So he confides in you and does he also accept your advice -- you think?*

Nathan  *Calls me for his advice? … Are you kidding me? He ends up using my advice … I’m like a little counselor too!*

Camille  *Do you counsel other people? Because your name has been brought up by other*
students in the case studies as you being a supportive person.

Nathan  Yeah – I don’t know – I don’t get myself personally … I support people, but I don’t support myself!

It is clear that Nathan’s friends in the IB Programme are important to him because they have “like minds”, have known each other for a long time (which settles the trust issue somewhat for Nathan) and similar home environments. He seems to be attracted to Ali as a friend and confidant who also has a reputation for being negative as well. Nathan can encourage Ali and Ali can encourage Nathan and understand that being academically successful is a more difficult task considering their home life and their issues of trust.

Nathan drew for me (per my request) a diagram showing his vertical and horizontal linkages when describing his institutional agents. For his vertical linkages he has written: “Julia Polaski, teacher/mentor, Curtis Stahl, robotics mentor/engineer, Ulna Martin/grandmother, and Annette Sudan/adult friend.” For his horizontal linkages he has “Taye Marcella/friend, Nathan O’Connor/myself and the IB Programme, class of 2004 students.” I find Nathan’s statements in his Written Questionnaire and Intensive Interview as well as his Horizontal and Vertical Linkages diagram refuting his results in the Network Survey, where he ranked everyone low, especially his friends and peers, yet in his diagram he lists the entire graduating class of the Dewey IB Programme 2004, which is fifty students!

I believe Nathan has gained institutional agency from comments made about him from his teachers throughout his schooling history, as well as from his classroom and program peers and his grandmother. However, he does not always use their support or advice, due to issues of trust.

Habitus: Definition of schooling success to maintain academic excellence.

In Nathan’s open-ended Written Questionnaire he wrote his definition of schooling success. It reads:

In my opinion schooling success is the ability of an academic environment (schools) to allow diverse individuals (students) to grow mentally, physically and socially. In order to prepare them for the adult world [sic].

Nathan is the student who believes he has predominantly gone through his education by himself believing in the meritocratic notion of the individualism and schooling success, although he does acknowledge occasional support of his family, teachers and friends. However, when I asked Nathan in his Intensive Interview if he had achieved schooling success, he is the only student participant who believes he has not. I asked:

Camille  Not academically successful? … What needs to change?

Nathan  Interaction between the students and the teachers. There is too much hierarchy in this school… You come to school, you go to the class, you do the work and that’s it … there’s no communication besides that. There’s no, “So how was your day?” [referring to adults and teachers in the school] … I do the initiative … “How are the
kids?” “I know you had a baby, how are they?” … I do that now, I started like this year … But before, when I first came here I really didn’t know the teachers that well … you do their assignment, get it done and then like A, B, C, D or F. So they didn’t really prepare me for an adult world … even my counselor…

Nathan was in my homebase for two years (9th and 10th grade) and we shared our personal lives with each other during morning homebase. I now realize that our morning talks were more important to him than I thought. He also expressed to me at a graduation party that his “new” homebase teacher did not talk with him the way I did, and she did not get to know her students on a personal level until their senior year. He stated his new homebase teacher changed her orientation to her students, because he complained openly that she needed to get know her students on a personal level and share her life with them. Nathan wants to develop friends in the adult world that will help him to understand what it means to be an adult.

Camille Would you like it that the adults in the building would share more of their living experiences or their experiences of what they’re going through? … Would that help you? Then you’d have this role modeling of adulthood and mentoring?

Nathan Yeah.

Although he states his mother often initiates or attempts to have conversations with him, he reports, he is silent at home. When I asked why, Nathan admitted to me he does not speak with his mother or other adults in his family because it usually leads to an argument or a misunderstanding.

Nathan has reached academic success in that he is graduating from the IB Programme and has done well in his coursework, but cannot get beyond the tensions in his home life that impede his trajectory towards college outside of River City and leaving his home. He needs adult advice to help him accomplish his goals. He does not have the knowledge or the energy to free himself from his home life. Therefore, he believes, he is not successful.

Later in the interview Nathan reveals the “silence” in his home:

Nathan You know mom? We don’t even talk. [OC: He states this bluntly and “matter of fact.”]

Camille Really how come?

Nathan She tries to talk to me but I don’t talk to her …. Like she’ll try to lead the conversation, but I’ll just sit there. Like yesterday for instance, she got mad, cause I would not say anything … I don’t like to talk in my house … I don’t like to be vocal, cause I don’t want to get into an argument with a sibling or something like that. I just want to stay quiet and shut myself out. Or they can come in my room and just start talking and I’ll just say “Yes” or “No.”

Camille Are you resentful of what’s going on in the family? [Nathan’s sister had a baby. She is in the 12th grade also. He reports it has made everyone’s life in his house more difficult] cause you said “going on to community college for two years to transfer even though I don’t want it this way I have to make sacrifices for my household.” So they want you to stay at home and help with payments? Is that it? …

Nathan Yeah – I wanted to leave… I wanted to go away like everyone else. If you go, you know it costs a lot of money coming back and all the out of state fees and who are
you going to stay with, you’re not going to know anyone. It’s little stuff like that…

I know she wants me to stay here. I figure if I leave, I’ll get a call every single day
... cause I’m the only one who’s doing well in school right now. I’m the one who’s

graduating June 26th!

Camille How are you going to keep a balance with that pressure … I want to see you finish
… I don’t want you to give up on your dreams … will this wear you down?

Nathan Probably it will. I was going to get a job just for me, keep the money, save it to go

in my savings account. But if you look at my account, every time I get paid the

money is gone.

Camille Where does it go?

Nathan I have to help my mom.

Habitus: Extracurricular activities

Nathan wrote about his need to be around adult mentors and to meet other students
outside his school. He wrote in fragmented statements:

US FIRST Robotics program. Like being with professionals and other young
people from different schools 10-12th year. FIRST helped me apply science and
technology information. Choir.

Extracurricular activities for Nathan is yet another way he can meet more people that might be
able to help him understand what it means to be an adult. He is involved in activities outside his
social class and culture and is exploring a trajectory unlike his mother or his family with his
interests in engineering programs.

Habitus: the “Rules of the Game”

Nathan also informed me he does not know the “rules of the game” and then quickly
changed the topic. At this point and without another interview or observations, I am unsure about
this statement.

Summary

In following Diagram 1b, Nathan is “bicultural” in the cultural capital sense of the word.
He attained the cultural capital of the dominant culture through his early contacts and
interactions with her elementary teachers as is evidenced by his successful schooling experiences
via his teachers’ comments regarding his behavior and stating comments such as “Nathan is a
role model for other student to follow.” His report card grades were also excellent with all A’s
and B’s. His teachers and administrators also selected Nathan to be in an academically
challenging accelerated middle school program and furthermore he was accepted into the IB
Programme, maintained his enrollment in the program and graduated in June 2004.

Nathan has institutional agency, but has not always utilized their support fully, thus
missing out on important social networks. I think Nathan is successful in that he graduated from
the IB Programme and is attending community college; however, the overarching impediment to his success does not lie with the school culture, curriculum and instruction, pedagogical practices and the administrations “mission” but with his sense of responsibility towards his family both financially and emotionally.

He does “cry out” for more adult interaction and mentoring, which can be problematic within the structure and function of secondary schools that unfortunately puts more emphasis on the subject (Goodson, 1997) and the assessments (Martina, Hursh, Markowitz, Hart & Debes, 2003) and less on interactions with students. The socialization process is as important in high school as it is in elementary and middle school as evidenced by Nathan and other study participants’ comments.

I do believe the “school mix effect” did retain Nathan’s interest in school by the diversity and small program size of the student population, the school culture as “family.” I also believe he was challenged by the curriculum and instruction. Being self-described “Mr. Negative,” it is difficult for me to attain an accurate portrayal of Nathan.

**Case study student participant: Taye**

**Background**

Taye is a young working class Black man and a recipient of public urban education in River City and in Durham, North Carolina. He came to Dewey High’s Pre-IB Programme in 2000. Taye was a student in my Pre-IB English I and II Honors class in ninth grade and is currently attending a small, liberal arts college in the southeastern United States.

Taye has lived with his grandparents most of his life. Taye’s mother graduated with a two-year community college degree in the culinary arts. She is a chef and restaurateur who is living in rural Alabama with his younger stepbrother. Taye reports that his mother purchased an old Greek Rival farmhouse many years ago and has turned it into a thriving restaurant. Taye would visit his mother in the summers and on holidays. He said it was “pretty boring” because there “was too much green and not enough pavement” or things to do. When I asked Taye why he lives with his grandparents and not his mother, he quietly states it is best for everyone.

Taye’s mother found out Taye is “gay” by reading his journal when he visited his mother and aunt three Christmas’s ago. He was very upset because she read his journal and she was upset with him because she worried about his lifestyle and that his sexual orientation would make his life more problematic. He frantically e-mailed Malika, another teacher and I. I told him to keep quiet, take a deep breath and give her time to think about everything. I stated I felt that eventually she would “turn around” and accept your position because she loves you and then this would be the time for the both of you to talk. Within two days, they were talking again and his mother has slowly accepted Taye’s choice.

When his grandparents would come to parent conferences they appeared to be in their seventies and rather old to be raising an energetic teenage boy. Taye’s grandmother commented during one parent-teacher conference, “I’m too old for this.” His grandparents have stood strongly beside Taye and have supported all his interests and his academic success.
Schooling experience/academic performance

Taye’s schooling experience varied from being schooled in River City in the north and being schooled in Durham in the south during his elementary school years. He felt there was a great difference in schooling practices and he also felt out-of-place in the south. He also had mixed reviews regarding his schooling in River City. He preferred small schools where he would feel a sense of family and caring. He also greatly appreciated hands-on activities and academic rigor. As you will witness, his teachers played an important role in Taye’s life. He mentions them frequently when discussing his previous schooling experiences.

