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# Teachers' Narratives of Experience with Social Class

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Teachers' Narratives of Experience with Social Class

by

Natalie Elizabeth Keefer

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Secondary Education  
with a concentration in Social Science Education  
College of Education  
University of South Florida

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to those who have provided me with guidance and support throughout my academic and personal life. I would like to express my gratitude to my parents for fostering my love of learning, critiquing my writing and convincing me I'd make a good teacher. You were right. Dr. Howard Johnston, Dr. Jimmy Duplass, Dr. Barbara Shircliffe, Dr. Castañeda and Dr. Greenbaum inspired and encouraged my academic passions. Their guidance, knowledge and counsel made this dissertation possible. Robin Stonaker, Jean Mulloy, Aimee Alexander-Shea and Danielle deGregory listened to my musings and gave me invaluable support over the years. I am grateful for their friendship. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to Khenpo Tsultrim Tenzin and my Sangha. Thank you for reminding me that Dharma practice takes many forms. May all beings benefit!

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## Abstract

Equality of educational opportunity has been a long elusive goal of public education in the United States. This narrative, phenomenological study conducted inquiry into how five teachers in Tampa, Florida construct meaning about social class and academic achievement based on their life experiences as members of a class-based society. Data produced descriptive, narrative stories that contextualize how meaning is constructed about social class based on participants' life experiences. This line of inquiry provides relevant insight into teachers' understandings of social class which may influence the provision of equal educational opportunities to all students. The following study includes a comprehensive analysis of the current qualitative and quantitative research supporting this line of inquiry and presents findings of how teacher's experiences with social class inform their understanding of academic achievement. Findings indicate emotional support is an important factor that influences academic confidence and success. Teachers' habitus is expressed through the practice of caring for students and providing students with support through the process of public schooling.



## Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

Education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories.

– Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.2

### *Introduction*

Public education in the United States was conceived with the intention of being, as Horace Mann so famously stated, “the great equalizer”. Since the beginning of public education in America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, through President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty” and into the modern era, Americans have looked to public education to uphold the idea of the American meritocracy, a long held belief that if you study diligently and try your best you can become anything you want. Public education should, therefore, allow all students to achieve and be successful regardless of their racial, ethnic or social class status. With the passage of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and its extension into the current No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTTT) legislation, it has been the goal of the United States public schools to provide an equal and high quality education to all students, regardless of race, ethnicity or social class background.

Federal funds tied to educational intervention programs such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Race to the Top (RTTT), and public education’s reliance on

standardized test scores to measure student achievement, created out of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and NCLB, have been implemented nationwide in an attempt to level the playing field for students from lower social class backgrounds. The purpose of testing under NCLB is to hold teachers, schools and local and state governments accountable for “closing the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers” (NCLB, 2002, p. 1). In February, 2009, the Obama Administration signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which included in it the Race to the Top (RTTT) funds program. As its top priority, the Race to the Top program aims at closing the achievement gap by raising student achievement in high poverty and high minority schools. Specifically, this program calls for school districts to “ensure the equitable distribution of teachers and principals by developing a plan, informed by reviews of prior actions and data, to ensure that students in high-poverty and/or high-minority schools have equitable access to highly effective teachers and principals” (US Department of Education, 2009, pp. 9-10). The RTTT’s focus on ensuring students in high poverty and/or high minority schools have access to effective teachers is a response to research indicating that teacher effects are larger in low-SES schools in contrast to high-SES schools, suggesting that “it matters more which teacher a child receives” in a low SES school (Nye et al., 2004, p. 254; Mangiante, 2011). State and local governments have mobilized to receive these funds by linking student achievement and teacher effectiveness through the use of standardized test scores.

Implicit in RTTT is the assumption that effective teachers always produce student achievement, despite the myriad of intervening factors from both inside and outside the school environment that influence academic success. Critics of RTTT, such as Diane Ravitch (2011), cite the continued use of a competitive educational model that places too much emphasis on children's test scores to determine teacher and school effectiveness, leading in some cases to school closings and academic dishonesty.

In order to compete for RTTT funds, many states are now implementing evaluation measures that determine teachers' salary based on standardized test scores. The increased reliance on testing to determine the economic worth of teachers, including the controversial "value added" measure (VAM), has angered teachers in many school districts and played a large part in the recent teacher strike in Chicago. In Chicago, under the new evaluation system teachers' pay will eventually be 40% based on students' test scores. Even with the VAM that is intended to control for variables such as attendance, socio-economic status, and race or ethnicity in some states, many teachers find flaws in a system that quantified teacher quality and then determines pay (Rich, 2012).

The State of Florida has implemented a VAM system. Hillsborough County, Florida is exempt from this system due to their concurrent acceptance of a 5 million dollar grant from the Bill and Melina Gates Foundation. In Hillsborough County's Evaluating Effective Teachers program, 40% of teachers' salary is based on student test scores, including the VAM, while 60% of salary is based on principal and evaluations from a peer or mentor. In other Florida counties, teachers' salaries will be based on 50% student test scores, including VAM and then administrative evaluations (FLDOE, 2012). Critics of the VAM statistic, including the president of Math for America, a leading

organization that seeks to improve math education in America, cite numerous flaws with the system. The first flaw is misuse of math for political purposes:

The most common misuse of mathematics is simpler, more pervasive, and (alas) more insidious: mathematics employed as a rhetorical weapon—an intellectual credential to convince the public that an idea or a process is “objective” and hence better than other competing ideas or processes. This is mathematical intimidation. It is especially persuasive because so many people are awed by mathematics and yet do not understand it—a dangerous combination. (Ewing, 2011, p.667)

Other flaws in the value-added system Ewing (2011) points out include, but are not limited to: the inability of VAM to control for all influences on test scores, the fact tests are only polls of a small sample of achievement within a larger domain of acquired knowledge, and the inability of tests to measure intangibles such as attitude, motivation, engagement, self-discipline, and the ability of a person to be an independent learner. Also, Ewing points out high stakes tests are more likely to cause people (students, teachers, and administrators) to cheat. If too much importance is placed on VAM to determine teachers’ worth then politicians and policymakers are missing the bigger picture and overlooking other important goals of public education such as the development of social and emotional skills necessary to compete in a global economy.

New approaches to conducting inquiry into social class inequality in schools should be considered since the academic achievement gap continues to persist, and many professionals in the field of education doubt a new evaluation system based on faulty statistical models can fix the problem. Qualitative, ethnography research can provide

descriptive insight into processes that reproduce social class in schools, as well as “help us to see patterns of resistance to social reproduction that are often glossed over or washed away in larger-scale investigations” (Diamond, Randolph & Spillane, 2004, p.79). This study offers an examination of the ways teachers’ life experiences have shaped their perceptions of social class. NCLB and RTTT both call for high quality teacher preparation programs and both assume effective teachers can make a difference in student achievement, regardless of social class background. Since teacher effectiveness matters more in low SES schools (Nye et al., 2004; Mangiante, 2011), focusing on teachers and how their past experiences shape their perceptions of students may provide insight into one of the many ways teachers can make a difference in student achievement.

This study used a narrative, phenomenological methodology to collect and present data in order to explore why and how teachers’ views on social class matters to students’ educational success. Decades of research on institutional inequality and home-factors related to educational success have shed some light on this topic, although less attention has been given to teachers’ experience with social class and how it might affect their relationships with students (Grossman & MacDonald, 2008). As far as relational aspects of practice between teachers and students, this research aims to understand how teachers’ experiences with social class have shaped their habitus, or general set of dispositions (Bourdieu, 1977), and thus influenced their development of relationships with students from difference social classes.

## *Rationale*

Colleges of Education in the United States, policy makers and school districts training out-of-field teachers can assist in closing the achievement gap by providing pre-service teachers and practicing teachers with the training necessary to understand and reflect on their interactions with students from different social class backgrounds. For example, the *Funds of Knowledge* project at the University of Arizona taught pre-service teachers ethnographic methods and sent them out to conduct research in the communities they would be assigned to during their teaching internships. The theoretical approach of the *Funds of Knowledge* program focused on education as a social process, acknowledging that “students’ learning is bound within larger contextual, historical, political, and ideological frameworks that affect students’ lives” (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti, 2005, p. ix). Overall, the programs’ goal was to shift pre-service teachers’ perceptions of working class and poor communities from that of communities with stark deficits to that of communities with many strengths and resources, or *funds of knowledge*. For example, Messing (2005) found during exit interviews that pre-service teacher-researchers in the project, after reflecting on their experiences, had changed attitudes about parents, improved communication with parents, and felt less judgmental about their students. One participant in the *Funds of Knowledge* project reported she “had been unconsciously judging the students in her classroom, and that this judgment was based on a lack of understanding of the family’s day-to-day reality” (Messing 2005, p. 190).

In the *Funds of Knowledge* project, participants were given time to reflect on their experiences after using basic ethnographic research methods such as guided walking tours of local communities, questionnaires, interviews, field notes, life history narratives

and participant observation, to learn about their student populations. The pre-service teachers, in their role as teacher-researcher, reported many shifts in perspective after analyzing their data and reflecting on their experiences during the research process (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005). Before their final internships, pre-service teachers reported the experience using ethnographic methods to learn about their students' daily lives "challenged them to learn new things about their students and students' families and therefore about their own roles as teachers and their practices" (Messing, 2005, p. 189). In the *Funds of Knowledge Project*, the shift in pre-service teachers perspective was not linked to student achievement, however, the interns noted how their ethnographic exploration of the communities they conducted their internships in had fostered communication and a positive exchange of ideas, talents and assets between the home and school environment (Messing, 2005).

Investigating how teachers develop beliefs about social class and educational achievement based on their experiences will create a foundation of knowledge that can be used to develop teacher training programs in school districts and colleges of education. These programs will aim to strengthen the ability to provide training for teachers that can allow them to develop an ability to understand their own socially contextualized interactions with the students they teach, regardless of socio-economic background.

Training social studies teachers to understand social class from a broader context is important because the content inherent in social science education deals specifically with the historical and contemporary composition of North American society, of which the study of social class is a cornerstone. The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has underscored the importance of social class in social studies education with its

inclusion of social class related issues and concepts in most of the ten curriculum themes (NCSS, 2011). Additionally, the Florida Department of Education includes class-based issues in standards and benchmarks for almost all 9-12 Social Studies curriculum. Florida Sunshine State Standards for secondary Social Studies require students to be able to understand social class dynamics from the beginnings of civilizations (SS.6.W.2.3), through Medieval times (SS.912.W.2.Su.j), and all the way up to the post World War II era (SS.912.A.7.2) (Florida Department of Education, 2008). These standards align with courses required for graduation in the State of Florida. Additionally, social science elective courses such as anthropology, psychology, sociology and human geography deal explicitly with class-based patterns of human social organization.

Social studies teachers interact with students from various social class backgrounds as well as teach *about* social class in their curriculums. Social studies teachers in particular may have had additional exposure and time for reflection and contemplation on social class as an issue. As a secondary line of inquiry, examining teachers' reflections on social class based on their choice to be and, later, their role as a social studies teacher will also be explored. In other words, to what extent have teachers' interest in social studies education as a career choice afforded the participants with opportunities to be reflexive as they interact with students from different social classes? If knowledge is generated about how teachers' understandings about the dynamics of social class are created and given meaning, a responsive teacher education curriculum integrating the fields of anthropology and social studies education can be developed for the purpose of creating a contemplative, valid and realistic portrayal of social class issues and their dynamics in public schools.



### *Statement of the Problem*

As federally mandated, all public school students in the United States are entitled to equal educational opportunities. Despite this, there is a preponderance of evidence that indicates social class is a key determinant of educational achievement, with lower social class students not making the educational gains of their upper class counterparts. This has significant implications for lower class students' ability to gain upward social mobility.

Sirin (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of literature on socio-economic status (SES) and academic achievement between 1990 and 2000 and found that "parents' location in the socioeconomic structure has a strong impact on students' academic achievement" (p. 438). Sirin's findings support research by Coleman (1988) indicating that a family's socio-economic background (SES) sets the stage for students' academic achievement through both the presence of resources at home and by providing the social capital that is necessary to succeed in school.

Nationally, research indicates a negative correlation exists between household income, as an indicator of socio-economic status, and high school drop-out rates. In 2007, the high school dropout rate among persons 16-24 years old was highest in low-income families (16.7%) as compared to high-income families (3.2%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). The National Center for Educational Statistics (2009) reported students from families in the lowest income quartiles had a higher drop-out rate (15.8%) than students from the highest income quartiles (2.5%) with a median drop-out rate of 8.1% within the four income-level quartiles.

Quantitative research indicates educational inequality exists, creating a gap in academic achievement between social classes (Sirin, 2005). Schools are responsible for closing this gap in order to provide federally mandated equal educational opportunities to all students. There is a sizeable gap in the literature qualitatively describing the unique role teachers' experiences with and attitudes toward social class play in informing their relationships with students from different social classes. Research by Messing (2005) is related to this topic within the context of the *Funds of Knowledge* project, and a study conducted in the United Kingdom (Oliver & Kettley, 2010) investigated teacher habitus, or general set of dispositions (Bourdieu, 1977), and how this influenced students' choices to apply to elite universities in the UK. Messing (2005) investigated teachers' change in attitude and disposition based on their experience in the *Funds of Knowledge* project. Oliver & Kettley (2010) investigated how teachers' habitus influenced students' higher education decisions. Yet, exploration into how teachers' experiences growing up shape the construction of a habitus is lacking.

This research seeks to fill this gap through a qualitative examination of how teachers' construct understandings of social class based on their life experiences, and how those experiences inform their relationships with students from different social class backgrounds as well as inform their understanding of students' potential for achievement in their classes. As stakeholders in public education, teachers' attitudes about students, whether positive or not, may determine student success in academic achievement. Grossman & McDonald (2008) note there is a sizable gap in the research literature regarding how teachers and students form pedagogical relationships. Furthermore, they contend

any framework of teaching practice should encompass these relational aspects of practice and identify the components of building and maintaining productive relationships with students. Such an understanding might be particularly useful in preparing teachers who can work effectively with students who differ from them in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and language. (p. 188)

In order to ascertain areas of weakness in knowledge in regards to teachers' experiences with social class and educational achievement, this study will resolve the following research problems:

- (1) How teachers' experiences shape their understanding of social class and educational achievement;
- (2) To what extent teachers' habitus influences their relationships with students;
- (3) To what extent teaching social studies provides teachers with opportunities to be reflective as they interact with students from different social classes.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this narrative, phenomenological study is to describe how social studies teachers' experiences with social class inform their understanding of academic achievement. Research indicates teachers are motivated to enter the profession for the "intrinsic value of teaching, the desire to make a social contribution, shape the future, and work with children/adolescents" (Richardson & Watt, 2006, p 3). Many teachers are aware of the connection the profession has towards making positive social contributions, and many teachers want to make a difference in the lives of young people. Teachers have an understanding of the ability of education to shape students' futures and to make a

positive social change. An exploration of the extent to which participants have been reflexive in their teaching practice and interactions with students from different social class backgrounds will describe how teachers interact with the content and students they teach.

As a phenomenological study, the focus of inquiry was on how teachers construct an understanding of social class based on the meanings they assign to their personal experiences as they were socialized in a class-based society. Semi-structured interviews and a narrative writing style produced stories of how five secondary social studies teachers in Tampa, FL developed an understanding of social class based on their life experiences. In narrative research, the researcher “is interested in determining the meaning of a particular experience or event for the one who had it, and tells about it in a story” (Kramp, 2004, p.5). In this manner, my goal as researcher was to produce stories about how social studies teachers have created meaning out of their particular experiences with social class.

The greater Tampa Bay area provides a wealth of diversity to pull from in regards to teaching environment (rural, suburban and urban) and student composition at various schools, both class-based, “racial”, and ethnic. As of the 2010 Census, with a population of 1,229,226 residents, Hillsborough County has a 25% Hispanic population and a 17% African American population. There are 151,802 families that receive food stamps in Hillsborough County, an increase from 60,721 in the year 2004, indicating poverty is increasing, and thus the number of students in poverty is increasing (USF, 2011). Therefore, a major benefit of conducting research on teachers in the Tampa Bay area is the ability of the population to support a maximum variation sample due to the dynamic

demographic composition of the urbanized area. Furthermore, with an increase in the number of students living in poverty in Hillsborough County, research on social class and education within the Tampa Bay area might shed light onto forces reproducing social class specifically due to the demographic composition of Hillsborough County and the surrounding area. Florida's Hispanic population is 22.9% and the Black population is 16.5% (US Census, 2011). The regions of the Tampa Metropolitan Statistical area outside Hillsborough County where other participants are employed follow a similar demographic trend with a Hispanic population of 20.1% and a slightly lower Black population of 11.4%. Additionally, minority student and teacher composition in Hillsborough County is representative of Florida as well. There are 58.63% minority students in Hillsborough County and 55.69% statewide, and there are 24.37% minority teachers in Hillsborough county and 26.61% minority teachers statewide (Florida Department of Education, 2011). The demographic make-up of Hillsborough County and the surrounding area is reflective of the State of Florida as a whole thus increasing generalizability.

The population of Tampa's Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) is similar to other medium to large cities in the United States. As a fully urbanized, diverse society many MSAs exist that serve a similar number of students and employ a similar volume of educational staff for their schools. MSA's encompassing cities such as Baltimore, Cleveland, St. Louis, Minneapolis, Sacraments, San Diego, Portland and Seattle are similar in size with over 2 million but fewer than 3 million residents (Census, 2010). These areas are statistically similar to the sheer size of the population from which this sample was selected.

The narrative format used in this research will produce stories about teachers' life experiences with social class. Literary elements such as point of view and tone were used to be inclusive of emotional aspects of the events produced by the participants as their stories were told (Coulter & Smith, 2009). In order to insure the participants' narratives are accurate, the participants reviewed not only the transcripts from the interviews for accuracy, but they also proof-read and edited their final narratives. Narratives were checked by participants for accuracy in rendering perspective or point of view, environment and context, sequence of events or plot, tone, and the proper structuring or framing of relationships (Kramp, 2004).

Analysis of qualitative data yielded descriptive themes for each participant. Themes that developed between participants were also identified. Interviews, member checks or verification of transcripts by participants, and use of an expert panel for feedback and triangulation facilitated the writing of narratives that describe how teachers' experiences shape their habitus, and understanding of social class and academic achievement.

### *Theoretical Framework*

*Narrative phenomenology.* As a framework for conducting qualitative research, phenomenology focuses on human experience and how our experiences create meaning and then allow us to make sense of the world around us. Phenomenological studies aim to describe participants' experiences and how those experiences are interpreted and then inform the development of a worldview. At the core of phenomenological inquiry is the assumption that an essential nature of shared experiences exist. "These essences are the

core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced” (Patton, 2002, p. 107). This study sought to uncover how teachers’ experiences with social class create an understanding of how their perception of social class may impact the academic achievement of their students. Patterns that emerge from the data will attempt to get at the core meanings that tend to be shared or mutually understood by the participants.

With the development of a line of inquiry based on phenomenology, a working of the data into a narrative structure is appropriate because stories about peoples’ experiences shape their dispositions and how they mediate and interact with the world around them. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note how “narrative and life go together and so the principal attraction of narrative as method is its capacity to render life experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and meaningful ways” (p. 10). Agency, experience and consciousness create individual subjectivities and these can be explored in depth and in a sequential manner through narrative analysis. Narrative stories forge a sense of temporal integration (Desjarlais, 1997) around experiences that allow us to see how a person develops the beliefs and attitudes that shape their understanding of how the world around them works and how they choose to interact with others.

A narrative approach to conducting qualitative inquiry is associated with research methods informed by cognitive anthropology. Jerome Bruner has theorized that interpretations of the world, how people make meaning out of experiences, are universally constructed and organized as a narrative mode of reasoning. In other words, “reality itself is narratively constructed” by humans vis-à-vis their experiences (Mattingly, Lutkehaus & Throop, 2008, p. 11). Jerome Bruner (1991) contends “we

organize our experiences and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on” (p.4). Using narrative inquiry as a research method allowed me to develop descriptive stories about teachers and how they make sense of social class by allowing their life stories to unfold in a natural, easily digestible pattern found in a narrative format. In this dissertation research, teachers’ life stories are presented in a narrative, or sequential format. In this manner, the life stories provide the content of teachers experiences while a narrative, sequential unfolding of their experiences describe how, over time, perceptions of social class are shaped.

Lila Abu-Lughod (1993) outlines specific ways researchers can employ narrative strategies for presenting data, which are consistent with my research describing teacher's experiences with social class. First, by making my thoughts and reflections explicit in writing during and after the research and analysis process I was able to maintain a relationship with the data without trying to remove myself from the data and narrative construction completely. My reflections on the research process as well as a disclosure of personal biases are addressed in Chapter Six and in the Appendix. In addition, leaving traces of myself as researcher in writing allows me to make explicit the methodological decisions that were made and explain unexpected occurrences that happened through the course of data collection that need to be mentioned or clarified. Second, telling stories about peoples' experiences from a literary perspective flow well and are easily understood. As noted above, conducting inquiry about peoples' experiences suits itself to a narrative format because the researcher is, in essence, telling stories about what people said, and what they did (Desjarlais, 1997; Agar, 1996). Narrative inquiry led my data



collection towards the production of five narratives and will also provided a framework for my data analysis methods, facilitating the movement back and forth between the data, from their emerging themes and the stories they produce.

*Social reproduction and deficit theory.* A review of the literature in Chapter Two will discuss the historical and social context related to this study. Social reproduction and deficit theory are discussed to demonstrate how these theories can be used to explain processes that determine teacher-student interactions in public schools. A further analysis of the processes operating in our public schools highlight the many implications social reproduction theory and deficit theory have for teachers. These implications are at the levels of: individual (teacher habitus), curriculum (manifest and hidden), and structure (tracking). This research study is focused on the level of the individual, specifically examining patterns of teachers' habitus, or long-lasting set of transposable dispositions, attitudes, experiences and ways of being that serve as a mediating factor between the individual and their world (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu's concepts of social and cultural capital are seminal to understanding social class as a phenomenon because an individual and their experiences cannot be understood without examining the totality of their material capital (books, technology, art, music) as well as their non-material capital (family, network of friends, colleagues).

The historical development and application of deficit theory in American public schools contextualizes our understanding of federal policies aimed at leveling the playing field for all students. How the federal government has decided to address the issue of social class inequality in schools has significant implications for our students, families and teachers. An examination of the adoption of The Elementary and Secondary

Education Act of 1965, specific federally funded programs such as Head Start, and the approach they have taken to alleviate social class inequality provides answers in regards to how the Federal government addresses the social problem of poverty through educational policies. The theoretical undergirding of federal programs hinged on the idea that a culture of poverty exists that produces an educationally deprived child, or a child that is performing below grade level due family characteristics or social characteristics such as living in poverty (Havighurst, 1969). The culture of poverty theory has recently been criticized by many scholars (Gorski, 2008a; Gorski, 2008b; Ladson-Billing, 2006) for ignoring individual differences, focusing on and perpetuating stereotypes about minority and lower class students and for ignoring structural problems in class society such as unequal access to schooling, housing and healthcare.

Anthropologists are critical of using the concept of culture to explain the social class achievement gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Gonzalez, 2005), instead, calling for an examination of how people and “ideas, events and institutions interact and change through time”. Ladson-Billings (2006) laments the use of the term culture on the part of educators to explain everything “school failure to problems with behavior management and discipline” (p. 104). The term culture is used by many teachers as code for race, or diversity or difference when in actuality it may not be the culture a student comes from, but a lack of access to resources in our society that is the problem. Research in education and anthropology should contribute to a conception of culture that is more “dynamic, interactional, and emergent” (Gonzalez, 2005, p. 37), and more reflective of the totality of knowledge and characteristics within a community and how knowledge determines the processes that create the practice of daily life and in turn shape experience. Furthermore,

a shared history, values, attitudes, beliefs, language or religion does not necessarily determine social class. Whether or not a person is lower class, middle class or upper class cannot be superficially and easily explained away by the term culture. Culture is a term that is often used on the part of teachers, administrators and policy makers to hide structural and social inequality in public schools but it is a superficial application of the term at best.

The concept of culture itself is problematized by many postmodern anthropologists (Abu-Lughod, 1993). Gonzalez, Amanti & Moll (2005) contend that “culture has lost much of its utility as a way to describe the diversity within societies” (p. 36). This is because the term culture in the field of anthropology has been used to create a distinction between self and other (Abu-Lughod, 1991). This distinction further exacerbates a division of power between those studying the poor and the poor themselves, preventing a full understanding of the experiences of those marginalized in our society. The amplification of difference between the poor and the rest of society prevents us from hearing the voices of the poor clearly, and also from realistically examining their experiences and how the lives of the poor may be similar to those who have a higher social status. Therefore, the notion of practice, or how people know about their world, experience life and describe and explain how they do things, or why things are done more accurately represents how habitus is constructed (Gonzalez, Amanti & Moll, 2005).

Although analysis for this study is at the level of the individual, teachers are a product of their social context. The structural context of education (social reproduction) and how our government has historically framed poverty in education has influenced both

student and teacher experiences. Developing narrative themes about teachers, social class and the development of the *habitus* cannot happen in an ahistorical or asocial void.

Understanding theory related to the structural context of inequality in public education allows for participants to be understood as individuals, having individual experiences within the larger social network that is a product of its historical development. In this way, the literature review will define and delineate the context of the historical and socio-political and professional aspects of participants' lives.

### *Qualitative Research Questions*

Following this theoretical line of reasoning, the main research questions for this study are:

1. How do teachers' life experiences with social class inform their understanding of their students?
2. How do teachers' perceive social class influencing educational attainment?
3. To what extent have social studies teachers' life experiences lead them to be reflective about social class?

A large body of qualitative research, which will be discussed at length in Chapter Two, has investigated the mechanisms reproducing socio-economic status at several sites: family, peer and school (Willis, 1977; MacLeod, 1996; Fine, 1991; Weis, 1992; Lareau, 2003). An examination of the unique role teachers' experiences play in shaping their understanding of the connection between social class and education contributed to the corpus of knowledge related to how reproduction of social class occurs in schools and the larger society as a whole.

### *Definition of Terms*

Culture of Poverty: The idea that poor people share a monolithic and predictable set of beliefs, values, and behaviors (Gorski, 2008b).

Social Class: A division in society based on family income, parent education, parent occupation and the cache of material possessions the family owns (Spring, 2012).

Habitus: A general set of transposable dispositions, attitudes, experiences and ways of being that serve as a mediating factor between the individual and their world (Bourdieu, 1977).

Social class and habitus as concepts are linked. Social class determines one's opportunities and experiences which in turn shape the habitus. Habitus is constructed based on individual experiences but because experiences tend to be more similar within social groups, a habitus or shared practices among people of the same social class or occupation, as I will make the case in Chapter 5, exists. Habitus is acquired through socialization and assimilation into society and schools and thus influence how teachers and students form relationships within the structure of public education (Bourdieu, 1977). Habitus shapes thought and emotions, and in turn determines possibilities for action and behavior between teachers and students. Habitus determines the practice of education in schools. Through the practice of education "teachers and students construct a sense of how 'we' do things" at school, what schooling as an experience is like and how schooling may be different elsewhere (Barber, 2002, p. 385). The practice of habitus can be seen of as a conduit through which social meanings are ascribed to educational practices.

Bourdieu (1987) recommends viewing social class as social spaces occupied by people with differences in accumulated economic, social and cultural capital. This understanding provides further clarification of the definition for social class provided above. Individuals belong to a social class based on their accumulation of various forms of capital in relation to other social groups. These forms of capital are related and reproductive. For example, parents' occupation is a sufficient measure of economic capital or income; parents' educational qualifications are embodied in cultural capital; accumulations of cultural and social capital facilitate networks that provide a person with access to a good job. These conditions determine a family's position within the social hierarchy which, in turn, forms habitus. In this manner, families with different access to income, jobs, education and accumulated wealth occupy different places in the social strata thus producing and reproducing social class through the construction of habitus.

