# Overlapping Student Environments: An Examination of the Homeschool Connection and Its Impact on Achievement

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## Abstract

This study of the impact of the homeschool connection on achievement was part of a larger interpretive case study which examined high achieving readers in a low performing school. The primary participants in the study were 7 African American 6th graders. Caregivers' thoughts on education and their aspirations for their children were examined through the lens of social reproduction theories, cultural-ecological theory, and the notions of cultural capital and habitus. Discourse analysis, analytic induction, and the constant-comparative method were used to analyze the data. Findings show disconnect among caregivers' aspirations for their children, how these aspirations are fostered, and student achievement.

## Keywords

minority education, social incongruities, homeschool interactions

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## Purpose

An examination of overlapping student environments and school achievement using data from a larger interpretive case study on what influenced African American sixth graders to be high achievers in reading when attending a low performing urban school was conducted. More specifically, the homeschool connection and its effect on achievement were examined.

## Theoretical/Conceptual Framework and Review of Literature

Social reproduction theorists are concerned with how capitalistic societies reproduce themselves. They describe schools as sites of social reproduction because social inequality is reinforced under the guise of providing equality for all students. Bowles and Gintis (1976) described how the educational system is tied to the economic and social class structures. They examined the parallels between the activities of the school environment with those of the workplace. They cited similar organization of power in schools and in the workplace. Bowles and Gintis related students' lack of influence over school curriculum with the workers' lack of control over the job responsibilities required of them by their employers. They equated the grades given out by schools and wages in the workplace as a means of extrinsic motivation, hereby reinforcing alienation.

They also described the differences in schools based on the neighborhoods which they served. Parents from different class backgrounds expect the schools to focus on different values based on their class background. For instance, working class families might expect schools to instill the importance of being submissive to authority in order that their children will be successful in the workplace. Bowles and Gintis posit that schools contribute to the socialization of students so that they occupy approximately the same social class as their parents (MacLeod, 1987).

Situated in the theoretical perspective of social reproduction are Bourdieu's (1986) notions of capital. Bourdieu discussed different forms of capital such as economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital. He noted that capital takes time to accumulate and the distribution of capital is reflective of the social world. Cultural capital is especially significant in studies of students in low-income urban areas because it can be used to interpret how and why some students are more successful in school than other students.

Cultural capital can be described as the cultural background, skills, and knowledge passed from one generation to the next generation based on social

class. Certain kinds of cultural capital prove to be more valuable than others depending on the social context. The cultural capital of the students in this study was examined as well as its congruity with the type of capital valued by the students' home and school environments. MacLeod (1987) explained schools as places where the socially valued cultural capital leads to high academic achievement. The cultural capital is then transformed into economic capital when the high achievers obtain high paying, powerful jobs. It is in this way that schools reproduce social inequality.

The school environment can play a crucial role in the academic success of students. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) discussed how schools subtly reproduce existing social inequalities through symbolic violence. The dominant class exercises its symbolic power and defines the social world based on the interests and competences of those within that class. The dominant class' use of symbolic power can result in conflicts between students' home and school environments. Educational institutions value the cultural capital of the dominant culture whereas devaluing the cultural capital of subordinate groups based on the make-up of the school curriculum. The knowledge of the middle- and upper-classes is the knowledge that is most likely to comprise schools' curricula.

Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) notion of habitus also helped to describe how society reproduces itself. Habitus is a set of perceptions, attitudes, conceptions, and actions possessed by a person based on his or her socialization and history. The notion of habitus was used to understand the social environments of the student participants while balancing agency and structure.

MacLeod (1987) connected habitus with the aspirations of people from different social classes. He explained how a child growing up in a lower-class environment who is rarely exposed to models of success will be less ambitious than a middle-class child who is surrounded by successful people. People think and act in specific ways based on their habitus. Thus a student's habitus can be a factor in various conflicts and congruities between the contexts of home and school.

