

**CHILDREN, ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS, AND TEACHING METHODS  
IN TWO DIFFERENT SOCIOECONOMIC CLASSES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Chloe Bartlett CHILDREN, ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS, AND TEACHING METHODS IN TWO DIFFERENT SOCIOECONOMIC CLASSES. Department of Anthropology, November, 2016.

Students from working class families are not given equal attention, treatment, opportunities or guidance as those of middle class backgrounds. The “gap” between family and school is the socioeconomic background being catered to in schools. I argue that schools run on a highly Western middle class ideology and thus do not reflect cultural values or systems of students from working class families, who perceive authority differently and have been socialized in a community plagued by violence, crime, and lack of economic resources. Such resources that middle class families can attain to academically assist their children. As a result, those students are not receiving a sufficient education that would allow them to bridge the achievement gap and end social reproduction in schools. Based on my experience in four different programs, two that attracted low-income children and two that attracted upper middle class children, as well as what I’ve read by other anthropologists, I argue that children are already substantially different by the time they reach school due to their upbringing and social class. Therefore, the ways in which they are taught and how they behave and learn in academic and enrichment programs reflect the context in which they grew up. Educators must learn to take into account the diverse range of students in the classroom and be sensitive to the many perspectives of each child in order to effectively teach and help bridge the achievement gap.

# CHAPTER ONE

## AN INTRODUCTION TO TWO SOCIOECONOMIC CLASSES

### OVERVIEW OF ARGUMENT

After reading much about how educational systems reproduce social class, I decided to focus my research on afterschool and summer programs aimed at children from different social classes. Therefore, I spent time in afterschool programs in the Schenectady area while I attended classes at Union College, and worked as a teaching assistant during the summers at enrichment programs for children in Fairfield, CT and Chicago, Illinois. I had read that parents and teachers make different assumptions about children according to social class, with a focus on developing the unique individual talents of middle class children and a focus on teaching working class children to be rough, resilient, and also obedient to authority. Ultimately, middle class children are socialized to act in such a way that schools and employers will recognize as showing that they have unique individual talents. Inner city children may in fact be equally gifted and unique but the cultural styles they have been taught do not display these traits in ways middle class teachers and employers expect.

What I found in some ways confirmed these patterns and in some ways did not. I found that the programs I examined socialized middle class children to think of themselves as unique and talented individuals and inner city children to be tough and self sufficient. Otherwise, however, the programs were in fact similar in the

degree to which children were encouraged to be creative and received individual attention. It was just the rhetoric that was different and the result was that middle class children got great resume building items while children in Hamilton Hill just went to after school programs. I conclude with two suggestions. First, as a cultural anthropologist, I think that society should recognize the diversity in styles of behavior and that teachers should realize that inner city and middle class children behave differently and will respond best to methods that they are familiar with. Second, I think society as a whole should recognize that middle class children receive a lot of “cultural capital” that doesn’t necessarily amount to be more creative, more gifted or a better employee.

## METHODOLOGY

### Low-Income Neighborhoods

Fall term of the 2015-2016 school year following my first summer working at the Summer Institute for the Gifted (SIG), I took an anthropology course called Anthropology of Poverty. Part of the course requirement was an internship in the local Schenectady community. I am from Fairfield County where the school districts are rated some of the best in the country, and kids go to college more often than not. However, the opportunities for the children in Hamilton Hill are not as abundant. I

have never worked with inner city children before, so I wanted to have a new teaching perspective. I thought it was important for me to witness how other kids grow up and to understand the world, especially in an environment other than one I am familiar with. As a result, I selected the Hamilton Hill Arts Center as my internship location for class.

The first day I walked into the arts center all of the children were sitting at fold up tables and immediately turned to look at me. A few stood up, walked towards me to ask what I was doing there, and started pulling my hair into braids. Mrs. Val, the director of the program, seemed to be controlling the children just by sitting on a bench in the front of the big open room on the first floor. It was very typical that she would yell at the children to discipline them. Very quickly I noticed that all of the children tattle taled on each other and made sure the adults knew when someone did something wrong. Mrs. Val simply said, "quit tattling." If they got into a fight their punishment was minimal, "sit down," Mrs. Val would yell, but there was no time out or call home. If a child hit another, Mrs. Val raised her voice and threatened to call their grandpa unless they settled down. For all of the ten weeks I was there, I do not recall ever seeing a child cry.

The kids liked to be creative and color, but when it came to finishing homework or completing a project, they needed additional motivation. I found that when I acted excited to work with them, they were more willing to finish their assignment. However, the kids got side tracked easily so when I sat down to help them, I made sure that they gave me their full attention. One day, a little boy named

Michael was having trouble making a fortune teller with paper so I folded it and told him what to do. He was intrigued and proud to finally have finished it. I found that giving kids individual attention really helped them get excited and more motivated to finish their work. In order to build a relationship with these kids, I got down to their level, joked around a lot (because they are tough and understand humor very well), and tried to ask them questions about themselves so they would be willing to open up.

Rather than having my cellphone or a notebook out to take notes, I would take time in my car after each day to jot down notes on interactions that stood out, what we did that day, and things the children had said and done. It was typical for them to fish through my backpack each day to find my phone and take pictures of themselves, and it was virtually impossible to stop what I was doing to write down notes. The children were simply too curious to allow that.

Similarly to my start at the art's center, I signed up for another anthropology internship course, Research Methods. I chose to work at the COCOA House simply because I love working with children, and academically because it contributed to my thesis. Here, I hoped to gain insight into different teaching methods of different socioeconomic classes while also observing what children respond to positively and negatively. When I interviewed Ashley, the program's president and my classmate, she pointed out the benefits the COCOA House offers families and children, since not only is it located next to MLK Elementary School, but the parents "want their children to receive academic enrichment that they are unable to provide."

MacLeod's *Ain't No Makin' It* explains social reproduction and the tendency for children of working class parents to go to school and enter into working class jobs, stuck in their socioeconomic class. MacLeod studied working class children and analyzed whether or not schools were responsible for this reproduction. Their families typically had one or more members in trouble with the law, and parents either did not finish high school or did not go on to attend college (MacLeod 1987, 53). How were the aspirations of family members and the lack of help from the school to accompany individual's needs, as well as the lack of recognition for social reproduction, hurting the children academically?

Through attending the COCOA House, I noticed that Ashley was right; the children were there because their parents knew they could not provide the academic help that their children would need to succeed in school, similar to the children at the arts center. However, how the children in inner city Schenectady responded to authority figures and teaching methods was very different from the responses of middle class students in Fairfield County, where I am from. Thus, I aimed to explore how the children interact with each other, the volunteers, and authoritative figures such as Ashley and Dr. Clark, the program director, as well as take into account their attitudes towards school. From all of this, I was able to identify teaching methods that work best for the children, why, and how they positively enforced the ultimate goal of the COCOA House, to "give them an initial understanding of the importance of education at a young age so it can stick with them throughout their life."



The COCOA House is a house set up like a classroom; however it has a kitchen where the volunteers make snacks for the children everyday, and engage the children in different chores from serving snack to saying the COCOA House pledge. For my research, I typically sat at a table farthest from the teacher's desk, and next to the windows looking out towards MLK Elementary School, in order to observe everything that was happening. A notebook let me stay engaged with what was going on around me, without the distractions of technology, and helped keep me part of the group. Using a phone or computer would have made me an outsider right away because no one else was using technology. All of the children do homework at the COCOA House, and having my own notebook let me fit right in, and also caught the children's attention when they asked me what I was doing. I told them I was doing homework as well, and that was that.

Major themes I found during my time at the Hamilton Hill Arts Center revolved around tradition, respect, punishment, and protection. Each plays a role in social reproduction and the lives of Hamilton Hill's residents. During my time at COCOA House, I noticed similarities in the way children behaved towards each other and towards authoritative figures as the children did at the Hamilton Hill Arts Center. Respect, tattling, and trying to one-up each other were constant themes. Additionally, authoritative figures at each program responded and spoke to the children in similar ways. Why was this? How come the Summer Institute for the Gifted (SIG) where I had worked the previous summer used different methods? Why didn't SIG use similar techniques to discipline children? What would happen if Dr.

Clark taught as an instructor for SIG? How would she behave? How would the children respond? All of these questions were beginning to take shape, and I knew I needed to get more information.

### Middle Class Children and Programs

I worked as a teaching assistant at a gifted student program during the summer of 2015. The previous school year I had decided I wanted to become an elementary school teacher so I applied to various teaching positions for summer break. I accepted a job from the Summer Institute for the Gifted at Fairfield University to work as a TA for their three-week day program. Before the program began, staff attended an orientation to learn about what they would be doing and the rules they must follow. I have worked with children my entire life, and they tend to get along with me very well, but I found it difficult being told I could not hold their hands to the dining hall, or have them sit in my lap outside in the grass during breaks. Interestingly, Pete, the program director, would eventually tell me how incredible it was to watch me interact with the kids and that they loved me, not minding that two were holding each of my hands at the time.

During this program, I was assigned three math classes (Geometry, Cracking Codes, Algebra) and the Theater course. During algebra, eight and nine year olds learned about mathematical concepts that are all around us in everyday life. Cracking Codes was for five and six year olds, where they learned about ciphers and

different secret messages, and eventually had to make up their own codes.

Geometry was aimed at five to nine year olds, and focused on different shapes, their properties, and where they can be found in nature. Theater was for all ages. Here, students worked together to put on their own play. They created a script, props, and costumes and performed for the entire camp at the end of the session.

During the theater class, the children were able to choose which part of the production they wanted to be a part of; stage crew, cast, director, costume designers. The instructor and I would go around the room making sure each child was participating and had something to work on. There was a wide age range in this class as well, and that proved to be very difficult to manage when the younger kids looked up to the older students, who were not always paying attention. During the orientation, the staff was educated on characteristics of a gifted child; for example, we were told that some may have a mature sense of humor and pick up on sarcasm, some may have ADD, and some are incredibly curious. I found these qualities in many children and I was impressed by how eager they were to learn. However, I couldn't help but wonder how exactly a child is determined to be gifted, especially when they are only five years old. To this day, I am still stumped on this.

I had just finished two internships in low-income neighborhoods so in order to have a broader range of fieldnotes; I applied to SIG once again, to be a TA and counselor at the University of Chicago's residential program during the summer of 2016. This program mirrors Fairfield University's SIG program except that children ranged from nine years old to seventeen years old, and the program attracted a lot

of international children from places such as China, Russia, Qatar, and Switzerland. Having so many different backgrounds and languages interacting 24 hours a day, 7 days a week was an incredible experience for me and I believe it was a great experience for the children as well. Being so young, they have already been exposed to different cultures and are learning to accept their peers.

I was a TA for Future Fitness, where children learned about healthy habits and technology used for exercise and health today, Shark Tank: SIG Style where nine year olds got to create their own inventions, and Acoustics: Music to My Ears where the class ranged from eight to seventeen years old and the students learned about the biology and science behind sound and instruments.

During the courses for which I was a TA, I took notes on teaching styles, things the kids loved doing, or didn't enjoy, as well as qualities the instructors possessed. I wrote my notes in a notebook, since each child had a notebook out as well, and I did not want my computer to be a loud distraction, or myself to look separate from the class. I was there to help teach and a computer would have cut me off from the students who were not allowed to have their computers or phones out during class time.

While I absolutely loved the children at UChicago, were they really gifted? Yes! I had to ask myself this, since my experience with SIG the previous year was much different. I found it hard to believe that a five year old could be tested gifted at such a young age. However, at UChicago the children in class and their everyday conversation showed me it was quite clear that they were on another level. They

thought differently, solved problems impressively, and their conversations with each other were rather mature. In each class I was in, the children were devoted to their projects and excited, practically on the edge of their seats, to learn. They knew they were smart, and they wholeheartedly enjoyed learning. Should a child be constantly reminded they are intelligent? How does a teacher further a student's interest in a lesson? In the three courses I was a teaching assistant for, different teaching styles from each instructor would speak to my questions: What is the most effective way to teach such a wide range of students who are tested gifted? Children were in mixed age classes so teachers were almost forced to tailor every lesson for individual children. Did this connect to my everyday interactions with the students from Schenectady public schools? After all, they too were placed in mixed age group settings. How are the children similar? Different? What teaching methods do the children respond to positively? Negatively? Further, SIG's fees must limit the program to wealthier families. The staff was told to treat the children in special ways because their parents paid a lot of money for them to be there. Did that mean children in lower class schools and programs were treated according to their socioeconomic class?

The SIG programs I observed billed themselves as enrichment opportunities for gifted students although it was sometimes difficult to determine how these children were tested to establish them as gifted in the first place. This only led me to wonder why the students' parents sent them to SIG. Most of the children were excited to be there every single day and truly loved getting to attend school in the

summer, but why would their parents pay for such an expensive program when they could simply drive them to the pool or to a cheaper summer camp? What if a family of a gifted child could not pay for SIG because it was too expensive? Does this gifted student program truly help develop and expand the children's minds? All of these questions tied into what I aimed to research and learn about for this thesis; are institutions reproducing social class? Do children from middle class backgrounds have enrichment experiences while lower class families send their children to afterschool programs, which simply keep them off the streets? Does this promote social reproduction? Based on the mission of SIG there is no question that SIG was aimed at the upper middle class, who could afford the program as well as pay to take the intelligence tests, and overall SIG correlates with the stereotypical mindset of a middle class sense of self, values, and aspirations.

Based on my experience in four different programs, two that attracted low-income children and two that attracted upper middle class children, as well as what I've read by other anthropologists, I argue that children are already substantially different by the time they reach school due to their upbringing and social class. Therefore, the ways in which they are taught and how they behave and learn in academic and enrichment programs reflect the context in which they grew up. This dimension of things has been under analyzed, as most research is based on adults and parenting styles. Further, I argue that although there is a dramatic difference in socioeconomic classes, there are in fact similarities across each class

when it comes to sending a child to these programs, and how the programs and their activities are run.

I found, consistent with what the literature suggested, that Hamilton Hill inner city minority children were socialized to be tough and resilient and to look after themselves while the upper middle class and international students of SIG were encouraged to see themselves as special, gifted, and unique and entitled to be treated like adults who could make their own choices. These observations were consistent with a literature that suggests that upper middle class children get educated to behave in ways that will later be expected and seen as signs of talent in professional jobs while working class kids get socialized to “suck it up” and be obedient. I also found that the Hamilton Hill programs went beyond teaching kids to survive in a harsh environment, but to instill in them a strong positive sense of self in order to encourage them to go on in life. The arts center encouraged children to take pride in their community and ethnic heritage. The assigned art projects in many ways encouraged individualism like SIG’s projects did, and the COCOA House was built on the idea of exposing inner city children to college students to widen their horizons. SIG, on the other hand, despite its grand self-presentation, often amounted to keeping children busy with fun projects not unlike the one’s assigned in Hamilton Hill. I argue then, that ultimately the major contribution of programs like SIG is to give children cultural capital in terms of impressive things to put on their resume while inner city children may have similar experiences and be

encouraged to develop some very adaptive traits but not get the kind of cultural capital that comes with money.