Taye’s grandmother, who has been his guardian most of his life, was notified via letter from the River City School District on June 17, 1991 that Taye was classified as having a learning disability. His classification was Speech Impaired and the program he was in was Special Class Option 2. His grandmother agreed that Taye needed speech therapy services, as well as occupational therapy because his coordination was also seen as clumsy and impaired. He made fine progress in these areas and was declassified later in elementary school. To date Taye’s speech is polished and articulate and his movements refined.

Taye’s academic record is sparkling with A+ s, As, and B+s with an occasional C+ through out his schooling career from elementary school through middle school. His teachers only wrote positive and encouraging comments about Taye such as:

Taye is making excellent progress. He has a wonderful attitude towards school (and life). We all enjoy his sense of humor and the stories he shares. He is a joy to work with.

Another entry read:

Taye continues to shine! His attitude and effort are certainly make (sic) him deserving of the Dr. King award. I know you must be very proud!

I asked:

Camille Tell me about how teachers perceived you? How you perceived the school, and your interest in the school.

Taye My principal, her name was Ms. Marx at the time, she’s now Mrs. Mallard because she married. She was great, but I was in kindergarten at 129th Street Elementary School. It was wonderful, my teacher, her name was Ms. Hemingway and Mrs. Lavender. Mrs. Lavender had orange hair, so it was the most confusing thing being a child at that time. I really enjoyed 129th Street Elementary School. They brought in a lot of hands-on activities to the school, because it was a small school…They had kindergarten through 4th grade.

Camille Then you moved on to Robert E. Lee? Why did you do that?

Taye My mom -- we moved down south for about a year.

Camille Oh that’s right, you went to Durham.

Taye Yeah
Camille: How was that? What was that education like? Do you remember?

Taye: Yeah—it was disgusting. *I didn’t like the atmosphere of the school* because I guess being from the north they were seeing me different and how the south has problems with the north from “way back.” Whatever, we still have grudges.

Camille: Have you heard the term “damn Yankee?”

Taye: Yeah, I did hear Yankee a couple of times from a teacher. Then I came back to River City … and went to Alexander Hamilton School. My teachers were Mrs. Christman and Mrs. Gowan.

Camille: Did you like school? Did they perceive you as smart?

Taye: Yeah, I was always doing work ahead of time and stuff like that. They always liked helping me. I liked school.

Camille: … And then you went on to Andrew Jackson?

Taye: I attended Andrew Jackson School because my mom didn’t see me being challenged enough at Alexander Hamilton. So we went out to Andrew Jackson School—it was like one of the premiere elementary magnet schools at that time. They had a great science program, so she transferred me out to Andrew Jackson School. I met a couple of my friends who are still my friends now. I think Andrew Jackson School was the best school.

Camille: So out of all your experiences that was the best?

Taye: Other than Dewey in high school, but Andrew Jackson School was great!

Taye’s teacher from Andrew Jackson School comments:

Taye is a delight—he brightens my days! Taye continues to perform well in all areas—his behavior and work habits set a fine example for his peers! I see much leadership potential in Taye—I know he has a bright future ahead of him. Taye has returned 100% of his homework the past three months.

Camille: Okay—why was it so good Taye?

Taye: I think because of the atmosphere again. *The teacher atmosphere, They were always nice and compassionate, you could see they really got into teaching.* Especially in my 5th and 6th grade teacher because we had a split class 5th and 6th grade year, we just stayed with the same teacher, Ms. Montgomery for the 2 years …

Camille: Hmmm … so you really got to know her then?

Taye: Yeah—she became another mother.

Camille: Did that help too?

Taye: Yeah, *the relationship between the class.*

Camille: Now were you living with your mom at this time or were you living with your grandmother?

Taye: I was still with mommy at this time. Then I graduated from Andrew Jackson in 6th grade.
Camille Why did you go to Lincoln Park?

Taye Because Andrew Jackson only went up to 6\textsuperscript{th} grade.

Camille Did you have a choice?

Taye I think we had a choice, but I think it was just like the lottery system at the time. Cause you know how the good River City School District is and my number came up to go Lincoln Park, so I went to Lincoln Park for 7\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} grade. 7\textsuperscript{th} grade year it was so easy. I ended the end of the year off with like a 4.21 for the GPA because it not challenging. It wasn’t at all. It wasn’t.

Camille So that was not so good time for your schooling?

Taye Yeah 7\textsuperscript{th} grade, and then in 8\textsuperscript{th} grade they transferred me to the accelerated program at Lincoln Park and it challenged me a little more. I dropped down to a 4.0 student.

Camille So you were with other students…. in 8\textsuperscript{th} grade you were in a more advanced program? And that made you were happier?

Taye Yeah I was happier in that because I was being challenged more.

Camille Why did you decide to come to the Dewey High School to be in the IB Programme?

Taye My 8\textsuperscript{th} grade biology teacher, her name was Janet Spears, she’s now vice principal at the Marquis de Fleur Academy. She was like, you should try to get into an IB program and also this program called the pre-freshmen engineering program at River City Poly-Technic Institute. She was like; they would be good programs for you. I wasn’t like really psyched about going to the programs, so I just sent in the application and surprisingly enough I got accepted to both of the programs and I love the IB program. Oh my God, the IB program is just crazy! I think 9\textsuperscript{th} grade year. I wasn’t really focused yet.

Camille Do you think you were able to just work on innate knowledge, or you didn’t have to study as hard before you came to this?

Taye Yeah, you didn’t have to study as hard before. The other students then knew at the time pushed me to do better…

Taye’s teachers have greatly influenced his attitudes, perceptions and behaviors regarding school. He quickly gained the cultural capital of the dominant culture by his many social interactions with his teachers. As a result, his teachers, as his institutional agents, sponsored Taye and encouraged him to be involved in more activities and programs that would intellectually engage him and at the same time also widen his social networks.

\textit{Institutional agency}

\textbf{Table 6.7} (on the following page) shows how Taye responded to his Network Survey
Table 6.8: Taye’s Network Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>A. Teachers</th>
<th>B. Friends</th>
<th>C. Peers</th>
<th>D. Relatives</th>
<th>E. Other Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Give me the moral support I need to do well in school</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10 Neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I rely on them for advice and guidance in making important school-related decisions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Blank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Are sensitive to my personal needs</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Blank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Are good at helping me solve school-related or academic problems</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Blank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I have a trusting and good relationship with them</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Blank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. They have shown me through their actions how to be successful in school</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Blank</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In viewing Taye’s responses to the quantitative Network Survey it is apparent that his teachers, friends and peers are very important regarding his academic success. He also mentions his entire neighborhood as giving him the moral support he needs to do well in school. In my observations of Taye and in his qualitative in-depth Intensive Interview, his Network Survey is an accurate portrayal of his support networks.

Taye’s open-ended Written Questionnaire also gave homage to his ancestors who did not have the same educational opportunities as he does today. Taye is grateful for the education he is receiving at Dewey High School. He also expresses a similar theme that other urban and minority students in the IB Programme expressed that they did not want to be stereotyped as not being successful, just because they live in the city, in poverty and are of minority status. They consciously and actively wanted to break that stereotype. Taye reflectively writes:

Friends are great motivators for me. I think they work well because of the academic program I am enrolled in. My mother use to use this saying “Birds of a feather flock together”…I finally understand what she was trying to say; since other people in the program are doing good (sic) it makes you perform well also.

Another motivator that I draw from is the past, I think about how many people were not given the chance of education that I have at my fingertips everyday. And I think lastly, I enjoy proving people wrong such as the media since they portray inner city dwellers as not learning and being productive in the long run. Being in the IB program I know I learn things and experiences things that many people will never have a chance at learning.
Taye defines his mother’s saying and what it means to him. He also refers to the diversity, program size, intelligence level and competitive nature of the “IB bunch” who are his friends and peers, as reasons why he and others at Dewey High School are academically successful. He also views “the IB bunch” as family. I ask:

Camille  Okay. When you think about friends, relationships and experiences, your mother talked about… she used to have this saying, “Birds of a feather flock together”, and you finally understand that. Tell me about your “friends that are great motivators” for you.

Taye  Oh my goodness … the IB bunch. … The 50 of us have grown [have matured] … Well we started as 100, but the other half, losers, dropped out or whatever.

Camille  Why do you think they dropped out?

Taye  I think they weren’t motivated enough to complete the program, or maybe they were just lazy also, but the 50 of us who are staying in, especially like my inner bunch, Malika, Marcy, Liam, Paul, Ken, John, Chelsea [the students he lists come from diverse backgrounds of race (Black, White, and Asian) and class and parental status] … we have grown to be like brothers and sisters.

Camille  It’s a family?

Taye  Yeah … it is a true family. Sure, we’ll all yell at each other for half the day, but before the end of the day we’ve made up and stuff … we’re kissing and stuff … it’s just a great motivation.

Camille  What drew you together? … What do you think was the thing that made you stick like glue, or feel like a family?

Taye  … I think it’s like the walks of life that we’ve come from. Like everyone has a different path. Where they were at and where they are now….Where they’re going …I just think it all meshed well…

Camille  Different paths? … Can you explain a little bit more?

Taye  Cause like … Paul and Mai’s family are like more internationally … cause Paul is from East Africa, Mai’s family is from Japan… and me and Malika are more like here [: Black and U.S. born]. But Malika is more north from River City, centered around River City. My family roots go back to Georgia, so it’s just like a nice mesh…

Camille  … Do you think diversity brought you together? Do you think it’s like minds? Do you think it’s the intelligence level?

Taye  I think it’s everything … the diversity, the intelligence level … cause like we know … we know who we are … we know what we want to do and we know really how to get it [know how to play the “rules of the game”]. It’s the only thing that might hinder us, is our self.