### *Overview of Methods*

Five secondary social studies teachers in or near Hillsborough County, Florida participated in the study. Participants were selected intentionally to create a sample of participants with maximum variability of social groups such as age, gender, race and ethnicity. During the data collection phase of the research agenda, I met with the participants to collect data for the purpose of the creation of life histories, specifically describing the participants' experiences in a class-based society from their earliest remembrance until the present. Analysis of the life history data yielded descriptive themes both within the participant's life history and between the life histories of all five participants. Each of the five participants' data produced themes based on their individual

life histories as well as contribute to the sorting of data into salient themes which are shared by all or most participants.

*Sampling procedures.* Five teachers were selected to participate in the proposed study based on their employment as a secondary social studies teacher in or near Hillsborough County, Florida. After these initial criteria were met, maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to intentionally include participants along all potential areas of analytical interest such as teaching experience, gender, ethnicity and race. By allowing the study to encompass a wide geographical area, I was able to intentionally sample participants from a range of urban and suburban school sites, as well as provide further heterogeneity of sample by the intentional selection of a sample that represents teachers from different social class backgrounds. In this manner I assembled a diversified sample of teachers of both genders with differences in length of teaching experience, from different school locations, as well as from different social class and ethnic or racial backgrounds. The underlying rationale behind this chosen pattern of sampling is that common themes which emerge “from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a phenomenon” (Patton, 2002, p.235). A table is provided below to illustrate the ethnic and racial composition of the panel of selected participants for the proposed study. Years teaching experience is also included in the table.

Table One: Categories for Sample of Participants

<b>Ethnic Category</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Total</b>
Hispanic or Latino	0	1	1
Not Hispanic or Latino	2	2	4
Total			5
<b>Racial Categories</b>			
Black	1	0	1
White or Hispanic	1	3	4
Total			5
<b>Years Teaching</b>			
<b>Less than five</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>More than five</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Total</b>			<b>5</b>

Following Patton’s (2002) suggestion, a sample of five participants has allowed me to reasonably cover the experiences of teachers from a diverse set of backgrounds and experiences.

*Interviews.* Semi-structured interviews were conducted for the purpose of data collection during this study. Interviews produced data for the construction of narratives for each of the five participants. Since the focus on the study is on how the participants ascribed meaning about social class to their experiences, the interview questions guided



the participants in this direction while still encouraging the participant to talk about their life chronologically (Agar, 1996). The interviews guided the participants from their earliest memories and awareness of social class and finished with the present day and their current beliefs about social class and educational achievement (see Appendix Three).

*Data analysis.* The audio recorded and transcribed interview data were analyzed using two column notes and Atlas.ti software. Initially, the use of two column notes allowed me to identify areas of interest within the transcripts for the emergence of themes and to identify new themes for further exploration or clarification in follow-up interviews. Once the data collection process was complete, I begin using the coded and sorted data to write the narratives about each of the participants. After the construction of each narrative I asked the participants to read their stories for accuracy and to provide any information that they believed might further contextualize the story or provide for richer accounts of events.

Two different types of themes identified are (1) themes within each of the individual narratives, and (2) themes consistent among all the participants' narratives. The themes within each of the individual participants' narratives focus on the particulars of their lives and how their experiences gave social class meaning to them. Themes among the different participants focus on the salient ways social class was given meaning that are consistent among most or all participants. Individuals in the study have their own themes that describe their experiences with social class as well as themes shared with other participants that collectively describe how teachers' life experiences have facilitated an understanding of how social class determines academic achievement.

*Triangulation.* Triangulation procedures are built into the research design and methods of collecting data to account for inconsistencies and to strengthen overall verisimilitude of results. After the data was collected and the transcription process complete, participants verified the transcripts as well as their finished narratives, and were able to make any changes to their statements if they chose to, thus insuring the transcription process has occurred accurately.

Three graduate students were asked to volunteer to serve as an expert panel, in order to provide feedback on the transcripts, both in regards to coding and the emergence of themes. I initially coded the data with general themes of either positive or negative experiences with social class, and then narrowed my codes as more focused patterns emerge. During this process, the expert panel was responsible for checking to make sure the data was coded properly during the transcription and coding process. The panel provided feedback on the accuracy of the coding system and suggested areas of further inquiry based on their interpretation of the transcripts. For example, a neutral code was added at the suggestion of the expert panel. Since the teachers' narratives are the final unit of analysis, once they were properly constructed and verified as accurate by the participants, the panel's primary goal was to assist in making sure the final themes, both individual and group, were consistent. This consistency guarantees the data and the stories they produced have a high level of verisimilitude, or the likelihood that something is truthful. In narrative inquiry, with its focus on stories and the understanding participants have a worldview or perspective that is unique, claiming to know the truth is less appropriate than knowing what was real and experienced by the participants, thus truthful and therefore meaningful for them (Kramp, 2004).

LeCompte & Schensul (1999) note the purpose of triangulation is to build redundancy in data collection methods. Triangulation allows the researcher to be reflexive and recursive throughout the research process and may expose further lines of inquiry or shed light on unanticipated outcomes. This research benefits from a well-designed triangulation protocol because it does all of the things mentioned above: corroborate data, fill in gaps and allowed me to be reflexive and recursive through the process of conducting research. Using multiple data verification methods (member checks and expert panel) for the purpose of triangulation allowed me to confirm whether data was valid. For example, the interview script was verified for validity by the interviewee to make sure what they said is what they said, and also was communicated correctly. Participants, through the process of member checks, were able to elaborate on their statements and clarify any responses that need further attention. The expert panel of graduate students assisted me in finding gaps in my data, idiosyncrasies or inconsistencies, and allowed me to view my data through several pairs of eyes for the purpose of allowing different avenues for analysis have been explored.

### *Limitations*

To what extent this research is generalizable outside of the specific research contexts is questionable due to the nature of qualitative research. As previously mentioned, the goal of this research is verisimilitude more than generalizability. Gall, Gall & Borg (2007) discuss how the term *applicability* may appropriately describe goals related to generalizability in qualitative research. Educational researchers Guba & Lincoln (1989) contend transferability, or showing that the findings are applicable in other contexts is a more appropriate term. Transferability is primarily achieved through

the use of thick description. Regardless of the semantics used to frame how my research can be generalized to other groups and places, the goal is to determine foremost appearance of truth (verisimilitude) and secondly applicability. For example, my findings indicate common themes between participants, through the use of thick description in my writing I have demonstrated how applicable each theme or case may be to other settings, similar circumstances or other teachers.

Merriam (1998) outlines several strategies utilized in this research facilitating the enhancement of the findings in a qualitative study being applicable or transferable to other populations:

1. Rich, thick description – providing enough description so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation in order to determine whether the findings can be transferred.
2. Typicality – describing how typical the program, event or individual is compared with others in the same category, so that users can make comparisons with their own situations.
3. Multisite design – using several sites, cases, situations, especially those that maximize diversity in the phenomenon of interest (pp. 211-212).

Through the production of life histories that are rich and thick in their description of events, as well as descriptions of the general typicality of experiences which vary by settings, a sense of the overall applicability and verisimilitude of the research findings has been determined and will be discussed at length in Chapter Seven: Reflections and Applications.

## *Conclusion*

This research, a narrative phenomenological study, explores how teachers construct an understanding of social class and educational achievement based on their experiences. Semi-structured interview data produced narratives of the participants with a particular focus on social class experiences in order to conduct inquiry into how teachers' experiences shape their understanding of social class and student achievement. The results of the study can be used to inform teacher education programs so they can provide a more relevant approach to teaching about social class and educational inequality in United States public schools.

## Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

### *Introduction*

This literature review will develop a solid theoretical framework for the discussion of how social reproduction theory and deficit theory articulate with teachers' experiences to contribute to an understanding of the ways that teachers may contribute to the phenomenon of social reproduction in public education. Teachers' experiences are shaped by the historical, social and political climate of society. The institutional structures of public education in US society have shaped the problem of social class and equal educational opportunities and provide the context of this study because teachers are a product of their social context. The historical, political and theoretical development of related lines of inquiry and relevant research will be discussed to contextualize the historical and socio-political context relevant to this line of inquiry and situate the study within the field of social science education and educational anthropology.

### *History and Politics of Poverty and Education*

Two approaches used in public education to explain and attempt to resolve the problem of poverty emerged out of federal legislation during the Johnson administration's War on Poverty and are still being debated today. On one side of the debate, scholars such as Paulo Freire (1970) and Paul Gorski (2008a; 2008b) contend that poverty is a product of structural (social, political, and economic) conditions. Eliminating poverty hinges upon the education of active, empowered citizens who will work for

progressive, organic social change. On the other side of this debate, educational conservatives and the business community argue that poverty can be eliminated without structural social change when the poor are socialized to fit into their appropriate role in the labor market (Spring, 1993).

Federal legislation put into law during Johnson's administration in the 1960's was based on the assumption that "an integrated set of social and psychological conditions existed among the poor that could be directly attacked by a set of comprehensive government programs" (Spring, 1989, p. 124). These adaptations of the poor created a cycle of poverty, initially coined in 1961 by anthropologist Oscar Lewis based on his ethnographic studies in a small Mexican community (Lewis, 1961). Lewis' concept of a *culture of poverty* was appropriated by Michael Harrington. Harrington's (1962) solution to the problem of poverty was to attack this "culture of poverty" head on, by systemically altering education, healthcare, housing and job access.

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, based on Harrington's framework, stipulated the provision of financial assistance in the form of grants to schools for "meeting the special educational needs of the educationally deprived child" (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965, p. 25). The label of *educationally deprived child* implied education was not valued in the home environment and/or that there was limited access to educational resources within the family and culture. The use of the term *educationally deprived* was applied to children who were performing below grade level because of family and cultural background (Spring, 1989, p. 143).

Two related government commissioned reports, The Moynihan Report (1965) and The Coleman Report (1966), which will be discussed at length later in this review of literature, solidified US education policy aimed at providing equal educational opportunities to lower income and minority students. In tandem with Lewis' and Harrington's development of the theory of a culture of poverty, these reports were instrumental in shaping future Federal educational policies for decades to come.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 also historically coincided with the establishment of The Head Start program. The Head Start program was designed to level the playing field for poor children by providing medical services, dental services and school-readiness programs. The emphasis of the Head Start school-readiness programs was to “provide an education that would counteract what were believed to be the negative effects of families living in a culture of poverty”, such as linguistic deficiencies and low IQ (Spring, 1989, p. 144-145). These linguistic and intelligence deficiencies among poor children were believed to exist due to lack of books and educational stimuli in the home environment. Despite the fact that characteristics associated with educational deprivation are not limited to low-income families, books and educational stimuli consistently refer to the education-rich home environment associated with the normative middle class culture in the United States. This sentiment is echoed today in the current Head Starts Performance Standards and Child Development Principles that states, “learning is influenced by the child's social and cultural context— what their culture values and doesn't value influences what and how children learn” (Wolverton, 2001, p. 1).



The culture of poverty theoretical framework emerged in the 1960's from "doctrines that point to presumed defects in the mentality or behavior of disadvantaged classes" (Valentine, 1968, p. 18). The development of these doctrines can be traced to some social scientists' misapplication of the term culture as being essentially synonymous with a society's social structure. Valentine (1968) notes the problem with this misapplication: "culture and society are not the same...the cultural patterns that shape the behavior of people in groups should not be confused with the structure of institutions or social systems" (p.3). It is important to note here culture, in this misapplication, is a conduit through which "men collectively adapt themselves to environmental conditions and historical circumstances" (Valentine, 1968, p. 5). Valentine argues culture among different social groups in the United States is not grossly different. As Valentine (1968) states:

Analysis in terms of "culture of poverty" may distract attention from crucial structural characteristics of the stratified social system as a whole and focus it instead on alleged motivational peculiarities of the poor that are of doubtful validity or relevance. Several investigations of the problem of class cultures suggest that the cultural values of the poor may be much the same as middle-class values, merely modified in practice because of situational stresses. (p.17)

In the United States, there is a shared culture on many fundamental levels, including valuing family, education and learning. Lower class families, despite similar cultural aspirations such as upward social mobility, are not able to attain the same level of achievement than their wealthier counterparts due to their lack of access to scarce and valued resources, not due to significant differences in what can be ascribed to as falling

along “cultural” lines (Gorski, 2008ab). As Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs would dictate, providing for the basic needs of the family becomes paramount to academic achievement in lower income households. Therefore, many lower income parents are primarily concerned with food, clothing, shelter and safety for their families because these basic needs are tenuous. Educational attainment may not be a luxury lower income families cannot afford financially or as far as time is concerned. For example, a working class hourly wage-earning parent may not be able to afford to take a day off from work to take their family to a zoo, museum or other educational space because (1) they are hourly employees and not salary, and a loss in a day of work means a loss in income, and (2) costs associated with such activities (transport, entrance, etc.) may be prohibitive. Financial constraints, not cultural values, limit access to educational experiences.

In the “culture of poverty” perspective, an examination of the role social structure plays in the reproduction of social class through unequal access to educational resources has been pushed aside, mostly ignored. Teachers and families are forced to bear the burden of responsibility for students’ academic achievement, often pointing fingers at each other instead of joining forces and demanding structural changes from federal and state legislatures. In this manner, structural (social, political, and economic) factors reproducing educational inequality are hidden in a smoke screen through: (1) a discourse of poor families and their pathological “culture” needing to be fixed, and (2) a sense that schools and teachers are failing our children. Treatments to remedy schools in The United States therefore generally hinge on fixing our poor students or fixing/punishing teachers in low income schools through pay-for-performance salaries and the emerging trend we

see in the proletarianization and corporatization of American schooling (Giroux, 2003; Apple, 2004).

Left out of the finger pointing at lower classes and teachers is a formidable discussion of the possibility that in order to resolve the issue of poverty in society, political and economic practices must be altered in order to level the playing field. For example, what working class and lower class students often lack equal access to food, clothing, shelter and healthcare (Gorski, 2008b) in relation to their middle class and upper class counterparts. Political policies such as universal healthcare and a tax system that places less of a burden on lower class families would lessen economic instability. Left out of the discussion is also the possibility that the corporatization of American schools may exacerbate inequality instead of closing achievement gaps between minority groups and dominant groups. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), in tandem with the trend towards the corporatization of American schools, has created a situation where schools and teachers compete for scarce and valued educational resources, including teacher salaries and merit pay bonuses. This has the potential to create a situation where some teachers might resent and blame poor families for low educational outcomes when teachers work hard yet still do not receive a salary that is reflective of their hard work and dedication to the profession.

### *Deficit Theory*

The notion of a “culture of poverty” and other forms of deficit theory previously discussed has been criticized for the perpetuation of stereotypes about students from lower social class backgrounds. Students' failure to be successful in schools is then

blamed on social class pathology instead of lack of access to scarce and valued resources. In this section, further historical development of the application of deficit theory in United States schools through federally mandated reports on the status of schools and social class will be reviewed and juxtaposed with alternative approaches in order to further delineate the debate regarding why students from lower-class social groups do not fare as well academically in public schools.

Several sociological reports were commissioned during and in the years following the Johnson administration and with the introduction of the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1964. Two of the arguably most influential reports and their implications for public education will be reviewed: The Moynihan Report (1965) and The Coleman Report (1966).

The goal of The Moynihan Report (1965) was to determine what could be done to improve the lives and life chances of poor Black people in the United States. The findings identified pathologies in Black communities and then made policy suggestions based on those areas of perceived weakness. The report found Black lower class communities to be lacking male role models and thus leadership in the home. At the time The Moynihan Report was commissioned, the structure of the poor, Black family was predominantly female-centered. According to the report, this was a result of disenfranchised Black males who lacked access to the job market. Black males lacked access to well paying jobs during times of economic crisis and as a result were less likely to be able to maintain their position as the head of the households. According to the Moynihan report, this created pathologies within Black communities such as crime, drug use and delinquency.

The recommendations for policy were few but pointed to the fact that something should be done to treat the pathologies found in this segment of US society.

The Coleman Report (1966) was a national scale survey of students, teachers and schools to determine whether or not equality of educational access was being provided to all students. The findings of the report indicated Black students achieved more in schools when they were well integrated with White students (when they were in class with more White students than Black students). Basically, it was school socio-economic environment that determined educational achievement. Coleman et al. (1966) found an achievement gap existed between Black and White students, although his research also found higher academic achievement for lower income students at schools with a higher overall socio-economic status of the student body. Considering the importance of school socio-economic composition, differences in school resources had little effect on student achievement. Findings from Coleman et al. (1966) heavily influenced policies encouraging racial, social and economic integration of schools (Gamoran & Long, 2006). The findings of this report prompted Coleman to initially support school desegregation via busing programs in order to integrate Black students into predominately White schools. Later, Coleman withdrew his support for busing programs because he felt they exacerbated the phenomenon of White flight because many Whites fled to the suburbs to escape busing plans (Gamoran & Long, 2006).

One commonality in both the Coleman and Moynihan reports was their focus on the perceived deficits of minority groups. Policy makers used the findings from these reports to provide education and other resources to lower class and minority communities. The beliefs was that if lower class and/or Black communities are fraught

with social pathology then we must fix their deficits by socializing them to fit better into our institutions of education. This perspective shifts the onus of responsibility for academic failure from lack of access to resources that make educational attainment possible (social structure) to poor families themselves; specifically, the blame of perceived “pathology” or deficit became a label placed upon lower class and minority communities.

From an educational standpoint, deficit theory focuses primarily on what is wrong or pathological with a community or social group and how education can teach poor students the culture/rules/codes for being successful in "normal American culture". Basically, how can we make "them" more like "us"? For this reason, deficit theory has been criticized by many (Gorski, 2008b; Ladson-Billings, 2006) for focusing on and perpetuating stereotypes about minority and lower class students and for ignoring structural problems in class society such as unequal access to schooling, housing and healthcare. Students should be taught the rules and codes of mainstream society (Delpit, 1995), but caution should be paid to not devalue students and their home environments by perpetuating stereotypes that may or may not be as salient as the concept of a *culture of poverty* implies.

Gorski (2008b) has uncovered many myths perpetuated by deficit theory perspectives about people living in poverty. Despite the knowledge that there is greater variation of cultural and behavioral characteristics within social classes than there is between them, myths about people living in poverty have become salient stereotypes in American society. The myths outlined by Gorski are:

1. Poor people are lazy and have an unmotivated work ethic- most adults in working class and poor families work longer hours and have more jobs than their middle class counterparts.

2. Lower classes don't care about their children's education - they do care about education but may be less involved with schools because their work schedules are not conducive to attending conferences and school functions. If they are working multiple jobs, then assisting their children with homework or attending school functions is not always possible.

3. Lower classes are linguistically deficient - all languages and forms of language have consistent, stable rules of grammar and syntax and are able to communicate ideas. Dialectal variation among lower classes does not point to linguistic deficiency or "broken English", it is just a different dialect than the Standard American English (SAE) used in schools (Lippi-Green, 1997).

4. Lower classes are more likely to use and abuse drugs and alcohol- research indicates middle and upper class students are more likely to abuse alcohol than lower and working class students. Research also indicates alcohol abuse is more widespread in middle class households. All social classes use drugs but the pattern of substance abuse is different, due to access to different types of illicit substances. For example, wealthier people have access to more prescription medication than their poorer counterparts so prescription abuse is more common among this social group.

In addition to perpetuating myths, schools and educators, when they adopt a “culture of poverty” paradigm, de-emphasize structural inequalities in society. Poor

families and their students do not have the same access to high quality and stable jobs, healthcare, affordable housing and schools that middle class families and students do. Basic needs in poorer families are more likely to have not been met. This is not an issue of pathology on the part of the families but an issue of access to scarce resources. Not only are access to high quality jobs, healthcare and housing lacking, lower class students are more likely to attend schools with fewer resources, more teachers teaching out of field, and in a less desirable learning environment (Gorski, 2008b).

Reports such as the Moynihan Report and The Coleman Report, although well intended, highlighted alleged deficits in minority communities and led to policy dictating what society and schools should do to "fix" the pathologies found within these communities. For the Moynihan Report, the maternalistic Black family structure and the plight of the Black male was caused by an unstable economy. The best way to "fix" Black family structure is to provide Black males with jobs so they can reclaim their roles as head of household. Affirmative Action programs were created to solve this problem but, as Wilson (1990) notes, poor Black men are still left behind.

The Coleman Report investigated the role education plays as a mediating factor for social mobility. Although The Coleman Report was influential in integrating Black students in to White schools its findings were bleak for the Black community and once again focused on perceived deficits in Black communities and their school environments. In combination, these reports influenced education policy in that they found poor Black families to have structural pathologies which lead to problems with public education in Black communities. This contention set the stage for nationwide, court-ordered busing



and Title I programs such as Head Start, aimed at leveling the playing field for minority students.

The federal studies reviewed above intended to assist minority groups and the poor by making policy recommendations that had direct implications for public education. Unfortunately, by focusing on perceived pathologies and deficiencies in communities, the policy implementations reinforced the notion of a culture of poverty/pathology that must be unlearned so students could succeed. Among poor Black students, the ever present achievement gap was viewed of as a problem that stemmed from "their culture" and from "their communities," not from a problem the education system and its failure to adequately acknowledge that not all students have equal access to scarce and valuable resources. This is where the distorted beliefs about why students fail are created. Poor students, regardless of race, have problems with structural inequalities to economic and educational resources *not* deeply imbedded cultural pathologies. We can't say with any certainty that *all poor people or all poor Black people* (1) are lazy, (2) don't care about education, (3) are linguistically deficient or (4) use drugs and alcohol.

An alternative approach to deficit theory is exemplified in González, Moll & Amanti's (2005) research known as the *Funds of Knowledge* project. Their series of research conducts inquiry on Mexican-American students and their families from an "asset mapping" approach (Kretzmann & McKnight, 2003). From this theoretical approach, all people have knowledge, skills, assets and attributes that can be used to contribute to the education of their children in a way that reflects their reality and their ways of knowing about the world. These community and family assets can be drawn

upon to make education relevant and empowering. In the *Funds of Knowledge* project, pre-service teachers conduct ethnographic-style projects where they investigate the home environment of students they will be teaching during their final internships. Many teachers, after their experiences collecting data about the families and communities who participated in the project, changed their perspectives and attitudes about poor, minority students (Messing, 2005).

In one of the *Funds of Knowledge* studies, Sylvester and Buck (2005) integrated a social studies methods course with a social foundations course and conducted inquiry on “the salience on preservice teachers’ consciousness of self and the “other” in relation to their entrance into urban communities” (p. 214); specifically, the urban communities the subjects (pre-service teachers) would be placed in for their final internships. The study highlighted the “pervasiveness of deficit orientation in urban schooling” and pre-service teachers’ tendency to “operate out of a ‘culture of poverty’ logic” (p. 224). This was exemplified in the pre-service teachers’ initial development of research questions to use while investigating urban communities. Buck and Sylvester (2005) found that, despite direct instructions to look for community assets, their pre-service teachers still focused on lines of inquiry that investigated failure. For example, instead of focusing on assets that might exist within the community, most students initially chose to conduct their inquiries into “academic underachievement...drug use, teen pregnancy, and criminal behavior” (p. 225).

The researchers then guided students towards the development of research questions that focused more on community assets. The pre-service teachers participated in guided walking tours, as well as conducted interviews and kept reflective journals on

their experiences in their internship placement communities. After analyzing students' final project write-ups, reflections, and conversations, Buck and Sylvester (2005) found that at the onset of the project the pre-service teachers' expressed sentiments congruent with deficit theory but were able to identify community assets as the project progressed.

If González, Moll & Amanti's (2005) asset-based model of school engagement with the community had been applied in light of (or in lieu of) the aforementioned federal reports, educators might have focused on identifying and illuminating assets that could be helpful in minority community school instead of perceived deficits and pathologies in lower income communities. It would be beneficial to focus on what strengths exist among community relationships that teachers can use to make learning relevant, meaningful and successful (a pedagogy of hope) instead of focusing on what is wrong and pathological in a community and why "those kids can't learn" (a pedagogy of pathology). Finally, by focusing on pathologies we send a message to minority communities and lower class students that they can't achieve, potentially lowering their aspirations (MacLeod, 1995) and creating self-fulfilling prophecies of educational failure with wide-spread consequences for our future economy.

### *Social Reproduction*

Theory and research related to the phenomenon of social reproduction indicate there are several sites where social class status is produced and reproduced: family, peer and school. These sites of reproduction can be categorized based on the amount of agency and subjectivity the individual possesses as they act upon forces that reproduce their ability to attain upward social mobility. Theory put forth by Bowles and Gintis

(1976) places social structure as the primary determinant of social status. Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) theory of social reproduction places emphasis on structure but acknowledges the role individual agency vis-à-vis the habitus has in reproducing social class. Paul Willis (1977) and Jay Macleod (1995) note the role structure plays in reproducing social status but they are concerned with how individual behavior and/or acts of resistance determine or fail to make upward mobility possible.

Starting with the highly structured theory of social reproduction, Bowles and Gintis (1976) contend schools produce students who are socialized to fit a predetermined role in society that largely corresponds with the occupational class of their parents. At the school level, Anyon (1980) found this reproduction primarily occurs through the hidden curriculum of schools. Through the school environment and its corresponding local socio-economic background, students are sorted into roles that will fit their predetermined, occupational class based on their parents' occupational class. For example, Anyon (1980) found teachers in schools in predominantly affluent areas stress skills, dispositions and behaviors more congruent with tasks and roles student will be expected to fulfill in middle to upper class professional jobs. In more affluent schools, the curriculum places greater emphasis on critical thinking, problem solving and creative analysis. These skills are valued in middle to upper level managerial jobs and jobs requiring higher levels of intellectual analysis. The skills also prepare students for their intended placement as college graduates.

Anyon (1980) found students who hail from working class or lower class backgrounds engaged in more behavior-oriented, as opposed to more critical thinking oriented, tasks. For example, working class and lower class students followed directions

and completed worksheets. Less emphasis was placed on critical thinking and more emphasis was placed on following orders and completing steps of a task. This socialized students to fill blue collar jobs requiring more manual labor and less critical thinking. In this manner schools sort and socialize students to fill positions in the capitalist labor market based on their parents' social class status, thus reproducing social class.

The curriculum in working class schools consists of developing procedural knowledge involving rote behavior and very little decision making or choice. In middle class schools, emphasis is placed on getting the right answers. In contrast with affluent professional schools where students continually articulate and apply ideas and concepts, the development of students' creative faculties in middle class schools is not a major part of the curriculum. As the social class in a community increases, the curriculum shifts relative to the roles different social classes have in the labor market. Working class students were socialized by the curriculum to perform tasks requiring manual labor skills, middle class students were socialized to fulfill middle management positions, and affluent professional students were socialized to fulfill leadership positions in the labor market. Anyon's (1980) research leads to the conclusion supported by Bowles & Gintis (1976) and Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) that public schools in capitalist societies make available to students in different social classes different types of educational experience and curriculum knowledge based on their expected future roles in the labor market.

Bowles and Gintis's theory that working class students are socially reproduced for working class jobs and that the school environment and school relations mirror the workplace have noted significance to social reproduction theory. Bowles and Gintis (2002) argue that socialization differences determine the place to which students are

ascribed in the institution of education. This argument is supported by MacLeod (1995) as well, who notes in his research that “although the boys chose their various [educational] programs, there are grounds for skepticism about the degree to which this was a completely uncoerced choice” (p.115). In the end, this tracking, as a potentially coercive practice, will have the effect of placing lower class students in vocational tracks that ultimately prepare them to enter into working class occupations after graduation.

Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) theory of social reproduction hinges on the development of two concepts: cultural capital and the habitus. Cultural capital refers to the material and nonmaterial culture an individual has access to that is transferable from one generation to the next. The habitus is a general set of transposable dispositions, attitudes, experiences and ways of being that serve as a mediating factor between the individual and their world (Bourdieu, 1977). Reproduction occurs in schools when the cultural capital of the upper classes is valued by institutions of education while the cultural capital of lower classes is devalued. In this manner, there can be perceived a mis-match existing between the cultural capital that lower class students bring to school relative to the cultural capital that upper class students bring. For example, students from upper classes are more likely to have been to museums, exposed to Standard American English more frequently, been inculcated with "middle class" values, attitudes and beliefs. This cultural capital is thus embodied through the habitus and interacts with formal schooling to produce and reproduce social class status. For Bourdieu, there is structure in institutions of education but it is mediated by the qualities of an individual's cultural capital (which corresponds with their social class) and the habitus. Annette Lareau (2003) found two distinct patterns of social behavior exhibited by families from lower and middle classes.

The lower classes followed a pattern of natural growth with their children while upper classes followed a pattern of concerted cultivation. These two different patterns correspond with Bourdieu's notion of the habitus because they form dispositions that allow students to mediate their relationships with teachers and adults.

Lareau (2003) found middle class students' upbringing through the pattern of concerted cultivation created a habitus where students are more likely to demand from adults what they are entitled to, and to use more sophisticated language patterns to get what they want from teachers and parents. They were engaged in more structured, purposeful activities (both academic and non-academic), had more experience with adults and more opportunities to use skills of persuasion to get what they wanted. On the downside, the children were more competitive, spent more time waiting for adults and were more likely to profess they hated their siblings. Lower class students experienced less language input (more directives) so they had fewer opportunities to engage in word play, and thus fewer opportunities to learn to demand what they are entitled to. However, lower class students were found to have closer, more amicable bonds with their siblings and were able to engage in more unstructured, creative play.

In Lareau's (2003) study, the habitus of the middle class students is valued by the schools they attend while the habitus of the lower class students is devalued. Parents from middle class families who practice concerted cultivation are able to pass on to their students the cultural capital valued by schools which the students act out (or practice) vis-à-vis their habitus. Parents of lower class students fail to pass on to their students the cultural capital valued by schools and the habitus of lower class students is less inculcated to demand of teachers what they are entitled to. So, reinforcing theory put

forth by Bourdieu (1977), the structure of schools reproduces social class of students based on whether or not their cultural capital is congruent with the values present in the school although students mediate the field of the school through dispositions and experiences present in their habitus.

Examination of Bourdieu's (1977) development of habitus in determining the teacher's role in social reproduction has significant implication for teacher education programs. Teachers should be aware of the role they serve in reproducing social class status. Individual teachers' dispositions, attitudes, behaviors and experiences (habitus) interrelate with the habitus of students from different social groups. Furthermore, it is important to note that in schools, teachers are the predominant conduits of cultural capital from the middle class as speakers of Standard American English and as the vehicles for both the manifest and hidden curriculum.

Lareau (2003) notes that students from working class and lower class backgrounds experience education differently because they come from a social class culture that has a more distrustful relationship with institutions of education. This sense of distrust potentially undermines the creation of effective and productive family-school relationships, leading to "an emerging *sense of constraint*" in working class and poor childrens' interactions in school settings (p.6). Furthermore, in her study comparing the childrearing strategies of parents from different social class backgrounds, Lareau (2003) observes that middle class families practice concerted cultivation of their children, where children are taught to believe they are entitled to adult attention, learn to question adults and address them as relative equals. Furthermore,



in their everyday experiences, middle class children not only acquire a variety of important life skills, but they also have repeated opportunities to practice those skills. Their working class and poor counterparts, on the other hand, typically neither participated in organized activities nor grew up in homes where the preferred approach to childrearing meshed seamlessly with the practices and values of society's dominant institutions. (p.63)

Some social reproduction theorists have taken into account more deterministic theories, yet also choose to focus on the role of individual agency in shaping students' hopes, attitudes, and aspirations. Paul Willis' (1977) work *Learning to Labor* and Jay Macleod's (1995) *Ain't no Makin' It* comprises knowledge informing this approach to social reproduction theory.

Paul Willis' (1977) seminal ethnography investigated forces that reproduced social class in an industrial city in England. Willis followed a group of boys called The Lads and found several patterns emerge that shaped their interaction with schools and reproduced their place in the labor market. The Lads' behavior was counterproductive to being "good students" and they frequently enjoyed having a "laff" at the expense of their teachers and the school. They did not take schooling seriously and resisted their formal education in general. In addition, the Lads internalized the shop-floor culture of their fathers as masculine and glorified it. The Lads in some ways knew schooling would not be the "great equalizer" it had been purported to be and that their rank in society was predetermined. By not taking school seriously and 'having a "laff", the Lads were penetrating the structure of school through their own resistance. Unfortunately, the

penetration of their own mystification was limited by their valorization of their parent's shop floor culture. This is what in the end sealed their fate to that of their parents.

Jay Macleod's (1995) ethnography focuses again at the level of individual behavior, agency and aspirations while also taking to account structural inequalities. The residents of Claredon Heights Housing Projects, social reproduction theory would dictate, have few opportunities for upward social mobility, if any. Macleod follows two groups, The Brothers and The Hallway Hangers, comparing their attitudes towards upward social mobility and whether or not we live in a meritocracy. The Hallway Hangers, a mostly white group of young men, have lowered aspirations. For them, there is no point in even running the race for social prizes and social mobility because they have no chance. The Brothers, a predominantly Black group of young men, believe if they work hard and try their best they will be able to make it out of the projects and create a better life for themselves. In the end, neither group is able to be successful in achieving upward mobility. The lowered aspirations of the Hallway Hangers are self-fulfilling prophecies and the Brothers are faced with challenges and failures that fail to bring them much success. In the end, classism and racism serve to create a situation where less social mobility is available for those living at the bottom rungs of the American social hierarchy.

Success predicated on hard work is the fundamental principle operating in the public education system's belief that it will be able to "level the playing field" for children from diverse ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds. As Nolan and Anyon (2004) point out, "schools are ideological institutions that serve to justify their own existence through a discourse of social mobility" (p. 143). However, the conviction that

upward social mobility in society is based on a system of meritocracy is erroneous, according to MacLeod's (1995) research in a low income neighborhood in Chicago. Nevertheless, the school system perpetuates this myth of society as a meritocracy by using the familiar mantra, "behave yourself, work hard, earn good grades, get a good job, and make lots of money" (MacLeod, 1995, p. 97).

MacLeod is able to point out in his ethnographic data that, due to the steadfast belief of the dominant culture that we exist in a meritocracy, this mantra is often pushed aside by the lower classes and replaced with sentiments of personal failure. MacLeod uses the metaphor of running an uphill race when discussing upward social mobility in the eyes of his subjects. One of MacLeod's two distinct subject groups, a Caucasian group known as the Hallway Hangers, gave up because they believed that the odds of winning, or even finishing the race, were against them. Most of the Hallway Hangers were confident that they would eventually be killed or end up in jail—this is likely based on the plight of their older siblings. In contrast, the African American group, the Brothers, had higher aspirations-- they felt their chances for success were better, partially due to affirmative action policies.

In his research, MacLeod (1995) discusses how the Hallway Hangers' racist beliefs are counterproductive to their economic success. "Their identification of class-based barriers to success and their impression that the deck is fairly stacked against them, insights which could catalyze the development of...political consciousness...is derailed by their racism" (MacLeod, 1995, p. 122). Consequently, the Hallway Hangers believe, like most neo-conservatives, that affirmative action has taken jobs from whites.

Willis's (1977) ethnographic research in England has similar parallels with MacLeod's subjects. For example, both Willis (1977) and MacLeod (1995) found schools and teachers functioned from a perspective of lowered aspirations for their lower class subjects. MacLeod specifically points to the culture of poverty paradigm as the cause for this attitude: "The concept of cultural deprivation attributes their problems solely to the cultural deficiencies of their families" (pgs.99-100). So, in both the Willis and MacLeod ethnographies, teachers had lower expectations for students they believed were culturally deprived.

Additionally, the subjects in both ethnographies exhibit a partial understanding of the social inequalities which serve as barriers to success, and the subjects all experience class related barriers which produce and reproduce their future as members of the lower classes (MacLeod, 1995). According to Willis (1977), working class or lower class students believe that conformity to school will not result in future prosperity—this is likely related to attitudes projected by their parents. In Willis's subject group, the Lads, working class cultural practices that are produced and reproduced at home were perceived as expressions of resistance at school. Concurrently these expressions had the effect of producing for the Lads a space in the working class (McLaren and Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, 2004). In this way, lower class attitudes about school and the institution of school contribute to social reproduction.

Willis's attitude towards the Lads' culture is more accepting and hopeful, it is also more optimistic than MacLeod's, based on the perceived ability of his group to be able to make progressive social change, perhaps due to the more socialist structure of English society. As MacLeod (1995) notes, "the British working class, with its long history,

organized trade unions, and progressive political party, has developed an identity, pride, and class consciousness that are (sic) lacking in the United States” (p. 122). Furthermore, the American working class “has been described as ‘fractured,’ historically along regional racial and ethnic lines, and more recently by the displacement of industrial workers and the erosion of the labor union as a social and political collectivity” (Stevenson & Ellsworth, 1993, p. 269).

Ethnographic evidence clearly demonstrates that a family’s social and economic status reproduces itself in Western societies. Despite the Brothers’ attempts, high aspirations, and willingness to “run the race”, they were unable to attain their goals because of racial issues and because they did not possess the cultural capital needed to be successful at school and later on in the job market. The Hallway Hangers knew that the odds were against them and did not even bother “running the race”. Willis’ Lads, due to their own partial understanding of how the society they lived in functioned, rebelled against school and adopted the attitudes and behaviors of their parents which indoctrinated them into the working class culture. MacLeod’s and Willis’s ethnographies provide the insight that educators and social theorists can use to identify how various structural inequalities function as agents of social reproduction by exposing the attitudes, values, and life experiences of the lower classes. In these two ethnographies, the subject’s experiences with the middle and upper class values of education have alienated them from the possibility of attaining their potential as students.

Social reproduction theory provides a framework for understanding the variables that make our society an unequal one. Research supporting these theories can give educators the insight necessary to enact effective reform in educational institutions. In

addition, ethnographic research illustrates how particular subcultures are affected by the variables related to social inequality. Teachers are integral participants in public schooling; an institution that educates the next generation of workers in American society. An understanding of how teachers perceive students from different social classes can help explain why schools function in a manner that reproduces social class status.

### *Teacher Habitus*

Research on teacher habitus is lacking in the literature. As I have demonstrated a plethora of theory and research exists on families, students and structural elements related to factors reproducing social status in public education. Little attention has been paid to teachers themselves, and to the influence of teachers as agents in the larger process of academic successes (Oliver & Kettley, 2010). Despite this, teachers are stakeholders and active agents in the education process of public schooling.

Oliver & Kettley (2010) found teachers' habitus, their own class background, and their ethical and political beliefs about social inequality determined whether or not they intervened in students' choices about which colleges or universities to attend. Their recent qualitative study in the United Kingdom indicates that "teachers' histories, prior experiences, moral and political beliefs and social capital potentially shape their proactivity or resignation in engaging with students' expectations and behaviours" (Oliver & Kettley, 2010, pp. 739-740). Oliver & Kettley (2010) found that, among public school teachers of prospective college students in the UK, some teachers pushed students, or intervened to challenge them to attend high prestige universities such as Oxford or Cambridge while others did not. The teachers who intervened on behalf of students were

more likely to facilitate students' application process from a disposition or habitus that encouraged their actions from the standpoint of social justice. Teachers that did not encourage students to apply to elite universities felt that elite universities would make students feel out of place or would not be a comfortable environment for them.

Some teachers' dispositions (habitus) led them to have expectations for students that did not challenge the expected "status quo" in regards to students' options for a higher education. These teachers were equally socially conscious but were more concerned about students' comfort in an "alien" higher education experience, and they expressed concern about their students' ability to "fit in" and complete at elite colleges such as Oxford. Teachers who were more likely to believe students would feel out of place or uncomfortable, or wouldn't "fit in" at elite universities served as gatekeepers, limiting students' access to elite universities and instead encouraged attendance at less prestigious universities. One teacher questioned whether or not his lower class students would have difficulty interacting with the "posh" elite undergraduates they saw on a campus tour: "how are our students going to cope with these people?" (p. 745). Another public school teacher mused that his students would be happier at a non-elite college, more socially comfortable because the student population was more like them. Teachers that had attended elite universities and thus had social networks, or social capital connected to these schools were more likely to encourage their students to apply. Teachers with "limited networks in these institutions and were less confident in the advice that they could offer to students" were more likely to believe their students would feel 'out of place' at an elite school (p.751). In this manner Oliver & Kettley (2010) found that individual "teachers' personal beliefs, experiences and connections shaped their agency

in being either facilitators or gatekeepers for students' applications" to college (p. 750). Furthermore, teachers had been reflective or contemplative about the role social class had in educational achievement, thus determining whether they took on the role of facilitator or gatekeeper in students' higher education choices.

Oliver & Kettley (2010) found that teachers served either as gatekeepers or facilitators of higher education institution choices based on their individual habituses:

The degree to which students' expectations were confirmed or challenged varied according to individual teachers. Although all vaunted the notion of respecting students' right to choose their [higher education] HE, some teachers were interventionist while others acquiesced to these 'expected' pathways. These variant school practices reflected: teachers' own habituses; their differential beliefs about Oxbridge; their own class background; knowledge of HE; and dis/comfort with different universities. (p. 744)

Research in the United Kingdom indicates teacher relationships with students can impact their aspirations for higher education and their choices in regards to which colleges they attend. The role teacher habitus plays in shaping students' education and attainment needs further exploration. An examination of how habitus is constructed based on experience as a reasonable starting point for this largely unexplored topic in the United States.

Individual teacher habitus can be modified by school environment. Diamond, Randolph & Spillane (2004) found "teachers' sense of responsibility for student learning is connected with their beliefs about students' academic abilities" through the larger



organizational habitus of the school, mostly set through the expectations of administration (p. 76). In the lower-income minority school sampled in the study, teachers' emphasized students' deficiencies, functioning from a more deficit-based habitus in regards to their students. Diamond, Randolph & Spillane (2004) acknowledge "teachers' expectations and their impact on students are associated with broader social forces". Stereotypes about minority students and poor students influence teachers' habitus; "the symbolic value of race, ethnicity, and social class has important implications for our students" (p.77). Overall, teachers' and administrators' habitus varied by social class and racial composition of the school. Interestingly, in a school with only 60% low-income (as opposed to the countywide school average of 84%) yet predominantly minority school "social class mediated the symbolic devaluing of African American status" (p. 83). Teachers explained their students were not as bad behaviorally compared to students at the poorer county schools.

Diamond, Randolph & Spillane (2004) used ethnographic methods to uncover a pattern of teacher habitus by demonstrating that "teachers' sense of responsibility for student learning was higher in contexts where they saw students possessing greater educational resources" (p.93). So, when teachers viewed students from an asset-based habitus, their sense of responsibility for student achievement was higher. On the other hand, "when students' deficits were emphasized, teachers believed that students' lack of motivation, families, and limited skills undermined teachers' ability to effectively teach" (p.93), thus leading to lower aspirations, and a lower sense of responsibility for student achievement. In this manner, a deficit-based habitus was expressed in the teachers'

expectations, dictating their overall lack of a sense of responsibility for student achievement.

There was one school that was an anomaly in Diamond, Randolph & Spillane's (2004) findings. Administrators at one middle school, despite teachers' deficit-based beliefs about students, had for years intentionally fostered a greater sense of teacher responsibility for student achievement. At this particular school, although teachers emphasized students' deficits they still "expressed a high degree of responsibility for student outcomes" because of the organizational habitus fostered by administration (Diamond, Randolph & Spillane, 2006, p.93). Through the use of ethnographic techniques, Diamond, Randolph & Spillane (2006) were able to show how asset-based and deficit-based expectations influence teachers' sense of responsibility for student learning. However, it is important to note how counter-resistance to forces that reproduce social class status, found among the aforementioned middle school, can be uncovered through the use of qualitative methods.

### *Conclusion*

As indicated by a review of the literature on the history of education and equality in our society, and theories such as social reproduction theory and deficit theory, many sites are interconnected and function to produce and reproduce social class status: family, peer and school. At the school level, examinations into the structure of school has shed light into institutional practices that perpetuate inequalities yet little is known about the unique role teachers have in the phenomenon of social reproduction in public education in the United States. This research seeks to close this gap in knowledge by focusing on

teachers' habitus, how they are constructed based on experience and how they may determine student success.

## Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures

### *Introduction*

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to investigate and construct narratives of five secondary social studies teachers' experiences with social class in Tampa, Florida. The goal of this inquiry yielded themes both within and between the participants' narratives about social class. These themes provide insight into how experiences shape understanding of social class and how, for teachers, this can influence their interactions with students from different social class backgrounds. Narrative research methods are congruent with this trajectory of inquiry because narrative research allows for the uncovering of the "subjective experience of participants as they interpret the events and conditions of their everyday lives" (Miller, 2005; Coulter & Smith, 2009, p. 578).

Through the construction of individual narratives centering on social class, teachers' perceptions of social class as a mediating factor in public education can be brought to life. Teachers' perceptions about social class have been created and shaped by their experiences in North American society. The development of narratives that describe the essence of individual experiences with social class flesh out how social class is constructed or given meaning and thus develops as a concept within an individual's habitus, or general set of dispositions (Bourdieu, 1977). This line of inquiry is important to explore because teachers' dispositions and attitudes, or *habitus*, can determine how

they approach their interactions with students, potentially influencing students' experiences and ultimately success in the classroom.

A secondary line of inquiry within this study also examined to what extent teachers' interest in social studies education has afforded them with opportunities to be reflective as they interact with students from different social classes. Uncovering patterns or themes related to teachers' perceptions of social class can assist teacher-educators in the continual development of programs aimed at the education of pre-service and practicing teachers in regards to social class and educational inequality. Pre-service and practicing teachers' exposure to topics related to equality of educational opportunity for students from different social groups is imperative, especially in a class-based society concerned with the provision of high quality education for all. The main research questions that guide this inquiry are:

1. How do teachers' life experiences with social class inform their understanding of their students?
2. How do teachers' perceive social class influencing educational attainment?
3. To what extent have social studies teachers' life experiences lead them to be reflective about social class?

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methods and procedures used in the study to determine themes both within and between participants' experiences with social class and how their experiences with social class have constructed subjective realities that have influence their daily interactions in the school environment. The method for selecting the five participants is outlined and explained, followed by a

detailed description of the research protocols concerning interviews, data analysis, and triangulation. Finally, I will discuss ethical considerations related to phenomenological, narrative inquiry and then set a general timeline for all stages of the research process.

### *Participants*

Due to the descriptive, attentive focus on the particular that is inherent in qualitative, phenomenological and narrative inquiry, a small sample size is warranted (although expanding outward from a small sample to encompass a larger group of individuals may be a trajectory for further research on this topic, especially considering the additional areas of interest that were uncovered). Five secondary social studies teachers in the public school districts in or near Tampa, Florida were chosen for this study. Casting a wide net around the Greater Tampa Bay area allowed for flexibility should it have been difficult for me to find participants in the most centralized school district in the area, Hillsborough County Public Schools. Furthermore, allowing for the selection of participants from different school districts, as well as social backgrounds, was advantageous because a sample drawing from participants within varied geographical locations (rural, urban, suburban) can increase generalizability, especially since data yield consistent themes (Merriam, 1998, p. 211).

The reason social studies teachers were selected and not teachers from other academic fields is because issues related to social class are explicitly taught in all social studies content areas. Social studies teachers, through teaching their content, have experiences with social class issues both academically due to their content area, as well as through their experiences. Since social class is taught in almost all social studies

curriculum, whether from a historical or social science perspective, further probing to what extent social studies teachers have been reflective through their content is a secondary goal of this prospectus.

An individual's experiences are determined by a vast and varied cache of factors, ranging from the geographical location where someone is from (rural, suburban, urban), gender, age, their social class status growing up, as well as ethnic and/or "racial" affiliation. So that my participants represented a greater variation of these factors, maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002) was employed. Maximum variation sampling intentionally creates a sample of participants both male and female, from a range of age groups and from different social groups, including "race", ethnicity and social class. I actively assembled a diversified sample along these lines in order to be inclusive of a wide range of experiences and social groups. My goal out of the initial sample size of seven participants was to include as even a mix as possible of Black, White and Latin American teachers; both more and less experienced teachers; teachers at urban and suburban schools; and teachers whose gender and social class backgrounds are as varied as possible. For example, I intentionally recruited a mix of Latin American participants, Black or African American participants and White participants for the study. Additionally, out of the five participants recruited there was a balanced sample of two males and three females. Three participants came from middle class to upper middle class families and two participants came from working class families. All teachers began their careers in the post-segregation era. The goal of my sample was to provide as much variability as possible among participants and this was sufficiently accomplished by narrowing the sample of participants down to only five, although a sample of four

participants had been considered a sufficient sample size at the proposal defense. My sample was slightly unbalanced in one way; my participants tended to be younger, with less than ten years teaching experience. However, my teachers ranged in age from a first year teacher in his early 20s, to a teacher in her 40s who began her career later in life due to lack of access to higher education for reasons that will be discussed at length in Chapters Four and Chapter Five. Even though the sample is small and relatively new to the profession they are diverse enough to capture a wide variety of experiences teachers have with social class.

I solicited participants via non-school district affiliated email accounts from my networks of colleagues in various public schools and universities throughout the Hillsborough County area. These are colleagues I have interacted with from either work at the University of South Florida or through work-related professional events. Since I did not want participants whom I would consider acquaintances, I asked colleagues who fell into this category if they know anyone they would recommend for participation in the study. Colleagues who fell under the category of acquaintance included individuals I knew in a personal capacity from taking courses together at USF, individuals in my Ph.D. cohort, and individuals I have worked with either at my school site or more than once through professional learning communities.

In the introductory email (Appendix Two), prospective participants were briefed about the study and about the interview, transcription and editing processes and were informed that, as compensation for their time and participation in the study, they would receive a \$15.00 gift certificate to Publix grocery store for participation in each interview and \$5.00 for each transcript verified, or a \$40.00 gift certificate to Publix at the end of



the interview and data analysis process. To compensate participants for travel and time to the interview sites on interview days, I purchased all food and beverages during the interviews. Since informed consent is a continual process, participants were asked if they had any questions about the study at the beginning of any communications with me.

Before the first interview, teachers completed the informed consent document (Appendix Three) and a brief informational form (Appendix Four). The informational form provided me with data about each participant's ethnicity, number of years teaching, sex, employment location, parents' occupation and highest degree earned, languages spoken and subject areas taught. On the bottom half of the questionnaire, a description of the study and informed-consent documentation was provided. Participants signed this form and returned it to me when we meet for the first scheduled interview. Informed consent was reviewed verbally at the start of the second interview when participants were reminded of the purpose of the study and that they could withdraw from the study at any time for any reason.

### *Research Protocol*

After the selection process, participants were interviewed twice, for approximately one hour each time, in order to construct the social class narratives. All interviews were arranged using non-school district email addresses. Additionally, interviews took place during non-school hours and only at non-school facilities such as a coffee shop. Participants were allowed to pick their preferred place to meet in order to allow them to feel as comfortable as possible in the environment in which the interviews were conducted.

## *Interviews*

The first interview developed a framework for the narrative, including establishing participants' perspective or point of view and tone, developing the context of the narrative and any sequence of events that brought to life the participants' story (Kramp, 2004). The second interview allowed for the completion of any questions from the interview script and also filled in any missing gaps in the narrative discovered from data analysis and researcher reflection. The second interview also allowed for the further exploration of any emergent themes within or between narratives from the first interviews.

These narratives focused specifically on social class, gleaned stories surrounding their experiences in a class-based society from the participants' particular, subjective experiences growing up. Participants were guided, using the semi-formal interview script (Appendix Four) through their childhood towards adulthood in order to uncover salient events that impacted their construction of an understanding of social class in our society. Once all the interviews were conducted and the audio tape recordings were transcribed, themes were determined for each participant, including themes that emerged between participants. These themes were determined using two-column notes during the interview process and from feedback from the participants at the conclusion of the first interview. Data analysis procedures will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

*Interview one.* Although anticipation of all potential irregularities during the interview process is not possible, steps were taken to minimize problems. Strategies taken to minimize interview irregularities include: (1) conducting the interviews in a location of

the participants' choosing, (2) waiting until rapport had been established before asking more sensitive questions, and (3) examining my own speech for subjectivities (Roulston, deMarrias & Lewis, 2003). Therefore, all interviews occurred in a public location of the participants' choosing, such as a coffee shop or restaurant. This made the participants as comfortable as possible in their surroundings and lessened any unease they may have felt about the interviews being recorded.

Before the first interview began at our first meeting, participants were briefed further about the interview process, informed consent, and their role as well as my role during the research process. The informed consent document was signed and returned to me. Once the necessary informed consent tasks, briefing and any questions the participants had were addressed, the interviews began.

During interview one, I began with a set of questions meant to establish some basic information about how participants had experienced social class in their lives. I already had some data about the participants from the informational questionnaire, such as: age, sex, ethnicity, number of years teaching, employment location, and subjects taught (see Appendix Two). This information in tandem with the interview one data provided the framework for each participant's narrative. Some details of the narrative were completed during interview one, but the primary purpose of interview two was to accomplish this task. Additional questions requested by my expert panel were added to interview two, mostly for the purpose of gathering more data on the participants' family dynamics while growing up. This line of questioning yielded rich data that opened up my participants' narratives and provided a more thorough understanding of the relationships my participants' had with immediate and extended family members.

*Interview two.* Since I expected the participants to share their experiences with me, I wanted them to be as comfortable as possible while disclosing personal information. This included holding off on any sensitive questions about their background until later on in the interview process, specifically during the second interview. The participants were aware that the study was about their experiences with social class, but before making more sensitive inquiries, I focused on preliminary questions, asking them first to talk about their childhood and their career to get a general sense of their background *and* to get an idea of what topics might be sensitive for them to discuss. This preliminary probing allowed me to (1) tailor the interview process to best suit the participants and their narratives, and to (2) begin to construct a narrative that was unique to each participant.

### *Analysis*

To allow for the initial emergence of themes within the data, two column notes and a data coding matrix were used (see Appendix Five). In the two column note system used, the left column consists of the data from the transcribed interviews and the right side of the notes consists of comments, insights or further probes I wanted to investigate regarding the emergence of themes. Data collection and data analysis through the use of two-column notes occurred simultaneously in order to stimulate critical thinking in observation and to allow me to pursue themes in the data as they emerged (Merriam, 1998). In addition to the use of two-column notes, a peer review panel also took part in the coding process. The peer review panel met after each round of interviews to verify the accuracy of the coding system and to provide critical insight into the development of

themes using the data coding matrix on which they were trained at the beginning of the first expert panel meeting.

Atlas.ti software was used to code, sort and query patterns in the transcripts. The software program was helpful in analyzing consistent words and phrases used by participants to describe their life experiences. For example, I was able to scan and then organize instances where participants talked about social class from a deficit perspective or instances where participants mentioned more than one code simultaneously. The use of Atlas.ti streamlined the task of identifying and then selecting quotes to illustrate patterns between participants' transcripts. Although there was a modest learning curve associated with learning this program my data analysis benefited greatly from the structure the software provided.

### *Triangulation*

Triangulation is an important aspect of conducting research because if one data source proves unreliable or incomplete, other data sources should be able to close any apparent gaps in information (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). In order to determine a high degree of verisimilitude, or validity, within the semi-structured interviews conducted with the teachers, triangulation strategies outlined by Merriam (1998) were used:

1. Member checks: verification of the interview script by the subjects

Participants were given an electronic copy of the transcription of the first interview for review at least one week before the second interview. They were instructed to read it and provide any corrections or clarifications they believed strengthened the

communication of their thoughts and experiences. During the second interview, we went over the first interview script. Notations and changes, if necessary, were made to the transcriptions before we proceeded with the rest of the second interview. Most changes the participants requested dealt with the spelling of geographical places. A few of my participants used the first transcription review to communicate to me areas they wanted to expand on, or things they wanted me to prompt them to discuss which they felt they had left out or needed to clarify.