## **CHAPTER TWO THE SCHOOL SYSTEM IN A CULTURAL CONTEXT: A LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **INTRODUCTION**

According to Apple and Weis, educational systems often reproduce social class. Schools have focused too much on how to get students to learn that they have “neglected to inquire into the larger context in which schools exist, a context that may actually make it very difficult for them to succeed,” (Apple 1986, 7). I argue that schools focus too much on teaching methods and not enough on aspects of children’s external lives that impact their attitudes towards education. Schools must be interpreted more culturally, socially, and structurally, and examined based on what is taught, what is rejected, and how other actors mediate one’s education in order to determine why and how schools reproduce the labor force (Apple 1986, 17).

My literature review identifies the more general literature that speaks to the theory that schools promote mobility for a few people while most simultaneously reproduce social class for many. There are multiple actors that lead children of different socioeconomic backgrounds down different life paths, and causing most to stay in the class background they grew up in. Middle class children are often seen as needing to be stimulated with enriched experiences whereas

children of lower class families are assumed to need remedial skills and to be taught positive habits.

In this chapter, I will review literature that attempts to explain why schools often reproduce social class instead of promoting mobility. I will first discuss work on the daily lives of children in different socioeconomic backgrounds in order to show how school fit into a broader context. Next, I will examine the work of scholars who say that conceptions of the child's self are different according to class.

Contradictory perceptions of self are instilled in multiple social class groups and examining these perceptions helps us understand the assumptions parents and teachers have about different children. Third, I will identify conflicting achievement ideologies and the process of social reproduction that results. Once I have laid the foundation for which society acts accordingly, I will introduce the role of the parent in child rearing of different socioeconomic backgrounds and address how their values and aspirations for their children contribute to their child's growth. Finally, I intend to examine the role of educators in child rearing in the school and identify how schools cater to individualism differently, which ultimately reinforces existing social classes.

Annette Lareau's Unequal Childhoods identifies "the largely invisible but powerful ways parents' social class impacts children's life experiences (Lareau 2003, 3). This book ultimately ties into Adrie Kusserow's American Individualisms and Jay MacLeod's Ain't No Makin' It as each study examines cultural models that influence children's life experiences and overall academic experience. American

Individualisms is about class differences and the conceptualization of the self of the child as dependent on socioeconomic terrain that cannot be generalized into one single conception (Kusserow 2003, 24). MacLeod, on the other hand, takes a similar approach as Lareau in exploring limiting social reproduction within the educational system and in the home. These three books have given great insight into the topic of my thesis and will help us to understand more fully the ways in which social class greatly influences the education of children.

## SCHOOLS AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

I argue that schools contribute to social reproduction. Apple and Weis further state that schools assist in defining certain group knowledge as legitimate (Apple 1986, 11). They considered Bernstein, Bourdieu and Passeron; schools take the knowledge that upper class students have learned at home such as language patterns, vocabulary, and knowledge of literature, and declare this to be the best and most legitimate kind of knowledge and regard children who exhibit these skills in school as gifted. Such knowledge is that of the dominant class, thus students are hierarchically ordered based on the cultural forms of the dominant groups. Schools legitimize social groups through the ways in which they teach, discipline, praise, and cultivate their students. "Students unequally labeled encounter differential policing and assumptions based on their abilities," thus are held to lower academic

standards and often encounter harsher discipline (Ochoa 2013). I argue that students of different socioeconomic backgrounds respond to teaching methods differently, and the ways in which the educational system works today greatly incorporates methods most effective for middle class students. Therefore, students of working class background do not respond the same way, and are not given the appropriate education that would best accompany their values and ideologies to allow them to move across class boundaries. “Contributions reinforce the need to critically examine how access to resources is allocated among students and to reflect on how to better support marginalized student groups. Without the direct action from administration and teachers, the processes of stratification will remain to the detriment of the academic opportunity for students,” says Murillo in regards to Ochoa (Murillo 2014, 3). His work, along with Apple and Weis, “showcases the need to focus on how unequal schooling hinders opportunities and fuels further divisions,” (Murillo 2014, 3). Rather than looking at the outcomes of education, Ochoa emphasizes the “processes that foster opportunity gaps,” and “affect students’ school performance,” (Murillo 2014, 1). Access to resources, social support, and cultural ideologies influence students’ perspectives of the educational system, their achievement ideologies, and the overall ways in which they are treated and disciplined in school.

## DAILY LIFE OF CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS

Scholars emphasize that the underlying unequal educational outcomes are influenced by differences in daily life of children growing up in lower class families and in middle class families. Understanding how a child lives and the influences that affect him or her outside of the classroom is integral in our overall understanding that children perform in school. The economic backgrounds contain material as well as subjective/cultural differences. Typically in middle class families, parents have often obtained college and advanced degrees and live in a community concerned with keeping its streets clean. Parents have the material means to protect and insulate their children from the violence of the city, so worries about safety are not primary concerns (Kusserow 2004, 86-87). Some extra “necessities” of middle class families include: country club membership, second homes, house cleaners, live-in babysitters, and extra caretakers in general are present to take care of the children while parents are working white-collar jobs. Lareau sums up middle-class living:

By encouraging involvement in activities outside the home, middle class parents position their children to receive more than an education in how to play soccer, baseball, or piano. These young sports enthusiasts and budding musicians acquire skills and dispositions that help them navigate the institutional world. They think of themselves as entitled to receive certain kinds of services

from adults. They also acquire a valuable set of white-collar work skills, including how to set priorities, manage an itinerary, shake hands with strangers, and work on a team. (Lareau 2003, 39)

Middle class families tend to organize their schedules around those of their children, enrolling them into multiple extracurricular activities meant to “enrich” their lives. Busy schedules and organized activities are a “top priority” of middle class families (Lareau 2003, 38). Centering the family’s lives and timing on those of their children has benefits but also creates problems. Children are incorporated into activities with other children and parents plan play dates. Adults start, end, and plan events, and drive their children to play dates in hopes of keeping their children continuously occupied. The youngest children grow up aware of the importance of commitments (Lareau 2003, 44). However, relationship ties can be subject to strain. Busy schedules and the need to get their children to places every day can cause stress among the parents as well as prevent children from having the time to interact with members outside of their immediate family. For example, a soccer game may trump a family graduation party (Lareau 2003, 58).

Further, money is “ever present and never mentioned.” Financial problems are never voiced to the children, and the children are rarely denied participation in an activity due to its cost (Lareau 2003, 59).

As opposed to middle class families, children of working class background are subject to informal play. Organized activities do not set the pace of life, instead,

children learn to manage their own time, strategize, negotiate, and defend themselves without the interference of parents (Lareau 2003, 67). They are given the flexibility to choose activities and playmates and how active or engaged they are in these activities.

Working class parents exercise a great deal of authority over their children (MacLeod 1987, 59). Educational achievement and attainment is often low, and many children spend their lives in public housing or in the projects (MacLeod 1987, 53). Parents often face sporadic employment (MacLeod 1987, 54) and face challenges based on resources available and their own temperaments (Lareau 2003, 96). Most parents have service jobs, technical, sales, administration or service oriented work, often working a second job (Kusserow 2004, 2). Further, family members and older siblings have sometimes found themselves in jail. "Insufficient resources shaped where families lived, what jobs parents held (or didn't hold), how individuals traveled from place to place, and how much and what kind of care parents could provide for young children," says Lareau (Lareau 2003, 97). Children of lower-class families face different trajectories than those of middle class families linked to neighborhood environments, which include struggles with drugs, safety, and income, and different opinions on kinship, networks, support systems, and danger (Kusserow 2004, 2).

Children ultimately have more autonomy to go out into the neighborhood and play with children of various ages (Lareau 2003, 73). There is a greater emphasis on kinship and more time interacting with family members. Due to a less

scheduled itinerary, siblings spend more time together, are more cordial, and offer mutual support (Lareau 2003, 76). Additionally, due to the lack of income, families rely on members outside of the nuclear family to take care of their children. Families and cousins often live in close proximity to each other, which makes caretaking easier and more convenient for parents.

Further, male figures are commonly absent or work multiple jobs. In Kusserow's research, she found that many mothers were divorced, on welfare, they sit in front of TVs, and are suspicious of outsiders, juvenile delinquents, and the "crazy people" inside their own apartments (Kusserow 2004, 4). She felt the chaos of the house where parents often dictated children with authoritative commands whereas parents of middle class families were more fearful of louder voices and direct commands that might hurt the child's feelings (Kusserow 2004, 17). Income struggles were also apparent because parents did not refrain from speaking about money issues around their children. Children did not grow up with a sense that they could attain the world if they wanted to. Parents did not want to set their children's aspirations too high, however this attitude depends on social reproduction and the way in which a child's parents grew up; Whether or not they were able to overcome struggles efficiently and obtain their own aspirations.



## CONCEPTIONS OF THE CHILD'S SELF ACCORDING TO SOCIAL CLASS

The different life conditions experienced according to social classes lead to different ideas about what kinds of qualities children need to succeed in life, some of which match school culture better than others. The ways in which children, parents, and teachers view a child's autonomy and individuality and how it is instilled depends on their cultural and economic background. According to Kusserow, "by looking at various strands of individualism that each community weaves into its own working class or upper middle class concerns and life visions, we can better understand the subtle relationship between individualism and social inequality," (Kusserow 2004, v). She recognizes Benjamin DeMott's argument that "we need to understand the ways in which social class is not simply shown and taken off in a manner of a Harvard degree or a gold wristwatch, but lived in the flesh, held in the cells of one's self-esteem and visions of life possibility," (Kusserow 2004, vii). I believe this sums up why we must explore the difference conceptions of the child's self in relation to different socioeconomic classes.

Middle class families emphasize "soft" individualism, where a child should respect other people's feelings while having his or her own emotions (Kusserow 2004, 37). One should show his or her emotions while continuing to be caring, kind, gentle, selfless, empathetic, and helpful, etc. In Parkside, a child is a singular unit that is "opening up" into the world. They are encouraged to loosen up the self and express their feelings because expressing one's view is a natural right (Kusserow

2004, 30). However, left unchecked and lacking self-confidence could cause people to walk all over them. As a result, children learn how to negotiate the world beyond their home through experiencing their parents' actions. Middle class children are encouraged to be unique individuals and encouraged to think that everyone has his/her own unique feeling, which should be respected.

According to Lareau, these families intervene in a child's growing process in order to lead them down a path that is more tailored to meet their needs (Lareau 2003, 165), consistent with the idea that each child is a unique individual who is entitled to individually tailored treatment. This includes requesting particular teachers for their children and pursuing a problem as soon as possible rather than letting the issue go (Lareau 2003, 173). Regardless of a child's learning ability and comprehension, it is a typical pattern for middle class parents to intervene in a child's education. For example, if a child was placed in a class that functioned at a slower pace based on the student's needs, this or her mother did not hesitate to contact the school, request her child be transferred to the higher level class, and pursue the issue until she got her way. Therefore, the child learns that he or she must be determined and confident in order to achieve high standards. All the while, the parent does not show frustration or anger when in front of her child. The child learns to stay calm and in a respectful manner.

In addition to middle class families, Kusserow and Lareau write a substantial amount on children of lower class backgrounds. Here, "children are not trained to see themselves as special and worthy of being catered to in daily life. Children

appear to gain a sense of constraint, as opposed to entitlement, in their workings with the larger world,” (Lareau 2003, 83). Their parents do not simply fight for their right to a higher-level class, but instead feel like they must fight against the world to accomplish this. In Queens, there is a conception of the child’s self as a singular unit “against” the world (Kusserow 2004, 26). This “‘hard’ individualism emphasizes a tough, resilient self that is hardly enough to protect itself from violence, poverty, and misfortune,” (Kusserow 2004, 57). The autonomous self must be earned and defended constantly. The emphasis is on protecting oneself in an environment that might be harsh and dangerous rather than on expecting the world to meet one’s unique needs.

Thickening and toughening of the boundaries of self is done through techniques such as humor and teasing, as seen by parents and teachers who instill the sense of self against the world (Kusserow 2004, 36). There is a “get over it and move on” philosophy where authoritative figures in lower class communities use a loud and strict voice when disciplining children. They do not find it necessary to save face in front of a child when they are angry or frustrated, so rather than explaining to a child what they did wrong, parents and teachers tell them to simply stop it. Telling a child she was bad won’t necessarily hurt their ego, self-esteem, or development (Kusserow 2004, 37). Instead, it requires the child to keep up a tough front, putting up shields of armor through pride, self-sufficiency, privacy, independence, toughening, and self-resilience (Kusserow 2004, 57). Therefore, the child will learn to protect themselves from the “harsh world around them.” If a child

is a pushover, “the negative influences of the street could penetrate and take over, people can walk all over you, and change you,” Kusserow says of lower class neighborhoods. A mother from Kelley, Kusserow’s pseudonym for the working class community she observed, said, “I try to teach [my son] that not everybody is his friend,” (Kusserow 2004, 35). As a result, when a stranger approaches a child, instead of being “polite” and mannerly, the child learns to be defensive and cautious. Being tough is a positive quality among the lower class, says Kusserow. A parent and educator puts limits on praise so that the child does not become too dependent on it or “full of himself,” because the world is out to get him. Instead, praise is put on individual acts done without help from anyone else (Kusserow 2004, 39). The child learns to be dependent on himself, and himself only, resisting outside influences that might be harmful.

In addition to hard protective ideologies, the lower class also reveals a hard projective ideology, which is a more offensive rather than defensive trajectory. Within the two neighborhoods in Queens that Kusserow studied, one held the hard protective ideology that would protect the child from the harsh world. The other contained a “more outgoing, upward-moving trajectory in which the sky was the limit and one’s socioeconomic terrain could be bettered with each successive generation,” (Kusserow 2004, 57). Parents notice their position in relation to their own parent’s position, and see that they have overcome challenges and have provided a better life for their families. They project this idea onto their children; if they maintain the same positive attitude, they too will accomplish greater things

than they have, as long as they are self-assertive, confident, self-reliant, dogged, and persistent.

These different conceptions of the child's self in lower class backgrounds creates greater ambiguity in the grand scheme of the western conceptions of self, which is usually flattened and generic and usually describes middle-class America (Kusserow 2004, 20). "The problem with the notion of a 'Western' conception of the self is the way in which individualism is treated as if it had the same meanings and uses for all groups," (Kusserow 2004, 21). There is a tremendous amount of variations of individualisms that have not been explored yet. By acknowledging both sociocentric and egocentric conceptions, it is then we can fully address students effectively in the classroom. This, in itself, has driven my research. Schools often cater to one type of individualism, and I aim to examine how and why this inhibits, as well as encourages, mobility and aspirations among different classes.

## CONFLICTING ACHIEVEMENT IDEOLOGIES

Social class also determines one's achievement ideology. A child's conception of the limits of their possible achievements in life comes through their interactions with parents and teachers, as well as their own neighborhood. A process of social reproduction is in play, while schools cultivate these ideologies. I plan to examine concerted cultivation and the achievement of natural growth as they pertain to the

middle and lower classes respectively. Both Lareau and Macleod speak to these ideologies, principally Macleod.

According to Lareau, a “parent’s social class position predicts children’s school success and thus their ultimate life chances... children of highly educated mothers continue to outperform children of less educated mothers throughout their school careers,” (Lareau 2003, 29). Family practices cohere by social class, which means “class position influences critical aspects of family life: time use, language use, and kin ties,” (Lareau 2003, 236). Lareau sums up the role of resources in a child’s growth:

It was the interweaving of life experiences and resources, including parents’ economic resources, occupational conditions, and educational backgrounds that seemed to be most important in leading middle-class parents to engage in concerted cultivation and working class and poor families to engage in the accomplishment of natural growth. (Lareau 2003, 250) How a child is brought up molds their view of the world, and thus the resources they are provided greatly affect their idea of success. Superior levels of education, extracurricular activities, and advantages for children in the institutional setting ultimately construct contrasting ideologies.