Camille  So it sounds like you’re all pretty independent! But yet, you can be with each other in your independence and feel comfortable?

Taye  Yeah
Is it also because of the size of the program? Do you think that helps at all?

Yeah … I think that since like the size has decreased, we were able to connect more … find the people who we’re close with, closer with. It’s always good to find a nice comforting soul … they are those comforting souls.

Habitus: Definition of schooling success to maintain academic excellence.

Taye wrote in his open-ended Written Questionnaire his definition of success:

My definition of schooling success includes every constituent is positively feeding off the next, teachers are teaching with passion because of their students who are in taking everything as fast as they are being taught.

Taye in our interview expressed that he enjoys being competitive. I further explored this lead in our interview and does his competitiveness lead to his academic success. I asked:

Do you see yourself as a competitive person, are you internally competitive?

Yeah I’m internally competitive, I dislike losing … I want to be the best.

Hmm… so you kind of drive yourself on and do you sometimes … do you still compare yourself with anybody else. [OC: Knowing that Taye has done this in the past]

Yeah, I … yeah I think being in a program, like you catch yourself every now and then comparing yourself to like people who’s like on your level … like see like if I’m doing work, are they doing work, what’s my average, what’s their average. It’s like back and forth … I think it’s just the program.

I find it interesting that Taye’s definition of academic success does not include comparisons of GPAs or letter grades, although it does seem evident that he still does his “comparative competitive gaze.” I think he does this for his own motivation and does not equate this with schooling success.

Habitus: Extracurricular activities

Taye wrote about others usually the school principal, IB Director, or Malika encouraging him to “volunteer” for an activity. He wrote:

I participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, I usually am the one being volunteered to do something for one time and after that first time I really enjoy that activity so I stay involved with it. Some of my activities include Choir, Voice, Math Team, Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program, School Based Planning Team, Student Leadership Congress, Student Government, Pre-Freshman Engineering Program, Pris’m, and the Dewey Gay Straight Alliance. [OC: Taye, with a help of a teacher, formed this group to stop prejudice against homosexual
students and “gay bashing” comments made by students at Dewey. He wanted to have an open forum for both gay and straight students in public schools.]

I constantly listen to music, from the time I awake in the morning to the time I fall asleep in the evening. Usually I listen to rhythm and blues (R&B)/Hip Hop and a combination of blues. I enjoy reading works of fiction written by African American authors such as E. Lynn Harris and Zane. Some of my magazines I read include Oprah, Time, Details and GQ. I love to watch Charmed on TNT and the WB. I enjoy going to all types of museums especially the Children’s Museum in River City. I enjoy comedy and drama filled movies.

Taye has a wide and varied list of political, social and academic extracurricular activities. He also wanted to express how these activities are similar and dissimilar to his relatives and who encouraged him to be involved in activities and interests outside of school. I first asked Taye if his interests were similar to his family’s interests and activities.

Camille When you think about it, your mom’s cultural interests and your grandparents who you live with now… are they similar or dissimilar?

Taye They’re similar … my mom … yeah they’re similar because … the family was always a close knit family, it was very together cause, like the intermediate family was always together, the outer family really don’t get along, we only see each other really at funeral or so I guess like being so close internally you like build special bonds or that …

Camille So is mom interested in rhythm and blues and

Taye Yeah, because of my grandfather. We traveled a lot. Growing-up she says they would listen to a BB King tape in the car. He [grandfather] wouldn’t turn it off until they got to the driveway down south, just repeating the same songs … so I guess the music crossed the ages.

Camille You also like a lot of things that people would consider elite class just by the books that you like to read … You like to go to museums and you enjoy movies … Do you go to plays … if you had the money, even go more?

Taye I would go to more plays seriously. I’m trying to count my paychecks right now cause I really would like to go see the new production of Raisin in the Sun that they’re doing in New York with Sean Combs and Office … that seems so interesting … I love that kind of stuff.

Camille Does your family go to plays?

Taye Not really.

Camille Is that where you set yourself apart?

Taye Yeah – I think we set ourselves apart there. My mom is like the calm, laid back type of person, she’s cool with going to the movies, go get something to eat and come back home. She’s more of a “homebody” person.
Camille  And you like to go out?

Taye  Yeah, I like to go out.

Taye also has sophisticated tastes and hangs out at very “upscale” places for a person his age. He seems to be exploring outside of his cultural and social class status.

Camille  Where’d you get this thing about cappuccino? [: Taye would often come up to my desk during morning homebase and explain with a sigh, “I wish I had a cappuccino right now!”]

Taye  I don’t … ha, ha … my grandmother said when I was smaller I would always come in her room in the morning and say good morning and, and she would let me drink out of her coffee mug at an early age. So I guess that stuck with me.

Camille  Grandma was brave wasn’t she … Kid on caffeine huh? Didn’t you used to go down to Theatre Street and you would go to The Symphony Café. [In the River City theatre and cultural district. This area has beautiful architecture and a Big City feel].

Taye  Yeah, still do that every night.

Camille  Whom do you go there with?

Taye  This kid I know, his name is Truman… he was about 3 years older than me … he’s now at Morehouse.

I also asked him how he becomes involved in all his extracurricular activities.

Camille  So I see you participate in a lot of extra curricular activities. You have a wide range and you state: “after the first time I do something I really enjoy that activity so I stay and blossom with it?” So does somebody have to invite you in at first does somebody have to tell you, “Hey Taye, you got to try this!”

Taye  Yeah.

Camille  And then you try it and they you get hooked?

Taye  Yeah, like school life financing.

Camille  Who told you to do that?

Taye  Mrs. Burgess, she brought me to one meeting the year she was leaving and after the first meeting I remember … after the first meeting and the food… I was hooked. I said, “Oh every first Tuesday of each month!” I can come and talk about stuff and eat while I’m talking? I will enjoy this!

Camille  Do you have a lot of adults mentor you in that way? Pull you into programs or was it equal amount of adults and students?

Taye  There was a lot of adults because like maybe they could have picked up my persona and they saw that I wanted to do more …I guess they put in the extra help that they could to help me do better.
Taye’s wide and varied activities ranging from political, artistic and academic indicate he is exploring outside his own cultural and social class status and making vertical linkages to his ever widening social networks.

Habitus: the “Rules of the Game”

Taye has secured many enduring relationships with his teachers, administrators and mentors throughout his schooling career. He revealed this information in his interview regarding his schooling experiences and extracurricular activities. I have known Taye for four years and have “seen him in action.” He definitely knows how to play the rules of the game. He is very adept at getting what he wants by his discourse, mannerisms and physical presentation.

Taye presents himself as upper middle class in the clothing, as well as in his speech and demeanor. He wears to school a dress shirt, slacks and a tie, or polo shirts with chinos. He reports he buys his clothes with the money he earns at his job and his allowance. He also subscribes to Gentlemen’s Quarterly magazine to get the latest fashion trends. He exclaims he is dressing the part of a successful person. He believes people respond more positively to him because of his dress and mannerisms. Taye is the student who reported in his definition of academic success that he wanted to break the stereotype of “city kids.” He has actively and purposely attempted to do this at every level.

Camille

How do you think you present yourself? How do you think people perceive you … adults … because they seem to come to you? What do you do that makes you attractive?

Taye

I don’t know what I do to make me attractive. I think I … well I guess the first thing that people really see is what you wear, so like clothes or, so I usually wear like business attire to make myself more presentable. Tuck in shirts, belts and … and I guess from like the image they perceive that he’s mature and what not, so maybe he could help in the long run or, so I guess that’s it.

Camille

Where did you come up with that? Was that something that you figured out on your own? Or did somebody tell you it has to do with sometimes your discourse and your mannerisms and the way you dress that people will be attracted to you?

Taye

I think I figured it out on my own about 9th grade summer year because … 10th grade actually, 10th grade … 9th grade I started thinking in that mode but at the time I didn’t have a good job to push the mode into full gear, but in 10th grade I found me a decent enough job and it pushed “the train” along so I could get into that mode.

Camille

And what job was this?

Taye

I started working at the Madison Library … The pay wasn’t good, but my grandfather gave me … an allowance, and besides my own job and I started buying the business attire that I enjoyed.

Camille

But you decided to do that on your own?
Taye I really decided on my own.

Camille Cause you read a lot on your own?

Taye Yeah … I decided on my own, because I know if I owned a business I wouldn’t want someone working for me if they wore baggy clothing to my business. I want someone who wears their right size and looks proper all the time.

Taye has gained much of his academic success by playing “the rules of the game” and views his teachers as his “competition.” He also embarrassingly admits you have to “feed” the teachers what they want to hear.

I asked Taye:

Camille So have you ever heard the term playing the rules of the game?

Taye Yeah.

Camille What does that mean Taye?

Taye I guess just fitting yourself to be the best competitor at something … at “the game of life” really.

Camille Talk about that a little bit, because you can have the grades, but if you don’t know “the rules of the game,” do you think you’ll be successful?

Taye No. I think the rules … can’t like really be taught the rules, it just has to be inside of you. It’s different … like some people are born sales people, some people are born to like be a more of an academic person, I do big things academically. Well it’s like street smarts and book smarts …

Camille What would you do in the classroom to play the rules of the game in order to succeed, not only with the grades, but you got to do something else besides just handing your work in.

Taye Yeah … you have to, I hate to say it, but I guess…you have to feed the teacher with what they want to hear. [Taye laughs]… Like you can’t just sit at the back of the class and just slouch in your chair, coasting through the class with a B. Sure that’s good, because you have the grades …but I think the teacher really enjoys someone who’s … trying their hardest, maybe maintaining l a C average, but also is putting in more of themselves, rather than that person who’s just sitting in the back in the class with a B.

Camille But you did hit on something that sometimes teachers want you … playing the rules of the game is giving the teacher, “what the teacher wants?”

Taye Yeah, yeah … it’s always good to know your … I hate to say teachers as your competition, but it’s always good to know where the next man is coming from.