Participants received an electronic or hard copy of the second interview script immediately after the audio file was transcribed. I provided participants with the choice of either meeting in person at a location of their choice or discussing over the phone any edits, clarifications or changes that should be made to the scripts. No changes to the second interview scripts were requested from participants. All participants read their final narrative and were debriefed after their narratives were constructed. The participants were pleased with their narratives and verified that I had told their stories accurately. There were only two minor changes to the final narratives: one participant instructed me to be more specific about her father's occupation and another wanted me to clarify that it was his maternal grandmother that had looked after him when he was younger.

## 2. Peer examination: asking colleagues to comment on the findings

Three graduate students at USF in the Social Science Education program served as a peer review panel. As a form of investigator triangulation, multiple perspectives from the panel provided alternative ways of interpreting the data (Patton, 2002). In this manner, peer examination provided a check on selective perception and clarified blind spots in the interpretive analysis (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, p. 1). My subjectivities as

researcher were moderated within the context of a review panel. Alternative explanations for themes in the data were brought up. The peer examination panel provided me with the ability to examine and analyze the data completely and critically by facilitating a polyvocal commentary and analysis of data in the form of transcripts and their coded themes.

The peer review panel met twice, once after all data from the first interview was transcribed and coded using two-column notes, and then after the second interviews had been transcribed and coded using the same system. The codes that emerged from the data were explained to members of the peer review panel and then the panel was asked if the codes matched with the data presented in the narratives; in some cases, new codes were generated. Each of the codes were presented to the peer panel and described. After the first and second round of interviews participants were given entire hour-long interview transcripts from all participants and instructed to code them using the pre-determined codes. The ten interviews produced 113 pages of transcripts so the coding process was time consuming but the expert panel was provided dinner and dessert to compensate for their time. Additionally, I am expected to review and provide feedback on their dissertations. The panel's codes matched mine, thus verifying that the codes have a high likelihood of being reliable and valid. Additional codes were determined; the most important one included a code for neutral phrases connected with different categories, adding to my codes for positive or negative phrases that corresponded to categories.

### *Ethical Considerations*

As Connelly & Clandinin (1990) note, equality between participants and the researcher in narrative inquiry is essential. Narrative inquiry as a research method is a collaborative process of storytelling and retelling. Participants' stories are given voice through the researcher's collaboration during the narrative-construction process. My role as researcher in this process was to attentively listen, record, and tell their story. Participants were viewed as the experts in their experiences. Throughout the research process I was a collaborative partner guiding the research, trusted to tell participants' stories with a high level of fidelity. During the interviews, my responsibility was to focus and guide the participants in the constructions of their narratives by actively listening to their stories and asking them follow-up or probing questions.

In addition to making sure I represented and provided a voice to my participants' within their narrative and provided as accurate a portrayal as possible of my participants' experiences, their confidentiality was another primary ethical consideration taken into account. To maintain participant confidentiality, pseudonyms were used to protect the names of participants as well as to disguise the names of the participants work locations. Before the first interview began, participants signed two documents (see Appendix One and Appendix Two) in order to insure they understood their rights as participants. The documents communicated to the participants a high level of confidentiality, their continual access to transcripts and recordings, and that they could have chosen to leave the study at any point.



## *Conclusion*

Five social studies teachers in the greater Tampa Bay area were participants in a narrative phenomenological study which allowed me to explore how social class is given meaning through experiences and thus embodied in the habitus of individuals.

Additionally, the extent to which teachers have been reflective or contemplative about social class and educational inequality was explored as a secondary line of inquiry. A semi-structured interview script produced narratives focusing on teachers' experiences with social class. The development of themes both within and between narratives was facilitated through the use of two-column notes and a data coding matrix. Participant checks of the interview scripts and an expert panel of colleagues in my program at USF assisted me in determining from the data a high level of verisimilitude or reliability and validity.

## Chapter Four: Narrative Case Studies

### *Introduction*

Social class is a dynamic concept that is experienced by individuals throughout their lives. These experiences with social class delineate an individual's position in the economic, social and political hierarchy. Experiences with social class form the basis of how people make sense of reality and their relationships with others, namely how social class habitus is constructed. Each of the five participants in this study has a unique story to tell. These five stories are rich in a wide array of affective elements that paint a picture of how social class dynamics can be experienced so differently by five secondary social studies teachers in the Tampa Bay area.

The participants range in age from their early 20s to mid-40s. Some teachers have been in the classroom for up to ten years, while others were in their first year of teaching when the data collection interviews were conducted. There were two men and three women teachers, with three white participants, a Black participant and a participant of Latin American descent. Teachers worked in schools in two county-wide districts in the Tampa Bay area, thus providing a range of schools from urban to rural geographic settings. Despite differences in demographics and years of teaching experience, salient themes were uncovered that illuminate how these teachers' life experiences have shaped their understanding of social class dynamics in school settings. Unique themes emerged for each participant. These themes highlight the subjective nature of experiences with

social class. Themes between participants highlight the aspects of experiences and reflections on those experiences that were shared among participants and may be similar to the experiences of other individuals in United States society.

Data indicate teachers' experiences with social class and their reflections on these experiences influence to varying degrees how they perceive their relationships with the students they teach. This is an important phenomenon to understand in the field of teacher education because research is lacking on relational aspects of schooling (Grossman & MacDonald, 2008). Teachers' experiences contribute to the development of a habitus, or 'common sense' set of perceptions of students and shared practices among teachers (Bourdieu, 1977). Identifying how teachers' habitus is constructed through life experiences sheds light on how they understand and frame their interactions with the students they teach. Since teacher effect sizes are greater in lower income schools (Sirin, 2005), how teachers' habitus are constructed may help us understand the connection between teacher-student relations and educational achievement for students from all social class backgrounds.

Participants' stories will be told one at a time in a narrative format in order to reveal the unique themes that resonate with each participant. Once all of the five stories have been told in Chapter Four, themes between some or all of the participants will be discussed at length in Chapter Five. Chapter Six includes a discussion of the concept at the heart of this study, social class. Chapter Seven ties together the results and insights from the study with reflections on the research process itself and recommendations for further research as well as curriculum recommendations for teacher education programs in North America.

## *Regina*

Regina first noticed differences in social class when her family moved to Florida after the end of third grade. Her middle class family moved from a predominantly Italian-American suburb in a New York City borough to a rural county north of Tampa Bay. Before the move her father owned a bar and her mother stayed at home. Once in Florida her mother was a teacher's assistant and her father worked for the City of Tampa.

Regina's family rented a house upon arrival in Tampa Bay and started to get adjusted to the area. Soon they began exploring the area to find a home to buy. It was during these car drives that Regina noticed trailer parks, a new type of housing she had not seen in New York, where Regina had been exposed to the urban landscape of public housing and inner city slums. Rural poverty was a new experience for her. To Regina, kids from this background were different and it was at this moment she realized there were differences in what people had on a material level. For Regina, the children she attended school with from these "pockets" of rural poverty would contribute to her understanding of social class dynamics at a young age.

Prior to the move, Regina's schooling experiences had been in a familiar white, Italian-American community in New York. In fourth grade, Regina began attending a much more diverse school in rural Florida. Regina went through a period of culture shock adjusting to her new learning environment. It was a traumatizing experience for her but it taught her valuable lessons about social class differences.

At first, Regina resisted attending the new school in rural Florida. It was different from her suburban school in Queens and she did not like that:

There were times when I would fake sick because I didn't want to go to school or I would just cry because I didn't want to go to school because it was so different... 'here comes this little girl with this extremely New York accent,' you know, and I get thrown into a class where... students, they were coming from very, like, farm – maybe not all farms – but it was spread out and rural and it was just very different from me.

In her former school Regina had one teacher but in her new school the structure was very different:

I went from one teacher, one classroom to a pod with four different teachers. Um, the dynamics of the school, I guess that was a big difference for me, but I also, culture shock a little bit for me coming from, you know, [Queens] to again, a very rural school.

Additionally, the economic and social differences she observed intimidated her. She had never met children who came from different backgrounds. Regina noticed things, like her accent was different and many of her classmates lived in trailers or on farms. In New York, Regina had been comfortable and in classes with people just like her. The move to a new school sparked a traumatic early-life adjustment period that centered on social differences.

After a few months Regina began to make friends at school and she felt like she belonged. She noticed her friends from school lived in different areas. Some of her friends lived in trailers, while other friends lived in homes like hers or in even more

affluent housing developments. She noticed these geographic pockets of social difference in her school:

After a few months and I had settled in...I had friends after that. And then fourth grade, fifth grade I was in that school and then it was just fine, but social class-wise, there was just a difference, too, because there were people in these rural areas and they were not really high, middle or upper class rural areas. You know, I'm not talking like plantation-style homes here; we're talking, like, trailers. Just lower class rural, if that makes sense.

Students in some of these pockets clearly had more than others, but these different groups all went to the same school. Although Regina attended a diverse school, socially she noticed students tended to interact with people in their own pocket. People from the lower class rural pocket stuck to themselves, as did people from the middle class and upper class pockets. As Regina grew older the social distance between these pockets grew wider and became much more noticeable in high school.

Regina's move to Florida and her subsequent adjustment to a new school was the pivotal experience in her life where she began to realize some people had more than others. The abrupt change in socio-cultural landscape from suburban New York to rural Florida provided an experience that delineated differences in social class into groups she refers to as pockets. Regina's period of culture shock was traumatizing for her, yet through overcoming her fear of a diverse new school setting she came to an understanding of social class based on experience. Regina gradually adjusted to the

cultural differences in rural Florida and diversity at her new school. She understood these differences in terms of the social groups of students who spent time together:

There were huge cultural differences and there were also social differences due to pockets of people...that attended that school.

These differences translated into pockets of segregated people, namely social classes, who occupied different spaces, had differences in accumulated wealth and had differences in access to resources. Geographical space divides social groups, leaving lower social class students' lacking access to educational resources both at school and in the home:

In the poor areas the access to quality education is lacking, you know, due to resources and other things...people in low socio-economic areas can't give kids the things they need to do well in school like other kids.

Regina's gives priority to the accumulation of wealth as the primary determinant for how pockets, or social classes, are formed:

When I think about how pockets of people are formed, I think it has to do with a distribution of wealth type of thing.

Besides differences in wealth, differences in housing are another common feature that widens the social distance between pockets. For example, lower class rural pockets of students lived in trailer parks:

You know rural kids, they were just different...I mean trailers, trailer parks...there are very nice trailer parks, but the ones I was seeing; they were not very kept up.

Regina remembered her peers from school living in three separate areas: an upper class housing development, a middle class housing development and a trailer park where the lower class rural population lived. Although Regina interacted with students from all areas at school, she mostly socialized with students who, like her, lived in the middle class housing areas.

Although traumatic at the time, Regina views this introduction to diversity as a positive experience. Her introduction to students who came from different social groups provided an important lesson in diversity and inequality beyond her earlier childhood memories of life in New York. As a middle school social studies teacher, Regina frames the importance of this childhood experience from a multicultural perspective. Regina uses language stressing the importance of exposure to diversity in reflecting on her adjustment to life in rural Florida:

I mean if you're always with the same type of people, I just, from a multicultural perspective I think you should be exposed to different types of people, and you know whether it be skin, money, people shouldn't be labeled just like that so I feel it was positive for me to be around other people besides just white Italian people.

Regina's belief in the importance of a multicultural perspective in social studies is reinforced by her pivotal moment in childhood. For the last eight years, Regina's



experiences as a teacher have further shaped her understanding of social class through teacher education, her content area and the student population she teaches. As far as Regina's experiences in teacher education:

I think it's exposed me to social class, taking classes in the College of Education or Master's Degree and what else. I think I was exposed to a lot of these issues.

Regina notes the importance of social class in social studies curriculum:

I think through teaching social studies and some of the themes, or what not and what we teach about I'm exposed to it [social class] because I'm teaching about it in different areas of history where we have different social movements and things like that.

Regina describes the school socio-economic environment she teaches at as being diverse as well, thus exposing her to social class in a different aspect of her job:

In the area that I teach we have children from all different socio-economic backgrounds, where we have the wealthier neighborhoods or other, very poorer areas with houses with no bottoms on the floors, busted pipes and things, so I mean...we do have the very low socio-economic trailer park area that also goes to my school, so I am kind of exposed to different types of children coming from different backgrounds.

In Regina's teacher education classes, multicultural education and social issues are covered. Regina firmly articulates the importance of a multicultural perspective and of representing diversity in the classroom. Regina is also exposed to social class as a facet

of the social studies content areas she teaches. Combined with Regina's pivotal move from New York to Florida, these experiences contributed to an understanding of her students based on their pocket or social class.

Regina understands that social class centers around pockets of students she noticed as a student in rural Florida and as a social studies teacher in Tampa. Regina's concept of pockets now represent social groups based primary on differences in: wealth, access to resources, and geographical space. Regina pulls from her training as a social studies teacher to describe her understanding of social mobility, once again framed in terms of pockets of people:

I don't think there is a lot of mobility in our society...but I think that is for a reason. I think through history and through our social structure and our government and other people in power, you know, [they] kind of have it that way where there are pockets of people who have money and pockets of poor people...there are reasons for that.

For Regina, lack of access to resources hinders social mobility for lower class people in our society:

I feel that social economic status has a lot to do with the availability of resources, um, for students' living in certain areas; cause in low socio-economic areas the schools might not be of the same quality as in certain areas.

This sentiment is expressed both in terms of understanding how social class dynamics function in our society writ large and in the lives of the students she teaches.

For example, a family's social class status affects their access to a good job. Regina further articulates the connection between resources, social status, family income and students' academic success:

I think resources, I also think if parents are working a lot due to their socio-economic status and, you know, trying to get by, there's not going to be much parent involvement with the child, so I think it could play against the achievement of the student.

Regina focuses on two economic resources lower class students and their families lack access to: jobs and education. These factors work together, hindering social mobility for the lower class pockets of students she teaches. Regina describes obstacles to social mobility facilitating a cycle of poverty:

For lower class people, I think it's hard for them to come out of the situation they are in. I mean, if you don't have a car how can you get a job? I think it's like a vicious cycle that kind of goes into social mobility. You know, how people kind of get in these situations and it's very hard to pull themselves out of it.

Regina further acknowledges reproductive elements that hinder mobility:

Being in these low areas...my own experience with these people, they have lived there for so long, like generations of people and it's like they keep producing the same type of child...there is a high probability that the kids that come from there, they don't get what the students get from other socio-economic backgrounds, so I think it's tough for people to get out of those situations.

Extending into academics, Regina is aware that lower class students' lack of access to economic and educational resources at home differentiates them from higher-achieving populations at school. Regina's gifted students are mostly white and middle class. At her school, minorities and lower class students are underrepresented on her class rosters. Regina supports observations for her own experience as a teacher with research on gifted populations to explain why minority and lower class students are often underrepresented in gifted programs:

There is something going on with why teachers are less apt to see the sign of giftedness. Yeah, it could be because they don't get tested. It's a fact that females and Black students and Hispanics are underrepresented in gifted programs.

Regina makes a connection between students' access to computer and Internet technology and social class:

We use a lot of technology at our school...we do surveys to see who's got computers at home. It's kind of clear for me, I can think right off of my head that the students who do not have the computer access are the ones on free and reduced lunch...something that I see with the use of technology is that the lower socio-economic pockets do not have access to and the availability of technology that a lot of the others have.

Regina is aware of digital inequalities during her interactions with students and their parents:

I think in my head, 'maybe they don't have as much as some of the other kids have and whether it be technology or other resources, or parents are working a lot and they don't have a lot of attention.'

Regina understands that the economic situation lower class parents are in often makes it difficult to communicate with teachers. Lower class parents tend to work more hours or they work hours that are not ideal for communicating with teachers. Regina believes her responsibility as a teacher is to continue to try and maintain open channels of communication with all students, regardless of background. Her attitude towards the looping program at her school is positive for her lower class students. The looping program at Regina's middle school allows her to teach the same students for three consecutive years in middle school. This gives Regina more time to establish relationships with families when she teaches a child for several years:

We are fortunate to build pretty good relationships with parents because we have their kids for so long. I know that it's the kids that are in certain socio-economic areas, it's harder for them to get a hold of. We don't have the Internet access to email them. When I've tried to contact them even through the phone, it's harder to get a hold of them.

According to Regina, teacher-parent relationships benefit from the looping program at her school. Although lower class parents are more difficult to contact, consecutive years teaching a student allows time for relationships to be built. Furthermore, Regina expresses a sense of responsibility in maintaining open channels of communication with families. She knows not all parents have access to email or can

check their email regularly. Reaching parents at home when they work non-traditional often lower class jobs is a dicey prospect as well. Although relationships with lower class parents are more difficult to establish for these reasons, the three-year looping program provides additional time for teachers to build channels of communication.

Regina is aware of the social class differences that exist among her students from different pockets. Regina's pivotal experience moving to Florida, her college training in social studies education, and her experiences as a middle school teacher gives meaning to the pockets of people she observes. Regina reflects on her students from lower social classes by noting they are more likely than their middle class peers to lack access to educational resources and the Internet at home. Part of this lack of access to educational resources is connected with lower class parents' lack of access to jobs that pay well and provide parents with opportunities to be more involved with their child's education.

Based on her life experiences, Regina is critical of the ability of lower class students to improve their social class status. Segregation of social classes into pockets means there are concentrations of people with limited access to resources. Regina notes these lower class pockets "keep producing the same type of child" and there are "reasons for this" that are connected to inherent inequality in a stratified society. According to Regina "society kind of makes it that way, makes it hard for people to get out of the low socio-economic bracket". Regina observes two main obstacles to academic success for students in lower class pockets: parents' work schedules and lack of access to educational resources outside of school. These two obstacles are related and contribute to a cycle of poverty. Lower class parents' long or non-traditional working hours limit parents'

academic involvement in school. Lower class parents also have less time and money to invest in extra-curricular activities that boost student achievement outside of school.

Regina believes education plays a role in social mobility, but obstacles for lower class students severely limit the opportunities they have to access quality education. In her teaching experience, lower class students are underrepresented in gifted programs because they are overlooked for testing. Even if students attend a school with a diverse socio-economic population, placement into gifted, honors or regular classes reinforces differences between pockets. For Regina, tracking students is an indicator of the reproductive nature of schools that falls along social class lines.

Regina's childhood experiences with social class were given meaning through her conceptualization of pockets. A family move to rural Florida sparked an experience that taught Regina about differences in housing, wealth and access to resources. In her career as a teacher, these pockets remain. Regina sees similar divisions among her students and understands what a students' social class means for their future. Education is a means for social mobility, but tracking in school is an institutional hindrance that can prevent students from achieving their potential. Spatial segregation in the community and social segregation at school further divides social groups thereby perpetuating social inequality.

## *Peter*

Peter, an African American high school teacher, grew up in a declining industrial city in the Northeastern United States. Peter's father was a middle school math teacher and his mother was a secretary. For Peter, his middle-class upbringing meant that he "never really needed anything". Peter's middle class background, his grandmother's strict supervision, and the fact his father was a teacher provided experiences at home that led to a higher education and successful teaching career.

When Peter was young and his parents were at work, his maternal grandmother watched him. Peter's grandmother was a Jehovah's Witness. She was strict with Peter and disapproved of his parents' excessive drinking. Peter learned a lot from his father once he was older, but during his early childhood he was raised more by his grandmother than parents. Peter's parents were often drunk, so life's early lessons were "learned more from my grandmother than from my parents". Peter's grandmother took him to Kingdom Hall a few times where he met people from different races and from different socio-economic classes. There were many different types of people: poor, rich, white, Black, and they all worshipped side by side. Peter remembers his grandmother never talked much about race or social class. The life lessons she taught Peter were by example. She was poor but she carried herself well, despite the fact she was on welfare and lived in the projects. His grandmother's quiet disapproval of swearing, drinking and smoking were examples of moral character that shaped his early upbringing.

Peter's father incorporated education into daily life and family vacations. Peter specifically recalls one vacation the family took to Washington, DC. In addition to the



obligatory stops at monuments and museums, the family took a detour through lower class neighborhoods. Peter's father wanted him to see good and bad neighborhoods, and to begin to learn about social inequality and that "things are different in the world". Peter's father was interested in providing learning experiences on a wide variety of topics: "social issues especially...everything, history, religion, he was really interested in everything." In Peter's family, education extended beyond the classroom into teachable moments based on experiences within and outside the community.

Peter frequently joined his father at school-related sporting events. When Peter tagged along he would observe older students thank his father for being their teacher and he was impressed that these students "remembered what he did for them." Based on these early experiences, Peter began to think that he wanted to be a teacher. At home Peter's father stressed the importance of school and attending college; his father did not tolerate poor grades or skipping school. Although alcohol abuse was a problem in Peter's family, it affected his relationship with his mother more than his father. Peter and his mother did not have a close relationship. However, alcohol abuse did not deter his father from providing academic and emotional support as he grew older.

As Peter grew older and entered high school, he began to notice differences in people based on their material possessions and the opportunities that were made available to them. Peter's best friend lived with his mom and they had less income than his family did. Peter lived with both his parents, his family had more money, and they also had more time and resources available to do things like go on vacation. For Peter this signified greater opportunities to "travel and just get out and see different places". Peter was exposed to a world outside of his hometown on vacations. When Peter enrolled in college

away from home it expanded the world around him even more. As Peter grew older, opportunities opened up for him due to his education. Peter felt sad that many of his friends did not have the same opportunities:

I felt bad for some of my friends because they never really got out of the community. Even now as adults they don't get out of the community. It kinda makes me sad.

At the same time Peter acknowledges his father's education and career as a math teacher were the main reason college was made available to him as a young man:

A lot of people I grew up with didn't go to college. Maybe just two out of all of my friends, and I think it was because my dad was a teacher and he really focused on education.

Peter also credits his family's social status as a key reason he had the opportunity to attend college:

College is the one thing that makes me realize that my social status helped me. It gave me the opportunity to go to college, if that makes sense.

Peter believes social class matters more often than not for school achievement. A self-professed idealist, he acknowledges exceptions to this rule. Individual determinism can trump social class and increase the likelihood of upward social mobility:

I think some people who don't have as much, it can make them try harder.

Regardless of social class.

Although Peter is skeptical about how mobile our society is he is optimistic people can change their social status through a variety of different strategies:

By gaining more education, by working harder, getting more jobs, sometimes even by hanging with a different group of people, some people “fake it until you make it”...there are situations people put themselves in, thrust themselves in, and change their social status.

Peter understands hindrances to social mobility exist in our society, but individual determinism can be a catalyst for improving social status. Peter acknowledges his optimistic sentiment towards social mobility, especially highlighting the role education plays in improving social status. Despite the strong connection between education and success, Peter believes social mobility is an attainable goal for those who are willing to work hard:

I think there is a strong connection [between education and social mobility]. A strong connection but not so strong that others should be discouraged if they don't have what society would call a positive social status. I do still believe in the exception to this rule. I still think that people can change their social status more quickly than society says we could.

Race matters less as a hindrance to social mobility than it did previously in our society. Peter's childhood experiences as an African American male, raised by his poor grandmother and middle class parents taught him that ethnicity is less of a barrier for minorities than it was when his parents were growing up:

I think people have better opportunities than they did when my parents were growing up in the 50s and 60s. I don't think it's as much of a barrier for minorities, I would say, I think we have many more opportunities...I feel very positive about it...based on the way I was raised. I'm positive people can mobilize themselves socially based on their ethnicity.

Peter believes racism persists in our society but it is less blatant than before. Our laws protecting minorities from discrimination have opened up access to opportunities for them. Peter knows that, as a Black male who grew up in the post-Civil Rights era, he has more opportunities than his grandparents and parents did.

Peter's childhood experiences taught him the importance of education and individual determinism. Lower class people have the ability to improve their social status through education and hard work. Peter acknowledges a person's social class status provides access to greater opportunities, but this should not serve as a deterrent for lower class people who want to improve their social status.

To Peter, a person's social class determines their access to opportunities. Peter's social status provided him with access to education and opportunities that expanded his horizons beyond his home town. These experiences are embodied in the meaning he gives to the concept of social class:

[Social class] means the opportunities that are available to you in the near future, or further off in the future, based on where you are right now. What you see on a day to day basis, what is made available to you, who you can interact with and the education that you are able to receive, the amount of money you earn, once again

this refers back to opportunities...I think some people are very limited in all those facets of life based on their social status...some people have endless possibilities and everywhere in between.

When Peter reflects on the opportunities that were made available to him based on social class, his father's time and support were key for his success. As he grew older, Peter's father was able to attend many of his sporting events and drove him to college orientation. Peter's family had a car, unlike most of his friends' parents.

Social class created opportunities for Peter to expand his world beyond the town he was raised in. He had been on vacations with his family and was able to move away to college because his family had more financial resources than many of his friends. Only a few of Peter's high school friends went to college. All but two of his friends dropped out. To Peter his lower class friends were left behind. His friends' lower social status had limited their opportunities to attend college and travel. When Peter graduated college he was able to move out of state and start his teaching career in Tampa. His lower class friends did not have the same opportunity to move away. Their social status meant they didn't have exposure to places outside of their home town:

They can't really move because they didn't have the money, or they are not used to other areas, because maybe they didn't go on vacations, or that they could leave the city or town.

Peter's experiences growing up taught him that opportunities made available to individuals based on social class. Social class determined a family's income, educational opportunities and the opportunity to expand one's horizons beyond the town in which one

grew up. Peter's middle class upbringing provided him with these opportunities, whereas his lower class friends were left behind.

Peter draws from the experiences he had growing up to inform the interactions he has with students today. In his ten-year career, Peter has taught at high schools in the Tampa area that range in student population from very poor and minority to mostly affluent and white. Currently teaching in an affluent school in Tampa, Peter is aware many of his students are privileged, although this is not a tacit assumption he generalizes to all students. Peter notes wealthier students have more confidence and background knowledge on topics such as politics. There is a connection between social class, education and family exposure to social studies topics and current events:

Some of the students from low socio-economic households, they might not talk about politics or they might not be able to engage in conversation as readily as someone else who comes from a family with education and a high socio-economic status.

In lower social class families, opportunities for educational extensions outside of the classroom are limited. The political and social issues Peter's father incorporated into teachable moments are not experiences his lower class students have with their parents. Peter also notes that less time may be spent on educational endeavors in lower class homes:

Sometimes in lower socio-economic households it seems like maybe some of the families don't spend as much time with the children or they may not be focused on those social issues and they focus on things that are more relevant to their lives.

Reflecting on his interactions with students and families, Peter notices several ways social class status either limits or provides access to educational opportunities both in and outside of school. Lower class families have more pressing concerns than planning for their child's college education. Peter notes differences between his more affluent school now and a much lower class school he where formerly taught:

I'd see a lot more minorities; hear more conversations about problems in their lives. I don't hear that much now as far as problems in students' lives.

In less affluent schools where Peter taught, access to college information and higher education resources was limited:

At the other school I was at, there was no college resources there. These kids would have to initiate that on their own, go to orientation on their own to find out about these colleges...of course they could go to a guidance counselor but that requires more effort from them.

Based on Peter's teaching experience at several high schools, he observed that lower class students' access to college opportunities were limited both inside and outside of school. Peter notes stark discrepancies exist in academic expectations between lower class and affluent schools:

So far as college resources available and colleges coming to the school, there was definitely a discrepancy or a disconnect...students I teach now will talk about college a lot more.