Concerted cultivation emphasizes talking to children to foster the development of children’s knowledge and opinions (Lareau 2003, 110). Therefore, parents and teachers of middle class backgrounds prefer a discipline approach that encourages asking children what they did wrong, how they could fix it, as well as how they could get what they want in an appropriate manner. In contrast, the

accomplishment of natural growth encourages children's informal play with peers, siblings, and cousins. Boundaries to what is acceptable behavior are clearly marked and there is an economic constraint that inhibits children's ability to join extracurricular activities, shaping what they are accustomed to. I argue that "aspirations mediate what an individual desires and what society can offer," (Macleod 1987, 7) while resources and cultural capital mediate aspirations.

Cultural capital, according to Kusserow, is a reflection of one's general cultural background, knowledge, skills, acquisitions, ways of speaking, dress sense, style, and accent, all passed down from generations. Unfortunately, what is valued in society and what schools generally consider to be a sign of intelligence skills working class kids bring to schools are not recognized as valuable. Some kinds of cultural capital are more valued than others in society and Kusserow, Lareau, and many others argue that middle class cultural capital is more valued in schools than working class cultural capital. Such capital includes educational credentials and relationships through networking and communication with teachers and those that have already attended a specific school. More educational qualifications and information about that school system greatly benefits the middle class. Unfortunately, cultural capital is often mistaken for personal rather than class-learned attributes, even though it is an unconscious internalization of cultural tendencies (Kusserow 2004, x). It is argued that schools play a role in cultivating achievement ideologies in relation to the accomplishments in different classes, and to cultural capital. Some people note that classes prepare its children with the skills

necessary for their work environment. Educators, whether they recognize it or not, believe middle class children are more emotionally invested in work. “Teachers also promote the concerted cultivation of their own children through a busy schedule of organized activities,” (Lareau 2003, 25). Class structure is reproduced through schools, and I believe this is due to how a child is brought up in the household, and their parent’s interventions in their education. For example, Parkside parents’ values are linked with success, achievement, and leadership in a competitive society, ensuring the child opens up into a successful career (Kusserow 2004, 81).

Further, MacLeod describes the American ideology of achievement; American society is open and fair and full of opportunity. Success is based on merit, economic inequality is based on ambition and ability, and social status is attained on your own (MacLeod 1987, 3). This ties into my previous argument that schools work according to one type of ideology, and that is the generic Western conceptions of individualism and achievement; in other words, schools implicitly assume that middle class cultural capital is the best kind. MacLeod then recognizes the need to look at the forces people struggle against by referring to Pierre Bourdieu:

Aspirations reflect an individual’s view of his or her own chances for getting ahead and are an internalization of objective probabilities. But aspirations are not the product of rational analysis; rather, they are acquired in the habitus of the individual and we learn what to aspire



to in the course of growing up, not by analyzing the resources available to us. (MacLeod 1987, 15)

Again, cultural capital is passed down from generation to generation. It happens to be the working class that is negatively affected by this social reproduction. Classes are generally located accordingly, which means geographical locations contain local opportunity structures, such as a certain job market, and educational attainment influences job choice (MacLeod 1987, 19). This means that children of working class parents who have little education are not as likely to attain as high academic achievement as children of middle class parents who have attained multiple degrees because working class children tend to assume that they will end up with the same kinds of jobs as their parents and do not have the learned habits and attitudes teachers are looking for in students.

MacLeod examines the Hallway Hangers who grew up in a neighborhood that values toughness and “being bad.” One’s fighting ability and time in prison contributes to respect as opposed to good grades. Their parents’ educational attainment is very low and many have family members who have encountered trouble with the law. They are fully aware of class-based obstacles to economic and social advancement, because “their personal experience on the job market and the experiences of their family members and their neighbors have taught the Hallway Hangers that the job market does not necessarily reward talent or effort,” (MacLeod 1987, 73). Their parents often work multiple jobs, experience sporadic employment,

and live a duration of their lives in public housing and the projects. Persistence and skill have not proven to lead to success in the eyes of the Hallway Hangers.

Conventional, middle class orientations towards employment are inadequate for working class neighborhoods. Parents do not want to set their children's aspirations too high, and therefore keep a lid on hope, because they see little choice in getting a job (MacLeod 1987, 63). Children, as well, do not see people around them who have succeeded through education and therefore tend to assume that education won't serve them well either.

It is incredibly important to emphasize how the conventional achievement ideology and its contrast to that of the lower class interact with the education system. The Hallway Hangers are unable to separate themselves from the dominant culture's values and norms and are thus regarded as failures (MacLeod 1987, 119). They "resent the fact that the school, because of its middle class orientation, ignores the skills they have picked up on the street," (MacLeod 1987, 109). Therefore, they are already "convinced that they are headed into jobs for which they do not need an education" and thus "see little value in schooling," (MacLeod 1987, 103). School is regarded as a waste of their time because they could be making an income by working a full time job.

The Brothers are from the same class background and attend the same school as the Hallway Hangers. The only difference is that they are black. While I do not plan on addressing racial diversity in my thesis, I do think it is important to acknowledge a difference in The Brother's internalization of their chances of making

it in contrast to that of the Hallway Hangers. They have more parents who graduated high school and older siblings who have higher educational achievements rather than in prison. Education is still relatively low and employment is uninteresting and unskilled, but they still maintain hope for their futures. They believe they can reach their goals through hard work and aspire to middle class jobs. Lack of success is only based on personal inadequacy (MacLeod 1987, 76). In school, they blame themselves for their mediocre academic performances (MacLeod 1987, 127). I want to point out how affirmative action plays a role in creating this attitude.

The Hallway Hangers resent affirmative action and those who benefit from it (MacLeod 1987, 123). This policy favors members of a disadvantaged group who currently suffer or have suffered discrimination within a culture. There is, then, no policy, which looks out for the Hallway Hangers, who come from a similar background as The Brothers. They cannot blame racial discrimination for their lack of social and economic mobility. Further, affirmative action has given The Brothers and their families a sense that the nation is headed towards further equality and opportunity, therefore they are able to aspire to high levels of achievement because race is no longer inhibiting their access to achievement. Instead, they hold onto a hard projective ideology, as seen in Kusserow's research (Kusserow 2004, 57).

All in all, schools and institutions are reproducing a variety of ideologies regarding individualism, achievement, and aspirations, which, based on past research, hurts or helps children from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

## Role of the Parent in Child Rearing of Different Socioeconomic Backgrounds

Upon reading the literature, the role of the parent was addressed throughout each book. Children that come from working class families and middle class families grow up learning different values and levels of aspirations according to their parents. Parents' social location systematically shapes children's life experiences and outcomes, and "different classes take a different approach to helping their children succeed in school," states Lareau (Lareau 2003, 198). Social reproduction, once again, greatly contributes to a child's mobility in social classes; therefore identifying different roles of the parent in two conflicting social classes may assist in explaining how the school is not incorporating each class equally. It is important to recognize that parents in all social classes want their children to succeed in schools; but they have different assumptions about what it takes to succeed in school and in life and different capacities to make schools listen to them so working class parents may not be as effective in helping children do well in school.

Working class parents see a boundary between adults and children and do not think they need to elicit their child's opinions or feelings when making decisions or disciplining their child (Lareau 2003, 3). "Children are not trained to see themselves as special and worthy of being catered to in daily life," she says. Instead, parents exhibit a lack of attention and involvement in their children's activities, allowing their children to be free to please themselves, giving them more

spontaneity and control of their own enjoyment. Adults believe child's play is for children only, and often lack the time to sit down and play a board game with their child or be able to drive them to an organized soccer game. "Simple life tasks were harder to accomplish for families that had the most limited economic resources," and therefore getting through the day was tougher than that of middle class parents. Additionally, Lareau explains working class punishment to be focused on the consequence of an act itself, and offer little response or acknowledgment to questions and arguments, but using loud, harsh voices without feeling it would severely hurt the child's feelings. This encourages the child to "move on" and not dwell on a worry, fight, or emotional upset since he learned that it would not necessarily lead to an attentive response for him parent (Lareau 2003, 39). Instead, parents taught children to persevere and be self-reliant because they cannot always count on the world to be in their favor. They emphasize the need to stand up for oneself and be independent, because they grew up in a "bad system" that couldn't be trusted (Kusserow 2004, 58). They should not be pushovers, because being a follower is what gets them into trouble (Kusserow 2004, 63). These attitudes come from the parents' own experiences of working class jobs and what it takes to succeed in life but do not prepare children well to conform to the expectations of middle class teachers who assume that ability to verbalize one's ideas and feelings reflects intelligence.

Middle class parents, on the other hand, take a different approach to child rearing. "Parenting guidelines typically stress the importance of reasoning with

children and teaching them to solve problems through negotiation rather than with physical force,” says Lareau (Lareau 2003, 4). Kusserow shows that parents use verbal negotiations to identify intent, motives, and feelings within a situation. Thus, they ask, “how can I help you get what you want?” (Kusserow 2004, 104). “Parents stressed the child’s cultivation of her emotions and the development of a good sense of self as crucial foundations for being happy and successful. Essentially, parents aim to “puff the delicate layers of the child’s self out,” rather than toughening them from the outside (99). The child must fully acknowledge and honor her emotions, tastes, and desires so that she can find the right societal outlet for them,” states Kusserow (Kusserow 2004, 83). Children are encouraged to express their feelings, and by doing so, they can figure out the most effective way to obtain their goal. Rather than a sense of constraint, there is a sense of entitlement a child learns in middle class families. Parents increase their child’s political awareness and work on expanding their vocabulary at a young age, teaching them they have the right to speak up and voice their opinions (Lareau 2003, 119). However, they are encouraged to get along with other kids, to share, and to be sensitive to other’s feelings, but not to the point where the child’s self is taken advantage of (Lareau 2003, 37). As a result, a child who is stubborn and perhaps tough to raise is viewed as unique, assertive, creative, and spirited in a middle class setting (Kusserow 2004, 101). These ideas reflect middle class parents’ experiences of professional jobs and prepare children well to behave in ways that are respected by middle class teachers

who look at ability to verbalize one's thoughts and desires as a reflection of intelligence and interest.

Lareau points out that social class seemed to make a difference in how parents managed their children's complaints about institutions, therefore taking different approaches to address their child's needs. For example, when her children did not meet the IQ to be part of a gifted student program, a middle class mother learned how to appeal and got their children into the program. "Her clear expectation was that once notified of Stacey's learning style, the teachers would adjust what they required her to accomplish," in order to accompany her into the program (Lareau 2003, 177). They are "entitled" to point out teacher's failings and believe they have the right and responsibility to intervene in the classroom, monitoring their children's education and making sure they are included in certain programs they believe will most benefit their child's future (Lareau 2003, 187).

Working class parents, on the other hand, tend to be more respectful towards teachers in fear of doing something wrong (Lareau 2003, 198). They believe education is the role of educators and are willing to comply with educators' decisions (Lareau 2003, 213). Many middle class families have parents who have not finished high school or gone on to get another degree, and feel as though the educators may know what is best for their children in the school setting. Kusserow further points out that the school is a threatening force, parents may also fear their kids may be taken away if they do not comply with the schools. Therefore, middle

class parents are not as demanding or assertive when it comes to their children's education.

Unfortunately, regardless of the different child rearing processes, there is a dominant set of cultural repertoires about how children should be raised among professionals and parents (Lareau 2003, 4). This is that of middle class background.

### ROLE OF EDUCATORS IN CHILD REARING IN THE SCHOOL

I argue that, like Lareau stated, there is one type of cultural repertoire being addressed in the schools, and that is the general Western conception of self and the individual, that identifies most with middle class America. Kusserow, MacLeod, and Lareau each examine how the schools cater to children of different socioeconomic backgrounds and ultimately reproduce social roles through different activities, discipline, praise, and the idea of cultural capital.

It is important to note the types of schools that were studied in Kusserow's research. She noticed that at each of the schools, low-income children were taught by teachers who reflected their parents' culture or were taught by upper middle class teachers. There was never an instance where working class teachers taught wealthy children. Thus, I find it important to examine the different teaching styles of teachers from middle class backgrounds and working class backgrounds, as both were studied in the books.



Working class teachers with similar cultural backgrounds to the children reflected similar disciplining and values as the parents of working class children. They learned “how to cope with difficulties without help, not expecting a lot from other in the way of praise or sympathy, dealing with things alone, not calling too much attention to yourself,” (Kusserow 2004, 113). Similar to parents, children were taught to move on silently without being crushed with “harsh words” or nonverbal signs of frustration. If a fight occurred the teacher look into account the children’s personalities that they knew rather than a narrative from each child’s point of view (Kusserow 2004, 126). Punishment was direct and not intent on hearing motives and feelings behind the actions. There is a low level of sympathy, praise, and attention that teachers of working class background give the children because they see the children as “weeds” rather than flowers; these teachers didn’t feel the child needs softness and delicate handling. Instead, they reacted in a way that the child *could* handle.

For example, teasing was a way to “blunt” the edges of the self and spark the defensive part of the child’s self (Kusserow 2004, 122). Children could talk back to the teacher in a joking sense, to show defense, but this “whipping the child into order,” was done “with a sense of joy and fun, hiding a smile underneath her orders,” Kusserow says of one of his case studies (Kusserow 2004, 116). This “public shaming” aimed to blunt the “flow” or impulse from the children in the future (Kusserow 2004, 127). Plus, “conformity to group life was taught more through practices such as teasing, public shaming, blaming, promotion of a sense of

competition between children, and the use of threats,” (Kusserow 2004, 113). Further, independent acts out of turn and not on schedule were praised as long as they were not disruptive or disobeying rules. Working class teachers value independence and self-reliance, and therefore praise their students accordingly. Ultimately, then, working class teachers might have also contributed to giving children skills that are valuable in working class lives but did not prepare them for going on to a middle class world of higher education where they would be expected to show the verbal skills encouraged in middle class children.

Middle class teachers value reasoning and verbal interactions over directives (Lareau 2003, 26). Children are encouraged to “use your words” to ensure that their feelings are heard because everyone in the classroom is your friend (Kusserow 2004, 98). Middle class parents could consider working class teachers to be “cruel, demeaning, and disrespectful,” and blocking the unfolding of the child’s self (Kusserow 2004, 114). Therefore, middle class teachers see the importance of keeping an emotional balance, always addressing the children positively, even if they arrived late. If two teachers were talking, they would stop and give their full attention to the child that interrupted them, encouraging the child’s sense of entitlement to voice their opinion and be heard. If two children fought, the teachers would use serious facial expressions and tone of voice to show they took the child’s rights and feelings into consideration and aim to teach the children to understand what it would feel like if their story was not heard at circle time (Kusserow 2004, 128). Disciplining included asking the children questions similar to how others

would feel in a given situation, while maintaining a calm, loving expression on their faces to avoid annoyance (Kusserow 2004, 148). “Efforts are made to reassure children that whatever emotions they were experiencing were ok,” thus regardless of the situation, a child was always given full attention and time to explain their intent and feelings, similar to the parental process of helping a child get what they want in a reasonable manner using their words (Kusserow 2004, 139).