Based on sociocultural approaches, Gee (1996) viewed literacy as inextricable from historical conditions and social practices. He described that the ways in which language is used to communicate (oral or written) are strong indicators of both personal and cultural identities. Gee explained the significance of "Discourses." He stated, "Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes" (p. 127). Gee stressed that Discourses were comprised of more than just language. He further explained, "A Discourse is a sort of identity kit which comes

complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize." (p. 127)

In ways similar to social reproduction theorists, Gee posited that the fluency in various Discourses can lead to the acquisition of such social goods as power, status, and money. These Discourses were termed "dominant Discourses" and persons or groups who have the least amount of conflict with their other Discourses when using dominant Discourses are said to belong to the "dominant groups" (p. 132). Gee pointed out that among English speakers there were sociocultural differences among Discourses and the uses of language within each Discourse. To illustrate this concept, he used the example of how African American children use Black Vernacular English as well as behaviors and beliefs to shape their experiences in different ways. The ways in which African American children interpret and express themselves may be in conflict with the means of expression valued by schools which is the dominant Discourse in the United States.

Gee described how Discourses must be acquired and not learned in order for mastery to occur. It is because of this that some nonmainstream children, such as the participants in this study are at a disadvantage in school. The dominant school-based Discourses may conflict with their primary discourses, whereas the primary Discourses of mainstream students are aligned with the dominant school-based Discourses. This alignment between the home lives of mainstream students and their school context stems from having parents or caregivers who have mastered the dominant Discourses favored by schools.

In this study, conflict and congruity among the Discourses of the student participants, their teacher, and their parents were used to explain possible influences on student achievement. In addition, the influences of various cultural beliefs and practices in relation to education were examined for congruities and conflicts focusing on Ogbu's ideas pertaining to minority education.

Ogbu and Simons' (1998) cultural-ecological theory sought to explain minority school performance. This theory deals with the forces within minority communities as well as school and societal factors. The theory consists of two major parts. First, the cultural-ecological theory deals with what Ogbu and Simons called "the system" which has to do with the mistreatment of minorities in education, specifically focusing on educational policies, pedagogy, and the rewards or level of success attained through education (p. 158).

The cultural-ecological theory also addresses how schooling is perceived and responded to by minority students based on their treatment within the system. Ogbu and Simons explained that the responses of minorities are

affected by how and why the group became a minority. They labeled these factors as "community forces" (p. 158). They described how minorities usually develop collective solutions to discrimination. They used the development of various folk theories and types of discrimination as examples of collective solutions.

The theory described how society's treatment of minorities is mirrored by the way they are treated within the educational system. Ogbu and Simons highlighted three specific ways in which this was evident: educational practices and policies toward minorities, the ways in which minority students are treated in classrooms, and the rewards granted by society to minority students for their school attainments. For instance, the abundance of "resegregated" schools is reflective of the segregated low-income neighborhoods inhabited by mostly minority families as Whites have moved from urban to more suburban areas (Garibaldi, 1997, p. 107).

In his examination of forces or responses within minority communities to explain the effects of "the system" and the perceptions of minority students based on their treatment within the system on school performance, Ogbu looked past the influences of structural barriers on minority school performance, citing that if structural barriers were mainly responsible for low performance in school then all minorities would do poorly in school. He explained that some minority groups were performing well in school while others were not. Ogbu described the importance of examining the community forces at work among minority groups in helping to explain achievement differences among minority students.

It was hypothesized that the community forces were comprised of four factors: the minority groups' frames of reference when comparing schools, how the minority groups' value schooling, the minority groups' interpretations of the relationship between them and the school, and symbolic beliefs related to schooling.

According to Ogbu's notions, African American students in urban settings deal with conflicting views of education based on historical and societal situations. These students can be torn between their more collective community and the individualistic ways of U.S. schools. There are many cultural differences between African American students and the middle-class White Americans whose culture dominates most U.S. schools, which may lead to cultural conflicts and hinder academic achievement. Despite these conflicts and incongruities, there are African American students who are high achievers in school. This study examined seven African American students who were high achievers or were thought to have the potential to be high achievers in their school by their classroom teacher.

## Participants

The primary participants in this study were high achieving readers in one sixth grade classroom. A total of 7 participants (five high achievers and two underachievers) were selected to allow for a rich study of what had influenced their high achievement, specifically in the area of reading and account for attrition.