Peter makes several connections between his childhood and his reflections on the students he teaches. As a social studies teacher, Peter wants his students to understand that although our society is unfair in many ways individual determinism can make a difference. Peter believes he has a responsibility to provide lower class students with weapons, or tools to combat social inequality:

I know part of it you can't do anything about, but the other part you *can* do something about. When I'm in the classroom that's something I would like to change about the students; I want to prepare them and give them the weapons so that they don't have to go through the same thing as their parents or be in the community in which they're in.

Peter watched as many of his childhood friends were left behind due to limited opportunities because of their lower social status. In his interactions with lower class students Peter's goal is to show them strategies they can use to gain more opportunities. Peter's optimism about social mobility despite acknowledgment of social injustices is a testament to his belief in hard work. Improvements in civil rights for minorities have increased the ability of education and hard work to help minority students change their social status. Peter's father attended a historically Black college and became a math teacher. Peter's father passed down the importance of education to him. Peter's faith in



education as a key to social mobility was reinforced early by his father and further embodied in his career choice.

As a theme *opportunity* resonates through Peter's narrative. Social class is the primary determinant of opportunities in life. Social class is a sign of a family's income, the ability to expand their world outside the community, and the ability of their children to have the opportunity to attend college. Despite his belief that social class limits opportunity, Peter believes his students can make the most of opportunity and improve their social class through hard work and perseverance.

### Lucy

Lucy is a white middle school teacher who teaches in a fast-growing suburb of Tampa Bay. At 42 years old, she started her teaching later in life and has been in the classroom for six years. Lucy grew up north of Miami, Florida in a working class family. Her father had an elementary level education and eventually became a supervisor for a waterproofing company. Lucy's mother graduated high school and cleaned houses for wealthy families in the area. Both parents' income was enough to support the family comfortably. Lucy knew her family wasn't as wealthy as others, but with her family's working to middle class social status she never seemed to want for anything.

When Lucy was eight or nine years old she began to realize some people had more than others. When school was on break, Lucy would tag along with her mother to cleaning jobs. She remembered visiting homes her mom cleaned and immediately noticed these families were better-off than hers. It was obvious by the size of the homes, the furnishings in the home and other material possessions that these families led different

lives. Despite the fact the families were nice to her and sometimes let her swim in their pools, she occasionally felt jealous of what they had. Lucy could tell they had a different future than she had. She began to realize at this early age that “people lived in different ways based on what their parents did for a living”. The families her mother worked for had more income and material possessions than her family did. Lucy began to realize the children in these families had different choices in their future and that this was related to their income:

I remember being jealous of the family’s my mother worked for. There were teenagers that were a little bit older than me. They had a pool, a caged in pool in their backyards. They had beautiful homes, and I knew they had a different future than I did

As Lucy grew older, she fell in love with horses and decided she wanted to be a horse veterinarian. In a round-about way Lucy landed a job taking care of horses at a stable. During a visit to a veterinary office through a health/veterinary program at school, Lucy observed a cat being declawed. Lucy fainted on the spot. She decided the health occupation/veterinary route was probably not for her. In reflecting back on this experience, Lucy wishes an adult or teacher had encouraged her to not give up on her goal to pursue veterinary sciences. Since she was unable to drop the program a teacher arranged for Lucy to finish out the remainder of the requirements taking care of horses at a stable nearby.

Although Lucy’s dream to become a horse vet was stopped short, working at the horse stable turned into a modest paying job for the next three years. The young girls who

kept their horses at the stable were from upper class families. Lucy's job was to train and take care of the horses other girls owned. Many of these upper class girls only took the time to see their horse when they had riding lessons or when they had a show. Lucy spent long hours at the stable making sure their horses were healthy and well cared-for. Lucy noticed horses were more of a hobby or an after school activity for the upper-class girls. To Lucy, horses were her passion, something to be taken care of like a cherished pet.

Feelings of jealousy surfaced again during this time in her life. Making five dollars an hour taking care of other people's horses seemed unfair:

I worked for a horse trainer for about four years and I'm working for about five dollars an hour slogging, you know, saddles around, wrestling horses and doing all the hard work while a lot of rich kids, had, one young lady had three horses and only saw her horses the two days before the show, during the show and then we wouldn't see her again for weeks, so there was at the time a lot of jealousy.

Reflecting back on this experience, Lucy understands her life was very different than the girls who owned the horses. Riding horses was probably one of the many different activities their parents had them involved in. Lucy understood that horses may not have been a passion for these girls. However, horse riding was an activity they were expected to do because of their social class.

Lucy's childhood experiences watching her mother clean homes and her job taking care of horses taught her powerful lessons about social class. The more privileged families she interacted with had more money than her family and they also had more opportunities in life. Lucy's feelings of jealousy that stemmed from these experiences

were an affective element of her early life that influenced her understanding of social class dynamics. Into adulthood and through her college education, Lucy transformed her jealousy into a learning experience. A family's social class determined access to material possessions such as horses, pools, cars and homes. Lucy would learn later in life that college was another opportunity determined by social class status.

Lucy's parents had a difficult marriage. Reflecting back on her childhood, it was clear that her family was not a healthy, well-functioning family. Besides being a racist, Lucy's father smoked and drank heavily. In Lucy's family, vacations centered around her father's access to alcohol. This limited vacations to visits with her father's family or theme parks that served alcohol. While he wasn't abusive to Lucy, he was verbally abusive to her mother. His lack of coping and emotional skills frequently led to him belittling Lucy's mom in front of her. Lucy's father frequently undermined her mother's authority. Lucy felt spoiled when her father let her break rules her mother set. He also gave her money for going to the movies in addition to the allowance her mother provided. At the same time, the contentious dynamic of her parent's relationship left Lucy with fears and insecurities. This seminal aspect of her childhood was not emotionally healthy.

As Lucy grew older she learned other things about her father. He had been previously married. When his first wife died, he basically abandoned his nine children. When her father died, she learned more about her step-siblings. Lucy noticed the impact that being abandoned by her father had on their lives. The lack of a parent to support her step-siblings, especially financially, had limited their opportunities. None of her step-siblings went to college, one had been in prison and another had severe health problems that led to an early death. Her father's neglect of her step-siblings had a significant,

negative impact on their lives. To this day none of her step-siblings have careers or have improved their social class. Her father's neglect "screw up their lives and their social class as well".

The dynamics of Lucy's family did not provide many opportunities to improve her social class status. Lucy believes opportunities were limited to her because of her social class. Hard work was the only key to success in her family:

I wouldn't say there were any opportunities made available to me because of my social class. My parents made it clear without sitting down with me, that in order to get ahead in life you had to work hard. So I don't think I was given anything to aid my future other than to work hard.

Lucy was not made aware of college as an opportunity until she was 29, married and attended community college for the first time. Lucy's parents never attended college and she didn't have any friends with parents who could tell her about college. Lucy's opportunities were limited because of this lack of knowledge about college and how to enroll in college. She was not exposed to post-secondary education opportunities in her home environment growing up. After high school Lucy got married, worked and had children. This was the choice that was made available to her. College was not an opportunity within Lucy's grasp because of her social class.

Lucy feels that if college had been an available option for her she would have made other decisions after high school to improve her social class. Lucy is positive about the ability of people to change their social status in our society, given an idea of what opportunities are available to them:

I think that here in the United States that anyone can change their social class if they are given some sort of idea of what is available to them. Of what the opportunities are and how they might reach them.

Education is a key to social mobility in our society but there are exceptions to the rule. These exceptions are rare and occur due to luck or exceptional talents:

I think that those people that move from a lower social class to a higher social class without education are very few and far between. They get lucky in one way or another, or they are naturally smart and innovative and find something. But I think most people, in order to improve social class, education is key. If you don't get a better education then you can look forward to having the same or even lower social class than your parents.

Lucy acknowledges people luck can create upward mobility but this is the exception to the rule. According to Lucy, lack of access to education hinders mobility. Lucy makes a connection between her lack of access to college as a young adult and how this can negatively affect her lower class students:

In my experience, I think those students who are well-off have more advantages because their parents have usually gone to college. So if your parents have gone to college you are more likely to be familiar with the college scene and how college works. Whereas for me I didn't know anything about college.

Lucy was not made aware of college as a tool to social mobility until she was in her late 20s. Her parent's limited education had not privileged her in this way. Her

parents encouraged her to be successful but they did not have the ability to help her achieve a college education. In her reflections Lucy notes, “my parents just thought ‘you’re smart and you can do anything you want’, but they had no tools to help me get there.” In her interactions with students, Lucy believes it is important to teach them about the tools that can help them gain access to educational opportunities.

Lucy believes it is important to help her lower class students know that college is an opportunity they can take advantage of if they are willing to work for it. Her parents did not provide her with access to college education and Lucy recalls that her teachers did not provide much support, either. She didn’t learn about college in school. Nobody was there to encourage her to pursue her dream to become a vet when her confidence faltered. Lucy wants things to be different for her students than they were for her:

I just didn’t have any support and I try to remember to tell my eighth grade students that college is out there. Telling them that this is something they can do, it’s a lot of hoops to jump through but you can do it...once you get in, it’s a lot better. It’s okay. And nobody is telling them this.

Reflecting on her childhood and role as a teacher, Lucy understands that not all students have the same resources at home, such as the Internet. Lucy is concerned about differences in home access to technology, a phenomenon known as the digital divide. She points out:

They’re pushing the Internet, iPads; they’re pushing all of this at school. We’re getting new social studies books this year [and] they’re telling us they’re all going

to be online. Several of us have to bring up the point that not all our students have the Internet.

Lucy's childhood experiences taught her not all students have the same opportunities in life. She tries to instill in her students that:

You may not come from a place where you feel college is an option or you feel that your future isn't very bright, but it is possible and it starts with trying. It starts with getting through this assignment, getting through this class, and then getting through the next class. Life is like that.

Lucy sees a connection between divorce and family instability and social class based on her experiences growing up and her interactions with students at school. Poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, broken families and a lack of parental support can be detrimental to a young person's success in life. These situations leave children with fears and insecurities that provide a sense of hopelessness or lack of confidence in their academic ability:

Students who are comfortable financially...have a bit more confidence as far as home and school...but other kids, you gotta feel like they give up after awhile. Coming home to a parent who is there but not there; who's physically there but has some other challenges because of lack of money. You know there is more alcoholism in lower classes. There's more issues.

Unstable households further exacerbate a student's ability to be academically successful, jeopardizing their ability to attend college, make more money and improve



their social class. Students of divorced parents do not have as much financial and emotional support at home. These supports are important to unlock academic success and opportunities. When students from lower social classes are not provided tools to academic success at home, they lack confidence in school. Financial limitations in lower class families mean that students may not know as much about college as their wealthier peers.

Lucy believes she has a responsibility to teach her students that, despite social class limitations, opportunities are out there if you know how to find them and are willing to work hard. This contention is supported by her belief in the role of government in our society. Social programs such as welfare only work if people want to improve their lives. Lucy is critical of the ability of social programs to motivate people in our society:

In places where everybody gets the same thing...why should I improve myself? If I become a doctor but I'm going to get the same as everyone else why should I bother going to medical school?

Raising taxes on people who make more money because of their financial success doesn't seem fair. People should not be penalized for their achievements in order to benefit of those in our society who do not contribute as much. Lucy believes welfare programs are necessary to protect children in poverty, but our government does not help poor people improve their lives by financially enabling them long-term.

Lucy believes what can help lower class students improve their social class is exposure to career and educational opportunities at school. These are the tools necessary to help students make good choices about their future. Teachers and guidance counselors

should have a stronger role in letting students know that college is out there. If family finances limit college or vocational school attendance, students can be made aware of scholarships or opportunities for financial assistance. There are a plethora of jobs and careers out there in which students can make a good living if they are made aware of them:

I know for myself, the only jobs I knew of were [from] people I knew who had whatever job they had. And then the big ones: lawyer, doctor, nurse, truck driver...there's all kinds of jobs out there that someone could do and make a decent living that these kids don't know about.

Lucy's childhood experiences taught her about the opportunities that were made to people based on social class. Self-motivation and education are key to social mobility yet people who lack knowledge of education can improve their lives if they take the steps to seek out opportunities and take advantage of them. There are hindrances to social mobility such as family instability, financial insecurity and a lack of knowledge of opportunities. However, lack of knowledge of opportunities can be offset by individual determinism and the drive to seek out opportunities in today's society.

In her interactions with students, Lucy believes she has a responsibility to help them gain access to opportunities such as higher education and career training. When Lucy was a teenager, education beyond college was not an available option for her. Lucy had not been provided with adequate support for her future at home or in school. Lucy believes providing students with knowledge of different career paths and how to successfully obtain a higher education are vital tools to pass on. Lucy is able to transform

the emotional aspects of her childhood into a deeper understanding of how social class relates to her life. Her interactions with students reflect her awareness that opportunity is limited by social class. However, Lucy believes teachers and schools have a responsibility to be supportive by providing students with the ability to make good, informed choices about their futures.

### *Monica*

Monica moved to the United States from a large urban area in South America before elementary school. Her parents immigrated to Tampa for better opportunities after her father lost his business. In the United States her father worked in restaurants as a wine steward while her mother eventually got a job as a hospital as a clerk. In South America, her family had been considered affluent, but by US standards they would have been considered working class or poor. Monica's family was close-knit and supportive. As Monica grew up and attended school her parent's support was fundamental to her academic success, which led to college and a career as a high school social studies teacher.

Adjusting to school in the United States was not always easy. Monica had her share of embarrassing moments learning English. Once in preschool she needed to use the bathroom and didn't know the right words. She had mistakenly associated the word *lollipop* with *bathroom* when she asked the teacher for permission to use the restroom. She was in excruciating pain and burst into tears crying "lollipop! lollipop!". With three teachers and a classroom of students looking on, perplexed, someone finally realized she might need to go to the bathroom. After the unfortunate incident, a teacher comforted her

with a lollipop, pointing to it saying “lollipop”, and gesturing to the door saying “bathroom”. Needless to say, *bathroom* was one of the first words Monica learned in English. Looking back on this incident, Monica finds it humorous but it was scary at the time.

Monica and the children who lived in her apartment complex went to school with the more affluent students in their community. She was shy but made friends quickly in her neighborhood. The sugar cookies her mom gave her to share helped. There were children from different ethnic backgrounds in her neighborhood: Hispanic, Black, and White. Reflecting on this experience, Monica notes that besides ethnicity they were all lower or working class. The children in her neighborhood didn’t care about differences in ethnicity; because of their social class they seemed to have similar lives. They just played together and had a good time. Although Monica got along with the more affluent students at school, she identified more with the children in her neighborhood.

Adjusting to life in the United States provided Monica with early lessons in social inequality. One of these early experiences was in Girl Scouts. After a day at the amusement park, a mother drove Monica and a few other Girl Scouts home. The mother and other girls came from more affluent backgrounds. Monica was the only Hispanic girl in the group. The other girls lived in homes in a more suburban part of town while Monica lived in an apartment complex “literally on the other side of the tracks”. When Monica was dropped off at her apartment complex, the girls in the back seat snickered “Oh my God! You live here?” This was the first time Monica realized that her family did not have what other families had. This experience was a rude awakening for Monica:

[I felt] horrible. I felt literally like a second class citizen. Um, I felt bad, I felt embarrassed...like a stab to my heart or my conscious in a way, you know, and I never realized because I thought I had more because my parents always told me, you know, “we are here for a reason, we had more, you don’t understand what we actually went through.”

Her parents had told her they were doing well, especially compared to their life in South America. Monica was embarrassed and felt inferior to these girls, “literally like a second-class citizen”. Her parents had told her they were living a much better life than they had in South America, which was true. Compared to the other Girl Scouts, however, Monica was a poor South American girl from the wrong side of the tracks.

Another incident that made Monica feel inferior was on the school bus the first day of 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The bus crossed the train tracks from her neighborhood to a more affluent and white housing development in her community. Two white students on the bus decided to pick on her and sneered “What the hell are you doing here, you spic? You don’t belong here!” Monica felt like an outcast, like she didn’t belong. Monica was vulnerable as a new student and therefore an easy target for these students’ racial slurs. Her feelings of insecurity resurfaced and she once again felt inferior, just like that day in Girl Scouts.

These two experiences in Monica’s early life brought feelings of inferiority to the forefront of her conceptions of social class. When the girls in Monica’s Girl Scout group made hurtful comments about where she lived she felt ashamed and inferior. The students on the middle school bus who made racist remarks made these negative emotions

resurface. For Monica, these experiences built connections between ethnicity, social class, and inequality in our society. These negative experiences made her feel embarrassed and inferior because of her background as a relatively poor South American immigrant. Despite these negative experiences with social class Monica was able to develop confidence in her academic abilities, attend college, and become a social studies teacher. Monica attributes her parents' support to her ability to overcome these hurtful experiences from her childhood.

Although Monica's parents were relatively affluent business owners in Latin America, they did not have a formal education. Still, they encourage her academically in every way they could. Her parents expected good grades. Monica's parents expected her to attend college and to take advantages of the opportunities that were not available in South America. Her parents may not have been able to help with homework, but their emotional support and encouragement was a driving force for Monica to succeed in school. Her father would often say, "All I want out of your life is for you to do a little better than I did". Her parents' support pushed her to want to attend college:

I was very lucky to have parents that, maybe they weren't able to help me academically, but they definitely gave me that nurturing, that love, that push, that I think helped me. They made me realize how important college was. The fact that they never had the opportunity to go to college, I knew that was a goal I wanted to meet personally.

Monica's father instilled in her the importance of education. He was determined that she would be the first person in their family to attend college. Monica's family had

immigrated to the United States for better opportunities. Monica having the opportunity to college represented the fruits of her parents' struggle to establish a new life in Tampa:

I don't know if this is a generalization for all immigrant families, but...my father always said, "I never went to college, but you *will* be the first generation in our family to go." And I did it. And I always knew in the back of my head it was something that I wanted to prove to myself and my family. They would always push "college, college, college" even though they could not financially support me; again, it was more of the emotional support that I got from them.

Despite her parents limited financial resources, they expected Monica to go to college. Their emotional support motivated Monica to earn good grades and made her determined to be the first person in her family to attend college. Although Monica's parents could not help her with her formal education, they ingrained in her a strong work ethic by expecting high grades. Her parents were stern about her academic performance and were only happy with As and Bs. Her parents worked hard to support the family; Monica was responsible for earning high grades.

Monica's parents may not have had formal education but they fostered a love for knowledge in their home. Her father was an avid reader. Monica remembers that they always had a subscription to National Geographic; she carries on this tradition to this day. Her family would watch Jeopardy and quiz each other on geography at the dinner table. Family discussions often reflected her father's interest in world cultures and other social studies topics. Learning was seen as a benefit unto itself. Monica's parents modeled an academic disposition despite their lack of formal schooling. They passed on their belief in

the value of education by showing their interest in knowledge and by providing emotional support for Monica's schooling.

In middle school Monica continued to struggle with the English language and scored poorly on standardized tests. Her grammar and spelling were horrible, but her stories and poems caught the interest of an English teacher. She didn't assign as many pen and pencil tests as most teachers. Her assessments were more performance-based. This teacher was impressed by Monica's writing ability and had her placed in the honors track even though English was her second language. Monica did well in her social studies classes because of her father's interest in geography. However, her guidance counselor in high school was not as supportive as her English teacher in middle school. Monica was not permitted to take honors or AP level social studies classes. This irks Monica:

In retrospect, who knows: What if I had taken that AP class or that honors class? Maybe I would have had that potential to earn college credit, but I was never given that choice because of tracking.

Monica continued to be a strong student into high school. She had matured past the painful childhood memories of being picked on for being a poor immigrant. Monica realized she had opportunities that would not have been made available to her in South America. Even though her family did not have a lot of money they supported her and provided for her so she could focus on her studies. So, when people complimented her homemade homecoming and prom dresses, Monica proudly said "Thanks! My mother made it." Monica had learned from her experiences that her status as an immigrant was not something to feel ashamed of.



Monica's hard work in school paid off. She applied to college and got accepted. Monica took out student loans since her parents could not financially help out with college. Her junior year, Monica received a Hispanic minority scholarship. The scholarship meant fewer loans and provided an opportunity for her to attend a conference with other minority pre-service teachers. Monica got to network with people and hear inspirational guest speakers. It was a stimulating experience for her.

With her teaching career firmly in place, Monica reflects back on the rewards of her college education. Monica is now a home owner and has recently purchased a car. She has reached her family's goal for her to attend college and is proud of her career. Monica hopes to be a reminder for her students that it is possible for them to get a higher education and improve their social class.

Monica believes in the cycle of poverty, but that it can be broken with education and family support:

I would say the vicious cycle. If you don't have, like I was very lucky to have parents that, maybe they weren't able to help me academically, but they definitely gave me that nurturing, that love, that push, that I think helped me.

There is a strong connection between social mobility and education. Without education, few lower class people have the ability to break the cycle of poverty.

They [education and social mobility] go hand in hand. Not to say there aren't successful people, economically speaking, who never went to college...but you

have to have a basis. Whatever it may be, even if it's technical school. Even if it's two years. I think it's a must to break that cycle.

Education is fundamental to breaking the cycle of poverty because it provides skills necessary to improve your social status in our society. Monica acknowledges that not everyone is suited for a four year college. Her idea of higher education includes vocational education that teaches valuable job skills in our society.

Education; that's the key. Some sort of education, some sort of training. If it's not a four year university, it's a trade school. If it's not a trade school it's a couple of online courses. Realistically, college isn't for everybody.

Monica also believes, however, that families and teachers should have more control over the academic tracks on which students are placed. As Monica reflects on her middle and high school experiences she sees the negative implications of tracking in schools. The ability to be successful in a class should not solely be determined by standardized test scores. Student work ethic is often overlooked. Teachers can identify students who have abilities that are not measured on tests. The right teacher in a class can motivate students to achieve their potential:

If you have the passion and the will and the right teacher to help you get to that level, that to me is more important than...saying "you belong in this class because we have to show numbers at the end of the year"...I have issues with that. I don't think it should be the end-all and be-all. Especially for an experienced teacher; they should have more say.

Monica reflects on her schooling and believes that teachers should have more input in the academic tracks in which students are placed. In middle school, a teacher had the autonomy to recognize and promote Monica to a higher track based on her writing ability. Conversely, in high school Monica was denied honors and AP social studies classes because of her test scores. Tracking in Monica's high school experience limited her opportunities. She is concerned tracking has a similar effect on many of her students today.

Monica's ability to reflect critically on social issues was developed from her childhood experiences and her training as a social studies teacher. Monica decided she wanted to be a teacher when she was a teenager. Her father's love of learning about social studies topics was infectious. Monica credits him for her personal passion for social studies, her career as a teacher, and for making her aware of politics and social issues in our society.

Being an educator you're way more aware. Being a social studies teacher, we're more sensitive to the BS that we see. We can almost filter through it and say, 'Okay, this is the hidden curriculum in the media or in the news or in the newspapers,' so we see those underlying assumptions. So when you sit there and try to have a political conversation with someone or an issue with someone, debate politics...I think we have a better comprehension of that. That we don't just regurgitate what we see in the news; we can actually analyze it and talk about it intelligently.

Monica has been teaching social studies for nine years at a Title I high school. The school is in an urban part of Tampa Bay and has a large Hispanic population. Monica identifies with many of the students based on her childhood experiences. Monica's parents supported her academic success and expected her to be the first member of their family to attend college, despite a lack of financial resources. Many of her students are in a similar situation. When Monica's students worry about the cost of college, she encourages them to take advantage of student loans to further their education:

A lot of my students are primarily Hispanic, or African American, and because I am Hispanic myself, I feel that I have that connection in relation to them. I can definitely empathize with my students and I also don't allow excuses in my classroom...I hear every year, "I can't go to college, I can't afford it," and once again, I use myself as an example. I say, "That's a bunch of BS because I'm standing in front of you with how many thousands of dollars in student loans. If you really want something, you can do it." So I think sharing a personal story with your students, they make that connection; it's more real to them. I'm not just this person standing in front of them from an affluent background who can't connect, [I'm] saying, "I was in your spot; I grew up where you grew up." So I think that helps them connect with me.

Monica is a role model for her students, an example of how education can provide social mobility.

Monica's approach to teaching reflects her childhood experiences. Because she was teased for where she lived and called names for being Hispanic, Monica has zero tolerance for bullying:

There is zero tolerance in my classroom [for bullying]. I'm sure the first day of school I scare the crap out of them. I give them statistics; I bring out the Columbine story... "It can happen anywhere, I don't care where you live," things like that. They know that they feel very safe in my classroom, and again, I think that has to do with what I personally experienced, so I don't want them to have that negative experience in high school.

Monica wants her students to learn more than just the county curriculum in her class. She hopes to provide them with valuable lessons about how to make a positive impact in our society and the world:

At the end of the day, after being a year in [my] class, all I want for them is to walk out having an open mind and empathizing and be able to see the world in different perspectives... That to me is the biggest and most important; understanding that you are a grain of rice in the global scheme of things and that we're all interconnected and that everything you do has a direct effect on everybody else; the domino effect. And once you realize that we're all connected – no matter race, religion, socio-economic status – that if they realize that, then we can truly make some positive difference.

Monica's childhood experiences have given her the ability to empathize with her lower class and minority students. Monica shares her embarrassing mistakes learning

English with students. She serves as an example of hard work leading to a successful career. Monica talks to her students about attending college and tells them that student loans are a good idea. She may be paying them off for years, but according to Monica she has made it. Her home, car, and career are proof that upward social mobility is possible. As a teacher Monica provides support for her students in this manner. Students may not have parents who are as supportive as Monica's parents were, but as their teacher Monica knows she can serve in a similar capacity by motivating them to reach their potential.

### *Jim*

Jim is a white, first year teacher in his early 20s at a Title I school. When he was three, Jim moved from a predominantly white, rural area in the Northeastern United States to Tampa, Florida. The area in Tampa his family moved to was mostly white and middle-class like his hometown, but where he started elementary school was more suburban than the rural area where he spent his first few years as a child. Jim's parents both had a college education and, despite modest beginnings, had worked their way up to an upper-middle class social status. They understood the importance of education and were diligent with Jim's schooling, especially since he had been diagnosed with a learning disability at a young age. Jim attributes his success in school, college and into his teaching career on his parent's value in hard work and their continual support.

Once Jim entered elementary school in Tampa, he began to notice there were different groups of people in the world. Even though Jim's classmates were mostly white and dressed similar there were subtle differences. Some of his classmates were on free and reduced lunch. There were also differences in the kinds of shoes people wore, or how

nice their backpacks were. Jim started to learn that some families did not have as much money as his. There were poor white children at Jim's elementary school but wasn't until secondary school that Jim was in a more ethnically diverse learning environment.

When Jim went to middle school and high school, the school population expanded to include more diverse neighborhoods. Jim began to hang out with a more ethnically diverse group of students. Although Jim noticed some social class differences at school, the fact that his friends had similar interests was more important to him than race or ethnicity. For example, his African-American friend was on free and reduced lunch. Although the school was more ethnically diverse, most of Jim's friends would still be considered middle class. Though his one friend was on free and reduced lunch, none of his peers were really poor. It wasn't until Jim started his teaching career that he began to have more interaction with people from lower class backgrounds.

Jim was diagnosed in third grade with a learning disability. Jim's parents were there to support him through his disability so he didn't need a tutor. Jim struggled with reading comprehension but his mother helped him every step of the way. She read with Jim nightly, encouraging him through his academic struggles. Jim's mother reinforced reading skills constantly. Jim's parents told him just because he wasn't good at reading didn't mean that he wouldn't get better with practice and hard work.

Throughout Jim's schooling his parents were able to provide academic support because of their college education. His mother helped him with reading, math and science. His father helped him with his English and social studies homework. The support Jim received at home was more than emotional. His parents had taken English,

math and science in college; besides checking his work for completion, they could help Jim solve difficult math problems or fix grammar mistakes in his writing. Support for homework was a nightly endeavor throughout Jim's schooling. By the time Jim was ready to attend college he had earned high grades and was accepted to a well-respected state university. Jim had learned the value of hard work and the skills necessary to be a successful college student. Jim enrolled at the university and decided to major in social science education.