Arguably, “institutional contexts build unevenly on family practices,” (Lareau 2003, 265). Lareau argues that middle class parents are more likely to be aware of and be able to comply with institutional expectations than parents of lower class backgrounds. She states, “This gap in the connections between working class and poor families and schools is important. It undermines their feelings of trust or comfort at school, a feeling that other researchers have argued is pivotal in the formation of effective and productive family-school relationships,” (Lareau 2003, 231). Ultimately, students from lower income families are not given equal attention, treatment, opportunities or guidance as those of middle class background. The “gap” between family and school is the socioeconomic background being catered to.

For example, gifted and talented programs typically attract middle class children whose parents have fought to get them into the program (Lareau 2003, 176). These programs draw an elite group of students and provides them with an enriched, challenging curriculum that working class parents are unable, or unknowing, to get their own children enrolled in.

## ROLE OF SCHOOLS

### Tracking

Here, I would like to address Gilda Ochoa's Academic Profiling: Latinos, Asian Americans, and the Achievement Gap and Vanessa Fong's Only Hope: Coming of Age Under China's One-Child Policy. Both anthropologists acknowledge America's emphasis on upward mobility to be successful and how such ideology influences children in China and Asian Americans. Another way that schools reproduce social class is through tracking, or assigning children from different class and ethnic backgrounds to different tracks. Gilda Ochoa, for instance, found that California schools operate on ethnic profiling. Ochoa recognizes the stereotype that Asian American students are highly invested in their studies, and are praised for being academically inclined and their parents are heavily involved in their education. Perhaps there is an ideology of the importance of education and attainment levels introduced by China's one-child policy that has been carried overseas which can account for the disproportionately high number of Asian Americans in high-track courses in schools. Ochoa argues that "racialized and class reputations" are used to make track decisions in high schools. Those in high track courses are allotted higher status in school and thus receive access to resources and institutional agents that support their academic progress and college preparation. However, working class

students are placed in less academically rigorous courses and their needs are less prioritized. In a society that puts great emphasis and value on SAT and standardized test scores and grade point averages, school resources are disproportionately allocated and not made available to those that need it or cannot afford it, further marginalizing student groups and fueling class divisions.

### International Students

Enrichment programs in the US today, such as the SIG program I worked with in Chicago, also attract many international students whose parents exhibit an extreme form of the American middle class parenting style, trying to pack their children's resumes with many activities and cater to their individual needs in order to get them good jobs in highly competitive Asian economies. For instance, with China's introduction into modernization and aim to be "First World" status, the government has introduced the one-child policy and ultimate decline in fertility. Once used to large families and the ability to rely on more than one child for old-age support, parents must now rely on a single child to support them. Due to such high competition for elite jobs and status, parents must heavily invest in their child's education (Fong 2004, 101). This puts wealthy families at an advantage as education level correlates with socioeconomic status (Fong 2004, 91). High parental involvement to get kids into better schools and receive private tutoring to score well on entrance exams is of the utmost importance to the entire family.

## Creativity

Additionally, artwork can be a major topic of study when examining the classroom setting. To what extent is it praised? Seen as a manifestation of self? The inner core? If it is something to simply occupy the children with? Middle class teachers emphasized creativity as an outlet for a child's subjectivity, for a child to channel their true selves and catalyze the individualization process (Kusserow 2004, 95). Structure, line, color, voice, song, design, shape, and form could all be connected to different personality traits. The teacher develops the child's self confidence by letting the child know they can do something in their own way. Middle class parents are recorded to have hired private art teachers to teach their children in their homes.

Interestingly, teachers in the preschools in Queenston, a lower income town, were working class and had not been trained using portfolios and psychologized teaching methods (Kusserow 2004, 46). The portfolios were meant to show a child's work that supposedly expressed the child's unique self more fully than a grade or report card. These teachers, however, thought it was ridiculous and believed they were doing well on their own terms. This shows how disruptive the "middle class" teaching methods are on working class students and classrooms. Academic achievement is often retranslated back into economic capital and the job market

then rewards those who excel academically. Admiring Bourdieu, “education’s most central role is the ‘function of conserving, inculcating and consecrating’ a class culture, including the cultural and symbolic capital that determine who has power in a society,” (Kusserow 2004, 32). Middle class capital is valued in schools while lower class capital is devalued. The “notion that academic performance is the crucial link to economic success” only sets back lower class students who have not been raised or conditioned similarly to middle class students, but are taught by such middle class values. The school, Kusserow argues, naturalizes and legitimates this whole process by making cultural capital look like natural talents, traits, gifts, skills or merits by making social hierarchies and the reproduction of those skills established and ratified by its sanctions, or by converting social hierarchies into academic hierarchies (Kusserow 2004, 33).

As a result, working class children are placed in the lowest educational tracks and receive failing grades, since “schools train the wealthy to take up places at the top of the economy while conditioning the poor to accept lowly status in the class structure,” (MacLeod 1987, 12). Institutions reproduce social class and do not cater to individual students of different socioeconomic backgrounds, therefore setting them up to fail.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**FIELDSITES:**  
**TWO DIFFERENT SOCIAL CLASSES**

FAIRFIELD, CT

The Summer Institute for the Gifted (SIG) has been “a leader in gifted education since 1984” with 11 residential sessions and 15 day programs in 8 states with locations at “prestigious” colleges and universities such as Princeton, Yale, and UC Berkeley. I applied to Fairfield University’s day program because it was located down the street from my house and only required a 5 minute commute every morning. Fairfield is primarily middle to upper class, with 11 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, 2 high schools, and 2 colleges. Downtown Fairfield is filled with shops and highly rated restaurants. SIG programs last three weeks and are reserved specifically for children ages 5-17 (however this program was aimed at 5-12 year olds) who can provide evidence of high academic ability and/or achievement. For example, SIG accepts as indications of being gifts that a child has successfully participated in their school’s gifted program, has scored in the gifted range on the PSAT, SAT, ACT, or SSATB, has been selected to participate in Academic Talent Searches based on standardized tests, or has scored in the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile or above in at least one section on a standardized intelligence assessment. If none of these forms of eligibility are available, two recommendation forms can be submits by



educators who are familiar with the student's academic record, performance, and potential.

A program of the National Society for the Gifted and Talented (NSGT), "the mission of SIG is to provide the highest quality education and social opportunities for academically gifted and talented students through programs designed to meet their abilities and needs." On the front page of their website, they pride themselves on "enriching minds where creativity thrives." To do so, they aim to "enrich" and "enhance" natural talents and abilities, "nurture "a child's social development, "strengthen" current skills and interests while allowing them to "explore" new areas and "acquire" new abilities in the midst of other "like-minded" peers who love learning. (Programs and Courses)

Each student selected four courses before the start of the program. Each course is designed to be innovative, thought provoking, and offer students a "curriculum beyond what is offered during the school day." Science, innovation, and technology are introduced in STEM courses that integrate science, art, technology, design, and culture. They are meant to be intriguing and fun, capturing student's interests for example, by teaching serious topics such as entrepreneurship by designing board games. The point of these courses is to give "SIG students the tools to compete in a highly competitive global environment and encourage them to pursue their passions and explore new interests, having fun and making friends along the way," (Programs and Courses). The staff selection process is "rigorous." Instructors that teach the courses are licensed educators during the normal school

year “who have experience in the topic of their courses as well as experience working with gifted and talented students.” TAs are assigned three to four classes that they will assist with each day for three weeks.

My job as a TA included attending an orientation and training day before the program began. We were given manuals and handouts about the program, and tips on how to behave with the children. The Program Director, Pete, reminded us that the children are gifted, their parents paid a lot of money for them to attend SIG, and that we should always address them kindly and keep our hands to ourselves (when we rallied the troops to get them to the dining hall, etc.).

SIG accentuates the importance of safety, emphasizing that children will “mature and develop in every element of life, develop long lasting and meaningful relationships, increase self confidence and think in divergent ways, all within a safe a secure environment at a prestigious campus.” Tammy, the program director at UChicago, constantly reminded everyone, “safety first, fun second.” SIG assures parents that their children will be supervised 24/7 and they will be able to reach the office 7 days a week. Additionally, there will be a nurse residing on campus during the duration of the program. Health, safety and supervision are a top propriety.

Marina, the math teacher I worked closely with, was an elementary school teacher for an urban, lower income, school. We met during orientation, and she was excited to be there but was unsure of how she was going to go about teaching the courses. “I can’t make a syllabus until I meet the students,” I remember her saying. Marina was given a list of topics she was required to cover but knew she needed to

get a feel for the student's interests and level of education to accurately plan out lessons. For example, the algebra class was full of eight and nine year olds but some were more advanced in math than others. I worked closely with a girl named Anya because she was having trouble adding and subtracting fractions, while a few boys across the room were already multiplying fractions and dealing with percentages. Geometry had a wider age range, and Marina knew that what Arjay, the five year old, could do might not be at the level of Kendall, the eight year old. This was the point of SIG and probably the most encouraged part of the program; students were to expand on individual skill sets by creating their own projects on topics relating to the class that they were interested in. Therefore, Arjay would make a coloring book of multiple shapes, while Kendall created a paper quilt by printing out shapes and arranging them to fit together. And Anya would create a math booklet of fractions and word problems while another boy was busy mapping out a diagram for a house. The duty of SIG is to ensure that children receive the individual attention they require. Lessons must be individually tailored because a five year old and a nine year old cannot do the same thing. This emphasis on treating children with respect and teaching them in an individualized way is consistent with the usual emphasis for middle class children.

## CHICAGO, IL

The concept of SIG at The University of Chicago was the same as Fairfield University's program, but the students ranged from nine years old to seventeen years old, and as a residential program, the students resided on campus for the full three weeks. I was assigned a group of 14 girls, all of whom were eleven and twelve years old. Ten of the girls were residential, while four girls were commuter students who arrived after breakfast. SIG residential programs greatly attracted children and families from overseas. Most of my girls traveled all the way to Chicago from China, others were from St. Louis, Michigan, Russia, Switzerland, Ohio, and the surrounding Chicago area. In addition to eight girls in my group, a majority of the camp spoke Chinese as their first language. This would pose as a challenge for instructors and TAs when teaching, but my group of girls spoke fluent English and many of which I would have never guessed English was their second language. Further, one of my girls and I were the only ones with English as their first language in my group.

On a typical day, I would wake up at 6:30am, knock on my girls' doors by 7am, and gather the troops to walk to breakfast by 7:40am. The walk to the dining hall was everybody's least favorite activity of the day because it was 15 minutes away. After breakfast, the camp gathered in the center of campus, or the quad as it was normally called, and the TAs held up signs that said what class they were in for first period. Students gathered around their designated TA, and walked to period one together. Classes were held in about five different academic buildings on

campus, including the dormitory lounges. After period one, the TAs would walk the students back to the quad where they would find their TA for period two. After period two, the kids were walked to lunch, met back in the quad, headed to period three, gathered in the quad one last time, and walked to period four. That was the end of the academic day. After period four, kids had recreational hour where they could go swimming, play basketball, relax in their dorm rooms, walk around campus playing Pokemon Go, and other similar activities. A counselor would be assigned an activity and lead it for the kids.

Once recreational hour was finished, commuters were picked up and residential students were walked to dinner. Following dinner, students had an hour of evening tutorial where they studied, did homework, or worked on projects for class. Each age group was designated to different areas according to age and gender. Counselors were close by to assist their campers or students with their work. After evening tutorial was an evening activity, such as a talent show, movie night, or counselor group craft. My group typically teamed up with Abby's group, another counselor group of young girls ages nine and ten, because Abby and I found it easier to manage and control the group when there were two of us watching out for them.

As I mentioned about Fairfield University's SIG program, UChicago aimed to cater to every child's individual needs and interests. One of my favorite examples of SIG's dedication to each child was when one of my campers, Erica, wanted so badly to perform for the camper talent show. Unfortunately, she was not able to lug her violin all the way to Chicago from Beijing, and violin was "the only thing I am

confident enough to do,” she told me. I told her I would talk to the directors and see what we could work out. I think Erica asked me three times a day for a week if we found a violin. She, as well as I, wanted nothing more than to find one for her to play for the camp. Tammy, the director, was a high school band director and incredibly excited to hear that a camper wanted to play the violin. “I want the other students to see her play,” Tammy said. She saw the importance of expanding the talent shows’ acts to not just silly musical numbers from the latest Disney movie, but to a range of musical instruments. The camp did not have a violin of it’s own to use, so she called local music stores and eventually was able to rent a violin for Erica to use. Erica used a day to practice and by the time the talent show came around, she blew the crowd away with her musical piece.

Further, Samantha, a high school student from China, brought her Chinese flute to perform at the show. The entire camp sat in awe as she played the instrument, one most of the children and staff from the US was not familiar with. Tammy was so thrilled with her performance that she invited her to perform for the parents during the closing ceremony. These were the moments that it was evident SIG aimed to introduce children to new things and expand their lives culturally.

SIG estimates that 70% of the children who attend its residential programs are American and 30% are international students. International students must submit the same eligibility documents as US students and “in addition need to demonstrate a high level of English language proficiency in speaking and writing to integrate successfully into the SIG academic program.” I found this startling since at

least three students from China in my classes at UChicago could not communicate with the instructor or I without another student who was fluent in both English and Chinese to translate for us. How were they eligible to attend the program? Other TAs and instructors were shocked to find this out; “their parents are paying thousands of dollars to send them here,” “maybe they hoped they would learn English more efficiently?” “They only speak to other students in Chinese,” “how do we teach them?” As a result, after a lesson I would walk over to Allan, one of the students who did not speak English, and try to communicate to him what to do. Ray, Allan’s friend, would translate for me. I could tell this was both difficult and frustrating for all three of us. Either way, they were able to pay tuition to attend the program.

SIG is an expensive program to attend and requires multiple documents, proof, and payment plans in order for a child to attend. NSGT is a payment of \$45.00 to become a member. SIG offers a discount for members. The application fee for residential and day programs is \$95. At UChicago, the residential program fee was \$4,295 (Yale and Princeton’s are \$5,495) and included the academic program, room and board, recreational hour programs, evening activities, Saturday field trips to Navy Pier or local museums, and Sunday activity days. The commuter program fee was \$2,795 (Yale’s is \$3,995, the cost of other residential program fees on other campuses) and only included the academic program and recreational hour programs. The day program fee at Fairfield University was \$2,295 for four courses, and \$1,098 for only two morning or only two afternoon courses. Fee reductions for every program depended on whether or not the child registered early (-\$25), was a

returning residential student (\$250), was a returning commuter student (-\$125), had a sibling enrolled as well (-\$100), or was attending a second session of SIG that summer (-\$250). There are financial assistance applications, but once funds have been distributed, SIG no longer offers them. When this is the case, a child can apply for an NSGT Board of Trustees Scholarship. Other SIG/NSGT financial assistance awards vary by campus and do not cover the total cost of a child's attendance at SIG. Assistance is offered on a first-come, first-served basis so the applications must be completed early and nonrefundable \$95 application fee included. SIG does provide a \$75 insurance coverage plan including refunds up to \$5,000 for residential students or \$4,000 for commuter students in the event that the student is unable to participate in the program due to serious injury or illness, or if a "family member suffers a sickness or injury that is not pre-existing... or if either parent of the insured is laid off." International students are automatically enrolled as part of their \$250 international student fee. (Programs and Courses)

## HAMILTON HILL DISTRICT

### Hamilton Hill Arts Center

On the center's website, it describes the after school program as a place where children go to learn about the music and culture of African American



heritage. “Our mission is to ensure the healthy development of youth by promoting their involvement in the visual, performing, and English language arts, as well as a unique focus on African and African American art. The Hamilton Hill Arts Center (HHAC) blends African and African-American arts and culture with educational and character-building activities, making the center a unique resource in the Capital Region. Founded in 1968 as a drop-in arts center for at-risk youth, our program offerings have expanded to meet the growing needs of our community. We bring beauty, culture, and hope to an inner-city neighborhood and the entire region,” (Hamilton Hill Arts Center).