Camille Where did you figure that? … When about did you figure that? Let’s think about your whole history from K through 12, …but when did it finally
dawn on, you said “Hey, if I just do this my life will be a little easier.”

**Taye**

I think about the 3rd grade, 3rd or 4th grade. …Like just giving them [teachers] what they need and then it helps me back in the long run so … I think about 3rd grade it really turned up. [: understanding how to play the rules of the game].

**Summary**

Consistent with my proposed model of how some disadvantaged students succeed in attaining the social capital of the dominant culture, Taye is “bicurious” in the cultural capital sense of the word. Taye gained the cultural capital of the dominant culture at a very young age with his many and varied social interactions with his teachers. This in turn made Taye more attractive to his teachers and other knowing adults, and therefore he gained more institutional agency from a variety of sources (i.e., neighborhood, administrators, teachers and academic mentors). As a result of his sponsorship his academic success continues.

Furthermore, Taye was promoted to several accelerated school programs (elementary, middle school and high school) that provided him a more academically challenging curricula and instruction and therefore he was more engaged in the process of learning. Similar to other case study participants, Taye enjoys a challenge and it make learning a worthy and engaging endeavor.

He has also learned the “rules of the game” and is very adept in enacting them. This also creates more agency and availability to more social networks with his peers, friends, teachers and other adults that he gains the social capital of the dominant culture as witnessed by his acceptance into college.

For Taye “school mix effect” is an integral part of his success. The structure and the culture of a school that procures the “positive teacher atmosphere,” which he mentions frequently and suggests for Taye, a school where teachers enjoy teaching and care for their students. School culture was an essential key to Taye’s academic performance. He performed well when he knew his teachers cared about him as an individual. This also signaled to Taye that his teachers were accessible to him and could be possible institutional agents to help maneuver his way through school and attain as much as he could.

A rigorous and challenging curriculum and instruction was also important to Taye as was the diversity of the school population that he stated made the difference for him in the IB Programme. In contrast, Taye was not as academically strong as Kim Sung, Rachael, Antoine, Grace or many other students; however, the administration’s “mission” of retaining students who would best benefit from the program, and not just the academically elite provided Taye with an excellent academic and social opportunity that he has greatly benefited from. His administrators encouraged, instead of discouraged Taye to stay in the program by their involvement with him at a personal level, as witnessed in his extracurricular activities that his administrators persuaded Taye to join.
Case study student participant: Grace

Background

Grace can be considered a disadvantaged student from many respects: she is a young woman of Chinese and American-Caucasian ancestry who comes from a working class and single parent home, and currently lives in poverty with her mother, her younger sister and brother. Grace’s father immigrated to the United States in the 1980s. Her parents met and were married for several years, although there were many marital separations during their marriage that Grace recalls as a young child. When Grace moved to River City in the 7th grade, her parents divorced. Her father now lives in the Midwest and Grace rarely sees him. Both of Grace’s parents graduated from high school and her father attended trade school in the United States.

Grace entered the IB Programme in the year 2000 and was a student in my Pre IB English I and II honors class. Her sister Faith, who I also taught, is a year younger, in the IB Programme and, until recently, was also an excellent student. Unfortunately, Grace reports her sister is not doing well academically and has gotten into the “social scene” at school and her grades have been dramatically falling. Her brother is in elementary school and is neither doing well in school academically, nor socially. Grace reports her siblings’ problems are most likely attributed to her mother’s alcoholism and mental illness.

Grace also informed me that she had originally aspired to attend a local state college; however, her guidance counselor urged her to apply to Stanford, Vassar, Harvard, and Princeton. She said she did not think she would even be considered to attend these universities. She felt these universities were out of her attainment. She applied and was accepted to Stanford and Vassar with full academic scholarships. She chose Vassar because it was on the east coast and she would be closer to her sister and brother if they needed her.

Schooling experience/academic performance

Grace describes most of her schooling experiences and academic performance in her elementary years through middle school as dull and boring. She did not feel academically challenged or engaged. Her accumulative academic record is scant and does not have much information about Grace’s early years in school. I do have a report card from 6th grade when she lived in Springfield before she moved to River City. Her final 6th grade report card is filled with five grades in the 90s, one in the 80s and one in the 70s. Her 6th grade teacher commented:

Grace is an all around good student. She is especially adept at reading and writing. She also shows excellent leadership skills, and works well with peers. It is a pleasure to work with her.

I then asked Grace to describe her schooling experience. In our interview I ask:

Camille

Grace, describe to me your schooling experiences from K through 12 and as I recall you were in Springfield from K through 6 and then you came to the city school district. So tell me about your attitude, your perception, how you felt about yourself academically through those grades.

Grace

Okay … We’ll start in kindergarten … not kindergarten, but elementary school. I
went to a couple of schools and I actually skip school a couple times.

Camille Why was that?

Grace Cause we moved and it was because of my ethnicity. It was a little different because it was more of a suburban White area, so it was a little different and not that I was teased, but I could definitely feel that I was different.

Camille You looked different than everybody else?

Grace There wasn’t many other Asian people and not many other Black people … There was just not…

Camille Not many minorities, mostly Caucasian?

Grace And so it was a little different and then I remember in 6th grade I was in an advanced kind of program.

Camille When did the school start to perceive you as having greater intelligence?

Grace …It wasn’t until 6th grade

Camille So 6th grade all of a sudden things fell into place … What do you think changed? What was different? Why did they all of a sudden recognize you?

Grace I think we were given more opportunities to do different things in the classroom … In 6th grade there was this special math group, but that was taken away from the class, so we go to do these different kind of puzzles and stuff and everybody got to try it and then whoever liked it or solved it got to keep doing it for the rest of the year, so I think that’s why they realized I was good in math. Other than that in the other course areas everybody did the same things, so it was hard to say “Oh she’s better” or “They’re better” or “It’s a better test score.”

Camille So it’s hard to stand out because everything was …geared towards exams?

Grace Well not so much exams, but like I mean when you get papers and everybody had the same topic, you know, write about this and everybody would do fairly the same thing so…

Camille So you couldn’t really have that much choice in your curriculum and you didn’t have much opportunity to really shine … It was not like what you were interested in or what you really knew ?…It was a restrictive curriculum? But then in 6th grade and then they got to see who you really were?

Grace Yeah.

Camille How’d you feel about that?

Grace I liked it because I felt bored before and even if I knew how do stuff, I didn’t do my homework. They might think “Oh her grade represents homework and class work.”

Later in the interview, Grace discussed how she moved out of the small city in the southern tier of the state and moved to River City where she was placed in an accelerated academic program in middle school. She still thought it was too easy and not challenging, but at least they recognized she was intelligent.
And when you moved to River City were you still with your dad? ... Were you with your dad in Springfield? Were your parents together then?

Well... they were together, but they were “on and off” separated and then they would get back together and then my dad, when we were “real little” he actually moved and lived in Chicago for a while.

When you moved to River City you went to Clarke Middle School? Were your parents still together then?

No – my dad moved ... We moved here cause he moved here and then he moved to Manchester... so now we’re here in River City.

And what was it like in Clarke?

I was placed in the accelerated middle school program.

Umm ... I remember actually going into the office the first day I went there and they were saying, right in front of me, “Should we put her in ‘the program’ or shouldn’t we?” I didn’t know what it was, and then I got there and it was just like a couple classes of students.

Were they small classes?

Not that small because in 8th grade they switched us all together, so a lot of people dropped.

Were there any people that were in that program that are with you today?

Hmm–Sasha, Penelope Mathison, and Ricardo.

Was that a good experience for you?

At first I didn’t know how to do some things and then I learned ... I learned pretty quickly and then I was like definitely at the top of the math class and then ... it was ... I mean it wasn’t that big of a challenge, so I don’t think I would have wanted to be in the regular classes.

That even seemed too easy to you? You would have like a little more academic rigor in it maybe?

I mean it wasn’t rigorous... There was hardly any homework ...It really wasn’t a challenge.

I asked Grace why she chose the IB Programme.

Did you choose to come to the IB programme at Dewey?

IB? I heard about it and then I said “Oh well, why don’t I do that?” ... I didn’t know where to go to high school because they [the school district] let you choose. I heard that Dewey had IB and I thought... “Oh well maybe I should go there!” I’m in the accelerated middle school program and it would be good to continue. ...I don’t remember exactly what person suggested I come.I wanted to be with my
one girlfriend … She didn’t get in … So I was sad… But, me and Amber and Lisa were all really happy together.

Camille  You came here and 9th grade was a little bit more challenging than the other program?

Grace  But still it’s only pre-IB, so it’s not …

Camille  Well you ended up really essentially doing high school in 2 years [getting all the state requirements and exams to graduate completed by the end of 10th grade]. So that was rigorous enough trying to complete everything?

Grace  It wasn’t even too bad though I mean now that I think about it freshmen year … Freshmen year is hard cause you’re getting adjusted to high school. But sophomore year we were taking just one AP [Advanced placement university level course] and then … it wasn’t that bad. In the IB Programme [11th and 12th grade] I had a more variety of teachers, different teachers, different grading styles, and different teaching styles… very different.

Institutional agency

Table 6.9 (below) shows how Grace responded to her Network Survey.

Table 6.9 Grace’s Network Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
<th>A. Teachers</th>
<th>B. Friends</th>
<th>C. Peers</th>
<th>D. Relatives</th>
<th>E. Other Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Give me the moral support I need to do well in school</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 Boyfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I rely on them for advice and guidance in making important school-related decisions</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8 Guidance counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Are sensitive to my personal needs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10 Boyfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Are good at helping me solve school related or academic problems</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Blank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I have a trusting and good relationship with them</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Blank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. They have shown me through their actions how to be successful in school</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Blank</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In viewing Grace’s Network Survey it is apparent that she considers her friends and teachers as being most supportive of her academic success. She also relies on her guidance counselor for school related decisions and her boyfriend for being sensitive to her personal needs. She also states that her teachers have shown her through their actions how to be successful in school.