When Jim completed college he did his internship in Tampa Bay. Fresh out of college, he was hired in 2011 to teach at a Title I school in an urban part of the area. Jim's first year teaching was at a school very different from where he had spent his own high school years. Students at the school where Jim works come from different social classes but most students are poor. Jim notes that most of his middle class students and most white and Asian students are enrolled in his AP and elective classes. The regular classes Jim teaches have more Black and Hispanic students.

Based on his life experiences, Jim understands the importance of social class in our society. However, an individual drive to succeed matters as well. A higher social class can provide access to greater resources:

I think that social class can make it easier for some groups. If [they] are upper class they just have access to more resources. They don't necessarily have to ask for something, it's usually just provided for them but I think it also comes down to the individual person as well.



Jim's parents were able to move up the social class ladder due to their college education. His parents improved their social status by attending college and working their way up through the corporate ladder. Jim's father started out as a janitor at a pharmaceutical company during college and is now a well-paid manager there. Although Jim acknowledges that improving your social status takes more work than people think, it is possible through a strong work ethic:

I know through statistics it's not easy. I want to say because I saw my parents do it just a generation before me it's definitely possible but I don't think it's easy to do...it's the American Dream if you can get to college as a kid and be successful.

Jim believes education is essential to upward mobility because it provides opportunities, but wisely selecting a major that can increase your earning potential is equally important. Not all college majors have the same ability to expand your job potential:

Having education opens up more available options. But with that education, [make sure] you're taking something that actually has opportunities; instead of...there are just some majors you take where you can't get a job outside of school. I think what you go for in education can actually open more doors for you. I think it really depends on what you are actually majoring in, what you are actually going to school for.

Jim's education was consistently supported by his parents as he was growing up. He had their support in many aspects of the schooling process: from monitoring homework to providing him with guidance when selecting a major that would lead to a

successful career. The importance of a strong work ethic goes hand in hand with a college education. A student can be smart but upward social mobility requires hard work and dedication. Laziness is not rewarded in the race for social advancement. Jim knows that hard work pays off. His students who are willing to put forth effort are rewarded as well:

I know kids I have right now...they have very little but they try hard every day. They come, they ask me questions, and they do better than the kids who I know are smart but just don't care.

Jim attributes his parents' upward mobility and his career success to their value in hard work and education:

Self-motivation. They wanted something better and they actually went to do that. They were willing to work a full-time job, go to school full-time, have a family and somehow make it work. Hard work and then sticking with it. That's definitely something that stuck with me.

Jim acknowledges racism and other forms of discrimination in our society can hinder social mobility but that our world is becoming more open to diversity:

People definitely first look at race when they first see someone and they make a judgment...so I think it can definitely slow the process of social mobility but I think that's starting to disappear because of world events.

However, access to college education and other opportunities have opened up for minorities since the Civil Rights Era. Jim refers to his knowledge of history to reinforce his beliefs about racial discrimination. For example, most of his students' parents were

born after the Civil Rights movement. Racial barriers to employment and housing have been legally removed and our society is more tolerant. Since then minority groups have better chances to pursue college or start their own business:

It's easier for people to get an education now days. There are just more opportunities to start your own business and move yourself up. [For example] you could actually start a business and never see the person if they are African American or Hispanic; if it is all computerized they can move up the social ladder.

Jim points to increased opportunities in our society and to the fact that technologies have made it more difficult for people to discriminate against others based on race. World events that have opened our society to diversity and technologies ushered in by the the modern era can level the playing field for minorities today.

Jim is aware his childhood was more sheltered compared to his students. Growing up in a mostly white community up north and in Florida did not provide many opportunities for Jim to experience poverty first-hand. Most of Jim's learning experiences with social class have stemmed from interactions with his students. Jim explains:

Growing up upper-middle class there's lots of things you don't have to deal with. You don't think 'where am I getting my next meal' and that's a big thing. If I needed something I can use a credit card and buy it. If I don't have the money myself I can get it from my parents. Right now I'm at a Title I school so I'm definitely getting the other experience now as a young adult.

Jim's students come from a different segment of society than he did. Some experiences his students are faced with are vastly different than anything he could have imagined. Jim anticipated unforeseen situations or events during his first year of teaching, yet his experiences as a first year teacher in a Title I high school were unexpected in many ways. For example, no one in Jim's family or social circle had a criminal record or had been on probation:

I had this one kid...I guess he had a record already at seventeen. Every day the resource officer has to check in with him to make sure he's in class or I guess that's a violation of his probation. So that's something I never had growing up...where you had to check in with your probation officer or kids miss school because they have court dates. That's something I never even thought of.

When students at the high school where Jim teaches drop out, it is not because they are lazy. Where he teaches, students drop out because they need to work or because there are other problems in their lives. One of his students was advised by the resource officer to drop out and get his GED. A college education was not in this students' future. This particular student did not have the resources at home to assist him in school and he needed to work to financially support himself. For many of Jim's students dropping out and earning and GED represents the limit of their educational opportunities:

They're messed up in their lives so much already [a GED program] is one of their only options because there are so many things stacked up against them. That's something I never had in my upbringing.

Jim's upper-middle class upbringing did not expose him to the elements of poverty that were found in other schools in Tampa Bay. Jim's school has some wealthier students who attend for a special academic program but they are separated from the rest of the population because they are disproportionately enrolled in the more advanced classes. These students provide the bulk of the middle to upper-class population at the school. The rest of the students come from the surrounding neighborhoods and tend to be working class or poor:

We have the low, low, low – like homeless living in shelters – kids coming from very low-income neighborhoods, then we have more middle class neighborhoods, then we have upper class kids from the [advanced] program. So we have the full range...people who are just there for meals – breakfast and lunch – and the kids who are actually there because they want to be in school.

Jim notes that although his school is diverse this diversity is not represented in upper level classes.

When you look at the classes, like the AP classes for the most part are white, Asian and a few African-Americans and Hispanics. Regular is mostly African-American and a few white [students].

Jim acknowledges differences in his interactions with students based on their social class. Jim more easily identifies with white, middle class students and spends more time with them on campus:

There's definitely more personal interaction with me and my upper- AP kids because they're upper-class. They've done more things in their life. There's definitely more of a connection with me and them because we are from similar backgrounds.

Jim is an avid sports fan and goes to many school sporting events. The students at his school who play sports tend to come from his AP classes. The regular students are not as involved in extra-curricular activities, so Jim has additional interaction time with his upper class students outside of the classroom:

Most of them are also involved in sports so I've been to...softball games; I've been to a bunch of basketball games and football games. So there's definitely more of a connection to them.

Jim's instruction varies to meet the needs of the two populations. Jim supports his AP students by providing guidance and fostering critical thinking skills. The more lower class students need more background knowledge and contextualization to be able to learn the curriculum:

Definitely my regular kids, lower income, I have to be more general with ideas. I have to break the information down a lot more.

Jim contrasts learning in his regular classes with his AP classes. He provides an example of the difference in critical thinking instruction and motivation:

So I've been trying to push opinion questions with [my regular students] but even when I'm doing opinion questions, they want me to give them the right answer.

And they don't get that it's *your* opinion; there's not necessarily a right or wrong answer for it. For them, they want more of a single answer type thing, so I've been trying to get them to do more opinion type stuff and thinking outside the box. And that's definitely been more difficult for them because they don't like it. I don't know if that's because it's something they're not used to – someone asking them what did they think about something. While the AP kids, I can ask them what they think and we can go for a whole class period on it and they'd be fine with it.

Jim observes that the regular students tend to be less willing to learn and spend time studying. His regular students are more concrete in terms of how they prefer to learn. Jim is able to do more critical thinking and group work with his AP students whereas the regular students prefer direct instruction and tend to be more resistant to critical thinking:

But the regular kids don't want to do that at all; they want whatever the work is, they want one answer and be done with it. They don't want to study for the test. Pretty much, they want the study guide to be the actual test questions they can do before hand then answer on the test. So definitely, they want more straight forward instruction where the AP kids are willing to do more abstract and different things.

Jim understands the challenges his lower class students' face and accepts responsibility for helping them learn. Despite the fact they are resistant to critical

thinking, Jim persists. His example of teaching them how to formulate and express opinions is testament to this.

When Jim reflects back on his childhood experiences in a white suburban area of Tampa he realizes the world is more diverse than it appeared growing up. There is greater variation in social class and race than what he saw as a child. Additionally, minorities have been able to achieve more social mobility since the Civil Rights Movement. Judging someone based on their ethnicity or race is unfair because social class and common interests matter more:

It's not just upper, middle and lower. There is definitely more degrees within each of those groups and even though whites/Caucasians are usually middle class, you definitely have a wide variety within each group. Even though you expect that, if you're white, you have more chances, that's not necessarily the case. So there is more diversity than you think and even within each group there is a lot more diversity than you would think of. Just because someone is one ethnic group, they can be exactly like you so you can't necessarily judge them when you first see them.

Jim's prominent experiences with social class have happened within the last year. As a first year teacher in a Title I school Jim has been immersed in an environment very different from his white, upper-middle class upbringing. The school is racially mixed but students from different racial groups tend to be tracked into different classes or in different academic programs on campus. Poor minority students are less likely to play



sports. Jim takes responsibility for all students learning in his class by tailoring instruction to meet the different populations and their academic abilities.

Jim sees the benefit of hard work and individual determinism for his family and in his own life. Jim's parents paid their way through college and became successful in the business world because of their willingness to persevere. With their support and guidance Jim was able to overcome a learning disability and attend college, leading to a career as a teacher. Although he acknowledges hindrances to social mobility such as discrimination, these have largely been removed over the past decades. Hard work in academics pays off. His students who are willing to put forth the effort and strive to achieve a college education have the ability to improve their social status. Jim knows upward social mobility is not easy but academic success can pave the road to better opportunities in life.

### *Conclusion*

All of the participants had a unique story to tell about social class. In this chapter, teachers' stories were written so that themes could unfold narratively. Stories focused on salient events or series of events that occurred in their lives when they realized that social class matters. Most of the important events in teachers' lives evoked strong emotions. Regina was traumatized and went through an uncomfortable adjustment period with new social groups. Peter felt sad when his friends did not have the same opportunities because of their social class. Lucy was jealous of people who had more than her family. Monica felt embarrassed and ashamed because her family was poor and immigrant. Jim was surprised by some of the aspects of his lower class students' lives. People can have strong

negative emotions connected with experiences with social class. This and other salient themes between participants will be discussed at length in Chapter Five.

Themes for each of the participants vary greatly. All participants were debriefed and read their narratives. The teachers approved of their themes and were able to suggest changes or reorder their narrative to place emphasis on certain experiences over others. They were also instrumental in helping to tie-up loose ends in their stories.

Regina had two themes that were clearly related. Despite the fact her family was close-knit and supportive, her primary theme was the traumatizing move from New York to Florida that turned into a pivotal experience with social class. This gave a geographic element to Regina's understanding of social class. There was a difference between poor city kids and poor rural kids. This geographic element plus education and income gave meaning to Regina's second theme: Pockets. Regina's understanding of pockets represents years of reflection about different social groups at schools both as a student and now as a teacher.

Peter's themes were opportunity and, conversely, a concern for friends left behind due to social class. Peter and his father both benefitted from a college education. Peter's grandmother was poor but she taught him important lessons at an early age. When he was older his father instilled him a love of knowledge and the importance of a college education. Many of Greg's friends did not have the same opportunities because of their social class. Geographic elements of Peter's narrative hinged on his lower class friends who were left behind. They didn't have vacations or supportive parents who helped them attain educational goals so their opportunities to move out of the geographical spaces, or

as Regina would term “pockets”, was limited. Greg strives to provide students with tools for success so they can improve their social status. He believes it is important to provide students with the information and encouragement to seek a higher education.

Lucy’s themes were lack of opportunity and jealousy. Lucy stressed the fact that she did not learn about college as an option until she was older. She didn’t begin attending community college until she was 30 years old. There are elements of jealousy in Lucy’s narrative because she saw how upper-class people lived, and realized her home was not like that. Her family was working class to lower middle-class. Her father’s alcohol addiction and abusive treatment of her mother made Lucy feel insecure and afraid at home. She wants her students to learn about options for higher education that she did not have because of her background. Lucy believes students should learn about numerous career paths and be informed about opportunities for the future.

Monica’s empathy towards students because of her immigrant experience is a strong theme that resonates in her narrative. Monica felt ashamed, embarrassed and inferior when people made fun of where she lived and her background. Another theme is parental support for academic success. This is an important feature of Monica’s story that differs from Lucy’s, the other more lower class participant, and will be discussed at length in Chapter Five. True, Monica’s parents could not check her homework or pay for college, but their emotional support was fundamental to her success. Monica was able to attend college, become a teacher and a homeowner. Monica wants her students to see her as an example that higher education is an option and that you can improve your social status with hard work and perseverance.

Jim's themes are his sheltered childhood and his recent experiences with social class as a teacher at a Title I school. Jim had a very sheltered upbringing in suburban Tampa up until high school. His family supported his education and taught him the importance of hard work. Plus, Jim knew his diligence with school had paid off. His first year teaching was a bit of a shock. The school was diverse demographically but students were still segregated by academic tracks. He had never really interacted with lower-class people much and was surprised by many facets of their lives. As a new teacher Jim is learning to negotiate the differences in expectations and abilities between the students in the different levels he teaches. He identifies more with the wealthier students because of their similar background. Despite this, Jim knows the importance of teaching critical thinking skills to all students regardless of social class differences.

Each participant's themes reflect their subjective understanding of social class and the students they teach. Their attitudes and perceptions form a disposition or habitus that shapes their relationships with students. Stories within the narratives told of events that were fundamental to shaping the meaning each person ascribes to social class. For example, some participants were more positive than others about social mobility while other participants focused more on hindrances to mobility. The teachers discussed access to resources and opportunities differently. Between participants social class as a concept has unique and shared elements. A further analysis of consistent and divergent features between the narratives is the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter Five: Themes between Participants

The teachers in this study subjectively understand social class based on their distinctive life-long experiences. Participants' narratives varied based on factors including but not limited to: where they grew up, family dynamics, age, gender, race and the schools where they both learned and later taught. Despite multiple layers of demographic difference in my sample, there are salient features in their narratives about social class. In this chapter, I will discuss the congruent and divergent features among participants and how they ultimately inform teacher and student interactions.

### *Social Class*

Since the narratives centered on the concept of social class, the interview questions asked participants to explain connections between social class and factors that influence social class in our society such as race or ethnicity and education. At the conclusion of both interviews, I asked participants to define social class in their own words. During the first interview participants were asked “what does social class mean to you?”, and at end of the second interview I concluded with the question “how would you define social class?”. The concept of social class was saturated in the transcripts. Participants understood social class to consist of a division in our society based on income. This division either provides or limits access to resources and opportunities. These resources coalesce around access to education, particularly higher education.

Participants' defined social class as a division in our society based on income that determines where people live and either provides or limits access to educational and other resources and opportunities. This definition was constructed by compiling salient features of participants' definition gleaned from the data. Participants' responses to the questions: What do the words "social class" mean to you? and How do you define social class? produced the above definition. Participants were asked to define social class at separate times during both interview one and two. In tandem with the literature informing social class as a concept, data yields knowledge of how social class as a concept has been constructed out of participants' reality and experiences. In this manner, participants were given the right to name their world (Freire, 1970), using language to define and describe what social class means for them, without any attempt to impose a definition of this concept upon participants' during the interviews.

In addition to income, geography plays a role in defining social class, as teachers frequently used spatial references to describe their experiences and talk about social class in general. Teachers had differing opinions on the extent to which US society is socially mobile. Whether or not participants believed that hard work could mediate inequality determined their opinions of the elasticity of US society. Another factor to add to the social class mix is family dynamics. Based on participants' experiences, a supportive family provides the means to achieve social mobility while, conversely, an unstable or unhealthy family limits social mobility.

*Income.* A division of people based on income or wealth was the most prominent factor that determined social class across participants. A family's ability to acquire financial resources is the starting point for determining their social class:

Regina: When I think about how [social classes] are formed, I think it has to do with a distribution of wealth type of thing. Social class means money, income and resources.

Peter: [Social class means] the opportunities that are available to you, in the near future...the education that you are able to receive, the amount of money you are able to earn.

Monica: Social class means to me, dividing human beings economically, materially, dividing them racially or ethnically...I would say social class is a hierarchy of your economic status or monetary status.

Jim: I guess my definition of social class would include your income: Are you above the poverty line? Are you comfortable? Do you have disposable income?

Lucy: I think mostly it means a division of, you know, a range of salaries, and with those salaries you kind of envision that those people that make between X and Y live or could live in this way...something like it's a division. It's an imaginary - somewhat - division of people mostly based on income.

Money matters in a capitalist society and the teachers readily acknowledge this. All participants highlighted how financial status determines access to resources. Income is the starting place for a family's access to socially meaningful resources. The most important resource teachers cited was education. Regina's definition of social class hinges strongly on access to resources. Specifically, she is concerned that students from lower social class lack access to educational resources at home and this limits their

success in school. For Peter and Jim, their middle class social class status meant access to educational resources and the ability to attend college. Their parents had attended college and were able to provide additional academic support at home. Their parents' work schedules were conducive to helping with homework and allowed time off for family vacations. Conversely, Lucy felt her lower social class left her with few choices early in life. She was never told college was an option for her until she was well into adulthood. Monica knew her lower social class limited her parent's ability to finance her college education but she persisted because of her parents' support. According to participants, income is a robust, consistent signifier of social class status. More importantly, income is the gatekeeper that provides access to resources, specifically education. All participants assert that post secondary-education is vital for social mobility.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), social class or socio-economic status (SES) is a primary determinant of school success (NCES, 2002). Teachers echoed this sentiment in their definitions by connecting financial resources to access to educational resources. Social class is more complex than a family's financial status. Income may be the starting point in the race for social and economic prizes, but it is the primary indicator of many other factors that go into the calculation of social class status. According to NCES social class includes: family income, parent education, parent occupation and the cache of material possessions the family owns (Spring, 2012). Teachers made the same connections with their definitions of social class, yet they also understood social class as a determinate of where a person lives and their family dynamics. Social class is a complex concept to understand because there are so many factors that influence social class. Based on participants' responses they understand



this complex web of factors that determine social class and added their own criteria: Where a family lives is a sign of their social class. Another sign of social class the teachers discussed that NCES does not include in their definition is family dynamics (although I will make the case that family dynamics is more of a catalyst for social mobility than an indicator of social class status). All participants except Monica voiced the perception that poor families tend to come from troubled homes, although Monica does acknowledge the financial hardships lower class families face. Monica does not fit this myth about poor people (Gorksi, 2006b) and she was able to significantly improve her social status with family support. This facet of Monica's narrative will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

*Geography.* Teachers identified spatial factors related to social class. All participants talked about people from different social classes occupying different geographies. Participants made connections between their social class and the neighborhood they grew up in. As a poor immigrant, Monica lived on the “wrong side of the tracks” from her white, more affluent peers. Participants see a similar pattern today; social class determines the neighborhoods where many of their students live. For example, Regina's pockets of students are in distinct areas just like they were when she was a child. Descriptions of neighborhoods and where people live create spatial, mental constructs of our surroundings that also provide insight into how people think differently about their surroundings. How people define and describe neighborhoods communicate imputed feelings and emotions upon the geography (Hardwick & Holtgrieve, 1996). When participants gave significance to how social class determines a person's place in

the local geography they acknowledge the presence of a spatial separation of social classes in our society.

Peter's poor friends who were left behind due to their social class lived on the "wrong side of the tracks" as well. Peter was growing up while his town fell into decline because industrial jobs left. When jobs left, the population declined and school districts merged, integrating social groups that had previously occupied different spaces in the local area. Peter's friends who were left behind when he went to college were from the lower class side of town. His friends at school who went to college were from the wealthier, whiter side of town; their parents were doctors, lawyers and teachers.

Jim's childhood was spent in a middle class white suburb until he attended high school. Today Jim teaches at a Title I school in an urban area. He is aware of the striking differences in social diversity and geography between these two environments. Jim references the different student populations he teaches in terms of social class and geography. He attaches meaning to the neighborhoods students come from in terms of social class:

We definitely have...kids coming from very low income neighborhoods, and then we have middle class neighborhoods.

Jim is aware that the poorest students he teaches come from the neighborhood surrounding the school. Most of the middle class students in his AP classes live in other areas of the school district.

If geography is not definitional of social class, it certainly is an indicator of one's status. The homes in wealthy areas Lucy's mother cleaned were an indicator of social status. Like Jim, Lucy references neighborhoods in terms of social class:

My neighborhood tends to be lower class, some poverty, some middle class that are getting by, and so forth.

Social classes occupy different spaces and are referenced in terms of neighborhoods with specific classes. Geography matters, whether it is Regina's pockets, lower class or middle class neighborhoods, or whichever side of the tracks you live on. People who occupy different positions on the social ladder in a stratified society occupy different geographic spaces.

*Family dynamics.* All participants made connections between single parent homes, emotional and educational support at home, and social class. Single family homes can stretch resources and place limits on parents' ability to support their child's schooling. With only one parent working, a single-parent home can mean less income and therefore fewer financial resources. Peter explains this connection best:

I remember my best friend, he didn't have as much as me in terms of, um, an income in his family. He just lived with his mom...they didn't have as much as us, and I thought it was because I had two parents that worked and he only had his mom.

Peter's parents were married, educated and had good jobs. Their jobs provided them with the financial resources and time to go on vacations. Peter's family had two cars, several televisions and more time together because of their jobs.

For social mobility, the number of parents contributing income matters less than an emotionally supportive and healthy environment. An unstable home where there is abuse means less parental support and encouragement to succeed academically. Or the opposite can be true: Monica's parents were poor immigrants, but their family was close-knit, stable and supportive. Whereas Lucy describes her family as emotionally unhealthy, Monica's parents provided emotional support that led her to a career in teaching earlier in life.

A healthy, supportive home environment is less likely to be a factor defining social class; Monica's family is an excellent example of this. Her parents were poor but they were emotionally supportive. Not all poor families are dysfunctional or unstable (Gorski, 2006b). As we can see with Monica's upbringing, a close-knit family is a better indicator of contentment and happiness than social class (Boyles, 2008). Monica's ability to improve her social class through education was due to her family's emotional support, not their abundance of economic capital. Despite their modest means, the healthy emotional dynamic in Monica's home made a big difference for her academically.

On the other end of the spectrum, Lucy believes her chances for social mobility were limited due to the contentious, unhealthy emotional environment in which she lived as a child. Growing up, Lucy was insecure and afraid at home and jealous of people who had better lives. Lucy mentions lower class students lacking confidence. This

understanding comes from her own childhood experiences. Lucy's opportunities in life were stunted by her family's emotionally unhealthy dynamics. In this manner, family dynamics is more of a catalyst for social mobility than an indicator of social class status. Ethnographic findings by Iverson & Armstrong (2007) indicate that parents' mental health issues, such as depression, affect children's schooling and economic mobility. Furthermore, "the association between parents' depression or depressive symptoms, parents' employment, children's schools, and family economic mobility is cumulative and reciprocal" (p. 347). Poor families that are emotionally healthy and supportive have a greater chance at intergenerational social mobility despite financial limitations. Poor families that cannot meet the emotional needs of their children place limitations on upward mobility. A further line for research might consist of studying how dynamics in middle class families affects social mobility.

An aspect of family dynamics that is important to compare across participants is related to academic and emotional support. Annette Lareau (2003) coined the term *concerted cultivation* to refer to a parenting pattern common in middle class families where parents engineer their child's upbringing in a way that fosters academic success. Regina, Peter and Jim have many elements of concerted cultivation embodied in their upbringing. However, Monica's family is a reminder that Annette Lareau's framework is fluid. Despite the fact that Monica's parents were poor her childhood has strong elements of concerted cultivation. Monica's family is a reminder of how elements of concerted cultivation can exist in any social class. Lareau (2003) acknowledges that concerted cultivation is not a parenting style practiced strictly among middle and upper class families. Monica's parents might not have been able to enroll her in hours upon hours of

afterschool activities, but dinner time meant there would be a geography quiz. When her father was not working he modeled for her a love of learning. Monica's father talked to her about how to succeed despite the odds and her parents supported her academic success as best they possibly could. Monica describes this aspect of her childhood:

I saw that from my parents and my father - even though he couldn't necessarily help me with academics, I saw his love for knowledge. For example, subscribing to National Geographic magazine all growing up - I got that from my father; I subscribe now as an adult. Watching Jeopardy every night with my father, playing those games. Every night at dinner it was Geography 101; countries and capitols and cities and physical features. So I felt that made a really big imprint on me. We also would discuss, for example, the plethora of cultures that are out there that my father always - I thought was fascinating.

Monica's parents fostered a love of learning and knowledge in their daughter with college as an end-goal. This was a strong element of concerted cultivation in her upbringing. This element of concerted cultivation was enough for Monica to be able to succeed despite the financial limitations faced by lower class families.

In contrast, Lucy's parents did not provide her with elements of concerted cultivation during her childhood. It is easy to see the difference in how this has affected her outlook on life. Lucy struggled emotionally as a child in an insecure and abusive household. Her educational opportunities were limited because her parents were unable to provide her with the support she needed to be successful. Lucy feels like she missed out on many opportunities that wealthier children had because of her social class. Despite

Monica and Lucy's similar social class background, the different dynamics in their families led to different dispositions about social class and different attitudes towards life.

The big difference these elements of concerted cultivation made for my participants is in their confidence. Peter makes a direct connection with academic interactions at home and confidence:

Some [upper class students] are very confident. Whenever we have classroom discussions, they're very confident in what they think they know. Sometimes they talk about politics, and I know they just hear it at the dinner table, where some of the students from low socio-economic households, they might not talk about politics or they might not be able to engage in a conversation as readily as someone else who comes from a family with education and a high socio-economic status.

On the other hand Lucy feels intimidated and lacks confidence around people she perceives of as being more upper class:

When I meet people and I infer or assume that they are of a high[er] social class than me, I tend to get more nervous about how I must look to them or inviting them to my house, which is, you know, is not that great.

Lucy's self-esteem and confidence were not cultivated by her parents. Like her home environment, her childhood memories with social class were not positive. Her schooling didn't help much either. Lucy does not feel her teachers provided much support in school either.

The participants believe family dynamics influence educational attainment and thus social mobility. Single family homes can stress financial resources and limit parent involvement in their child's education. Mental, physical or substance abuse at home can deteriorate parents' ability to provide emotional support. However, not all lower class families are dysfunctional or lack the ability to provide their children with emotional and academic support. Emotionally healthy and supportive lower class families can provide the means to upward social mobility even though financial resources prohibit economic support.

### *Social Mobility and Education*

Teachers were asked about the connection between social mobility and education. Responses included reflections on the extent to which our society is mobile. All participants acknowledged that social mobility was difficult in a stratified society. However, Regina, Monica and Lucy were more critical of the ability of people to move from one social class to the next. Both Regina and Monica referenced the concept of a *cycle of poverty* in their interviews. Monica is familiar with this concept because she teaches it in both her AP courses. Regina frames her understanding of social mobility in terms of access to resources, a prime concern for her in regards to her lower class students. Regina's understanding of the cycle of poverty is referenced from her observations. She observed that spatial separation between social classes further limits social mobility:



I think it's like a vicious cycle that kind of goes into social mobility. You know, how people kind of get in these situations that they're in and it's very hard for them to pull themselves out of it...

From my own experience with these people...they have lived there for a long, like generations of people and it's like they keep producing the same type of child. I've been at my school long enough to see that and I hate to say 'Oh, this kid's from \_\_\_\_\_', which I do not say like, 'Oh, he's from \_\_\_\_\_ so I'm going to automatically say that he's poor with a family that doesn't care or that doesn't have the resources and whatever else.'

Regina's perception of pockets of poverty is an expression of her belief that our society lacks mobility. Groups of people are geographically segregated, lacking financial and educational resources and this greatly limits social mobility.