Upon my first steps into the arts center, it was obvious it was simply a place that children can go to after school when their parents were not yet home. HHAC is open 10:00 am – 3:00 pm Monday-Friday and the afterschool program is held from 3:00 pm to 5:30 pm, or until the last child is picked up. Val, the director of the program, said her aim for the program was to keep the children off the streets of Hamilton Hill, away from the dangers that came with it. Hamilton Hill is a low-income neighborhood located about five minutes from Union College. The cars are older, smaller, and no one stops to look both ways- there are hardly any stop signs. There were men that hung out on corners and stared at me with interest as I drove by each day. Around 3:30, there are children everywhere walking along the sidewalks; some are with parents managing multiple children, holding some in their arms and allowing some to run ahead. Mothers are talking to each other more than watching their children in the street- there seems to be an understanding that

people can hang out in the streets and cars must stop for them. Other women sit or stand on their front porches and watch cars go by, perhaps waiting for their children to walk home from school. Children travel in packs without adult supervision

The HHAC is incredibly community based and prides itself for reaching out with such few hands. "We serve over 300 at-risk youth a year at the Arts Center. We also coordinate and host exhibits in our art gallery and sell African and African-American crafts and products. We serve hundreds more through our Arts in Education Program at a number of local and regional schools. In addition, thousands more are served through our regional celebrations of Kwanzaa (at the NYS Museum), (a three day festival held at Schenectady's Central Park) and Culturefest. This is done with a staff of five. Volunteers and many community volunteers augment our staff." Further, the HHAC pioneered the celebration of Kwanzaa in the Capital Region, partnering with several organizations to create a seven-day observance celebration, each day at a different location. The day at HHAC included a candle lighting, a speech made by a Schenectady High School student, a drum performance by a HHAC drum instructor, an Afro-Cuban influence band performance, a singer, and poetry read by several poets. Moreover, there is an annual Hamilton Hill Arts Center Gala Celebration with entertainment by children, a silent auction, and music and dance performances. It is entirely run by the help of volunteers, sponsors, and donations. (Hamilton Hill Arts Center)

My job was to keep the kids busy, help them finish their homework, and assist them in arts and crafts. Each day they would start with a snack, do their

homework, and finish with an art project. Children ranged from about five years old all the way to high school. The site described the after school program as a place children can explore the arts of the African Diaspora and other cultures, with classes in painting and drawing, pottery, photography, and printmaking and visiting artists. “These special guests show the children that art is a valuable channel of expression and can be a lifelong hobby, and can even become a career,” (Hamilton Hill Arts Center). It is obvious they aim to create a place that children can expand their worlds and create goals and attain aspirations. Unfortunately, during my time at the center, each afternoon was devoted to homework and drawing, occasionally a trip to the arts and crafts room in the basement to draw on pumpkins for Halloween, but never in relation to African culture. Towards the end of my internship, Mrs. Val mentioned that the arts center functions off donations and that none of the children have to pay to be there since some can only afford to give a dollar each year. The summer program requests \$35 but accepts donations to defray the cost. The school year after school program is \$5 for the year but contrary to what the site says the HHAC requires, this fee can be paid in donations. The arts center accepts whatever the family can afford. The program and other Hamilton Hill Arts Center Programs are partially funded by a Community Development Block Grant, New York State Council on the Arts, and The Schenectady County Youth Bureau.

The HHAC offers music programs such as steel drums and choir. “Students receive one-on-one lessons and are given incentives to practice and participate in our annual Music Recital, held at the end of the year.” Other activities include field

trips to local performances, workshops and visiting artists. “*A place for Jazz* offers workshops which give students and parents the opportunity to meet, listen and learn from talented Jazz artists, who share their experiences and offer insight into the world of jazz,” (Hamilton Hill Arts Center).

Families can also participate in Umoja African Dance and Drumming groups that meet on Saturdays, but adults are not permitted unless accompanied by their child or children. “Umoja is unique in that it stresses family participation during Saturday rehearsals; parents and siblings are encouraged to learn alongside the children, further promoting Umoja's message of unity and teamwork. The group performs approximately fifteen times each year and performing opportunities are available,” (Hamilton Hill Arts Center). The HHAC aims to exhibit the creativity and spirit of the African and African-American cultures. “Through African dance and drumming, children (and the group as a whole) serve as role models and cultural ambassadors.” There is an emphasis child involvement and on how the programs will benefit children and connect them to their community.

Upon researching the HHAC online, I found a description about the adult programs they offer. “The Hamilton Hill Arts Center offers various adult workshops each fall and winter, including African Drumming and Senior Painting. Previous offerings have included Mask Making and Udu Drum Making. These adult workshops are fun and entertaining, with a focus on the cultural and artistic aspect of our mission. While there are costs associated with many of these workshops, these funds are used for supplies, instructors and generally benefit the Arts Center and the

programs we provide for children. The workshops are a great opportunity to meet like-minded individuals with shared interests, are great for adults of all age levels and skills, and are open to all," (Hamilton Hill Arts Center). "Like-minded" stood out to me, as SIG also prides itself on connecting "like-minded" individuals.

The arts center has it's own computer lab.

"The Joseph E. Bowman Computer Lab allows children and adults to develop skills in the technology field through projects using graphic arts. In addition, the Art and Technology program offers exposure to the possibilities that computers offer and allows for technological exploration and career development opportunities. In addition to basic computer skills, we focus on the use of computers for the development of arts skills. Students can gain the skills for a variety of careers including TV, film, advertising, animation, multimedia presentations, web design and music composition. Activities include specific projects directed by our staff, as well as activities that our youth develop on their own. The computer lab is both PC and Mac-based. It also supports our other activities such as creative writing, music composition and research. □The computers used in the Art and Technology lab were donated by 100 Black Men and the Albany Internal Revenue Service office, GE Elfun Society. This program is also supported by The United Way of Schenectady County.

The computer lab has also received support from New York State legislative grants (Senator Hugh Farley and Assemblyman George Amedore).” (Hamilton Hill Arts Center)

It is obvious how important donations and help from New York State is to keep the center up and running. However, during computer time, the children played games online or watched music videos on YouTube. Rarely did they listen to the volunteers asking them to play an educational game.

Costs of each program are negotiable. The most expensive workshop is storytelling combined with drum making, which costs \$400, which includes materials. Drum making alone is \$350. African dance, drumming, pottery, and mask making each cost \$250. Steel drum band costs \$350 and storytelling alone is the least expensive workshop, costing \$150. The space for which these activities take place can be rented out for meetings and events, and inside the center is the Jerry Burrell Gallery that holds exhibitions throughout the year, and the Kuumba Krafts Boutique which sells clothing, jewelry, wood carvings, handbags, greeting cards, soaps, incense, scented oils and more. The center is always looking for volunteers to manage the boutique, promote and fundraise for the center, teach art, and assist at special events. Always on their wish list is art supplies, office supplies, computers and notebooks, books and DVDs, musical instruments, microphones, shelving units, printers, and amplifiers.

The arts center is very much a community center where everyone feels safe to leave their children. It is as if there is an unspoken rule that no one touches the art center. The site says, "we offer a safe and creative haven, with positive role models. Youth are supported and encouraged in a lifestyle that fosters positive development. A lifestyle that will help each individual discover and express his or her own uniqueness. Youth who come to the Arts Center are encouraged to develop their artistic potential, learning many important life lessons in the process." I had no doubt that these children are so cared for (whether by the center or family or both) that the community protects them. There are rumors that drug deals go on down the street and that it is a very rough neighborhood, but being in the center, I can tell that the adults work to make sure the kids stay out of trouble and stay safe. Mrs. Val eventually told me how grateful they are to have Union students at the center to be role models for the children. One little girl told me she wants to go to Union and is excited to get her big sister in the Big Brothers, Big Sisters program (the same day she asked me if I have been to jail).

Throughout my research, I was mainly surrounded by generational poverty. Children from all over Hamilton Hill attend the arts center and it is evident that the poverty they face is a result of what they have grown up in and the environment their parents have also grown up in. For example, young mothers who look to be about my age of 20, pick up their children from the center. Teen pregnancy is a societal norm that their mothers experienced, as reflected in the children's grandparents, who look no older than my own parents at 50. Children look up to

parents as role models, therefore, there is a higher probability that they will follow in their footsteps and teen pregnancy will continue to persist. There isn't anyone to warn them of the financial responsibilities and possible issues that eventually contribute to poverty.

In more extreme cases, the circumstances in which a child grew up in could lead them down a dangerous path. In their 12 year long ethnographic fieldwork on homelessness and drug abuse, Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg conclude, "with only a few exceptions, all of the Edgewater homeless grew up poor. Most of their childhood homes were violent, and many had alcoholic parents," (Bourgois 118). The homeless people they interacted with come from difficult backgrounds that caused them to end up on the street.

Those in generational poverty are usually offered different and often limited resources that could potentially help them out of poverty if available. Coping strategies, support groups, and motivation are lacking when the environment they are in can easily suck them back into a life of crime, drug abuse, and poverty. The arts center is a non-profit cultural arts center. It is a positive resource that promotes the development of youth by focusing on African and African-American Art through educational and character building activities. Part of its mission is to "bring hope to an inner-city neighborhood." It is a place devoted to children and a place where they can learn about art and music they may not get to learn elsewhere. It would probably become more of an educational experience for me than for the kids, as I



observed their interactions with me as well as the hierarchy of respect in the arts center.

### COCOA House

Children of Our Community Open to Achievement, or COCOA House, is an afterschool program aimed at at-risk youth in the Hamilton Hill and Vale Districts of Schenectady, NY. Their mission is to provide free academic enrichment and sustainable life skills in a safe after school environment for inner city youth. “Our grassroots project began in a small church basement and offered homework assistance and rewarded children with hot cocoa and popcorn once assignments were complete, hence the namesake COCOA house. Support from the community and volunteers facilitated the acquisition and renovation of a dilapidated former drug house next door into our kid-friendly learning center,” (COCOA House). The COCOA House focuses on child-centered education and practices found in Montessori, free school, Waldorf/Steiner, and homeschool settings. Thus providing individually catered assistance to each child. Through hands on activities and learning, they hope to have a garden and nature center that students can learn about the importance of sustainable living practices, environmental awareness, and understanding of natural cycles.

There are almost always fundraisers being held on nearby Union College campus and in the community for the COCOA House. Tabling in the campus center

and GoFundMe pages are hard to miss and Blaze Pizza has hosted fundraisers to support the kids at COCOA House. Other online groups and flyers would read, "COCOA House needs your help! COCOA House is a tutoring center in Hamilton Hill, the poorest neighborhood in Schenectady, NY. A Union College student established the program back in 1996 as a place where Union students provide one-on-one tutoring to children. The COCOA House enables youth to stay off of the streets and attain academic success by encouraging and helping them with their schoolwork and offering a full meal. For some kids their only chance to eat after school is while at COCOA House.

Operating on 100% volunteers, COCOA House is kept running by Union College. Although during my field experience I did not meet students from other schools, the COCOA House website says that University of Albany, and Hudson Valley Community College students and community volunteers provide daily academic tutoring and homework assistance as well. Volunteers attend when they can, and there are almost always enough volunteers for each child to have one college student provide one-on-one tutoring. Clubs routinely visit the house and shape lessons according to them, such as the Biology Club and the Engineering Club. With the help of students, the COCOA House is often the center of publicity on Facebook, whether for fundraisers, or to highlight a day's lesson. For example, "At COCOA House, the day's lesson focused on the coordinate plane. Volunteers worked with the kids to plot and identify points in a game of Jeopardy! Afterwards, the kids

and volunteers relaxed with some hot cocoa and played a rousing match of Connect Four!”

Cocoa House aims to improve their academic performances. There are penalties for arriving late, as it is not a drop by center but a weekly commitment. I explored the house my first day as a volunteer and felt as if this was a place that children must love to go; motivational posters plastered the walls, the study spaces were comfortable and decorated according to subject. It felt like a second home specifically meant for the eight children I would meet.

Lessons are brief, but the following activities are hands on and engaging for the children. For example, one day the children learned about the parts of a flower, and proceeded to create their own sprouts using lima beans, paper towels, and water. Ashley, the president of COCOA House, emphasized to me the importance of trying to keep the children interested and devoted to academics. Union College provided role models for the children to learn about the importance of studying, working hard, and enjoying learning. Volunteers visited the house because they wanted to be there and were passionate about the program. The students would feed off this determination and hopefully apply it to their studies and school days.

Initially, the program was divided by age groups, each attending once a week. Students in grades 3 and 4 attended on Tuesdays and grades 5 and 6 attend on Thursdays 3:15pm-5:30pm. Eventually, every student would attend twice a week on Tuesday and Thursdays. Fridays were reserved for enrichment activities and special events (i.e., field trips, cooking class, gardening workshop, etc.) They would start

with homework, then move on to snack while the Program Director guided students in an activity or facilitated a discussion that focused on the importance of various aspects concerning personal life such as fitness, hygiene, nutrition, finances, spirituality, education, awareness, work ethic, and relationships, etc. Homework and general studies time was for students to begin their assignments. If the student did not have an assignment to complete, tutors referred to student's academic profile to work on areas of high need. Tutors academically coached and engaged students in activities that addressed their individual needs according to grade level and state standards by using flashcards, workbooks, and textbooks. Following this activity was a group activity. "At this time, students will be guided into an activity with their tutors that focuses on developing at least one of the following qualities: a clear and effective communicator, a responsible and involved citizen, a collaborative and quality worker, a creative and practical problem solver, an integrative and informed thinker, a self- directed & life-long learner," (COCOA House). All of which I would assume parents strived to teach their children but were unable to do so themselves.

Program highlights online emphasize mentoring as a way volunteers spend time with individual students by speaking with them and participating in activities that create close bonds such as field trips, social activities, or special classes. Volunteers are believed to teach children life skills such as cooking, critical thinking, conflict resolution, public speaking, money budgeting, and energy conservation. Special outings for children include visiting a college campus once a month to

participate in games and events that expose them to life on the college campuses.

“College students serve as role models and mentor young minds. Seeing is believing, therefore, the more exposure to campus life the students receive, the more the students can visualize themselves attending college,” (COCOA House).

In short, I examined four programs, two framed as summer enrichment programs for gifted children, whose high fees meant that most of the children who attended came from upper middle class families, and two from a poor neighborhood in Schenectady whose stated purpose was to teach good life skills and give hope to children growing up in dangerous neighborhoods. In the following chapters I will show how in some ways the programs were more similar than their goals would indicate, with a large amount of time spent keeping children occupied and happy in both programs. I will also show however that the programs continued in the process of inculcating class based assumptions about self and society with upper middle class children given the message that they were special and needed personalized treatment while Hamilton Hill children were told that they just needed to avoid danger. But I will also show that the Hamilton Hill programs had many more positive messages for the children; they went beyond keeping children safe to encourage a positive sense of pride and to expand children’s aspirations.