The teacher (Dr. Curry) was asked to select African American students who were high achievers in reading based on scores from state English Language Arts tests and formal and informal assessments given by the teacher. She was asked to select students who were above average on all of the assessments. The students who assented and received consent to participate in the study were the student participants. Six high achieving students were chosen by the teacher to be primary student participants in the study. Dr. Curry selected three boys and three girls who she considered to be high achievers in reading. Upon my request, she also allowed me to add another girl who was new to the classroom. Two of the high achieving boys chose not to participate in the study. One boy knew that he would be moving and declined and the other boy simply said that he was not interested. The two boys agreed to be secondary student participants in the study. At the onset of the study, Amber, Arlisha, Jayniqua, Kayla, and DeAnthony were the students who were considered to be the high achievers in reading.

In addition, the teacher was asked to select one or two students who were below average achievement in reading but had the potential to be high achievers in reading based on teacher recommendation and standardized test scores. The inclusion of these students in the study allowed for an examination of what influenced high reading achievement aside from cognitive abilities. Dr. Curry recommended Bill and Marcus as underachievers for the study. However, the labels of high achiever and underachiever for the various participants changed throughout the study. Amber and Bill were deemed the underachievers at the conclusion of the study based on their grades and test scores.

Parents and family members were also asked to participate in the study. They were asked to provide information related to early literacy activities and family views on education.

## Site

This study took place at a school which was part of a large urban school district and the neighborhood and community surrounding the school in a northeastern city. The name of the school was changed to Public School #41 for reporting purposes. The school contained students from Pre-K to eighth grade. A state

report card for the school indicated that the school had an enrollment of 681 students as of a year before the study was conducted. A total of 79% of the students enrolled were African American, approximately 2% of the students were Hispanic, and just over 18% of the students were White (not Hispanic).

The state report card also provided student socioeconomic and stability indicators based on the percent of enrollment. Almost 75% of the students qualified for a free lunch, whereas approximately 12% of the total students enrolled qualified for a reduced price lunch. The state report card also indicated that 71-80% of the students qualified for public assistance. The student stability rate was 84%.

## Data Sources

Primary data sources included classroom, school, and home observations and formal and informal interviews. Observations were conducted in the classroom and the homes of 2 primary student participants. Field notes were taken during and/or after all observations. The field notes were expanded after each observation to aid in the ongoing analysis. All of the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Field notes were taken during each interview and expanded upon after the interview (Spradley, 1980).

## Data Gathering Procedures

Approximately 133 hours were spent on classroom observations during the length of the study (September-December). September was spent doing "grand tour observations" (Spradley, 1980, p. 77). More focused observations occurred throughout October, November, and December for the purpose of narrowing the scope of the investigation based on previously gathered data from initial observations and interviews.

Student and teacher interviews were conducted during the school day. Parent interviews were conducted at the convenience of the parents of the students. One phone interview also occurred. During the following August, member checking (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985;) occurred based on the data analyses.

## Data Analysis Procedures

All audio-tapes were transcribed in script form so that they were easily read, reread and then coded. All field notes, transcripts, and documents were read carefully several times and marginal notes were made to begin to highlight

interesting pieces of information that were possibly relevant to the study (Merriam, 1998). This allowed for the beginning of the coding processes in which initial concepts were elicited from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The data analysis consisted of microanalyses which included discourse analysis. The macro-analyses consisted of analytic induction and constant-comparative methods. The microanalyses were used to support themes and draw broader conclusions.

*Discourse analysis.* Discourse analysis was employed to examine various cultural models and situated meanings associated with the lives of the primary student participants and the other participants in the study (Gee, 1992, 1996, 1999). This analysis also helped to situate the data historically and examine how the discourse contributed to the reproduction of societal structures by supporting the interpretation of the emerging themes from the data (Fairclough, 1995).

Key situations were selected based on their relevance to the research questions and emerging concepts for discourse analysis (see appendix). In particular, excerpts from teacher and parent interviews were selected for examination of similarities and differences as far as the discourse was concerned. The data were divided into idea units and each idea unit was put on its own line. The idea units were comprised of a verb and the words that went with it. The word or phrase with the most stress that carried the most important information in the idea unit was underlined. The lines were then grouped by topic, event, and so on into stanzas. The stanzas were labeled based on their contents. Next the lines and stanzas were read and reread. The situated meanings or a pattern or image produced within a certain context based on one's interpretation of the context and past experienced of the underlined words within the context of the study as well as the cultural models, meaning storylines or theories rooted in practices of sociocultural groups they seemed to implicate were examined. The Discourses and social languages relevant to the data and the research questions were also considered. The emerging findings were compared with the data from other sources and related or revised as necessary. This analysis helped to highlight cultural congruities and incongruities among the participants' discourse (Gee, 1999).