Grace has not experienced a positive and supportive home environment. Some circumstances in a student’s life are out of their control such as parental loss, illness, alcoholism and neglect. Although Grace has experienced such problems, she has used her negative
circumstances as a motivator to be academically successful. What is also helpful are her network relationships that she has with her friends that support her academic success. Grace writes:

I believe that I have a unique experience (in reference to my academic success). I have an alcoholic mother and live in a single parent home. For some reason it is crucial for me to be successful in school. By working hard at school, I can ignore the crap at home.

My father is another person in my life who has encouraged my academic success. I see how his life is hard and because he did not attend higher education (he is an immigrant from China). Since I was younger, he encouraged me to do well in school.

My friends. I also believe my friends or peer group have made it possible for me to succeed in a rigorous academic program such as IB. I am around a group of hard workers (senioritis is kickin (sic) in) and intelligent thinkers. Everyone is working hard, so it is easier for me to work hard and try and push myself.

In my interview with Grace, I asked her about her position that having an alcoholic mother has motivated her to be successful and how she negotiates the tensions at home with her family and siblings. In addition, I also asked her how her friends and peers at Dewey have had an impact on her academics. I stated:

Camille: This was a very interesting … you talk about friends, relationships and experiences … at least three memorable incidences … that you have a “unique experience”, is how you put it, in reference to my academic success … that “I have an alcoholic mother and I live in a single parent home, and for some reason I thought it was crucial for me to be successful.” Now I have to say to Grace, a lot of people would have said that was the reason why they weren’t successful. How, or why did you turn it around to drive yourself to look at mom and your situation and say, … “I’m going to be a success!”

Grace: I just didn’t want to turn out like her, I guess. I don’t know, it was hard seeing her do that and I didn’t want to do things like that. I think me and my sister…. It’s like that for her … even though she’s not doing too well now but… for my brother now though, because he’s in elementary school, and is doing badly in school.

Camille: Is he the sibling you said is not doing well? …He’s in with a bad peer group?

Grace: Umm yeah … he doesn’t get very much attention as we did when we were younger, cause it’s [her mother’s alcoholism and mental illness] gotten worse … like now compared to when we were younger.

Camille: Does your dad know this?

Grace: Yeah.

Camille: And he doesn’t want to take your brother?
Grace  Umm … he will have to eventually when me and Faith leave … or something, I don’t know what will happen, but something.

Camille  And nobody in mom’s family is addressing this issue?

Grace  Umm … well see it happens like cyclical. So … umm … it’s kind of hard cause sometimes she’ll be okay, sometimes she won’t so … it’s hard.

Camille  You’ve been able to maintain your focus with your studies … I mean that must be pretty hard cause you’ve got this distraction with mom and her illness you know, it is an illness.

Grace  Right … umm … I don’t … I don’t know.

Camille  So you don’t want to tolerate “the crap that goes on at home.”

Grace  Right!

Camille  So do you spend a lot more time, do you think, at school, or after school just so you don’t have to go home?

Grace  Well…if she’s [Grace’s mother] drinking, she’s not at home…Sometimes she might be, sometimes she won’t … I guess yes, in some ways it’s easier to focus on doing my homework, than dealing with what she’s doing…I don’t like pay attention to what she’s doing.

Camille  And she doesn’t listen to you and Faith about this?  About her problem?

Grace  Oh she’s in like a group … She also has a mental illness as well, so she’s trying to deal with both.

Camille  …This is difficult for you though too.

Another important influence is the support and trust of Grace’s friends and peers in the International Baccalaureate Programme. She explains issues of trust, competitiveness and support she receives from her fellow students. In a comparison with another friend’s experiences at another city high school, Grace indicates that the close and supportive school culture at Dewey High School is an important factor concerning her success. Grace believes this does not occur in other school settings and feels Dewey’s IB Programme and students are unique. I continue the interview with a question I have about her response to her Written Questionnaire concerning the support and academic influence of her peers and friends:

Camille  What do you think about the students in the program? Are they supportive of you, of your work and your abilities to succeed? Do they push you?

Grace  I think everyone is competitive, but I think sometimes we’re all together and we’re all in the same program and “all in the same boat.” It’s easy for us to try to do better and not like someone is like saying, “Oh I’m better than you”, you know, no one is like that … Nobody “turns on you” like that.

Camille  You know that’s unique. Don’t you think? …Why do you think that is in this program? I notice that …you are all competitive and also independent … Everybody likes to speak their own mind here.

Grace  We definitely don’t take what we’re doing, and how good we are, to another person. I think some people do, but I don’t … I don’t say, “Oh I have to be like
them” …

Camille  Kind of celebrates your own individual style and independence? How are issues of trust? – Do you trust people?

Grace  Like people I meet, like I know I can leave my purse in the classroom and nothing will happen to it … like that kind of trust?

Camille  Yes, but also can you confide with somebody?

Grace  I definitely talk to a lot of people, about a lot of things … you know nothing … they won’t go and tell everyone….

[OC: Further on in the interview]

Camille  … “To help me solve school related and academic problems” [referring to Grace’s response to her Network Survey] you put … I have some friends and peer groups. So they’re the ones who are really kind of helping you get through school… Relatives score pretty low here for helping you solve school problems.

Grace  – Yeah – like if I have an issue in school, I don’t go to my mom or my dad.

Camille  And showing through their actions how to be successful in school [Grace’s responses to the Network Survey] are teachers and your peer group?

Grace  Yeah.

Camille  So they’re the ones who have kind of modeled in positive ways?

Grace  Yeah … I’m definitely glad I came here to Dewey, to IB.

Camille  Do you think it would have been different if you didn’t come here?

Grace  Yeah, because my friend, another girl that we went to middle school with, she went to Lindberg Vocational and Technical High School and she is the valedictorian of her class, and she’s no different from us. It’s just that her peers are not motivated.

Camille  Hmmm – not supportive in positive ways – she kind of feels like an outsider?

Grace  No – … actually she said she only took AP classes and that was it, and she just got A’s and “state examination” classes and she was valedictorian. And I think, say if you’re a person who says, “Oh, I want to be like them!” So, another kids says, “Oh I want to be like Gina cause she’s the valedictorian!” … The opportunities for someone to take classes, like at Dewey, aren’t there, cause everyone [at Lindberg High School] says “Oh why should we be in class? Let’s just hang out!” … So, I think coming to this school was definitely a better choice.

Habitus: Definition of schooling success to maintain academic excellence.

Grace indicates, as other study participants do, that school is more than a test score. That one’s individual learning style and the curriculum should meet the needs of the students, so that all students are given the opportunity to succeed in school. Grace writes:
Schooling Success is when students are able to learn a subject or curriculum to the best of their ability. This is done best when the student’s individual learning style is addressed. The goal of the curriculum should not be oriented toward a test. Schooling success is when any person is given the opportunity to succeed in an educational setting.

I asked Grace:

Camille You talk about schooling success and you say the goal … the thing that I highlighted was “the goal of the curriculum should not be oriented toward a test. Schooling success is when any person is given the opportunity to succeed in an educational setting.” Do you believe that you’ve been given those opportunities throughout your schooling career? Or only near the end of your schooling career? Or not at all?

Grace I think so but I’m definitely still taught to an exam. Definitely because I mean that’s why we’re in IB not only are we in a program, but they want us to pass the test. But I think we have learned other things that maybe, maybe not for a test. Like learning how to learn, learning how to study, stuff like that pretty much ….

Habitus: Extracurricular activities

Grace wrote in her open-ended Written Questionnaire her extracurricular activities and interests:

Varsity swimming 11\textsuperscript{th} and 12\textsuperscript{th} grade year in high school. I wanted to try a sport and I also wanted to join because it seemed like fun. I also joined the robotics team here at Dewey called US FIRST. I wanted to learn more about engineering. I am interested in Spanish because I like learning about different cultures. I also believe I will continue studying Spanish in the future in college. Cultural interests? I like listening to music, traveling (which I rarely do), and also swimming. Social? I like hanging out with my friends and also with my boyfriend. This aspect of my life is incredibly important: however; due to work and school it is sometimes forgotten.

I commented:

Camille You participated in many different activities … you’ve been in sports doing varsity swimming for 2 years. And you joined the robotics team FIRST! You wanted to learn more about engineering. You could probably call up a lot of your excellent math skills for that … Are these interests that other people in your family have? … Are they interested in sports?

Grace My sister joined swimming the same year I did. I joined first my sophomore year and she’s a year behind me, so she joined when she came.

Camille Are you still in FIRST?
Grace was in, let’s see, sophomore … I was in 2 or 3 year … 2 years.

Camille

And you like to listen to music. What kind of music?

Grace

I like R&B.

Camille

You state: “socially I like hanging out with my friends and also with my boyfriend. This aspect of my life is incredibly important, however, due to work and school it’s sometimes forgotten.” So you kind of have to put some of these on schedule, things on hold, because your schooling experience requires a lot of your time … is that true?

Grace

Hmm– not so much anymore since it’s the end of the year … but definitely last year.

Habitus: the “Rules of the Game”

Grace views “playing the rules of the game” as focusing on how to succeed. She embarrassingly admits that some students “suck up” to the teachers and also help each other with knowledge about exams or what they did in class. Throughout this phase of our interview Grace was uncomfortable and attempted to avoid the question. The portion of the interview I report here is when she stated something clearly. I asked Grace:

Camille

Have you ever heard this phrase, “playing the rules of the game?”

Grace

I think so.

Camille

Somebody says, “I know how to play the rules of the game.” Do you know what that means, do you have an idea tell me what your idea is?

Grace

Umm … like if you know let’s say how something is going to be judged or something is going to be tested, you focus on how you can succeed through kind of playing on those with someone who’s already knows …. 