## **CHAPTER FOUR THE WORKING CLASS: HAMILTON HILL ARTS CENTER**

Scholars have suggested that inner city children from poor neighborhoods are socialized into a hard defensive individualism, which focuses on surviving in harsh conditions and resisting bad influences but does not necessarily give them the interactional skills that are valued among middle class professionals, thus capping their career trajectories. Children themselves may see few role models who have succeeded through education so perceive working hard in school as selling out.

Adults keep a firm authority line and do things like teasing and shaming children to toughen them up. Parents who are overstressed focus on "accomplishing natural growth" rather than building a child's resume through varied after school activities.

In the Hamilton Hill arts center I found some of these ideas to be true. There was an emphasis on just protecting children and keeping them safe over promoting individual "flowering" of potential. There were clear lines of authority and straightforward ways of disciplining children. But I also found the Hamilton Hill Arts Center to focus on keeping together a strong community to protect its children, involving family ties extending across generations. Children in turn were very focused on looking after younger siblings. I also found that the Center went beyond just keeping children safe to attempting to promote a sense of pride in their community and ethnic identity and encouraging individual creativity through the arts. This center, like many programs in inner city areas, also brought together

children with nearby college students and with more successful members of the community in order to provide role models of people who had succeeded through education.

*Hamilton Hill is its own small world in the middle of Schenectady, literally at the top of a hill. The cars are older model sedans and hatchbacks with the exception of a few black, tinted Audis driving down the street every once in a while. There are few road signs and where a stop sign would usually be, it is a traffic free for all. The first sign one sees driving up the hill is "This is a drug free school zone." Most streets are one way so I had to wind in and out of Paige Street and Van Voast Street on the way to the Hamilton Hill Arts Center. Many houses have beat up porches with cracked wood and chipped paint. Toys are scattered throughout the small lawns and are piled up on porches. Women sit or stand on their front porches, simply watching cars drive by, perhaps waiting for their older children to walk home from school. Some have young children playing in the sidewalk on scooters or play cars. Houses are close enough together that neighbors stand outside and talk from their front doors. Garages aren't used to house cars. Instead, cars line the streets and garages act as storage space. Young men in snapbacks and extra large shirts stand and mingle on corners and stare at me as I drive by.*

*By 3:30 PM, there are children everywhere walking along the sidewalks. Adults are holding babies in one arm, and grabbing younger children's arms with another hand to keep them out of the street. Other mothers talk to each other with a child in hand and watch five other children on the street. There seems to be an understanding that the street is a playground and cars stop for all pedestrians. Three boys that look to be about 10 years old with backpacks larger than their bodies are walking down Van Voast holding cell phones. Children are traveling in packs as they walk from the school, through Jerry Burrell Park and into the neighborhood.*

*Mike, Kylie and I pulled up into the arts center in my Subaru Legacy, the only maroon colored car on the block. We were surprised to be the only car in the lot. Didn't Ms. Val drive? What about parents dropping kids off? The building is made of brick with murals in black, red, white, and green paint on the sides. The lot has potholes and weeds throughout. The front door is small, and it is hard to tell if it is the main entrance. Walking up three steps, we opened the door to a small hallway and about 15 kids staring at us. They sat at fold-up tables and chairs, split up into groups of teenagers and little kids. One shouted, "Ms. Val there are people here!" Some were excited to see new faces, some were just curious and kept an eye on us as we walked toward the lady sitting on a bench on the side of the room. She seemed to be in charge because kids*



*were talking loudly and walking back and forth from the tables to her. Right away she told us her name is Ms. Val and asked if Professor Witsoe sent us. "Oooh I love when he sends me kids!" She was definitely excited to have help coming her way. Ms. Val has been with the center before she was even old enough to join. It started as a two-room place and she would sit outside on the steps while her older siblings went inside. One day, she snuck in and "once you sneak in, you can never sneak out," she said. From volunteering after school, to becoming an art aid, and then an art assistant to the after school director, Ms. Val has spent her whole life at the center. So much so that the mayor declared a Valarie Lewis day in her honor.*

## INNER-CITY CHILDREN

### Hard Individualism

Elijah Anderson's Code of the Street stresses the importance of respect in an inner city area in Pennsylvania. How one dresses, speaks, and behaves directly determines one's social hierarchy:

In inner-city neighborhoods, verbal prowess is important for establishing identity, but physicality is a fairly common way of

asserting oneself. Physical assertiveness is also unambiguous. If you punch someone out, if you succeed in keeping someone from walking down your block, “you did it.” It is a fair accomplishment, and the evidence that you prevail is there for all to see. (Anderson 1999, 68).

The streets require you to establish a rapport by “physically campaigning for respect.” The street is where people learn boundaries and communicate with one another. Anderson examines this “code” as a result of racial stereotypes, drug use, and lack of jobs. He argues that an individual’s self worth, as well as safety, are based on the amount of respect he gains from the community, since earning respect from outside of the neighborhood is believed to be next to impossible due to their low economic class, and stigma of race and violence. They are stuck in a world that inhibits their ability to aspire to the “American Dream,” and as a result learn to cope through different means of living in their low-income neighborhood.

At the Hamilton Hill Arts Center, children are quick to judge when someone does something wrong, tattling at the first sign of a problem. They kick, yell, tease, and hit each other constantly, but their punishment is kept to a minimum; perhaps a strong “sit down!” from the program director, but there is no time out and no call home. Through all of this, I have never witnessed a child cry during my time at the center. According to Kusserow’s American Individualisms, these signs of aggression from the children and the direct commands from authority afterwards are characteristics of a hard individualism, typical for lower class communities.

Being tough is a positive quality; children in Hamilton Hill grow up learning to not show weakness so that they don't get taken advantage of, as well as learn to defend themselves by not depending on adults to solve all of their problems. Children grow up with a certain cultural system, and parents with material means to protect their children from violence do not worry about the safety or negative influence of their neighborhood.

One day at the arts center, Shania, a little girl about five years old, asked me if I had ever been to jail, because she had. I told her I had never been, and she continued to describe the police as "angry and they take your hands and cuff them behind your back very rough." Then, she asked if Mike, the other student from Union College working at the center, was my friend. I said yes, and she asked me why I am friends with a boy.

"They are nice," I told her.

"Do you like black boys?"

"Yes, of course," and she asked me why.

"I like anyone who is nice."

At the time I did not know why Shania was asking me these questions. I assumed she was being a typical curious first grader, but why would she choose those questions to ask me? I realized that while I was growing up, I was not familiar with violence, or issues with the police or race. Shania is an African American girl living in a low-income neighborhood plagued by violence and police cars each day. At such a young age, she has been exposed to these things most middle class

children never have had to experience. “Hard individualism emphasized a tough, resilient self that was hard enough to protect itself from violence, poverty, and misfortune,” and the children at the arts center have had experiences that shape their view of the world in relation to hard individualism (Kusserow 2004, 57).

### Discipline and Authority

Kusserow argues that working class families try to socialize their children to have strong values and to be tough in order to stand up for themselves and resist pressures in inner city neighborhoods. Adults emphasize their own authority and straightforwardly tell children both to obey adults and to be self-sufficient. I saw some of these patterns at the Arts center but also noticed an interesting pattern whereby older siblings looked out for and took charge of younger ones. Older siblings would assert their authority in much the same way as adults. So kids were not only socialized to toughness and obedience but were encouraged to take ownership of values and to take charge of younger siblings in an empowering way.

Parents instill strong moral values in their children by directly telling them what to do to make them tough individuals, so that they have the ability to resist negative temptations. Parents clearly regard the neighborhood as dangerous because they need such tough outer shells to survive, and the arts center is a place where kids will be protected. Here, children are encouraged to work out their own problems instead of whining to Ms. Val. This conforms to what Lareau and

Kusserow say, but they miss an element: it is not just hard defensive socialization that takes place in Hamilton Hill. There are also some hard offensive, positive values beyond defending themselves, and valuing their part in the community and looking after other family members reflects this.

## Values

Naji is the youngest of the eight siblings. He is 4 years old and he loves WMA video games and is quiet in large groups of people, but when you get him talking about his brothers and sisters, he can talk forever. I have noticed these kids internalize family as a major value. One day, Naji went outside by himself, and he ignored me when I asked him to come back inside. Jamiah is the middle child in the family of eight and she watches out for her little brothers at the center. She went outside, picked Naji up, and made sure he was okay. She made him feel better when the older girls and I couldn't. Jamiah is only nine years old with four older siblings and already takes on a leadership role in her family. Siblings have each other's backs and listen to each other before they listen to me. She has a lot of responsibility and is tough at a young age.

After my first day of getting familiar with the layout of the center, I began to interact with the kids and get a feel for the cliques and attitudes that I would be surrounded by. The older girls who are about 13 and 14-years-old love to sit in the corners with their backpacks still on their backs and gossip. They wear tight shirts,

jeans, and usually have their phones out. When Ms. Val tells everyone to sit in a circle, the older boys push the limits and refuse to listen. All of the older kids don't tend to interact with the younger kids. When they do, it is to scold the younger children and teach them their definition of respect.

Older siblings take charge of younger ones and use the same styles that Kusserow describes as typical of parents and teachers. Just one week after I had been at the center, I would walk in and kids would swarm me with hugs. Meliqui, a kid I had only seen from afar, walked over and hugged me before I could even put my backpack down. It was out of the blue and unlike him because he is usually very negative and against being at the arts center. He doesn't like interacting with anyone, but the fact that he felt comfortable enough to approach me was rewarding. He asked me for help to make pictures, glue paper together, and make fortune tellers. He had also set the stage for another little girl I was unfamiliar with to come up and hug me. I have noticed that these kids follow one another and stick together within age groups. Their older siblings and cousins often boss them around, but it is always a matter of teaching them respect. The older kids yell at the younger ones to "stop yelling, it is disrespectful," which seems ironic, but it works for them. Older sisters discipline their younger siblings and teach them not to interrupt them and to take their seats. They dissect little things children do, watching their every move and teaching them right from wrong, leaving little room to mess up in the slightest way. I find this interesting. There isn't a moment to ask what happened and get the

full story- Ms. Val and the older kids go straight to reprimanding them and the young ones accept it and move on.

Naji and Jamiah are the latest few in their family, and often talk in admiration about their older sister, Jules, who is too old to attend any more. When it comes to relationships, family bonds are presented strongest. Cousins often butt heads but they only push each other's buttons because they can't get away with it with anyone else. Family is the only concrete aspect, I believe, in the kids' lives. They are at the center because they have members looking out for their well being and actively trying to improve their lives. Siblings aggressively teach each other respect and good habits. Family is a major value in Hamilton Hill; family comes first and they trust each other more than anyone else. They look out for each other, especially the youngest children. Such strong protection and guidance conditions children to avoid the negative influences of the streets. While siblings fight most often, they teach each other how to behave and defend themselves without adult intervention.

Naji and Jamiah are familiar with loyalty and trust within their family, and "the family as an institution is a crucial network for resources and for the reproduction of cultural and ideological values, but it is also often a crucible for violence," (Bourgois 1995, 207). Other people on the streets know violence, abuse, addiction, and instability, especially more so when their relatives or siblings have known such things. When it comes to asking the kids about their families, I must suspend what I have grown up to know so that I can understand where they are coming from. Growing up, it was an unspoken rule that I would attend college. It

was what was expected of me when growing up in Fairfield County. While talking to Shania, what I was familiar with was inapplicable. She asked me, “have you gone to jail?” as if it was inevitable or if I hadn’t, when would I? In generational poverty, there are different factors that drive certain functions and social norms. I may have a close relationship with my brother, but we have never resorted to violence in order to protect each other, which is an action familiar to street life and portraying a tough image to survive the streets.

### Protecting Children

Lareau and Kusserow suggest that there is a primary concern with protecting children from a dangerous environment in the inner city. I did find that the center wanted to protect children but also found a positive sense of building community ties rather than just a strategy of keeping kids out of trouble and teaching them to be tough. Furthermore, rather than focusing on just toughness, I found the center tried to build in children a positive sense of pride in community and identity.

Brothers and sisters have each other’s backs, but the neighborhood values the kids of the community as well. It is very normal for children to come and go from the arts center as they pleased. Naji could too, if he wanted, but Jamiah would have to walk him home. Most of the children live two houses or so down from the arts center. Ms. Val told me the neighborhood watches out for kids; it is safe for them to walk home because as a community, the kids are protected. People are always



sitting on their front porch with their youngest children playing on big wheels on the sidewalks, or just chatting across the narrow lawn to their neighbors. As a community, children are looked after, to make sure they get home safe, and stay out of trouble. They are the future and most adults are there to make sure they continue on a path without violence, drugs, and issues with the law.

### WHY THEY ARE HERE

Those in generational poverty are usually offered different and often limited resources that could potentially help them out of poverty if available. Coping strategies, support groups, and motivation are lacking when the environment they are in can easily suck them back into a life of crime, drug abuse, and poverty. The arts center is a non-profit cultural arts center. It is a positive resource that promotes the development of youth by focusing on African and African-American Art through educational and character building activities. Part of its mission is to “bring hope to an inner-city neighborhood.” It is a place devoted to children and a place where they can learn about art and music they may not get to learn elsewhere.

Ms. Val is a phenomenal woman who arrives at 2:30 pm every day and doesn't leave until 6 pm. She devotes every day to the children and earns their respect just by running the after school program they all love. As an important resource that allows for extracurricular activities for the kids and a place to

congregate after school instead of the streets, it enforces positive work habits and social interactions, and kids enjoy the special attention they receive at the arts center.

Parents want what is best for their children, and therefore an enrichment program that offers opportunities at little to no cost at all is ideal for those living in Hamilton Hill.

### Family and Community

Ms. Val once told me “those two are brothers, and there are six others that have come through here.” They have three older siblings that don’t attend the arts center anymore but three others that do. Ms. Val said she had most of the children’s parents and even some grandparents that have attended the arts center. When she says, “I am going to call your grandfather,” the kids automatically calm down. She knows their entire families because they have all stayed in or around Hamilton Hill all of their lives. Those without siblings have cousins at the center; everyone is related to someone else in the neighborhood. Families maintain the tradition of sending their children to the arts center.

I felt like exploring the center one day, so I found myself down the hall and in the main arts and crafts room. Craft supplies and books were everywhere. Tables were lined up in two rows, kids’ creations were hanging from the ceiling and just like Ms. Val’s office desk, her craft room desk was just as cluttered with papers. Ms.

Val sent Monet, Shania's 12-year-old sister, downstairs to help me find tape to keep wires hidden. She knew exactly where the tape was in the desk. The kids are in the center every day, practically living there, and so it is no wonder they know where everything is placed.

The children are lucky to have people promoting their well being and trying to help them stay on successful paths. Children grow up, appreciate the arts center, and send their own children to it so they have the same opportunities and protection as they did. The arts center becomes a second home to each of them.