*Analytic induction.* Analytic induction was also used as part of the analysis process. Assertions were continuously developed regarding what influenced high achievement in reading. Erickson (1986) stated, "One basic task of data analysis is to generate these assertions, largely through induction." (p. 146)

Initially, the assertions that were consistently supported by data became the basis for categories of interest and were also used to support the major themes found in the other analytic processes. Assertions were grouped by relationship to each other. New data were tested against the assertions to see

whether they supported or refuted them. As the data and assertions did fit, more data were tested against the assertion. As the data and assertion did not fit, the assertion was revised and tested again. Discrepant cases were noted and analyzed further. This continued until the assertion covered all of the incidents, events, and comments that may have influenced high achievement in reading (Erickson, 1986; Merriam, 1998).

*Constant-comparative method.* All field notes, transcripts, and documents initially underwent open coding by means of line-by-line analysis in which the data were examined word by word (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The data were unpacked into discrete parts, given a name(s) or label(s), examined for similarities and differences, and then the items found to be related or conceptually similar were grouped into labeled categories for explanatory and predictive purposes. The various characteristics or properties of the categories and the location of properties along a continuum or the dimensions were then recorded. A total of 121 codes emerged from the data. At this point, the data were examined for patterns as groups align themselves along different dimensions. Throughout this process memos were written detailing ideas and assertions regarding the emerging concepts and their properties and dimensions.

The next stage in this process of analysis was axial coding. This entailed putting back together the data that was broken down during open coding. During axial coding, the categories were made into subcategories based on properties and dimensions. At this level of analysis conditions or sets of events related to a phenomenon as well as actions and/or interactions were explored. Memos were created that described the relationships between categories and subcategories as well as the relationships among major categories.

Finally, selective coding was used to refine and integrate the categories which had emerged in subsequent analyses. At this point, three main themes or central categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in the research were determined which described what the research was all about and helped to pull all of the categories together. They were defined based on the properties and dimensions of the data. All of the previously written memos were reviewed and classified for ways in which the categories could be integrated and then summarized or diagrammed (based on the nature of the data). Ultimately, the three themes dealt with student environments, teaching styles, beliefs and values, and achievement and resistance. For the purposes of this piece, the student environments (home and school) were examined.

## Findings

This study sought to examine the effect of the connection between the home and school environments on achievement. The majority of the data gathered

throughout this study shed light on the effect of the students' academic life on reading achievement. Only glimpses inside the home of the student participants were allowed.

*Home life.* All of the primary student participants lived with single parents or caregivers, except for Marcus who lived with both his mother and father. The other participants lived with their mothers, except for Jayniqua who lived with her maternal grandmother. All of the primary student participants also had at least one sibling living with him or her. DeAnthony had a twin sister. Amber, Bill, and Marcus were all the eldest children in their families. Kayla, Jayniqua, and Arlisha were all middle children in their families. All of the primary caregivers of the students held jobs at some point during the study except for Jayniqua's grandmother, who was disabled and for the most part confined to her house.

Information was sent home to caregivers regarding participation in the study. Caregivers were then contacted by phone or approached at parent-teacher conferences about participation. Three parents responded quickly that they would be interested in talking with me. Bill's mother set up an interview with me immediately. Amber's mother scheduled several interviews at different times and places and canceled many times. Arlisha's mother scheduled an interview to be held at the county senior citizens' home in which she worked. A few hours before the interview, she canceled and then did not return phone calls to reschedule the interview. Marcus' parents did not return phone calls and Marcus explained that they were not interested. Kayla's mother and DeAnthony's mother both explained that they were too busy to participate in the study. Jayniqua's grandmother was reached by telephone and she agreed to schedule a phone interview the following week.

Permission was granted to visit the homes of only two of the student participants. The mothers of both of the student participants who were considered underachievers, Bill and Amber, granted interviews at their homes, whereas Jayniqua's grandmother allowed for a phone interview.

Bill's mother gave directions to her home when the interview was scheduled. It was located in a complex of low-income housing. The interview took place at the home at 10:00 a.m. on a weekday while she was on a break from her job as a bus aide for the same city school district Bill attended.