Camille

You kind of do it by observation … I think you said earlier when you had these different teachers you kind of had to sit back and watch them and then figure out what they wanted or the rules, their kind of rules and then how to be successful in that classroom, cause it wasn’t just academic rigor.

Grace

Right.

Camille

But there was this human component that you had to kind of figure out. Do you think you’ve been successful in doing that as you’ve gone through your schooling years and when did this start? … When did you figure out? … “Gee, I need to do more than just do the work”, I need to figure out what the other aspect of this is?

Grace

I definitely think I can manage to be able to do that … like some people would be extra, extra nice to teachers you know, “suck up” to teachers. … They always are the first ones to raise their hand, like oh I know the answer, … other people who even say you have English, for the period of the day and someone else has that class earlier. They’ll ask the other person what did we do, what was on the test … everyone does that.
Summary

Grace’s acceptance into Vassar on full academic scholarship is in contrast to her parent’s educational achievements and their human, cultural, and social capital. In spite of living in poverty with a single parent who is an alcoholic and suffers from mental illness, Grace is an academic success. Grace’s desire for a better life than her mother and father has inspired her to work hard to attain enrollment at a university. Furthermore, no matter how distracting her home life has been, Grace maintains her focus to achieve her goals with the help of her friends and teachers.

Consistent with my proposed model of how some disadvantaged students succeed in attaining the social capital of the dominant culture, Grace is “bicultural” in the cultural capital sense of the word. She had difficulty at first adapting to elementary school due to feeling “otherized,” in that she was the only Asian student in her predominantly White school district in Springfield and felt out of place.

However, once she entered 6th grade Grace began to be recognized for her accomplishments. Her teacher commented that Grace was an excellent student overall and had both excellent math and leadership skills. These comments were indicative of Grace’s ability to foster the discourse and mannerisms of the dominant culture. She transitioned this knowledge to her arrival at River City’s Clarke Middle School, where she was placed in an academically accelerated program, which she did not find that challenging and where she performed exceedingly well academically. Grace was then encouraged by her teachers and guidance counselor to apply for the IB Programme. She was accepted in the program and began to work with her friends and peers as well as her teachers and guidance counselor as her institutional agents. Grace gained the social capital of the dominant culture as evidenced by her acceptance into Vassar and Stanford on full academic scholarships.

Grace also benefited from the “school mix effect.” The diversity of the school population by race, class and ethnicity made Grace feel more a part of the school and not an “outsider.” She no longer felt “otherized” because of the diversity of the student population. She also stated that she thought Dewey was different from other area schools because of the school culture that fostered students to work with each other in a competitive spirit that was inspiring and not boastful. Dewey also has a sense of “family” for which Grace felt that the teachers and students truly cared about her reaching her goals. The curriculum and instruction at Dewey kept Grace engaged and challenged. Lastly, the pedagogical practices of IB Programme teachers in which they encourage their students to think how and why they attain knowledge, helped Grace see her goals clearly and how to actively achieve her goals, by deconstructing her own actions and reviewing her own sense of academic purpose.

CHAPTER 7

Focus Group Results and Trends

Data triangulation

I merged the findings from the nine case studies presented in Chapter 6, as well as, the data collected from the other eight students not presented in that chapter, with the Phase III (N=6) Focus Group data so as to highlight some interesting trends that emerged across the experiences of these diverse students.
Phase III: The focus group discussion

The six students who attended the Focus Group session were Ali, Caroline [Caroline case study is not reported, but had similar theme], Kim Sung, Malika, Nathan and Whitney. Other students who stated they were interested but did not attend (due to work or transportation problems) were Taye, Antoine, Jorge, Rachael and Laura.

I wrote on the board of a classroom the themes I saw from the interviews. The first theme I discussed was the student participants’ ability to be independent, critical, outspoken and competitive and still collaborate and work with each other to achieve their overarching goal—that is to graduate from the IB Programme and to support their trajectories of acceptance to university degree programs. I stated:

Camille: What I thought is interesting is the comments, statements and observations of students in Phase II as being independent, outspoken and competitive. This seemed to be a trend with the seventeen students that I interviewed and that all of you have those qualities. Some were apologetic for it, others were very proud of it [students laugh]. And yet, what I find interesting was that you also help each other academically, socially and emotionally, and the overall support that you give each other… which some people would say, is truly unique.

Why do you think you’re able to negotiate that? … How do you even negotiate being independent, outspoken and yet so able to “get along?” So willing to help other people in the program? Can you talk to me about that?

Caroline: There are different functions of competition.

Camille: Okay.

Caroline: You know not everyone is as academically competitive as certain people. For instance, me and Ali, we work in groups sometimes and we work very well in a group. But you know, Ali isn’t necessarily aspiring to a grade that I may want. That is how we get along so well. I may be looking forward to a 4 point something … Ali just wants to get pass a certain barrier … [all the students laugh] That’s why we get along so well!

Camille: I noticed [in the students Written Questionnaire and Intensive Interviews] that academic success meant something different to everybody, which was really cool. All of you weren’t focused on grades and GPA’s as much…. So for you, your definition of success was different than Ali’s and this is why you think you can get along?

The response to the first question and Caroline’s suggestion that there are different functions of competition quickly led to my second question about the students’ definitions of academic success. What I found is that the students employed adaptive strategies and expressed the need to change their “mind set” concerning what education and learning meant to them. It was out of their adversity and disappointment (achieving lower letter grades and GPAs for the first time in their schooling careers) that many of them saw clearly what they wanted to achieve and how to achieve it.

Whitney: Yeah –I think that grades, like letter grades don’t necessarily define your
intelligence or who you are academically…. who I am and my intellectual ability.

Camille  When did you figure that out? … I mean it is interesting … You talk about students that dropped out of the IB program—they were so focused on GPA’s and grades, [the students agree with acknowledge with “Uh mms”] the kids that stayed in weren’t. You saw success as something different. *When did it dawn on you that it’s not about the grades?*

Whitney  *When I kept getting a bad grade* – like if I kept getting a C in the classroom and I’ve been working my hardest and trying every effort and then I’ll still just get a C and I was like “No maybe it’s not, maybe it’s not me, maybe it’s not really what I’m doing?” “Maybe it’s what I’m taking out of here?” Honestly I think the constant higher academic level, is what I am able to work for.

Ali  I agree!

Whitney  *What I’m able to pretty much take with me at other places, I value that a lot.*

Students’ also admitted there were times when they also felt like dropping out of the IB Programme, until they came to the conclusion that success was not about grades, but rather the challenges they faced ahead by not taking the easy way out and the knowledge they would gain. They also conceded that their transition from not being “grade and numbers driven” was difficult in that for many student participants, their academic identities had been proudly shrouded in their class rank and GPAs.

Malika  *I think more than anything, I think I started to really realize it this year, because you know I’m starting to think about leaving and because really there’s plenty of times where I thought “Oh I’m going to drop out”* [of the IB Programme].

Camille  Really?

Malika  There’s been times where I felt …

Camille  *So it hasn’t been that all of you wanted to stay* [in the IB Programme] *the whole time?*

Malika  Oh no – I mean coming from middle school and being third in my class!

Nathan  Right! [Before the students entered IB they were all ranked high in their class and schools academically. Some students never received anything lower than a B plus].

Whitney  Getting C’s and sometimes D’s [they all laugh] and then working so hard, you have to change your mindset, and it’s like *What am I getting out of this?* … Am I supposed to struggle and just make the grade? Or, am I supposed to take an easy course? … And I’ve never been one that takes the easy course, *so my decision to stay in the program was to work hard to ... I mean even if I got a C ... that was my C, I owned that C, I’m happy about my C – you know what I mean?* So in the regular class [general education] if I get a 4.0 who cares? … Anybody can do that! *So if the challenge is what kept me going,* then I think the fact that we all worked so well together, because everybody… I think that happens to a lot of people. *I think that’s why we work so well together because, we had to change our mindset and I think, we all started to come around at the same time.*
Camille When would that be? … When did you all start coming around? [Regarding less emphasis on their letter grades and GPAs.]

Whitney Well I think mostly this year because …

Malika Yeah it’s mostly last year and this year [since they were inducted into the IB Programme and some students they had been with in Pre-IB were dropping out] … Since this year I still had hope! [They all laugh]

Ali Yeah, we all did.

Malika I can do it! I can get a 4.0 … I can get a 4.0! … Now it’s like I’m not really looking for the 4.0, so it’s like I think working together, like going to the library and meeting like “Oh Mr. Spinoza said we have a project due tomorrow”, everybody’s going to the library.

Ali, Whitney, & Nathan [State in unison] “Yeah like everybody’s going to the library!”

Malika It’s the little things like that. So that’s what I will really cherish when we leave … and I think that’s why we work so well together. Everybody just works hard to work together pretty much.

Further along in the Focus Group discussion, students talked about what knowledge is valuable and what is not. Just memorizing answers or concepts for a test is empty and hollow. They began to see how knowledge was acquired and used. It was also then that the grades didn’t mean so much to them.

Camille Well everybody here could have left the program and could have 4.0 or better [in the regular high school program], but you decided to “stick it out” because…was it that you saw that grades were subjective?

Ali Well you know what? … I noticed that sophomore year. I think it came through the most clear … I just wanted to get an A on one of my tests …. So, I do all this work to get my A and then a week after when I was to look back on what I did, I would not remember anything that I looked at because I was like so focused on just getting the A. That I really didn’t internalize anything … it was just memorization.

Camille So your knowledge did not carry over to the information you studied?

Ali Yeah – it just wouldn’t… so then I started dropping it … such as, when we took the IB test this year… I’m pretty sure I did really good on a lot of my IB tests and I didn’t study for them either … I just took what I learned, during class, like class discussions and all that I really got into…I just didn’t think about grades anymore and I think I did really well!