Monica is skeptical of social mobility in our society, but she underscores how crucial family support is for breaking the cycle of poverty. She attributes her social mobility to her parents' emotional support growing up. College would not have been a goal for Monica had her parents not encouraged her:

I think children who don't have that kind of support at home - It's almost like a vicious cycle that they can't seem to get out of. Unless, if they have a parent or someone in their life to say, "Look, you can move out of this situation".

[Social class] is almost like the caste system in India; you are stamped with it and you are in that system or in that hierarchy or division until you're able to break away from that cycle.

Lucy was taught the value of hard work before she even knew college was an option. Lucy worked hourly wage jobs after high school, got married and had a family. Her social status did not improve. Once Lucy got to college her work ethic paid off. Instead of working wage jobs she had a career. However, Lucy notes that as a teacher she doesn't feel that her social status has improved much. A different major in college would have resulted in a more marked improvement in social status:

I know now I could have made different decisions to greatly improve my social class, but I chose teaching so I feel I'm about right where my parents were. Just because, I chose teaching, so...

Unlike Monica, Lucy does not see education as a career choice that provided her with upward social mobility. Although Lucy acknowledges that teaching is a career and not a wage-earning job, she does not see teaching as a career that has improved her social class status. Lucy believes that if she had been better informed about career choices she would have made different decisions. There are careers that bring more income and a higher social status than teaching.

Monica believes because she was able to attend college and now has a successful teaching career that she has achieved the American Dream. To support this claim, she points to the fact that she is a homeowner and was recently able to purchase a new car. To Monica, her teaching career improved her social class greatly. She achieved her and

her parents' goals. Lucy, on the other hand, does not see teaching as a career that improved her social status. Lucy would have made better decisions to improve her social class if her parents had provided more emotional support, encouraged her to go to college and to pursue a career where she could make more money.

Lucy believes education is the key to social mobility. Unfortunately, her lower class status denied her access to college and to information about careers that could have improved her social status. Lucy does not believe she has attained social mobility even though she was eventually able to go to college and become a teacher. Monica is skeptical of how mobile our society is yet she acknowledges that she has been able to improve her social status, namely because of her parents' support. Lucy and Monica may have both come from a lower class background that placed limitations on their social mobility but that is the only common feature in their narratives.

Regina's background is more similar to Monica's. Social status was not the determining factor in their histories; it was the level of emotional support found in their homes. Both Regina and Monica had supportive families and they are both content and successful teachers. Regina's social status did not improve much in life, but Monica's did. However, despite their differences in social class, their family dynamics were similar. Both Regina and Monica had their emotional needs met regardless of the difference in social class. Conversely, Lucy came from a family that lacked a stable, emotionally healthy dynamic. Due to her childhood, Lucy is less confident in herself and less content with her career as a teacher than Regina and Monica.

Peter and Jim were more optimistic about social mobility in our society. Peter points to several strategies people can use to attain social mobility. Hard work and education are vital for success but there are other strategies as well. Social capital (Bourdieu, 1987), or basically who you know, can be an advantage in getting a better job and making more money. Peter references “giving students the weapons” they can use to be successful in life. These weapons or strategies for Peter include education, hard work, seeking out opportunity and strengthening social networks:

By gaining more education, by working harder, getting more jobs, um, sometimes even by hanging with a different group of people, some people “fake it until you make it.” I think there are situations which people put themselves in, thrust themselves in, and change their social status. And I don’t necessarily think there is anything wrong with that. I think everyone has different strategies in life.

I do still believe in the exception to the rule. I still think that people can change their social status more quickly than society says we could.

For Peter and Jim, focusing hard work in the right directions can improve one’s social class. They worked diligently despite obstacles and were able to either improve or maintain their social class status. Peter’s father pushed him to succeed academically. Jim’s parents supported his struggles with a learning disorder so he could be successful in college. That took hard work and perseverance. Jim points to the fact that his parents were able to improve their social status. They had worked hard and attended college because they wanted a better life, and managed to raise a family at the same time.

Peter and Jim stress the importance of individual determinism and a strong work ethic in influencing social mobility. Both male teachers had academic support at home and educated parents. Peter and Jim were taught that diligence and a willingness to work hard can lead to success in life. Their outlook on social mobility is more positive. There are obstacles to social mobility such as racism, but individual determinism can undermine racist practices in the job market.

Regina, Monica and Lucy acknowledge that individual determinism plays a role in social mobility, but they believe mobility is less attainable for poor students. The only thing Lucy's parents taught her was the importance of hard work and she still perceives herself as working class. Monica's diligence and individual determinism to succeed in college paid off for her, but without her parents support she would have had few opportunities to improve her social status. Regina perceives lower class pockets or social classes as static groups that reproduce the same type of child due to lack of access to resources.

All teachers believe education is the best possible path to upward social mobility. Monica explicitly attributes her college education to her upward mobility. Peter and Jim know that education is important for social mobility because that is how their parents became middle class. Lucy's lack of access to education early in life stunted her social mobility. For Regina, social class determines access to education as a resource but because lower class students lack access to education, their social mobility is limited.

Education is an opportunity Regina, Peter and Jim had access to because of their middle class social status. Regina, Peter and Jim see the vital role education played in the

maintenance of their family's middle class status. They are successful like their parents because they were able to go to college and have a career. They want to instill in their lower class students the same value of education their parents provided them. Lucy believes her lack of knowledge about college is because her family was lower class. Her goal as a teacher is to expose her lower class students to information about college and careers because she never had that type of academic support. In Monica's family, education was a tool for social mobility. From her own experience Monica knows that lower class students need emotional support and encouragement as well as information about how to succeed in college in order to improve their social status.

For all participants education is vital to social mobility, although the extent to which our society is mobile varies across participants. The teachers understand the importance of encouraging their students to aim for a college education even if there are limitations due to lack of resources based on social class. College preparation in schools is important for students from all social class backgrounds. Regina and Lucy, the two middle school teachers, see the importance of starting college preparation in middle school. Peter, Monica and Jim encourage their students to aim for a college education despite the financial limitations to higher education many of their students have. Money makes a post-secondary education easier to attain but that shouldn't stop poor students from seeking out opportunities to attend college.

### *Social Mobility and Race*

All teachers mentioned that, since the Civil Rights Movement, there is more racial or ethnic diversity within social classes. Peter believes our society is more accepting of African Americans than when his parents were younger. As African Americans growing up during the Civil Rights Movement, his parents had more struggles than he does today. However, Peter is quick to temper his optimism with the reality that racism persists in our society; it is just less explicit and less of a hindrance to social mobility than it was for his parents. Peter's father was an example for him of an educated, successful African American male. Peter admired his father's love of learning and decided early in life that he wanted to be a teacher too. Although access to college was limited for many African Americans at the time, Peter's father attended a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) and became a math teacher. Peter was a successful student because of his father's support and was able to attend college in a more integrated era.

Regina, Lucy and Jim see more of a diverse mix of students in the classes they teach. Their middle and upper class students have similar financial resources but there are more minorities represented in the upper classes than in previous decades. Regina also notes that poverty does not necessarily equate with minority status. Regina was exposed to white rural poverty growing up near trailer parks. Regina notes:

I think there is poor of every ethnicity.

For all his acknowledged naïveté about social class due to his sheltered upbringing, Jim believes people are not aware of how much minorities are integrated into all social classes:

There is definitely more diversity than you think...more degrees within each of those groups and even though whites/Caucasians are usually middle class, you definitely have a wide variety within each group. Even though you expect that, if you're white, you have more chances, that's not necessarily the case. So there is more diversity than you think and even within each group.

Lucy's father was a racist and openly expressed negative sentiments towards Blacks. Lucy knew her father's beliefs were wrong and they would not be considered popular today. Our society now has laws protecting minorities against discrimination. The shift in our society's acceptance of racism is reflected in the younger generations:

There have been laws or acts put in place to aid minorities, different ethnic groups which actually aren't really minorities anymore, but I also think that there is some prejudices that are alive and well, as far as keeping different races down. But then I also think that it's becoming less of an issue. That, you know your ethnicity or race does not necessarily determine your social mobility as much as it used to. I see this in my students. I'm always surprised, growing up the way I did where my father was what I would consider racist, that my students don't seem to see race. Hardly at all. They just don't seem to see it. Whereas it was crystal clear to me about how my father felt when I went to school. I don't think race is affecting social mobility as much but I am certain there are still prejudices out there.

The participants observe that race has become more equally dispersed among all social classes. They see this demographic shift in the student populations they teach. Just



because a student is Black no longer means they are poor. The face of poverty can be white, Black or Hispanic.

Monica's perceptions of race and mobility are more negative than the other teachers. In her neighborhood there were poor children from all races and they played together well. Monica thinks that there are still people in our society who judge people based on race. This is antithetical to social mobility for minorities. She was bullied as a little girl because she was Colombian. Her skin was darker and she struggled with English and spoke with an accent. Monica was hurt by that experience and believes these sentiments towards minorities are still openly expressed in our society. She does not think it is helpful when people are negatively judged based on their skin color:

People are continuously judged by their pigment, or their accent. Instead of embracing that, people see that as, almost like a handicap, when it shouldn't be, in my opinion.

None of the participants were willing to say the issue of racial equality in our schools and society has been resolved. Minority students are still underrepresented in their advanced and honors academic classes. Regina's honors students mostly live in the middle class housing developments. On average, Regina's middle class students take more advanced classes than students who live in the lower class areas. Jim's advanced classes are mostly comprised of white students who come in from outside the local neighborhood for the accelerated academic program at his school. They do not take many classes with poor, minority students from the neighborhood. Peter is concerned with the segregation of social classes in different schools. He has taught at several schools in

Tampa Bay, each in areas with different minority populations as well. This segregation is an injustice that prevents equal educational opportunities. Geography segregates students in addition to within-school tracking:

You go to different parts of this district and there are so many different socio-economic classes, so many different types of students, and there's injustice in these different parts of the district. Not to say that there's one evil person controlling everything, but it's so weird how there is a different student, different socio-economic [groups] in different parts of the district.

Race was perceived to be less of a determinant of social class status than it was in previous generations. Teachers observe that minorities are represented in all social classes today. Participants teach poor students from all racial backgrounds but old patterns persist. Teachers notice minority students are still underrepresented in honors and advanced classes. Racial segregation still has a visible presence in Tampa area schools.

### *Deficit Mapping and Habitus*

*Deficit mapping.* All teachers used language that focused on perceived deficits or what lower class students *lacked*. None of the teachers mentioned positive features found in many poor communities, such as close-knit extended families and strong social networks (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005). Teachers framed their understanding of students from lower social classes in terms of what they lacked compared to their wealthier peers. Awareness of deficit mapping among teachers is important to note

because it paints a picture of how teachers approach their relationships to lower class students.

In this study, teachers' understanding of their lower class students is built on the basic understanding that poor students are lacking access to resources. Teachers were especially concerned with lower class students' lack of access to post-secondary education. Teachers perceived lower class families as being inherently unstable, having more problems or being prone to domestic and/or substance abuse. Please note Monica's family was poor but did not exhibit any of the negative qualities teachers' attached to lower class students.

Regina consistently frames her understanding of social class in terms of lack of access to resources:

I think that a lot of, in the poor areas the access to quality education is lacking, you know, due to resources and other things.

I feel that social economic status has a lot to do with the availability of resources, um, for students living in certain areas, 'cause in low socio-economic areas, the schools might not be of the same quality as in certain areas. I think resources, also. I think if parents are working a lot due to their socio-economic status and, you know, trying to get by, there's not going to be as much parent involvement with the child, so I think it could, you know, play against the achievement of the student for those reasons, given.

Jim agrees with Regina that his lower class students lack access to resources compared to his upper class students:

If it's upper class they have just access to more resources. Um, they don't necessarily have to ask for something, it's usually just provided for them.

Jim's advanced students do not attend school to receive free or reduced lunch. Compared to Jim's wealthier students, his lower class students attend school for breakfast and lunch. Many of Jim's lower class students do not participate in sports or clubs. They are not engaged in extra-curricular activities as much as his wealthier students. Jim regularly attends sporting events at his school. He has noticed that school serves a different purpose for poor students:

We have the full range of people who are there for just two meals - breakfast and lunch - and the kids who are actually there because they want to be there at school and are then doing sports and clubs and all those other extracurricular activities at the same time.

Peter and Lucy discussed how lower class families are less stable, more prone to problems and abuse:

Lucy: Coming home to a parent who is there but not there; who's physically there but has some other challenges because the lack of money. You just know there's more alcoholism in lower social class. There's more issues.

Peter: I'd see a lot more minorities [in lower class schools]; hear more conversations about problems in their lives. I don't hear that much now as far as problems in the students' lives.

Jim is able to make this comparison because he has taught at three different schools in the local area with different socio-economic profiles. He began his career in Florida teaching at a school in a poor area and now he teaches at one of the more affluent schools in the area.

Monica observes many of her lower class students come from single-parent homes and lack adequate nutrition. Only one parent at home means less time dedicated to encouraging academics. Students without adequate nutrition may also have problems learning in school. Constant hunger makes it difficult to pay attention and to concentrate in class:

I think it affects our students, especially because most of these kids are coming from single parent homes, they have mothers who work two or three jobs. They don't have the time to sit down and help these students with homework, or revise their work... a lot of student where I teach, these kids are reduced lunch. These kids go home hungry; they don't have a full meal, the protein, or the 2000 calories they need, that's going to affect their cognitive ability to learn, to comprehend what we are trying to teach them.

The five participants focused on the perceived deficits of their lower-class students. They did not mention any positive stories about their lower class students. They expressed awareness that lower class family's lack access to resources such as: income,

education, leisure time and food. Participants perceived lower class students were more likely to come from single-parent homes and therefore had more obstacles to tackle in life. The numerous deficits that lower class students have lead to fewer opportunities in life writ large.

The teachers' contention that lower class students lack resources is not completely inaccurate. Lower class families lack access to: education, income, food, healthcare and housing (Rogalsky, 2009). However, it is important to resist generalizing that all lower class families are unstable and struggle with various forms of abuse. Monica is proof that this is not always the case. In fact, Monica provides evidence that social class may matter less in academic achievement and family support matters more.

*Habitus of caring.* Participants' habitus, or general set of attitudes, dispositions and actions related to students was exemplified through the practice of teaching. Habitus is formed at the individual level but comprises a set of shared actions among a group of people (Bourdieu, 1977). In this context teachers' habitus can be uncovered at the level of teacher and institution. Most research on habitus in education has focused on this concept at the institutional or whole school level (Diamond, Randolph & Spillane, 2004; Barber, 2002) specifically investigating how larger practices among school faculty determine student achievement.

In this study, the development of a habitus was uncovered narratively. Commonalities in participants' narratives led them to practice education with similar assumptions, expectations and behaviors towards their students. Findings are consistent with research by Barber (2002), who uncovered a habitus of caring among teachers

towards their students. Barber found high school teachers identified caring about students as a fundamental element of a teachers' professional concept of the self. In other words, secondary teachers practice through the habitus the role, responsibility and social expectation of teachers to care for their students.

Participants practice caring, as an expression of a teacher habitus, when they accept the responsibility they have as teachers to help their students succeed in life despite challenges. Regina and Lucy practice caring for their students when they voiced concerns to administration about access to technology for lower class students. Monica practices caring for her students when she engages them in discussion aimed at motivating them to attend college even if they have limited financial resources, and when she creates an emotionally safe space for her students:

They feel very safe in my classroom, and again, I think that has to do with what I personally experienced, so I don't want them to have that negative experience in high school. I can't control what happens outside my classroom, but at least for that fifty minutes, they feel safe and comfortable there.

Lucy practices caring when she reflects on her experiences and cares to inform students about college:

I tell them college is not just your mom signs you up at the front desk and you're in school; it's a maze to get through and kids' guidance counselors aren't helping them with this. Not in my experience. Telling them that this is something you *can* do; it's a lot of hoops to jump through, but you can do this. Even if you just get a certificate in phlebotomy, even if you become a CAN, even if you go to a

technical school... It is some hoops and jumps, but you can do this. Once you get in, it's a lot better. It's okay.

Peter practices caring when he is aware his students come from different backgrounds and he chooses to be careful with his words. Peter practices caring when he is sensitive to students' feelings about their social class:

I try to watch what I say. I try not to assume...that they're all rich and their parents are doctors and lawyers. Even though I know a lot of them are, I try not to assume that because I know that some students that aren't super rich, so I try to monitor my conversation with them.

Teachers in this study practice an occupational habitus of caring despite their different upbringings. Just like Barber (2002) found, there was a similar practice of teaching, namely the practice of caring for students that all teachers exhibited. Additionally, there was a societal expectation that teachers care about students. Although habitus refers to disposition and attitude, behavior is an important aspect of habitus that must be investigated. The argument can be made that as members of a profession, teachers' habitus of caring for young people is practiced on a daily basis in schools across the United States. Although a micro analysis of teachers' behavior toward students in the classroom was not investigated in this study, further research into the daily behaviors teachers exhibit towards students would provide an exploration of specifically how teachers' occupational habitus is practiced in schools.

The participants practiced a sense of responsibility to help lower class students gain access to higher education. These practices fall into two categories: encouraging



motivation and a positive work ethic and providing academic support. Teachers expressed the desire to help poor students improve their social class status by encouraging motivation and hard work. All participants had learned the value of hard work from their parents and their own academic experience and try to reinforce this belief with their students.

Teachers believe they are responsible for providing the academic support many lower class students lack at home. Academic support in this manner means extending beyond the curriculum to provide lower class students with information about how to gain access to higher education so they can improve their social class. In the context of their daily classroom routine, the teachers encouraged students to work hard despite obstacles to social mobility.

Although Regina and Jim identify less with their lower class students, their sense of responsibility to help them achieve is apparent. They know lower class students have fewer resources at home, yet this does not limit their ability to be successful if given support at school. If anything, a students' lower class background is an indicator they needed more support at school. Peter, Lucy and Monica are able to use their childhood experiences to help students understand that hard work can lead to success in life even if you come from a poor background. Lucy and Monica identify most with their lower class students because of their upbringing. Monica frequently uses herself as an example for her lower class students that college is an attainable goal. Lucy believes it is important to expose students to as many career paths as possible since her options growing up were so limited. Although a shared habitus of caring is present, all participants had different paths that led to their careers as secondary social studies teachers.

The tacit notion that teachers care about their students is not without controversy in our society. Joan Tronto (2001) discusses several public spaces that are responsible for caring for citizens: (1) government institutions, (2) family and (3) economic market. Traditionally in our society the nuclear family, headed by a working father with the mother providing the bulk of care, was responsible for providing care for dependents such as children and the elderly. In the modern era the nuclear family as a domestic structure is no longer an assumed institutional arrangement.

United States society increasingly looks to government institutions such as schools and public health structures to provide care to dependents. Furthermore, in order to successfully enter the workforce students need to be taught 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. “Children need other sources of power outside the family” in order to develop citizens capable of competing in the globalized job market (Tronto, 2001, p. 69). With more families headed by single parents there is an increased reliance on public schools to provide care. Additionally, more families require day care for their children as women have entered the work force (Tronto, 1991). Schools are an extension of this child care need as public institutions increasingly provide what used to be a private service to single parent families or families where both parents work. Teachers can fit the notion of care in a modern society proposed by Tronto (2001) because they can make care itself particular to their students’ needs with a clearly defined purpose: entering the job market or pursuing post-secondary career training. When teachers develop caring relationships with students, the basic need of care, both academic and emotional, is shifted from private life to public life. This is a daunting task for teachers and schools because parenting is still an important aspect of child socialization. Students spend only 15% of their time in schools

so the shared social expectation of parents and schools to provide academic socialization is often an area of contention between parents and teachers (Paul, 2012).

Teachers' caring about students should not be deemed an absolute characteristic. There are some teachers that do not care about students or do not want to step into a caring role in schools. There are teachers who try to care but are unable to develop caring relationships with students due to personality conflicts, curriculum and testing restraints, or failure to provide care in a meaningful way (Noddings, 2005). When caring is done properly, it has the potential to provide students with access to knowledgeable adults and greater exposure to character and moral education outside the home environment. Noddings (2005) discussed how caring could reduce the need for accountability and testing because our increased reliance in standardized tests "is largely a product of separation and lack of trust" (p.5). If teachers had time and flexibility to develop a curriculum of caring and character education, then it might be inferred that strengthened relational aspects of teaching would provide greater accuracy in measuring achievement. Teachers would know their students better on a personal level and would be able to assess their acquired knowledge accurately without increased reliance on testing.

Testing, accountability and structural elements of public schooling can interfere with teachers' developing caring relationships with their students. The goal of school administration is to manage school personnel, handle discipline and school safety, and to manage school testing that is aligned with state and federal standards (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012-2013). Instructional goals are part of administrative duties but school safety and a focus on standardized tests can impede the development caring relationships.

The Wallace Foundation, an organization that aims to improve school leadership, published a research report that identifies best practices for effective school leadership. This research is based on the perspective that school principals should have more of an instructional leadership role, not just building management, teacher management and testing data analysis (Mendels, 2012). These practices include, but are not limited to: shaping a vision of academic success and high expectations for all students, and fostering an environment that is conducive to collaboration as well as school safety (The Wallace Foundation, 2012). The best practices The Wallace Foundation identified can be structured in order to foster a caring environment at school. A caring and safe school environment can support the vision of academic success and high expectations for all students. Principals can foster a nonbureaucratic environment at school by working collaboratively with teachers as part of a professional community (Mendels, 2012). School district bureaucracy must be attended to but administrators can shift bureaucratic work away from teachers so they can focus on students and curriculum. Standardized tests are here to stay, yet administration can support teachers' efforts to nurture positive social, moral and emotional development by providing the needed flexibility and support to do so.

Teachers shared deficit perspectives of their lower class students and they shared a sense of responsibility for providing students with emotional and academic support they may not receive at home. Teachers did not have lowered expectations of their lower class students but they did have an understanding of challenges they face to academic success. Teachers' sense of responsibility to their lower class students therefore hinges on supplementing students' need for academic and emotional support, especially if they do

not receive this support at home. Education is the key to social mobility but without emotional and academic support social mobility for lower class students is limited. Caring as an important aspect of teachers' habitus is expressed through this sense of responsibility but it is not without limitations. Sometimes teachers simply don't care, although this is not the case with the five participants in this study. Institutional structures do not always foster a caring environment or curriculum at schools. Lack of administrative support, a focus on testing and lack of parents' involvement can hinder students' social, emotional and academic development. However, most teachers provide care for their students and often work hard at helping students meet academic goals.

Teachers shared deficit perspectives of their lower class students and they shared a sense of responsibility for providing students with emotional and academic support they may not receive at home. Teachers did not have lowered expectations of their lower class students but they did have an understanding of challenges they face to academic success. Teachers' sense of responsibility to their lower class students therefore hinges on supplementing students' need for academic and emotional support, especially if they do not receive this support at home. Education is the key to social mobility but without emotional and academic support social mobility for lower class students is limited. Caring as an important aspect of teachers' habitus is expressed through this sense of responsibility but it is not without limitations. Sometimes teachers simply don't care, although this is not the case with the five participants in this study. Institutional structures do not always foster a caring environment or curriculum at schools. Lack of administrative support and lack of parents' involvement can hinder students' social,

emotional and academic development. However, most teachers provide care for their students and often work hard at helping students meet academic goals.

### *Conclusion*

Participants communicated a complex understanding of social class as a concept and the role it has in determining academic success. Participants defined social class as a division based on income that influences where people live, access to education, opportunities in life and family dynamics. Participants believe race or ethnicity matters less in the calculation of one's social class status or one's ability to be upwardly mobile than before the Civil Rights movement, but tracking in schools is still a visible indicator that minority students do not have the same access to advanced academic classes as their white peers. Regardless of race or ethnicity, lower class students have limited opportunities for social mobility without support at home and school. Teachers feel a sense of responsibility to bridge this gap by providing emotional encouragement and academic support.

A consistent theme of interest for teacher-education is that emotional support matters for academic success. All participants discussed at length the role their parents played in supporting achievement at school. Participants expressed concern that students who do not have emotional support at home lack confidence in themselves and their academic abilities. Regina, Peter, Monica and Jim came from households where there were emotional supports that bred confidence in their academic abilities and led to either social mobility or maintenance of social status. Lucy's home environment was not emotionally supportive and led to an arrested development of her education and career.

Monica had more opportunities for social mobility than Lucy because of her parents' emotional support. Monica had her share of challenges to face as a poor Latina but obstacles to education were diminished because her parents believed she could attend college if they gave her all the support they could, despite their limited financial means. Monica's parents cultivated her academic success as best they could. Their support was the crucial feature of her family's dynamics that provided the means for social mobility. The implications for this finding in the fields of teacher education and educational anthropology will be discussed at length in Chapter Six.

## Chapter Six: Reflections and Recommendations

This study focused on how teachers' life experiences with social class shaped their habitus, and thus influenced their interactions with students from different social class backgrounds. Teachers' habitus was practiced through their understanding of the role and responsibility they had as professionals to care for their students' success. Teachers perceived that lower class students lacked access to resources relative to their wealthier peers. This lack of access to resources limited social mobility, thus reproducing social class status. More subtle factors indicating or influencing social class status include geography and family dynamics. Geography exacerbates social reproduction by concentrating poor people in areas with fewer resources such as good schools. Teachers stressed the importance of educational resources and hard work as factors promoting social mobility. Most of the teachers attributed their educational achievements to their family's emotional support which led to their own intergenerational maintenance or improvement of social class status.

Based on their life experiences, the teachers interviewed believe that without emotional support through the process of schooling, upward social mobility is rarely attainable. The teachers' narratives unlocked the subjective ways they understood the importance of family support and academic success. Regina, Peter, Monica and Jim learned about the importance of family support because they had families that were emotionally and academically supportive, encouraging good grades and expecting them to



attend college. Lucy learned about the importance of the family and emotional support because she had none. Lucy generalizes that, just like when she was a child, her lower class students lack confidence in academics and often come from unstable, abusive homes.

The most prominent facet of this study that can be used to inform teacher education programs is the importance of providing emotional support for students from all social class backgrounds. There are many strategies for providing positive emotional support at school. It can take the form of: (1) creating an emotionally safe learning environment, (2) providing students with tools they can use to handle stressful situations and negative emotions such as anger, anxiety and insecurity, or (3) engineering instruction to provide examples of positive role models (Reyes et al, 2012; Townsend, 2012; Protheroe, 2007).

Public education's intense focus on standardized assessments should be balanced with other skills that can help students become prepared for post-secondary education. Conley (2007) refers to these skills as essential academic behaviors that emotionally foster college readiness. These skills include: self-awareness, self-monitoring, self-control and the ability to accept constructive feedback.

The participants had distinctive narratives but positive emotional support was a strong common denominator for everyone except Lucy. Lucy would have benefited greatly from a healthier home environment. She might have been encouraged to pursue her dream of being a veterinarian and to attend college earlier in life. Due to Lucy's abusive home life, her basic emotional needs were not met; yet, Lucy's parents were still

married. Whether or not the family is still intact is not an indicator of a stable, happy home that can provide emotional and educational support for their children. Lucy's parents were unable to provide what was necessary for her academic success. However, Lucy was able to successfully complete college later in life, with support from her first husband.

Lucy's teachers could have provided more emotional support than they did. Lucy wishes her teacher had encouraged her through the challenges of the veterinary program when she wanted to give up. As a teacher Lucy believes it is vital to support her students by providing them with the information she never received at home or school about different careers and college opportunities. Although public school teachers have a limited ability to intervene in unstable homes, greater emotional support in the classroom is a relational aspect of education we can encourage teachers to develop in order to mitigate socially reproductive forces at home and school.