Bill's mother, a 29-year-old African American woman, unlocked several locks and opened the door with a warm smile in response to the doorbell. Bill's mother, Ms. Johnston, was pleasant and somewhat enthusiastic about doing the interview. First off, she divulged that Bill's father passed away when Bill was only 6 weeks old. Ms. Johnston explained that they used to live with her mother and this was the first place that was all her own. Ms. Johnston's twin

sister helped in the raising of the boys. It was Bill's aunt who came to parent-teacher conferences.

After discussing the family's schedule and routines, his mother explained how much Bill had improved as far as his reading was concerned. She started having him read the newspaper. They took turns reading articles to one another. She also shared articles she found in magazines about his favorite singers with him. Ms. Johnston read a lot of gossip magazines. She stated, "I'm not going to lie, I love the gossip." She read the newspaper daily and also belonged to a book club. She usually read about two or three books a week. Despite seeing an improvement in Bill's reading, that was not her main source of pride in her son.

Ms. Johnston explained that Bill made her proud by doing the ironing without being asked. She stated, "He might decide to iron or he'll go upstairs and clean his and his brother's room. Stuff like that makes me really proud because it's less housework for me." She added that Bill was not rewarded for good grades at home. She stated, "As far as his grades, he has nothing to do but go to school and get good grades." Grades were obviously important to Ms. Johnston, but she actually valued the way that he helped her. She hoped for a good life for the son she had nurtured for 11 years, but what was valued in their home did not necessarily foster the skills that were necessary to achieve her goals for him.

Bill really enjoyed sports. He watched ESPN when he got up each morning. Bill used to play football, but after 5 weeks his mother took him off the team. She stated,

> He was so small for his age I took him off of that. Bill only weighed 60 pounds but because of his age he has to play with the one hundred and twenty pound kids. To see Bill on the field with those guys, I only let him play for five weeks because I don't want him on the field anyway.

Despite his size, Ms. Johnston hoped that Bill might someday be a lawyer or play basketball for the Lakers. She stated, "If he becomes an NBA star, I'll be happy. If he becomes a lawyer, I'll be happy. But I do want him to go to college." Ms. Johnston had hopes for Bill's future, but there were no plans in place to help foster Bill's talents and abilities to allow for future success in these specific areas. She did feel as though she had a good relationship with Bill's school and with his teacher.

Ms. Johnston made calls to the school, wrote notes, and stopped in on Bill's classroom to check on his progress. She explained,

Me and Dr. C. keep in touch because there is an issue with Bill and the glasses. He is in sixth grade and he wants to be cool. He doesn't want to wear the glasses. I wrote her a note and told her if he doesn't have them on call me because I am coming to the school. I want him to wear the glasses everyday. So you know, we have a really good relationship.

Bill had a loving mother and supportive extended family. He did spend a great deal of time in day care as a youngster and continued to spend time there after school each day. Ms. Johnston wanted her son to attend college, but she didn't seem to take much pride in his grades at school. Bill's help around the house led to much more pride and appreciation from his mother. Her goal of him becoming an NBA star was a bit unrealistic as neither she nor Bill mentioned that he played basketball at any time. She even called attention to Bill's small stature. Bill expressed that he would like to be a lawyer concurring with his mother's hopes for him. He did not seem to really understand what becoming a lawyer entailed. He thought he would probably have to finish high school to become a lawyer. Bill did not mention any intention of becoming a professional basketball player.

Although Bill's family was supportive of School #41, Dr. Curry, and his schoolwork, there was an incongruity as far as their aspirations for Bill were concerned and what was actually being done to foster Bill's academic development. Part of Bill's home life did not overlap or was incongruent with his academic life. When Bill's mother was asked how things were different in Bill's school from the time she went to school, she addressed behavioral, not academic issues. She thought schools had become more lenient since she was in school. School was viewed as his job, something he had to endure each day. There was no focus on processes or techniques, Bill and his family used or planned to use to achieve their goals. Bill's resistant behaviors as far as his clothes (sometimes) and his glasses were concerned may have also interfered with his academic achievement. Like Bill, Amber's situation was similar.

Amber's mother was interviewed at their apartment on a Sunday evening. The interview was obtained after many cancellations and no shows.

Amber was present for the interview and enjoyed every minute of a conversation that was focused on her. She even at times tried to answer for her mother. Her mother insisted that they be truthful and refused to exaggerate in some aspects of the interview where Amber was inclined to do, such as how old she was when she learned to read.