The Hamilton Hill Arts Center is very much a community center where everyone feels safe to leave their children. Ms. Val describes it as "one of the safest havens of the community." Vale Cemetery is down the street and there is a lot of drug trafficking and activity there. Up and down Hamilton Hill, there are gangs of men and deals going on. On the sidewalk right before the arts center is a memorial for a recently shot victim. There is a big box with different kinds of alcohol in it and the letter C in flowers on the telephone pole. Amidst everything around it, it is as if there is an unspoken rule that no one touches the arts center. After being in the center for one day, I got the sense that these kids are profoundly cared for and looked after. The community is working to make sure the children stay out of trouble and stay safe. Having this venue in the middle of a very rough neighborhood felt comforting to me knowing there is a program that reaches out to at-risk children and that their families are trying to protect their kids from dangers of the street. The center "has always been a drop in center," which means nobody will be turned away.

It relies on grants for funding and while there is a membership fee, most families do not pay. "If you can pay, you pay, or give a dollar all year... it beats nothing."

Programs such as this offer so much to children and to people in general. While the Hamilton Hill Arts Center is simply an after school program, other programs serve similar beneficial purposes. Robert, a previous drug abuser Elijah Anderson meets in Code of the Street, joined three other men in recovery and supported each other to be decent and get off the streets after prison. Ms. Val is the kids' mentor while Robert had Herman, an old head who had respect in the neighborhood but a positive force in the community. He served as their mentor by simply making them clean up parking lots. Additionally, he helped change their lives around and taught them how to be entrepreneurs. Without this kind of mentorship and guidance, Robert wouldn't have had the chance or support to leave his drug friends who wanted him back in the game after he got out of prison.

These programs do not just serve as a sanctuary away from life at home but also provide guidance on healthy, positive life paths. Surprisingly, a correctional facility had "everything you wanted up there" according to Carter, a homeless man living in a camp in Edgewater (Bourgeois 1995, 134). Life at home was so violent and difficult that he praised the facility for being beautiful, singing to him on his birthday, and feeding him three meals a day. Facilities that treat people like this and show them positive behaviors and mutual respect make significant impacts on lives. It is the streets, environments, and people that, without continuous support, can sweep someone back up into the violence.

Government funds social programs for at-risk youth that show and teach them the business field and keep them on track. But once funding ends, people go back to the street life. It is a dangerous cycle. While lower class and middle class families instill different qualities in children that they believe they will need to be successful in life, parents in Hamilton Hill recognize the overall educational system's relation to cultural capital. They try their best to get their children into extracurricular programs. They know that the Hamilton Hill Arts Center provides extra opportunities and tutoring to kids, and can help promote children's ability to be competitive in the future, in a society where success is based on merit.

### Protection

As I previously mentioned, residents of Hamilton Hill look out for the children walking along the streets to and from their homes. The Hamilton Hill Arts Center is the heart of the community and the base for protection and hope. "The community is surrounded by bad vibes, they know what weed smells like," Ms. Val told me in our interview, "some of their cousins have been shot, they know this at their age... They don't get to be kids all the time, they have to act like adults, they think they are older than they are... I have to say 'don't talk to me like that.'" The arts center acts as protection from the dangers of the surrounding neighborhood, and perhaps aims to hold on to the child's innocence just a little longer. Ms. Val tells me that most of the children here do not like the violence or guns. "Parents sell

drugs but the kids are so far removed from it and never know their parents are in a click in it... It is how parents teach their kids," she says. Where they put their children influences how the child will grow up. Therefore, a child isn't exposed to so much danger if they are put in good schools and programs like the arts center, which aims to ensure the healthy development of at-risk youth. Regardless of whether their parents are mixed up in drugs or the like, children at the arts center are put there to avoid going down the same path as their parents and "promote their involvement in the visual, performing, and English language arts, as well as a unique focus on African and African American art," (Hamilton Hill Arts Center).

Additionally, the arts center's afterschool program attracts children whose parents are not yet home by the time school is let out. One day, Naji, five years old, said to Ms. Val, "I'm doing good in school!" and Ms. Val responded, "I'm proud of you and your mom will be too!" Naji walked away and Ms. Val told me that their father is in a nursing home and used to walk with them home from school. They have more freedom now than when he was around, especially when "their mother remarried and is having kid number nine." The arts center is now Naji and his siblings' go-to spot after school, keeping them from wandering the streets until their mom is home.

The Hamilton Hill Arts Center pulls together a community of families who help look after the children and has done so over a couple of generations. The center is cementing the community to look after it's kids while simultaneously helping kids to feel pride in who they are as community and ethnic group members.

## Cost

Perhaps the most important aspect of the Hamilton Hill Arts Center that attracts neighborhood children is its attainable fees. Some of the children simply just walk in when they want to, “it has always been a drop in center,” Ms. Val said. Whether you live in the area or are commuting from Albany, if you can get to the center, you can attend. Parents must register their children for grants and important information regarding their children. There is a membership fee, but nobody is turned away. Most of the families do not pay because certain grants are specially used for their membership. “If you can pay you can pay, or give a dollar all year and say ‘I’m working on it’ it beats nothing,” but run only on donations and an endowment, the center is in “financial ruins,” as it waits for grants. The previous executive director lost the grant, which put the center in a bad financial state. Still, no one is turned away. Further, during the summer, children who attend during the school year are able to attend the center’s summer program for free. Hamilton Hill Arts Center makes it easy for the community to place their children in the programs that it offers, greatly attracting low-income families who could otherwise not afford such opportunities for their children.

## INTERACTIONS WITH AUTHORITY

*The arts center loves all the volunteers they can get to watch the kids and play with them. It takes a whole team to wrestle a group of 15 kids, who range from 5-14 years old. Having additional support is a relief for Ms. Val because every child isn't constantly bothering her for paper, scissors, or snacks. It was easy for me to take on a leadership role at the center. I believe it was due to the children being drawn to us as volunteers. They are infinitely curious and willing to make new friends. I am already 5-year-old Shania's best friend. There is a sigh of relief from Ms. Val when I walk through the door and get dragged away to a table by three kids at a time. They focus all of their attention on me. This contributes to a calmer, and saner, environment for everyone. As small as it may seem to some, it is so important that I draw pictures for them, let them braid my hair, and distract them from fighting with each other.*

*One day, Ms. Val brought us into her office, which connects to the gallery. Papers are everywhere and the office has an old, peach paint job. As she tried to talk to us and document our information, kids would walk in as if they knew where everything was and there were no boundaries. Interestingly, Ms. Val trusted them as they explored her office. When she walked back into the main room, she sat at the bench and never stood back up. Everyday she controls the kids from one spot and even from across the room, they listen to and respect her. Every single child and adult that walked by her said "Hi Ms. Val." Her presence is known and no child seemed to challenge her authority when she told them to sit down, be quiet, or stop arguing with each other.*



The way in which the children at the arts center behave towards me is dramatically different than the way they behave towards Ms. Val and listen to her. Both of us are greeted with an abundance of hugs and there is little evidence of personal space, but when it comes to who is in charge, they view me as someone closer to their age, such as a friend, and Ms. Val as the authoritative figure.

For example, they are fascinated with my hair. I was making a fortune teller for a little girl named Ayana and all of a sudden, four kids were playing with different sections of hair on my head. Monet tried making me a (painful) braid, but it didn't hold. I thought it was so cool that she wanted to try it out, though. She loves asking me for advice on Nick Jonas, nail polish color, and hip hop songs, but mostly likes asking about my boyfriend and looking at pictures and games on my phone. Similarly, I was helping a little girl finish her homework while two other girls were braiding my hair and fascinated about Union College, my roommate, and what it is like living in a sorority house. I found that talking to kids about my life as well as their own lives placed me on an equal level, and I bonded with the older girls more than Mike could. They gave him sass and ignore him when he tries to get them to behave, but they look up to me. Being able to bond so closely with them did assist in getting their attention and controlling their behavior, but they were quicker to listen to Ms. Val. While trying to discipline them, she refused to put up with any nonsense. Some kids respond with "smart" comments back to her, but walk away and quiet down immediately following.

Ms. Val was not going to let the children braid her hair, but they are given a lot of trust when it comes to moving about the center. I felt like exploring one day so I found myself in the main arts and crafts room in the basement. Craft supplies and books were spread out everywhere. In the front of the room was a teacher's desk loaded with papers, pencils, art supplies, pins, anything and everything. I could hardly see the desk itself. I needed tape but it looked as if there was no hope in finding it in that desk. Ms. Val sent a young girl downstairs to help me, and immediately she opened a drawer and found the roll of tape. I was surprised they were able to shift through the desk in the art room as well as in Ms. Val's office on the first floor without her saying a word. It occurred to me that the children have been attending the arts center for such a long time that they knew where everything was and Ms. Val trusted them enough, whereas this would not have occurred in the public schools I attended. The teacher's desk was private from the students. I did not get this sense of boundary at the arts center.

During class one day, Professor Witsoe brought in representatives from Youth L.I.F.E. Support Network, Inc., a non-profit organization that focuses on public safety and works with high-risk youth and their families, providing community outreach, violence intervention, and education support. I asked Jamel, the executive director of the program, "how effective do you think programs for kids are that get them off the streets after school?" He said it depended on who was allowed to conduct the programs. "It is a cultural thing and subculture and if you don't have a relationship with the subculture, then you aren't going to be as effective in getting

someone out of that cultural group.” This meant that the Hamilton Hill Arts Center is more effective if run by community members with the same cultural background, than if someone from a middle to upper class background tried to intervene. Their cultural background influences the way in which children interact with authority. According to the definition of hard individualism, children are used to certain ways of discipline. If I were to attempt such interaction, I would fail, as I am not a part of their subculture and they are very aware of this. Therefore, they do not see me as someone who comes from the same neighborhood as they do. This influences the way in which they interact with me, as a friend, rather than a volunteer with a leadership role directly under Ms. Val.

### UNION COLLEGE’S INFLUENCE

Aside from other Union students that are occasionally there with me, I am the only white person in the room. I undoubtedly stand out but the kids love talking to me and are interested in my business. Union is their favorite topic of discussion. They want to know what it is like living with 50 other girls in a house and how I live with a roommate. One girl told me “I go to Union! I have swim camp!” and others ask me if I know their Big Brother or Big Sister from the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. The youngest children tell me they get a big sister next year when they are old enough, and others are excited beyond belief to start the program this year.

Union offers so much to these children, and they are excited to interact with college students. Union plays a huge role in their lives, whether they travel to the campus, or we come to them at the center.

Students are extremely helpful for programs like the arts center. “The parents think Union is wonderful. I am over ecstatic!” Ms. Val commented. Jamel said, “A lot of organizations and agencies just appreciate free labor.” They need the help in managing their nonprofits and take what they can get. However, how effective are these programs if this is the case? A lot of people outside the Union gates see Union as an isolated island, especially with respect to economic class. This isn’t as apparent to children who have yet to understand it. The only difference they see is the color of my skin. So, working with children requires making relationships that inspire them, supporting them in whatever task they take on, keeping them out of trouble, and helping them stay away from what they don’t want to be involved in. Making it known to the kids that someone is there for them may make a world of a difference if they don’t experience that kind of support at home. The positive interactions they have with students at Union impact their lives because they are able to see how success can come about from continuing to be dedicated to their education.

## TEACHING: METHODS AND DISCIPLINE

When it comes to sitting down and getting work done, the children at the Hamilton Hill Arts Center are subject to constant distractions and lack of motivation. Being at the center, the kids are around a lot of other kids, so while some have homework to finish, others are jumping around and playing games. Friends say “hi,” and distract the homework workers, sometimes trying to help them and sometimes stopping to play with my hair. I went about certain ways to help motivate the children I tutored to finish their assignments, as well as learned and adopted methods that were most effective in this situation.

### Methods

The kids get side tracked very easily, so I would try to sit down and help them with a project. I made sure they gave me their full attention. To build a relationship with the kids, I bent down to their eye level, I joked around with them and I try to ask questions about themselves so they developed trust in me. In turn, they would follow up by asking me about my life, my school, my friends, and most importantly, my phone, of course.

One of my favorite days at the arts center was when I tutored two girls in mathematics. Keke was having trouble with fractions and ratios and got distracted

very easily. I would go over how to do each problem and make sure she understood what to do. When she did it right, I would congratulate her and make sure she knew she accomplished something very difficult. I wanted to make sure she knew she could do it and feel proud of herself. Most of all, I wanted her to feel motivated to continue working diligently. That same day, I worked with Amina, Naji and Jamiah's sister. She was very good at reading but had some difficulty understanding how numbers work (which numbers were greater than or less than). But when she got the answer correct, she was ecstatic. However, being 6 years old, she had a very short attention span and often took breaks to play musical chairs. Realizing this, I would have her answer a few math problems, play a few rounds of musical chairs, but sit back down and work further on her homework. Another day, sixth grader Olivia drew a picture of palm trees and a beach scene. I admired her work and pointed out specifically what I loved about her masterpiece. Olivia, Keke and Amina thrived off of feeling a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction when they completed their assignments and genuinely heard my comments and appreciation for their work.

I put myself in a situation that I have never experienced before. The kids in Hamilton Hill are loud, excited, and most of all, tough. Getting through to them requires more than just patience. Instead of sympathy, one must be tough back, as demonstrated by Ms. Val. I am not tough in nature, so I have learned to use my sarcasm and sass to make the kids laugh and listen to me. For example, a little boy named Amir asked me to make him a "cortune fetcher," aka "fortune teller." He

asked for my help to draw the numbers on each flap and add pictures. I wrote the numbers out, but insisted that he drew the pictures himself, “ehh I think that’s your job,” I told him, smiling. I aimed to let the children be as independent as possible and not have to rely on me so much, which I thought was important, as well as a trait hard individualism tries to instill in children. But I always praised them for doing well and getting things done, which I believe helps to motivate them, especially when I joke around like they are typically used to with Ms. Val.

Children at the arts center have limited access to resources and are less likely to be able to afford supplemental education through the “for profit tutoring industry,” (Murillo 2014, 2). In the school system, teachers maintain a widely middle-class based assumption that students have such tutoring services and as a result, no longer engage students in stimulating and challenging class material. Such assumptions contribute to the disparities in social reproduction and cultural capital because students who require the most assistance in class do not receive it. They are left to fend for themselves in a society based on competition with an uneven playing field. The Hamilton Hill Arts Center helps to bridge the gap between class disparities and offer lower class children an affordable chance at extra help in school, as well as help socially and culturally.

### Discipline in a School Setting

According to the Jamel, the Executive Director of the Youth L.I.F.E. Support Network, Inc., the people that are allowed to conduct programs can be problematic. Hamilton Hill Arts Center does not fire volunteers like me, I simply walked in and offered my help. How I treat the kids is effective, but not as aggressive as perhaps Ms. Val. But I swing kids around, joke with them, and sass them (very lightly) back. Alternately, a staff member for Youth L.I.F.E. can say, “get your stupid ass in the car” and no one would think twice. If I had said this, I would not be taken seriously. Ms. Val knows each child so well that she can literally predict what they are going to do and say next: “Noah went to play with the little kids, nicely, and quietly. Javi is going to make them scream real soon,” she whispered to me. Sure enough, little kids started yelling while Javi had a grin on his face. Ms. Val mentioned about her teaching, “sometimes, I don’t want people thinking I’m mean, I am preparing them for no nonsense [in the future]... None of these kids are abused; some of them need a whoopin!” she said jokingly. But parents know how the program runs and know how effective it is. If this were to happen at the Boys and Girls Club, the staff would be kicked out and fired. The hiring culture prevents them from having people with similar backgrounds as the children. Programs such as the arts center benefit from volunteers who have a relationship with the subculture in which the kids are from. Otherwise, it won’t be as effective in getting someone out of that cultural group. It gives volunteers and staff credibility and takes the “you don’t know what I’m going through” excuse off the table. I have no street credibility and it is important that I, and anyone like me, do not try to fake it. Jamel emphasized the importance of being



“who you are, and play your position. Don’t try to be the hero and the thug at the same time.”