The other four participants had supportive homes despite the fact that other facets of their life were different. For Regina, Peter, Monica, and Jim, geographical, social class, racial and ethnic differences created vastly different paths for each participant regarding social class maintenance or mobility. The one commonality was the abundance of emotional and motivational support for learning and higher education that either maintained or facilitated social mobility. Teachers and other educators need to focus more on developing extensions of emotional and academic support from the home to school. We need to balance our focus on standardized testing with concern for the psycho-social wellbeing of our students regardless of background (Townsend, 2012; Protheroe, 2007). Emotional support is something teachers can provide regardless of

whether it is present at home or not. Furthermore, emotional and academic support should be provided to students from all social class backgrounds, especially since emotional support is not always a feature of lower social classes as Lucy's childhood demonstrated.

### *Recommendations for Social Studies Teacher Education*

Public education's focus on test scores has led the emotional aspects of growth and learning to atrophy. These are essential skills such as stress management and motivation that are needed in adulthood to manage the college experience and interpersonal relationships at work and home (Townsend, 2012; Protheroe, 2007). What would an emotional support curriculum look like in teacher education or in a social studies curriculum? There are several examples that can be used to train pre-service social studies teachers how to approach students in a manner where they are educating the 'whole child' by meeting their academic as well as emotional needs. Character education is a main goal of social studies education at the elementary level (Duplass, 2011). This approach to teaching social studies should not be discarded in lieu of producing test results once students reach secondary school. Within social studies, the fields of psychology, anthropology and sociology can be used to teach students about positive ways to manage negative emotions and provide students with an understanding of respectful patterns of human social interaction. In addition to learning how to read, write and do math, these skills are essential to improve students' confidence and instill in them a belief in their ability to be successful in the future. All students would benefit from a curriculum that strengthens their emotional and mental health regardless of whether or not these needs are met at home.

Validating students' experiences as relevant and being respectful of the realities of their lives is a starting point for an emotionally supportive social studies curriculum (Gay, 2004). Understanding that, despite social class background, all students come to school with knowledge based on their life experiences can help to improve their confidence. Some lower class students may lack academic confidence but they have a myriad of competencies that may be overlooked because they are poor or minority, or both (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005). Pre-service teachers can learn how to recognize students' competencies as a way to foster confidence and then scaffold that level of confidence into academics through lesson plans that integrate students' experiences into the curriculum. This strategy can be applied in many academic disciplines.

Pre-service teachers should have opportunities to explore how they construct knowledge of social classes based on their own life experiences. The teachers in this study had divergent life experiences with social class. Teachers like Jim have limited experiences with different social classes. Jim's sheltered upbringing left him largely unaware and ultimately shocked by the social realities of many of his students. In this instance Jim's pre-service teacher training could have better prepared him to teach at a Title I school. Only Regina and Monica mentioned that they learned about social class issues in their teacher education programs. Peter, Jim and Lucy learned about social class mostly from their experiences outside of colleges of education (although Jim admits he didn't learn much). Peter and Lucy's experiences with social class provided them with opportunities to develop a rich, although not always accurate, understanding of social class inequalities. Still, they would have benefited and possibly appreciated learning instructional strategies that foster academic and emotional growth for their students.

Pre-service teachers' knowledge of social class should be complemented with activities that allow them to confront misconceptions they may have about poor students (Gorski, 2006b). Teachers in this study view social class from a deficit perspective. An asset-based approach to understanding social class should be used in colleges of education to provide a more balanced assessment of lower class realities. The Funds of Knowledge project (Gonzalez, Amanti & Moll, 2005) allows pre-service elementary teachers greater exposure to the positive aspects of lower class communities. Pre-service secondary teachers would benefit from similar activities such as: ethnographic interviews with community leaders, listing or mapping community assets, and conducting historical inquiry into the communities where they will be completing their pre-service training or internships.

A more pervasive or systemic coverage of social class and equality of educational opportunity should exist in colleges of education so that teachers, regardless of background, are prepared to teach at any school. Pre-service teachers should learn about social class and how it relates to equality of educational opportunity *and* should have several opportunities to learn about the communities where they will be completing their internships. Pre-service teachers should be placed in several internships at schools with different socio-economic profiles before they graduate and enter the classroom. This will provide pre-service teachers with experience interacting with students from different social classes. Before pre-service teachers enter the classroom they should complete an activity that encourages them to uncover positive as well as negative aspects of the communities where they teach. Assignments such as these challenge teachers'

misconceptions about social class and can develop a more sophisticated and balanced understanding of the students they teach.

### *Recommendations for Social Studies Education*

Students in social studies classes should learn how to manage interpersonal relationships and negative emotions in lessons that address topics such as conflict resolution and effective communication. History classes teach about world leaders such as Ghandi, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King, Jr. and how they were able to channel their negative emotions in a way that led to the resolution of conflicts through peaceful means. Aphorisms or quotes from world leaders who exhibited positive emotional traits can be integrated into daily lesson plans not only to help students understand history but also to teach students how they can handle their own emotional challenges in daily life. In this manner teachers can support students' emotional needs by providing them with models of exemplary ways to overcome challenges and deal with personal struggles. These teaching strategies are already known as best practices in social studies instruction (Duplass, 2011). Teachers should be informed of their importance for strengthening social skills and provided with resources to implement these strategies on a regular basis.

Social science classes such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology explicitly cover topics that help to foster intrapersonal development and mental health. Stress management, motivation and emotions, the connection between happiness and positive thoughts, life skills, and emotional development are taught in psychology electives. Sociology and anthropology classes cover topics such as social class, family dynamics

and social problems. These topics teach students about unhealthy behaviors that cripple the ability of a family to be emotionally supportive such as physical, mental, or substance abuse. Coping mechanisms and constructive ways to deal with abuse and mental illness are taught as well. The field of anthropology contributes to students' knowledge of how humans can resolve conflicts and deal with negative emotions constructively from a cross-cultural perspective.

All students should have the opportunity to be exposed to social science electives in secondary school. Unfortunately students in remedial reading and math classes are often denied access to elective courses in their schedules. Social studies classes ubiquitously integrate reading in the content area. Struggling readers would benefit from social science electives that can improve their confidence and emotional health through the content while simultaneously strengthening reading skills. Remedial reading classes may increase reading skills, however, reading in the social science content area can raise reading test scores *and* bring a solid injection of curriculum that fosters positive life skills and emotional development.

I do not recommend a major overhaul of social studies as a subject area in order to support students' emotionally. I am suggesting there is more we can do to foster positive emotional development within the curriculum as it currently exists. If engineered correctly the social studies classroom is rife with opportunities to provide emotional support. If pre-service teachers are educated about the importance of emotional support for academic achievement then they can decide for themselves how they can best meet the needs of the students they teach. Social studies teachers should be able to choose how they want to provide emotional support to their students. Teachable moments, personal

stories, aphorisms or quotes, or explicit instruction on personal emotional development are some examples of how emotional support can be integrated in social studies classrooms. Teachers and pre-service teachers should be educated about how these teaching strategies can provide emotional support and academic confidence for their students.

### *Recommendations for Further Research*

This study indicates emotional support may matter more for academic achievement than social class, although a larger sample is needed to fully substantiate this claim. However, findings are consistent with research that indicates providing students with emotional support can improve academic achievement (Protheroe, 2007). Furthermore, emerging research from the field of educational psychology indicates the emotional connections students form with teachers impact their success in school” (Reyes et al., 2012, p.700). In the field of education there is an evolving understanding that emotional characteristics such as “motivation, self-discipline, stability, dependability, perseverance, self-esteem, optimism [and] future orientation” influence academic success and college readiness (Spring, 2012, p. 89).

Emotional support was the feature that provided Monica and Lucy with vastly different childhoods despite their lower social status. The emotional support that Monica’s family provided was more consistent with the emotional support found in the middle class participants’ upbringings. Lucy’s path was different from the other participants in one important way: lack of emotional support at home. This led to feelings of fear and insecurity, and a lack of confidence in her abilities. Lucy was left without the



knowledge of or means to attend college until later in life. Monica and Lucy have little in common despite their similar social class backgrounds. Keeping this disparity in mind, important research questions for further consideration would include: What are the social mobility implications of a lack of emotional support for middle class children? To what extent do these individuals have fears, insecurities and a lack of confidence similar to Lucy? If so, are their differences in how teachers should meet the emotional needs of these students?

Other considerations for further research would be to increase the sample size to include more teachers, therefore increasing the generalizability of the study to other populations. The participants taught in urban or suburban settings in a large metropolitan area in the Southeast. Rural school districts were not explored in this study. A further exploration of teachers in these settings and how they perceive their students could yield different results. Expanding the study to include different regions of the United States or even different countries would increase the generalizability and strengthen the overall results.

Ethnicity and immigrant status is another feature to explore to further generate more knowledge about emotional support among lower class students. Monica's parents were first generation immigrants who believed in the American Dream and came to the United States for a better life. Peter's idealism about the ability of Blacks and other minorities to improve their social status through education stems from his father's example. As minorities Peter and Monica believe hard work can lead to the American Dream and they impart this knowledge to their students. Like MacLeod's (1995) subjects,

as minorities they had greater aspirations despite the fact they both indicated racial discrimination is still a problem that plagues our society.

On the other hand, Lucy's parents were poor whites and her father was overtly racist. Lucy believes hard work is important but she does not believe her hard work and college degree increased her social status. Regina is critical of the ability lower class students have to improve their social class because they are concentrated in pockets of poverty that reproduce themselves. Jim does not believe his lower class students have the same opportunities to attend college and improve their life chances. The examples Jim provides of hindrances to mobility - poor students on probation or poor students having to drop out to work - exemplifies his stance. There may be a stronger connection between belief in social mobility, ethnicity, and immigrant status but the limited sample size of this study hinders a more in-depth analysis. Further research should examine the connections between teachers' belief in social mobility, and their immigrant status or ethnicity. Additional lines of research might also investigate the experiences of teachers who grew up middle class yet lacked emotional support at home.

Looking more at the practice of teachers, studies could examine behaviors and strategies that teachers use in the classroom to provide emotional support and then identify best practices for this endeavor in the classroom. An analysis of the specific practices or actions that comprise an occupational habitus for teachers is also recommended for further investigation. In other words, how is caring for students as an occupational habitus embodied in the practice of teaching? An investigation of the types of emotional support teachers believe are important would be another line of research.

Developing further knowledge on this topic can assist teachers' in meeting the emotional and academic needs of their students.

### *Personal Reflections*

I did not choose this research topic on a whim. From a young age I have been concerned with social class and inequality in our society. Just like most of my participants, I have memories of when I noticed that social class mattered, when I realized that some people had more than others, and that because of that they were treated differently in our society. These experiences made me realize we live in a society that is not always fair even though it wants to be.

One of my first recollections of social class injustice was my first year in middle school. I grew up in a predominantly white, middle class suburb of a city in Northwestern New York State. I had some interaction with two Black children before sixth grade. They were middle class like us; the children of a teacher my mom worked with at the local elementary school I attended. Once in middle school, there were more Black children in my school but they never had classes with us. The only time I interacted with the Black students at my school was during gym. They were in different classes than me and I never understood why. Most Black students in my school district were in lower tracks or the ESE programs. When I got to high school, there were more Blacks in my regular science and math classes but most of my White friends were in my Honors English and social studies classes. I remember thinking this did not make sense and I knew somehow this was unfair. Many of my Black classmates were just as smart as me yet the school treated them differently.

In middle school, I made friends with a poor white girl named Shea. We were inseparable during school hours and spent hours talking on the phone in the evenings. The only problem was that I lived in a middle class housing development like most students at our school. Shea lived in the infamous government subsidized apartment complex in our town. On the wrong side of the tracks. We talked often about having sleepovers or getting together on the weekends but this never materialized. My parents wouldn't let me sleep at her place because they were worried about my safety. I invited Shea to sleep over at my house but her mom couldn't drive her. Maybe she was working or didn't have a car. At the time, I thought this was awfully unfair. These experiences in my childhood signified the beginning of my interest in social inequality.

My own personal concerns with social class determined the topic for this study. It is important that I clarify personal subjectivities in order to disclose necessary information that I believe will help increase the rigor of this qualitative research. There are two facets of who I am as a teacher that should be disclosed: my background as a human geography teacher and my own personal concern with the psycho-social wellbeing of my students. I will explain these subjective points and provide reasons why I do not believe my personal subjectivities significantly influenced the research outcomes.

As a high school human geography teacher it is important for me to clarify how geography became an indicator of social class status for my participants without my implicit or explicit influence. Participants were asked two geography-based questions: Where were you born? and Where did you grow up? This is the extent of my probing for geographical information during the interviews. Participants referenced geography in the

context of telling their narratives, such as when Monica stated “I was from the wrong side of the tracks” or Peter’s “literally, from the wrong side of the tracks”. Regina’s pockets of social classes with their unique spatial distributions were fundamental to her specific definition. Jim and Lucy noted different social classes live in their respective neighborhoods.

The spatial connections with social class were elicited without coercion or any attempt at overt leading through the interview questions. Actually, the two geography questions yielded pathetic results. Participants’ responses simply provided a list of their home towns. Spatial separation of social classes was brought up by the participants in the context of either defining social class or describing the link between social class, education and mobility. Any interests I have in geography and spatial analysis of social inequality were not incorporated in this study. Geographic analysis of social inequality may be a tool I use for future research but it was never a desired goal of this study. Participants’ narratives organically reflected geography as a result of their disclosure of information during interviews.

During the first interview I focused on developing a framework that would lead to an understanding of teachers’ interactions with students. I wanted to know how teachers’ life experiences writ large shaped their habitus towards students. This left open the possibility that teachers’ experiences could have occurred in many different social contexts. I had not attempted to predict whether the seminal experiences in participants’ lives would come from school, social, or home environments.

Participants all mentioned parents' emotional support as a factor that either helped or hindered their academic achievement. Beyond this line of inquiry it never crossed my mind to directly ask about participants about the dynamics in their families growing up. My expert panel suggested this line of inquiry after coding the first round of interviews. So I probed participants for information about their family dynamics during the second interview. I simply asked participants to describe their family's dynamics. This question yielded richer results regarding the emotional support that was either present or lacking in participants' upbringing.

My own personal beliefs about the role of social studies education are consistent with my findings, although not at all in the way I intended. I was keenly interested in asset versus deficit mapping, and was hoping to find results that would illuminate greater insight into this canon of knowledge in educational anthropology. In my study this line of inquiry redundantly reinforced the record of research in educational anthropology. My findings corroborate other research that indicates most teachers perceive lower class students come from backgrounds where they lack access resources and are plagued with social pathologies such as abuse and unstable homes (Gorski, 2008b; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Gonzalez, Amanti & Moll, 2005).

What is necessary to disclose is that I have felt for a long time that our focus on testing has left emotional support for students lacking in public education. My behavior as a public high school social studies teacher betrays my interests in emotionally supporting students through the academic experience. I sponsor the Meditation Club, Gay Straight Alliance, and I teach my students explicitly about stress management and test anxiety.

I teach students how to meditate in class to help them learn to control negative emotions and reduce anxiety before tests. Monthly, my Meditation Club meets to learn meditation and mindfulness techniques. This is how I give students tools they can use to be successful in academics, sports, and in relationships with others. I believe meditation can help my students make better decisions in school and at home. Teaching meditation is how I share a method of anxiety and stress reduction that has served me well over the years.

I sponsor the Gay Straight Alliance because all students have a right to feel psycho-socially safe at school. In this club students are given a space and the opportunity to talk about being a gay teenager and problems at school such as bullying and homophobia. I bring in guest speakers in the hopes that club members will be exposed to positive role models and prominent leaders in the gay community in Tampa. I sponsor GSA because of my concern for the emotional health of gay students.

As an Advanced Placement teacher I observe daily the pressures that advanced academic classes have on students. I have attended professional development workshops and asked for resources from our school psychologist to help teach students how to reduce test anxiety and manage stress. There are several times throughout the school year that I take time away from the curriculum to share readings on reducing anxiety and managing stress. I sought after information and resources to help my AP students because I want to give students tools to handle stress and anxiety.

My participants agree that emotional support is essential for academic success. My line of questioning did not lead or coerce them to this conclusion. None of my

interview questions asked about emotional support at home or school. At first I only asked how education, income and race determined social mobility. During the first round of interviews, the teachers of their own volition either raved about their parents' support and how it was fundamental to their academic and professional success or, in the case of Lucy, lamented how their childhood was riddled with fears and insecurities that led to a lack of confidence and a stunted career path.

It wasn't until I met with my expert panel for the purpose of triangulation and verification of codes that the importance of emotional support began to emerge from the data. The panel's suggestion was that I inquire more into the participants' family dynamics in addition to the events that shaped their narratives on social class. What I discovered was that it is not only isolated experiences or events that shape our life narratives; it is the emotional aspects of home and school experiences that make these experiences profound.

### *Conclusion*

After I completed writing the narratives all participants were debriefed and provided copies of their narratives for review. The participants agreed that their stories, including the emotional elements, had been accurately narrated and interpreted. The high validity of participants' narratives due to member checks and triangulation methods strengthen the accuracy of this study's finding. Expanding the sample size to include more social studies teachers in a multitude of geographical locations is a prudent recommendation for further research. A greater volume of teachers' narratives will increase the reliability of findings and further produce knowledge of (1) how teachers'



life experiences shape their habitus and influence their interactions with students from different social classes, and (2) how emotional support at home and school can increase academic achievement.

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## Appendix One: IRB Approval Letter



DIVISION OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE  
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669  
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799  
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-5618

November 17, 2011

Natalie Keefer  
Secondary Education  
410 The Place Court A-9  
Tampa, FL 33606

RE: **Expedited Approval** for Initial Review  
IRB#: Pro00005999  
Title: Teachers' Narratives of Experience with Social Class

Dear Ms. Keefer:

On 11/17/2011 the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above referenced protocol. Please note that your approval for this study will expire on 11/17/2012.

Approved Items:

**Protocol Document(s):**

[Keefer proposal](#)

**Consent/Assent Document(s):**

[Keefer\\_revisedinformedconsent.pdf](#)

**Please use only the watermarked/stamped consent form(s) found under the "Attachment Tab" in the recruitment of participants.**

Please note, the informed consent/assent documents are valid during the period indicated by the official, IRB-Approval stamp located on the form. Valid consent must be documented on a copy of the most recently IRB-approved consent form.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John A. Schinka, Ph.D." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

John A. Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson  
USF Institutional Review Board



## Appendix Two: Email Script for Recruiting Participants

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a doctoral candidate in Social Science Education at the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida. I am pursuing my doctorate by conducting research on social studies teachers and their experiences with social class. Your participation is requested in this research, IRB Study # 5999, involving the development of stories about experiences in a class-based society. As compensation for your time and participation in the study you will receive a \$15.00 gift certificate to Publix at the completing of each interview and a \$5.00 gift certificate to Publix for verification of each interview script. For completing the entire research process you will receive a \$40.00 gift certificate to Publix. During the interviews, all food and beverage will be paid for by me.

Participation in the study will require about two one-hour interviews and one hour of verifying transcripts and themes. With your permission, the interviews will be taped and transcribed. To maintain confidentiality, you will be given a pseudonym in all transcriptions and you will not be identified by name on the tape. Transcription software and/or a professional transcriptionist may be used to transcribe the audio files. The audio files will be locked at my house. Each participant will be offered a copy of their audio files and a copy of their transcription. The participants and I will be the only ones with access to the audio files. The master audio file will remain in my possession and will be destroyed five years after the publication of the dissertation.

The two interviews will be arranged at a location of your convenience during non-school hours and at a non-school facility. The first interview will occur early Spring 2012 (January-March) and the second interview will take place late Spring or early Summer 2012 (March-April). Transcripts for the first interview will be made available for participant review before the second interview. Transcripts from the second interview will be made available by the end of July, 2012.

I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of my request. Please contact me at the email or phone number listed below if you would like to participate in this voluntary research.

Sincerely,

Natalie E. Keefer, M.A.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Secondary Education  
University of South Florida  
nkeef@mail.usf.edu  
813.389.6080

## Appendix Three: Informed Consent



### **Informed Consent to Participate in Research Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study**

#### **IRB Study # 5999**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below. Participation is voluntary and that the subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled.

**We are asking you to take part in a research study called: Teachers' Narratives of Experience with Social Class.**

The person who is in charge of this research study is Natalie Keefer. This person is called the Principal Investigator. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Howard Johnston. Ms. Keefer can be contacted at (813) 389.6080 or nkeef@mail.usf.edu.

The two research interviews will be conducted at a location of your convenience off school campus, during non-school hours.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to:

- Develop stories about social studies teachers' experiences in a class-based society.
- This study is being conducted by a graduate student for completion of a doctoral dissertation.

**Study Procedures**

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in two one-hour semi-structured interviews and approximately one hour of verifying transcripts and themes.
- With your permission the interviews will be taped and transcribed. To maintain confidentiality, you will be given a pseudonym in all transcriptions and you will not be identified by name on the tape. Transcription software and/or a professional transcriptionist may be used to transcribe the audio files.
- The audio files will be locked in Ms. Keefer's house. Each participant will be offered a copy of their own audio files and a copy of their own transcription. The participants and principle investigator will be the only ones with access to the audio files. The master audio file will remain in Ms. Keefer's possession and will be destroyed five years after the publication of the dissertation.
- The two interviews will be arranged at a location of the participants' convenience. The first interview will occur early Spring 2012 (January-March) and the second interview will take place late Spring or early summer 2012 (March-April).
- Transcripts for the first interview will be made available for participant review before the second interview. Transcripts from the second interview will be made available by the end of July, 2012.

**Total Number of Participants**

About five individuals will take part in this study at USF.

**Alternatives**

You do not have to participate in this research study.

**Benefits**

We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study.

**Risks or Discomfort**

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

**Compensation**

You will be paid \$40.00 in the form of a Publix gift certificate if you complete all the scheduled study visits. If you withdraw for any reason from the study before completion you will be paid \$15.00 in the form of a Publix gift certificate for each complete study visit and \$5.00 for verification of each of the interview transcripts. During the study visits, all food and beverage will be paid for by Natalie Keefer.

**Cost**

There will be no additional costs to you as a result of being in this study.

**Confidentiality**

Certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are: The research team, including the Principal Investigator and all other research staff. Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety: This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, general questions, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638.

### Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.

**I freely give my consent to take part in this study and I acknowledge I may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason.** I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

### Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he/ she understands:

- What the study is about;
- What procedures/interventions/investigational drugs or devices will be used;
- What the potential benefits might be; and
- What the known risks might be.

I can confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in the appropriate language. Additionally, this subject reads well enough to understand this document or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her. This subject does not have a medical/psychological problem that would compromise comprehension and therefore makes it hard to understand what is being explained and can, therefore, give legally effective informed consent. This subject is not under any type of anesthesia or analgesic that may cloud their judgment or make it hard to understand what is being explained and, therefore, can be considered competent to give informed consent.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent / Research Authorization

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent / Research Authorization

Appendix Four: Participant Questionnaire

IRB Study #5999

Name \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_ Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

Languages spoken \_\_\_\_\_ Birth place \_\_\_\_\_

Parents occupation \_\_\_\_\_ Number of siblings \_\_\_\_\_

Highest degree earned by parent \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of years teaching \_\_\_\_\_

Subjects taught \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix Five: Semi-structured Interview Script

### IRB Study #5999

1. Where were you born?
2. Where did you live as a child?
3. What was your family's economic status when you were growing up?
4. Who lived with you growing up?
5. Do you remember the first time you realized some people had more than others?  
Can you tell me that story?
6. How often did you spend time with people from different social classes or social groups growing up?
7. What opportunities were made available to you because (or despite) of your social class?
8. To what extent do you believe social class matters for school achievement?
9. To what extent do believe someone can change their social class?
  - a. Can you provide an example from your own life?
10. What do you think is the connection between education and social mobility?
  - a. Can you provide an example from your own life?
11. What do you think is the connection between ethnicity or "race" and social mobility?
  - a. Can you provide an example from your own life?



12. How do you think your experiences have ultimately shaped your understanding of social class?
  - a. Can you provide an example from your own life?
13. What do the words “social class” mean to you?
14. When has social class been an important aspect of your life?
15. How would you define social class?

## Appendix Six: Data Coding Matrix

### Coding Matrix for IRB Study #5999

#### Codes

+ = asset

- = hindrance or deficit

+/- = neutral

S = segregation with different social groups I= integration with different social groups

A = access to resources

Ed= education as opportunity

R= Reflection on social class from direct experience (specify work or non-work related)

E=Ethnicity

Sc= Social class

In=Individual determinism

#### Themes within group

#### Themes for individuals

P1

P2

P3

P4

What else should I ask?

Other codes to include, themes, notes or comments?

## Appendix Seven

### Comments on the Research Procedures

There are a few comments or thoughts I would like to share about the research process that was implemented for this study. Two specific tools I used for triangulation yielded expected and unexpected results: my expert panel and Atlas.ti software. Both methods of qualitative data analysis were built into the study's design for the purpose of strengthening the internal validity of my coding system. These two methods were also used to help me see emergent themes in the data.

The expert panel met twice to verify my coding of the data. Members on the panel were given a matrix with the codes (see appendix five) and verbal instructions on how to match the content of the transcripts with the provided codes. Panel members were also encouraged to provide me feedback if they thought any codes were missing. For example, we added a neutral code for participants discourse on all variables in addition to the positive and negative codes I had initially provided. I acted on the panel's suggestion to inquire further into the dynamics of participants' families. Their feedback and multi-faceted approaches to viewing the data yielded rewarding results. The multitude of perspectives generated useful feedback and enriched the findings of my study.

My colleagues on the expert panel were voracious data-coders. At times I needed to streamline their coding because they over-coded sentences or a whole response by focusing on words instead of the meaning of the response itself. For example, instead of

coding a teacher's response in its entirety as "positive ethnicity" they coded several words within the paragraph as "positive ethnicity". My copy-editor for this manuscript, an English teacher in Tampa Bay helped me with this task.

I failed to see the need to teach myself the Atlas.ti software once my data had been coded by hand by myself and all the members on my expert panel. Codes that led to themes were consistently and redundantly verified. The themes had already been sorted into a chart for analysis purposes and I was confident I had reached a critical level of validity. I had considered not using Atlas.ti but since it was included in the proposal for this study I felt the need to follow through with my original plan.

Atlas.ti was more helpful than I had imagined. Once I added all the verified codes into the software I was able to search and query the transcripts for related themes and select quotes from participants with the same codes much more efficiently than if I had not used the software. Since the software was available via a proxy server through USF I was able to take my laptop and data files anywhere to write my results. I was pleasantly surprised how efficient my analysis was with Atlas.ti after my initial annoyance with learning the software. The task of learning and using Atlas.ti was a useful exercise that will help me conduct qualitative research in the future.

The expert panel and Atlas.ti software, proved useful for triangulation, coding and data analysis. Despite minor flaws in the expert panel's highly detailed coding, the panel accomplished exactly what it had intended to do. My data coding was verified for consistency and I was given feedback that assisted me in pursuing lines of inquiry I may not have recognized myself. Without the expert panel I may not have noticed the link

between family dynamics and academic achievement. The Atlas.ti software was a helpful tool for organizing codes, sorting them by related themes and selecting the best quotes to describe participants' experiences. These two methods of handling qualitative data, expert panels and Atlas.ti software, made the handling of massive amounts of qualitative data manageable.

### Appendix Eight: Dissertation Timeline

Proposal Hearing and Approval	Fall 2011
IRB Approval	Fall 2011
Invitation sent to Participants	Fall 2011
First Round of Interviews, Transcriptions, and Analysis	January-February 2012
Member & Code Checks for First Interviews	March 2012
Second Round of Interviews, Transcriptions, and Analysis	April-May 2012
Member & Code Checks for Second Interviews	June 2012
Chapter 4 – Presentation of Data Completed	July 2012
Chapter 5 – Analysis and Summary Completed	August 2010
Manuscript Format Check	September 2012
Pre-Defense Committee Meeting	September 2012
Dissertation Defense	October 18, 2012