Amber's mother believed her child was smart and had high expectations for her. She acknowledged that Amber was not a "behind the scenes" type of person. She wished Amber would end up doing something she liked, like a

lawyer or an actress. The things that made Amber's mother proud of her did not necessarily relate to characteristics that were valued in Amber's academic life. Her mother just enjoyed being around her. She was proud that she "always comes up with something different" and that she was "a prankster."

During the time the study was conducted Amber's mother went through two jobs. One day, Amber revealed that her mother called in sick from her job at a clothing store in a nearby plaza to go Christmas shopping. Amber also told her teacher the Monday following the school's Christmas carnival, that her mother tried to get them up to the school that Sunday for the carnival but they came too late. Her mother cancelled several times and was late for our interview as well. According to Amber, where schools, addresses, and jobs were concerned, the lives of Amber, her mother, and her younger sister had not been very consistent.

Amber's good looks and communication skills came through in the beginning of the school year. Amber's grades slipped after a few weeks. She was consistently able to please Dr. Curry by doing things like helping to clean up, keeping her desk clean, and offering to run errands, not by earning good grades. Amber had difficulty with pacing and was easily distracted by the students around her.

She was often involved in disagreements with other girls in her class. She wrote notes to Dr. Curry about these difficulties and complained about how hard it was to be a newcomer in a class that had all been together for the fifth grade. She attributed a lot of her difficulties with other students to her newcomer status and not to any of her personality traits or actions. Amber's personality and relationships with peers provided for immense difficulties in her academic life. Her external locus of control was reinforced by her mother. Although her mother stressed to Dr. Curry that she did not send Amber to school to make friends, but to get an education, her mother did not seem to foster and model responsible behaviors for Amber as far as academics were concerned. Conversely, Jayniqua's caregiver promoted academics in their home.

Jayniqua's grandmother, Ms. Wheezer, agreed to a phone interview in the afternoon on a weekday in December. She talked excitedly and proudly of her relationship with Jayniqua and the other grandchildren under her care. She did not elaborate on how and why the children came to be in her care, just that her daughter went through a rough time when she was younger. Ms. Wheezer cared for the three children as if she were their mother. Despite her health problems which prohibited her from getting about easily, she remained active in the children's lives. If there was something she was unable to do to care for the children, such as a school visit, her son was available to

help out. She found joy in the chaos that came with caring with three children. According to her, she established systems and routines in order for their lives to run smoothly. Ms. Wheezer admitted she would anxiously watch out the window and wait for the children to come home from school so that she might hear all about their day.

Ms. Wheezer did not have specific aspirations for Jayniqua. She wanted her to go to college and to eventually be a productive adult. In no way did she want to force a career onto Jayniqua. She was realistic when it came to the basic skills that Jayniqua would need to eventually be successful. Ms. Wheezer and her son checked out various schools in the district and attempted to enroll Jayniqua. When they were not satisfied with her previous school, they searched for an alternative. Her grandmother made sure she was taken to the library each week to use the computer and take out books. Through these trips, skills were honed that would help Jayniqua in the future.

## Conclusions

The parents in this study may be grouped into two separate categories, those parents who were open to a researcher coming into their homes and those parents who were not. The academic achievement of the student participants were aligned with the two parent categories. The two parents of the students who performed at average or below average on their report cards were the parents who allowed for interviews at their homes. The remaining parents had children who were considered to be high achievers, honor roll, and merit roll students at School #41.

The families to which access was not gained could have been untrusting of motives of the study and more metacognitively aware of what may have been found or not found in their homes. As well, according to their children, they led busy lives. As well as the parents who were interviewed, they served as hardworking role models for their children by working several jobs and going to school.

The lofty aspirations and the disconnect between what Bill's and Amber's mothers said about the importance of school and what they actually valued and took pride in were evident. It is possible that these parents were less metacognitively aware of what they were and were not doing to support their children's academic achievement. Like some of the student participants, the parents stressed the importance of school and getting an education verbally, but their actions were not congruent with their words. As Ogbu and Simons (1998) have suggested, these children were aware of parents' feelings and actions and this may have increased their ambivalence on the actual benefits of getting an education.