Further on in the Focus Group discussion Caroline went back to the initial question as to why the student participants work so well together. She stated:

Caroline We’ve pretty much gone through the same situation and is why we work so well together … and I think that you know. Ali is right, he is right, you know. Everyone is right so far about the whole idea of … I mean you’ve got to get through the
frustration first … You know, you’re trying to get that A and then you just can’t get it. Cause I remember junior year, I was always on the border with my math class, I was just so bad at it and I kept focusing on that and eventually it pulled my other grades down. So then I said, you know what, just forget it … I’m just going to try what I can, I’ll do what I can in class, do my homework, try to pass my exam and do not focus too much on it, because if you do, then it really does mess up you concentration with all the rest of your studies … you really got to get through that frustration and then just kind of go with the flow with it

Camille Yeah – that’s really interesting, I mean that’s a valuable lesson to carry on to the university with you, to not make yourself a “nutzoid “trying to get this goal …

I then asked how they viewed the students who dropped out of the IB Program. In asking this question I also hoped it would provide insight into how they viewed themselves. I asked:

Camille How do you see the drop outs … the people that didn’t stay in?

Nathan They have 4.0.

Ali They’re doing really well.

Nathan They only have electives.

Whitney They’ve all got 4.0’s!

Nathan They only have electives though – cause IB.

Camille Right, because they took all the state exams [: by the end of 10th grade to graduate] by their sophomore year.

Malika And it’s so funny because the other day a girl told me, I think you’re all going to be the most memorable IB class ever because, other people notice our bond … other people … they look up to me… you guys did everything together … you guys went to the movies with “you all”, “you all” don’t invite us to your little IB outings.

Camille Do you think that’s why you are successful? … When I think of the first class [first IB Programme class to graduate from Dewey] that graduated last year and I think of you (your class) and I think of the places that so many of you are going (universities) and the scholarships that you got and the prestigious schools you’re going to …That wasn’t last year’s class … That’s this year’s class.

Whitney Yeah!

Ali Yeah!

Camille Is that because you stuck together?

Caroline It’s because we’re so close knit because if you look at their class…

Malika “They were always on each other” – It was like “get over it!” – I mean you’re in this [working in a rigorous and demanding program] and … I feel like this, our IB class we were always so close because we’re in this together. This is a family … we’re like this is family thing … you know we’re in here to get this together and I feel that you know I like that closeness because I can always talked to you [making reference to the students in her IB Programme cohort]. I can always call you at 9:00
at night. Hey you going to start this homework?

Camille Yeah – somebody told me that you also have like this “little network.” That you could call up each other and you would say, “I know you’re watching television – turn that television off!” …

Ali Yeah!

Malika Yeah – “Do your homework – okay ---- do your homework.”

What the students’ felt was a decisive difference between they and the students who dropped out of the IB Programme and the previous graduating IB class, was their tight knit bond that they had formed in their student network that they describe as family. Their “family” was trustworthy and their efforts were reciprocated.

Looking across Phase II participants’ data

First and foremost, it is apparent that the study participants’ attained the cultural capital of the dominant culture, and for some the “rules of the game,” primarily by their early observations and interactions with their teachers in elementary school. This was facilitated in some cases by the small size and personal attention the students received in elementary school and in other cases by the academically accelerated programs in which they were enrolled, which provided culturally enriching and somewhat challenging curriculum that supported and reinforced mainstream cultural capital discourse, mannerisms and “ways of knowing” (implicit knowledge).

As a result of the study participant’s attainment of the cultural capital of the dominant culture, the student became more “attractive” for sponsorship, which led to increased sponsorship from their teachers as their primary institutional agents within the structure of schooling. Some study participants also learned and initiated the “rules of the game” shortly after their cultural capital attainment and knew how to maneuver through “the system” and practices of schooling to further their success.

It is not until the study participants reach the unfamiliar domains of high school, compounded by the rigors of the IB Programme, that their modus operandi is no longer the sole means for their academic success, due to the structure of secondary schooling, in which students can no longer rely on the social interactions and agency of their teachers to support their academic success (Goodson, 1997; Martina, Hursh, Markowitz, Hart & Debes, 2003). It is also problematic if the student maintains the meritocratic myth that they solely supported their success in elementary and middle school and continues to work in “isolation” and does not initiate other institutional agents within school, such as their peers and friends.

The Focus Group discussion confirms previous analysis of the trends from the Network Survey data and the themes that emerged from the Written Questionnaires and the Intensive Interviews that the students relied on each other and collaborated their knowledge, efforts and social networks to achieve a common goal of graduating from the IB Programme (micro) and reaching their trajectories of acceptance to university degree programs (macro). Furthermore they readily took inspiration, advice and suggestions from each other to work hard in that they were “all in the same boat.”

One of the added insights of the Focus Group was how they negotiated their competitiveness and how they were able to work with each other as a “tight knit family”. The consensus was that there are different functions of competition and the students were not opposing each other as “rivals,” but as fellow competitors. Each student set personal goals and
definitions as to what it meant to be academically successful. In essence they were not competing with each other, but with their set goals and themselves. Furthermore, they revealed that they came to this conclusion by changing their “mindset” that letters grades and GPAs were not what defines them as a person or their intellectual capabilities. However, the students admitted that it was difficult and frustrating at times to refute the notions of popular culture, which equates grades and GPAs with academic success.

They mediated their tensions with these traditional measurements of success by further exploring what it means to attain a quality education, which may have been inspired by the discussions they have about knowledge in their Theory Of Knowledge course. Their conclusion was that knowledge attainment was not hollow memorization of information or the manic quest for the perfect GPA, it was the challenging curriculum, the high academic level of attainment and retention of knowledge to be employed in present and future academic interests.

**How does the data build on theory?**

The linchpin for the student’s academic success was an alteration in their habitus. The many alterations and transformations of the student participants’ habitus was evidenced and revealed within the qualitative data by their words and subsequent actions of forming a collaborative (macro) student social network (social capital) to achieve their individual (micro) goals. In general, the study participants needed to dramatically alter their attitudes, perceptions and behaviors towards schooling in order to maintain academic success in a more challenging academic environment. The catalyst for change was when the student participants’ habitus encountered a social field, such as Dewey High School’s IB Programme, that was unlike any other schooling experience in their life history. Therefore, the unfamiliarity of the social field is what produced alterations in their habitus (McNay, 2000).

Furthermore, I suggest these alterations in their habitus were specifically initiated by the rigor of the curriculum and instruction and supported by the small and diverse population of students, the school culture “as family,” and the pedagogical practices of contesting and deconstructing knowledge, which as Sayer (2004) suggests are the important “inner conversations” we have with ourselves that often question our ways of thinking and initiate habitus change.

I will leave you with this quote from Malika that sums up the student participants’ point of view concerning their academic success. In her *Written Questionnaire* she wrote:

*We have all come to the conclusion that no diploma can tell us how hard we worked this year. Actually getting through the program and not giving up has been enough assurance that we have accomplished something. Being in IB has given us a whole new perspective on how important friends and building relationships means.*
CHAPTER 8

Conclusions

Summary of Key Findings

The goal of this study was to investigate and understand the complexities of how disadvantaged students can succeed in school, and particularly the role played by institutional agents in the process. The research question I posed was “How do academically successful disadvantaged students select and retain institutional agents that can contribute to their gaining of the social and cultural capital of schools that can facilitate their academic success and social mobility?” My dissertation employed Bourdieu’s (1986) concepts of cultural capital, habitus and social capital to explain why some historically disadvantaged students succeed, while others do not.

Social capital research (1990-2003) has primarily focused on the role of adults in a student’s attainment of social capital linked to educational outcomes. However, thus far, there has been a significant absence of research on the role a student’s friends and peers in school may contribute to the their attainment of social capital – despite the fact that students spend much of their time interacting with their friends and peers and are greatly influenced by them. Therefore, I included in my investigation the influences and interactions of peers and friends, along with that of relatives, teachers and “other” adults who may support and influence the attainment of a student’s academic success. The participants in my study were disadvantaged students who come from working class families and/or single parent homes yet were academically successful and attained socially mobile by securing scholarships in good colleges.

I initially conjectured that these students must first be able to “decode” the cultural capital of the dominant culture. Next, they must accept agency. For some students this might occur through an “enlightening moment” (epiphany) through social observations or interactions. I also suggested accepting agency results in a change of the student’s habitus through gained mainstream institutional knowledge. When this happens, these students are able to gain the social capital of the dominant culture by networking with those in power and by understanding, as Bourdieu (1992) calls it, “the rules of the game” that have often been obscured or misunderstood within their own social class’s social and cultural capital.

Diagram 1b, as reported in Chapter 1, was my first conceptualization of how a disadvantaged student could attain academic success by accepting institutional agency, previous to my collection of data (see Diagram 1b Chapter 1,). The data collected and analyzed in this study have enabled me to further articulate this model as summarized in Diagram 8.0 and further articulated in what follows.
Diagram 8.0. “Success” in attaining the social capital of the dominant culture as a result of Cultural Capital and Institutional Agency Supported by “School Mix” Effect

After interviewing the student participants it became apparent that they acquired early in their schooling history the cultural capital of the dominant culture through their socializations, interactions and observations of their teachers, and “successful” middle class and working class peers. Many student participants reported they understood what was expected of them in school and how to “fit in” and be academically successful in a traditional school setting (elementary and middle school). Some students admitted that as early as elementary school they had learned also how to enact “the rules of the game” by observation or by being informed by a relative (mostly siblings) or “knowing” peer. This is why I have added to Diagram 8.0, in the lower left hand box, the text “socialization, observation, curricular and instructional practices in school” leading with an arrow towards the top left box with the text “student attains the cultural capital of the dominant culture.”

The case studies also revealed that many of the student participants’ attitudes, perceptions and behaviors towards schooling changed dramatically while attending Dewey High School. First of all, their preconceived notions of schooling success, competitiveness, and acquiring knowledge were challenged by the rigor of the curriculum and assessments in the IB Programme. Furthermore, because of the structure of secondary schools and teachers’ focus on the curriculum/subject area (Goodson, 1997) and high stakes exams (Martina, Hursh, Markowitz,
Hart & Debes, 2003) needed to satisfy state requirements for graduation within their first two years in Dewey’s Pre-IB Programme, most students were unable to make those important connections they had made in the elementary and middle school with teachers as their primary institutional agents. In order to continue their academic success, students were compelled to solicit sponsorship and institutional agency of their peers and friends. For many students this meant changes in the student participants’ habitus such as: trusting other students; redefining schooling success, competitiveness, knowledge and learning, and working collaboratively, rather than enacting the “false” meritocratic notions of individualism that had worked for them in the past with the “invisible” support of their teachers and relatives. The IB Programme’s curriculum and instruction, as well as pedagogical practices in the 11th and 12th grade, coupled with the diversity of the student population, helped instigate these changes.

I suggest all these changes in the student’s habitus were facilitated by the combination of characteristics of the IB Programme at Dewey High School which included the diversity of the student population (race, class, gender and ethnicity), the school culture, the curriculum and instruction, pedagogical practices and the administration’s “mission” to select students for the IB Programme not only from the “intellectual or social class elite,” but from diverse backgrounds. This is why I have encapsulated most of Diagram 8.0 within a larger box labeled “School Mix” Effect with the subtitles of “diversity of the school population, school culture, curriculum and instruction, pedagogical practices and administration’s ‘mission’.” I maintain that the successful institutional agency by peers experienced by the study participants would not have occurred in a conventional school setting, as the student participants’ selection and retention of their peer agents was not only motivated by issues of trust, but also by their need and desire to continue their enrollment in the challenging IB Programme.

Although institutional agency of their relatives (parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins) and teachers is also a primary consideration in this study, their agency was established early in the student participants’ schooling history; however, peer/friend institutional agency did not occur with much frequency or perceived support until the student participants attended Dewey High School’s IB Programme.

The linchpin for many students to accept agency was their ability to trust their institutional agents’ motivations. Unlike relatives or teachers, peer institutional agents had the advantage of sharing a common goal within a common setting. As the student participants stated “we are all in the same boat.” The “sink or swim” mentality of the student participants’ academic survival was driven by their academic hardships, such as attaining lower GPAs and letter grades in the IB Programme than they had been used to in their previous schooling experiences. The student participants’ academic “crisis” and motivation to succeed altered their habitus and made it possible for students to trust the motivations and intentions of their peer agents and to forfeit their individualistic meritocratic notions. In general, the student participants also revealed their knowledge of and in some cases enacted “the rules of the game” (Bourdieu, 1992), although a few students admitted they also had ethical tensions with this concept.

In overcoming issues of trust, the students were able and willing to support each other intellectually and emotionally. They were able to achieve a collaborative network without resistance or begrudging thoughts. They gleaned inspiration, advice and suggestions from each other to work hard and understood that they were “in this program together.” As a result, the student participants worked as a collective unit to achieve their common goal of graduating from the IB Programme that would support their trajectories of acceptance to university degree programs and therefore create more possibilities for social mobility.
The student participants were also able to overcome their competitive nature and understood they were not competing with each other, but within their own personal goals, comprehending there “are different functions of competition” and that they were not opposing each other as “rivals,” but as fellow competitors. In addition, each student set personal goals and definitions as to what it meant to be academically successful by changing their “mindset” regarding letters grades and GPAs as not what defines them as a person or their intellectual capabilities. They admitted it was a difficult and frustrating transition to refute the notions of popular culture, which equates grades and GPAs with academic success and that were often tied to external rewards such as scholarships and other forms of public recognition. They reconciled their concerns with conventional measurements of success by exploring what it means to attain a quality education. They concluded that education was not the vacant and vast memorization of data, nor their frenzied pursuit of the ultimate GPA, but the higher academic level and pursuit of a challenging and rigorous curriculum, as well as the subsequent attainment and retention of their knowledge to be engaged in present and future academic interests. Given that their definitions of schooling success are not within the notions of the mainstream culture’s definitions or those used in conventional schooling practices, the student participants’ rethinking of their definitions of schooling success were facilitated by the “school mix” effect. “School mix” effect accurately explains the phenomenon I witnessed at Dewey and may well explain the higher number of disadvantaged students (concerning race, social class and parental status) who are maintain a higher graduation rate than advantaged students in this school.

School mix effect in this context incorporates (a) the diversity of the Dewey IB Programme student population (socioeconomic status, social class and culture, race and ethnicity), (b) the school culture enacting the axiom of the “Dewey family,” which is supported by students, faculty, staff and alumni, (c) the curriculum and instruction that entails a rigorous and challenging “international” curriculum supported by a high level of teaching, and (d) the more varied pedagogical practices of Dewey IB Programme teachers that encourage students to be open-minded, critical of information, to deconstruct ways of thinking, and to openly contest and debate within the context of their course work and (e) the administration’s “mission” and philosophy to choose students for the IB Programme based on who will best benefit from the program and to ensure that a majority of students selected for admission are minority and working class students.

Research limitations and implications

This was an exploratory study and the most obvious limitation in my research was the small number of student participants. At the same time, as documented by the demographics reported in Chapter 4, participants in this study are representative of urban student populations and included “disadvantaged” students from many different backgrounds.

My research question was theory building and successfully used several theoretical concepts of Pierre Bourdieu (1987, 1992, 1998) – and particularly the concept of habitus – to inform the collection and analysis of empirical data. As such, it provides support to Reay’s (2004) and Sayer’s (2004) call to use the conceptual tool of habitus in empirical research to understand the complexities of racism, sexism, and ageism as well as analysis of gender, race and ethnicity.

I suggest that the lack of detailed empirical research using the concept of habitus to date is due to the “messy” and complex nature of the concept, with its multiple variables to be taken
into consideration. Yet, my study shows the value – and the feasibility – of taking on such a challenge.

My research findings also brought new implications and directions for further research by merging Bourdieu’s theoretical framework with research in “school mix”/compositional effect. They confirm the value of Lauder and Thrupp’s (2004) call for more longitudinal “school mix”/compositional effects research studies and the use of different measures of composition beyond SES. Lauder and Thrupp (2004) contend:

No justification has been given in literature as to why the mean composition should capture the effects of the process of school composition. For example, the ‘tipping’ hypothesis (Bourdieu, 1993) might suggest that it is not the mean but the proportion and interaction of particular groups of students within a school that may have an effect on school outcomes. (p.9)

Furthermore, compositional effects research should also employ both qualitative and quantitative research methods (mixed methods), recognizing the limitations of employing primarily quantitative research methods and analysis using the medical model standard of “control groups.”

Policy implications

A significant policy implication of this study is the finding that the IB Programme at River City High School is helping historically underserved students succeed academically. Therefore, first of all, the IB Programme at Dewey should be continued. The key reasons for the success of this program, as revealed by this study, also suggests that we need to rethink and implement “school mix” (Coleman, 1966; Thrupp, 1995 1996, 1997 1999; Lauder & Thrupp, 2004) policies within our metropolitan areas so as to improve the chance of student socialization and interaction with a diverse student population (race, socioeconomic status, social class and ethnicity) and to eliminate segregation by social class and socioeconomic status.

We also need to rethink curriculum and instruction. Curriculum needs to be more rigorous and diverse. Curricula for all students, similar to the International Baccalaureate curriculum, needs to be inclusive of all world populations to encourage students to comprehend global cultural difference and similarities, while informing students on varying viewpoints making them more aware of other people’s needs and concerns as seen through “their eyes” and not solely through one’s own sociocultural and historical context. Courses similar to the IB Programme’s Theory of Knowledge should be implemented for the general school population because they encourage students to think about how knowledge is created, therefore encouraging reflection and comprehension about the how and why of learning and knowledge attainment.

Similarly, all teachers should incorporate into their instruction pedagogical practices that encourage students to openly contest, deconstruct and analyze and reconstruct knowledge within their coursework, in contrast with traditional “top down” hierarchal pouring of facts and information for memorization that creates a “disconnect” between students and their knowledge attainment.

Educators need to foster a school culture where students feel the school has their “best interests” at heart, where, as several student participants expressed, their teachers and administrators get to know them and their families on a personal level and the school “has that
“family feel.” These schools tend to be small in size, promoting faculty, staff and students having personal knowledge about each other.

We must also recognize that some students are in desperate need for adult role models and academic mentors. For these reasons school personnel such as counselors, teachers and administrators need to learn more about their students and their peer and family networks. As a result, schools districts need to create a time in the day (such as at Dewey High School where homebase occurs for a 45–55 minute period each day) for increased student socialization and interactions with teachers, administrator and counselors that are not student course or crisis motivated, but are opportunities for teachers, administrators and counselors to know their students on a personal level and therefore be in a greater position to create an atmosphere of trustworthiness, cooperation and mentoring.

Students often develop enduring and memorable relationships with their elementary school teachers, but are unable to do so in the secondary school environment that emphasizes curriculum content over social relations. This research shows that secondary schools need to encourage their teachers and administrators to get to know their students on a personal level. These vertical linkages have a strong impact on how students view themselves and support their attainment of the cultural capital of the dominant culture. It also helps students view their school as a place that cares about them and encourages a student’s trust and confidence in a teacher’s, counselor’s and/or administrator’s motives regarding agency.

Given the important role played by peers in the same program as institutional agents revealed by this study, we should also provide space and opportunities that encourage the kind of relationships and initiatives that students in the 1B program at Dewey have been able to experience.

Lastly, school administrators’ should ensure that programs and school policies include the mission to serve the historically underserved student populations and maintain and enact these policies on a daily basis with their interaction with the students and teachers.

References


1-13.