This difference between what was said and what was actually valued and done in the homes of the students, lays the seeds for further incongruity for the children between the home and the school environments. The old saying "Actions speak louder than words" did ring true in this situation. Children are very much in tune with what their parents value by how they live their lives.

The notion of habitus can also be used to help understand this phenomenon. MacLeod (1987) stated,

> A lower-class child growing up in an environment where success is rare is much less likely to develop strong ambitions than is a middle-class boy or girl growing up in a social world peopled by those who have "made it" and where the connection between effort and reward is taken for granted. (p. 15)

Bourdieu's idea of relates to MacLeod's example in that "the habitus is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent's practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be none the less 'sensible' and 'reasonable'" (p. 79). A child can take his or her cues about society from the experiences of older family members. A person's habitus acts as a regulator between an individual and society which inclines people to act and think in specific ways (MacLeod, 1987).

Dr. Curry heard from many parents that they wanted their children to get an education and eventually go to college. This rhetoric may lead teachers to believe that parents and teachers all value the same thing, when at times they might not. It is these perceived shared beliefs and values on which many educators justify what they are teaching and how they are teaching it in the classroom. This lack of overlap between what is valued at home with what is valued at school may influence student achievement.

Discourse analysis made the differences between teacher and parent values more conspicuous. For example, transcripts from a teacher interview and a parent interview with Ms. Johnston, Bill's mother pertaining to their expectations and hopes for children were examined. It was evident in both transcripts that each woman cared deeply for the child or children about whom they spoke.

Dr. Curry used many I-statements such as, "I think. . . , I try to. . . , I want. . ." when she discussed her plan for preparing students for the future (see appendix), however, her emphasis (stress) was placed on what she specifically tried to teach them. For instance, Dr. Curry stated, "I want them to be positive people and try to look at the good in life." She used an I-statement and stressed the words "positive people." She wanted them to be organized, neat, and well-presented. In general, she wanted all of the students to be happy. She did not have specific plans for each individual student, but she did have several skills

and values she tried to teach and impart to her students. Dr. Curry explained her decisions pertaining to what she taught her children. She based her decisions on her own experiences and values which she felt were important. She emphasized, "I share my life with them." She felt that humor carried her a long way in life and saw that to be an important quality to foster in her students. Her stress on the words that helped to describe or lay out the values and skills she found crucial indicated her strong belief in their importance to the futures of her students. For example, Dr. Curry often stressed words such as "listening" and "following directions."

Conversely, Ms. Johnston's transcript was filled with words of indecision and inconsistency (see appendix). She stated, "Bill really is into sports here lately. I don't know what it is." She talked about how Bill *might* do something for her, such as the ironing. These housekeeping tasks were not aligned with Brandon's academic performance or aspirations.

Ms. Johnston discussed various unrelated professions that Bill might want to pursue when he was older. She went from doctor to NBA player to lawyer. Again, these were not areas in which Bill currently participated in related activities. For instance, he was not part of a basketball team.

Ms. Johnston spoke predominantly about her own happiness whether Bill were to pursue any of the careers she listed. I-statements such as "I want. . . " and "I'll be happy" frequently occurred and were emphasized or stressed in Ms. Johnston's transcripts.

She selected professions for her son that were higher paying jobs than her own job as a bus aide. She clearly wanted more for her son than what she was able to attain, insisting she wanted him to go to college. However, Ms. Johnston's actions may have spoken louder than her words. Her disenchantment with her own inabilities to obtain a higher paying job may have led her to mistrust how far Bill's education would really take him. His mother may have emphasized her pride in him helping her and not in his schoolwork because of a possible doubt pertaining to job opportunities.

These findings echoed the sentiments of Ogbu and Simons (1998) who explained that voluntary minorities, such as African Americans, have an "ambivalent theory of making it." In general, they believe in the necessity of hard work and education for success in the United States, however, the discrimination they have faced for years in a "White-controlled economy" could lead to ambivalence. Ogbu and Simons (1998) stated:

> The ambivalence may not be conscious. Parents and other adults in the community tell children to do well in school because that will help them get good jobs and be successful adults. However, from their

personal and group experiences with employment discrimination they know only too well that school success often does not lead to a good job. Moreover, they often engage in various forms of "collective struggle" with whites for more job opportunities. Involuntary minority children are affected by this actual texture of their parents' lives: they observe and hear about their parents' experience. Eventually they share their parents' ambivalence. Thus, involuntary minorities are less sure that education leads to success or helps to overcome barriers to upward mobility (p. 172).

This may have been the case with both Bill's and Amber's mothers. Bill's mother held a low paying job and Amber's mother inconsistently worked for low wages through employment in a nursing home and in a retail clothing store. They wanted more for their children but expressed discontent with their abilities to "make it" economically, which may have impacted the children's feelings and attitudes about school.

Mickelson (1990) concurred with Ogbu's findings. She found that people's actual educational experiences as well as their experiences with the rewards and opportunities that followed from education influenced their behavior more than an individual's abstract beliefs of how education is important. This suggested that the student participants may have been mistrustful and ambivalent about school and what was being taught because of the experiences of their family members as far as education and employment were concerned, regardless of how much they verbally stressed the importance of doing well in school.

# Appendix

## *Discourse Analysis*

Bill's Mother (Parent Interview)
(Proud)
 1. As far as his grades
 2. he has nothin' to do
 3. but go to school
 4. and get good grades
 5. so that I mean he doesn't get a reward for good grades here
 6. But like when he comes home
 7. he might come home
 8. and see the clothes on the ironing board
 9. He'll decide
10. I'll iron for you

## Appendix (continued)

11. or he'll <u>go upstairs</u>
12. and <u>clean his room</u>
13. <u>and</u> his brother's room
14. stuff like that <u>makes me really proud</u>
15. because it's <u>less housework for me</u>
(Dreams for Bill)
  1. Bill really is <u>into sports</u>
  2. Here
  3. Lately
  4. <u>I don't know what it is</u>
  5. I mean, I , they, we get up at five in the morning
  6. so I might walk past his room
  7. <u>he's watching ESPN</u>
  8. and then at first he wanted to <u>be a doctor</u>
  9. now it's
10. <u>I want to play</u> for the Lakers
11. I mean
12. <u>If that's what you want</u> to do
13. you <u>go ahead</u> and do it
14. so I mean
15. If he becomes an <u>NBA star</u>
16. <u>I'll be happy</u>
17. If he becomes <u>a lawyer</u>
18. <u>I'll be happy</u>
19. But <u>I do</u> want him
20. to go <u>to college</u>
Dr. Curry (Teacher Interview)
(Dreams for Students)
  1. I think they <u>need to</u>
  2. they <u>need</u>
  3. to be able to <u>get along with each other</u>
  4. Their peers are very <u>important</u>
  5. I try to <u>really set up a situation</u>
  6. where <u>I'm not always</u>
  7. it's not always <u>top-down control</u>
  8. where there's, they need to have <u>self-control</u>
  9. They need to <u>get along with other people</u>
10. um I want them to <u>be happy</u>
11. I want them to be <u>positive people</u>
12. and try to look at the <u>good in life</u>
13. and with <u>urban kids</u> at times
14. uh, they might not <u>have</u> a lot of good to look for
15. but <u>in the literature</u>

## Appendix (continued)

16. and the things <u>we do</u>
17. and I try <u>to model</u> that to them
18. I do <u>a lot of modeling</u>
19. I share my life <u>with them</u>
20. so control, getting along with people, <u>organization</u>
21. <u>I work a lot</u> on that
22. organization, <u>neatness</u>
23. um I want them to be <u>on time</u>
24. I want them to <u>be well-presented</u>
25. organization, <u>listening, following directions, those types of life skills</u>
26. and again I, <u>I can get preachy</u>
27. where <u>if you can listen</u>
28. if <u>you can follow directions</u>
29. <u>you can do this</u>
30. <u>you can do that</u>
31. you can be <u>successful in whatever</u>
32. so I think <u>those</u>, those things um
33. and <u>humor</u>
34. <u>I want them to be able to</u> not only be positive
35. but <u>humor has carried me a long way in my life</u>
36. And <u>I share that with them</u>
37. And <u>we do have fun</u> in the classroom
38. and we <u>are able</u> to
39. <u>when Kenneth tripped</u>
40. <u>you know</u>
41. he was able to <u>laugh at himself</u>
42. and <u>recover</u>
43. <u>to me this is such a critical age</u>
44. where I think <u>humor can fill in a lot</u>
45. of the <u>cracks and bruises that life gives them</u>

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

## Funding

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## Bio

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