The children at the Hamilton Hill Arts Center are taught respect, but violence is not tolerated. I may see what happened between two kids, but I do not tell Ms. Val, nor does she ask me, because then I would be a tattletale, which is treated seriously in the neighborhood. Respect comes with loyalty, and ratting someone out is disrespectful. If there is ever hitting or screaming involved, which is typical, Ms. Val shouts, “if you want to fight, get out.” Violence is prohibited. There is no time out and no call home. I am used to violence never being tolerated for a second, but I am also surprised no child has ever cried because of a violent altercation or screaming match at the arts center. Ms. Val disciplines them using her loud, strong voice and the unspoken threat of her knowing their grandparent; she doesn’t tolerate nonsense. *I wonder how they get away with pushing and yelling at each other?* Ms. Val stated a good point, that “cursing them out to do things will be the only way you get them to do things.” You can’t teach them like that. I caught on to how Ms. Val teaches because I should not try to implement my cultural norm of dealing with problems when the center’s is so different. I was there to learn about their lives and bond with them.

*While they play games, they are not afraid to tell each other what is on their minds; ratting kids out for cheating and pushing them off chairs is*

*a typical day at the center. Musical chairs brought out the worst in some of them, but Ms. Val is always there to put them in their place:*

*“He pushed me!”*

*“He didn’t push you, you just weren’t in the right spot.”*

*The game is so hectic and rather dangerous, but there is never any crying- only whining. I am still getting used to how tough kids can be here. In Fairfield, I had a six-year-old boy bite me because he lost a game of Simon Says. He is not used to having to stick up for himself or learn to deal with issues alone, while five-year-olds in Hamilton Hill are already able to walk home alone.*

*That same day, Vereshun and Naji and Jamiah’s brother got into a fistfight. Vereshun was punched in the neck, I broke it up and their brother ran out the door. My first instinct was to run after him, so I did. People across the street on their porches were watching me as I begged him to come back inside. I had no idea how to get through to a child who just got into a fight and ran away. Ms. Val yelled to me from the door that it was okay for him to go home. I am not used to letting kids do what they want, when they want. I am used to controlled situations, so I was definitely rattled.*

Very notably, there is no attempt at saving face when it comes to disciplining the children. The first day I meet Basir, I noticed he was at the awkward age of not

being young enough to get away with anything, and not being old enough to boss the little kids around. He openly said, "I don't like her," about his cousin who was sitting next to him and well as stole other kids' food when he knew it would make the little girls cry. Ms. Val reprimanded him, he talked back to her, but said, "sorry Ms. Val," turning around and quieting down immediately. Eventually, Ms. Val yelled at him while he was leaning backwards in his chair, and said "you could fall over and become a quadriplegic and have to be bathed and fed for the rest of your life." She did not hesitate with the dirty details to teach Basir a lesson and put up with no nonsense.

Another day, while working on crafts in the basement, there was a table of older children that were very loud and obnoxious, getting yelled by Ms. Val at right when I walked in. She warned them that they would be kicked out if they continued to be rude. Cousins were arguing, people were tattle taling and yelling at each other, being very sassy. They were immediately kicked out of the center and made to walk home. The younger kids who were watching the events unfold, were well behaved and worried they were kicked out too. As a result, the proceeded to decorate their pumpkins and talk about their Halloween costumes.

Amir's brother is about Vereshun's age and loves picking on Vereshun. They bickered, tattle taled, and just plain annoyed each other for a while. I kept asking them to stop talking to each other, and when one tattle taled on the other, I told them to stop tattle taling, which is in line with what children learn not to do. Ayana, who was sitting on my lap as usual, chimed in and said she used to tattle tale and

doesn't anymore because "it isn't good to do." The two boys threw paper at me to make them a fortuneteller, fighting over who was first. Finally, I spoke up for myself and told them I wasn't making either of them a fortune teller because I did not appreciate paper being thrown at me or being told what to do. It was the direct approach I took that finally made them realize they would not get anything they wanted if they acted terribly. From then on, I continued to take on a direct approach when disciplining the children. I would try to mediate situations and tell the children to stop talking to each other. Mike, however, has a harder time disciplining the kids, especially the older girls, so Ms. Val told him, "You have to shut them down, tighten up the belt, and get respect, say you'll send them to Ms. Val if they don't listen to you."

While discipline in lower class societies requires a direct and firm approach, the overall educational system does not account for such discourse, and instead adopts a middle class discourse on discipline and objectives. Thus, negative attitudes towards the lower class children, who have grow up with a different cultural system and different set of resources available to them, reflect stereotypes of regarding the lower class as "lazy" and incapable of achieving the same academic heights as middle class students. As I stated in my literature review, the stereotypes of children from middle class families encourages children to be stimulated with enriched experiences whereas children of lower class families are assumed to need remedial skills to be taught positive habits. Such assumptions of the lower class do not take into account class differences and further marginalize lower class students.

It is important that students' culture and identities are affirmed through an asset-based and socially conscious curriculum (Murillo 2014, 4).

## ACTIVITIES

*The room we were in is to the right of the main entrance and is used for performing activities. It is not a kid-friendly space with statues in the corners and paintings of African –Americans hanging up on every wall. It was definitely the gallery space. There are sharp edges on counters and benches, and there weren't any toys or instruments out for the kids to play with. There were piles of paper and some markers on one table, but other tables occupied homework while others had kids squirming around, eating snacks.*

Little kids are usually doing their own thing, whether they are coloring or sitting off to the side at the benches, they don't have as much homework as the middle and high school students do. As a result, there are crafts and other activities for them to do when they finished their schoolwork. For example, there is a computer room that had not been used for a long time, but Mike fixed them and connected them to the Internet. The kids are always excited to run down stairs and play on the computers or use them for homework. They may not have access to Internet at home, so this gives them a chance to explore the World Wide Web after

school. Additionally, there are always white sheets of paper and buckets of crayons and markers out on fold up tables for children to mess around with.

The goals of the center reflect a somewhat class-based idea about children: this is accomplishment of natural growth and keeping children safe and helping them to stand up for themselves rather than helping their individual personalities flower, such as the middle class soft individualism. Yet in other ways the class differences are overstated and the Hamilton Hill culture does not perfectly fit into one type of individual that Kusserow describes. It is, instead, more complex.

### Catering to Individualism

The arts center caters to the individual child, having activities planned out but allowing full artistic integrity of the child-artists. During the week of Halloween, mini pumpkins were donated to the arts center and the kids got to color on them and decorate them however they liked using hot glue guns, yarn, felt, and sequins. Monte, on the other hand, was invested in her costume. Ms. Val had brought an old skirt from home for Monte to work with because she knew how much she wanted to dress up. That small act of kindness and address of one child's needs was not uncommon at the arts center.

One day, Poodie, Vereshun, and Shania, Monte's little sister, tackled me with hugs before I could step foot into the center. Shania took my hand and dragged me to her coloring station, plopping herself down in my lap. Later that day, Ms. Val told

me it was so great for me to spend time with her because she is so young and having someone giving her special attention is helpful not only to Ms. Val but to Shania. If I wasn't there, older kids would boss her around and she wouldn't succeed individually.

A few days later, a young girl named Julianna walked in and sat down at the table I was at. She was very shy so I tried to make conversation with her and told her I attended Union College. As it turned out, she was part of the Big Brothers, Big Sisters program on campus and her big sister was my sorority sister, Julia. I let Julianna use my phone to message Julia on Facebook. She was happy to talk to Julia, who was studying abroad in China at the time, and get special attention and privileges to use my phone.

Children would sometimes miss out on computer time from doing homework or not being chosen to go downstairs to the lab, so Ms. Val would have Mike or I bring a few children down to play on the computers towards the end of the day. They got to choose which games to play, while others listen to music on YouTube or looked at fashion websites. The computers were in their hands and they were free to explore how they pleased.

Some creativity and individuality is being emphasized, much like soft individualism. Having volunteers at the arts center ensured that more students were given individual attention to their specific needs and preferences. Such attention further motivates them to complete assignments and get excited about

their academics, rather than letting them fend for themselves and lose interest in their studies.

### Point of the Activities

The Hamilton Hill Arts Center offers a variety of programs for children and families that allow children to interact with other kids in their community, learn new things about African American culture, and enrich their minds through extra tutoring, music lessons, and art.

Children have to be informed of harsh realities, often losing innocence at a young age. They are familiar with guns, violence, and drugs. Hamilton Hill families have the arts center to rely on. The most rewarding part of working with the kids, Ms. Val says, “is when, later on down the years they say ‘I bet you don’t know who I am’ and I tell them their whole name and they tell me that they went to college, a girl went abroad to Africa, they have children of their own that are well educated... a lot of good stories... and they say, ‘I’ll tell you, Ms. Val, if it wasn’t for you I would have gotten in trouble.” To see how far they have come and how successful they are now is phenomenal and proof of the effectiveness of the Hamilton Hill Arts Center.

The children love to be creative and do things with their hands. Most of them take dance lessons and try to teach me hip-hop moves. Each time I would remind them that I could not dance to save my life, but they kept on teaching me, and laughed when I attempted the Whip and Nae Nae. They are always busting out



moves with each other or starting up games of hot potato. They have learned to get along with each other (most of the time) and interact in ways they can connect to each other with, such as through dance and love of crafting.

The art center exposes them to opportunities they would not have had otherwise. A veggie truck drives up to the parking lot each Friday and all of the kids run outside to test what that week's treats are. The fall season meant lots of apples! The drivers gave each child a cup of applesauce and a few bags of apples to carry into the center to make applesauce themselves. One week, I arrived and the kids were serving each other homemade ziti! The community donates to the center and creates opportunities for the children to learn new things such as how to make applesauce. Additionally, the center offers exciting performances for the community and children to attend that include African drumming, African dance, and storytelling. Each summer, they host Culturefest, a free summer concert series where adults and youth in the community can showcase their talent. Special programs are offered as well, such as mask making, sculpture, dance, music lessons, and drumming. The Hamilton Hill Arts Center aims to bring the community together and expose at-risk youth to enrichment opportunities to further their education, skills, and interests. From giving children the opportunity to gain confidence and perform in front of their neighbors, to allowing them to explore new areas of art and music, to simply helping them complete their schoolwork, they come to the arts center and develop social and academic skills that they will use for the rest of their lives.



**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**THE WORKING CLASS:**  
**COCOA HOUSE**

THE COMMUNITY

*There were seven of us volunteers waiting for the shuttle to pick us up from Union College and take us to COCOA House about 5 minutes away. Two other girls my age happened to be volunteering for class internships as well. We looked at the regular volunteers for assurance that we were in the right place. Once the driver arrived, we filed into the van and headed out. We pulled up to a brown, skinny house with a maroon ramp, across the street from King Elementary School. Outside there was a sign hanging from the porch ceiling that said "Children of Our Community Open to Achievement."*

*I walked into the house and realized it was set up just like a small school: the teacher's desk all the way to the end of the room, and three circular tables scattered where sofas and a TV might have been, were it a regular home. Bookshelves of Britannica encyclopedias and binders with children's names written on the spines lined each wall. A small white board stood to the right of the teacher's desk and to the left was a shelf full of glue, string, paper, and other arts and crafts materials.*

*In the foyer, there is an addition desk for Dr. Clark, an older black woman who was taking a phone call as I walked through the door. After her desk is a mini hallway to the kitchen where volunteers started to prepare snack: nachos with cheese, salsa, and beans, along with a clementine. There were only eight plates set, so I asked Maddie, a junior volunteer, how many children attend the COCOA House. She said about eight or nine depending on the day. Today was a Tuesday so only eight would be there. The kitchen was fairly small and could fit about three people comfortably. Regardless of its size, it seemed to have loads of snacks and Kool-aid for the kids.*

*After putting my backpack in a closet at the end of the kitchen, I wandered around the house. Motivational posters cover each and every wall; "believe in yourself," "you are stronger than you think," "you are braver than you believe." Most of the posters seemed like they were written and drawn by kids. They gave the house a sense of character, as if it was a second home, a special place that was specifically for these eight kids I was about to meet.*

In many ways, the COCOA House was very similar to the Hamilton Hill Arts Center and contained the same basic principles; to help at-risk youth avoid the dangers and negative influences of their communities while encouraging good behaviors and study habits. However, the COCOA House took a more structured

approach in its activities, closely related to that of a school classroom. How might this approach further benefit children from low-income neighborhoods? Did the COCOA House children exemplify similar values as the children from the arts center? Most importantly, how did this affect teaching methods? After my time spent at the COCOA House, I was able to identify important methods that all educators should take into account when working with children from different economic and social backgrounds.

#### INNER-CITY CHILDREN

Different qualities are needed to succeed in different communities, where an autonomy and individuality are instilled based on cultural and economic backgrounds. The children at the COCOA House exhibited patterns of behavior similar to those at the arts center, centered on establishing oneself as a tough individual who must be treated with respect. MacLeod explores what constitutes as respect in working class neighborhoods in Clarendon Heights, and concluded that time spent in prison, fighting ability, and “being bad” all contributed to establishing respect from others (MacLeod 1987, 29). This usually led them down the path of drugs and run ins with the law. Whether tattle taling, disciplining, and trying to one-up each other, the children have an image of the right way to conduct

themselves. Sticking to these standards helps people in the Hamilton Hill district get by.

*“I don’t want to read. I hate reading,” Marquese shouted while looking out the window at the street full of kids getting out of school. “You know what will happen if you can’t listen?” asked Ashley. “You’ll get a call home!!” said his sister. He proceeded to tell his sister, “you’re such a snitch,” and walked over to another table and slouched down.*

A few weeks later:

*“Marquese almost got in a fight yesterday!” Kylese seemed eager to share.*

*“Stop tellin’ my business,” Marquese was not amused.*

*“Just like you told Ashley my business!”*

*Ashley agreed that tattle taling was not ok, but at the same time told Marquese she was glad Kylese informed her, because fighting is not ok, either. Marquese quieted down, but only seemed upset that Kylese ratted him out.*

Marquese perhaps most exhibited the topic of tattle taling, never tattle taling himself, but telling others to get out of his business, leave him alone, and calling

them a snitch when they “ratted him out.” There is an underlying theme that revolves around staying out of each other’s business. This theme connects with how the children discipline each other, calling each other out when they do something wrong before a teacher could. They have been conditioned to stick up for themselves and must discipline each other because they grew up not able to rely on adults to do so.

Along the lines of sticking up for oneself, one must establish rapport and respect in a community that favors hard individualism. Ashley, the president of the COCOA House club on Union College campus, started to describe a new project, and I started to see conversation rituals among the children pertaining to trying to one up each other:

*“I never wrote an essay in my life,” said Carina.*

*“I’ve made one,” said Revin, Christina’s brother.*

*“I’ve written two,” Kylese stares at me as she said this.*

Later:

*Ashley walked up to the “Whooh behaved at the COCOA House today” sticker boards and automatically there was a band of children behind her. “How many do I have?” asked Kylese, “I’m almost at the end of the road! Why didn’t I get two?” “Close call, you were trying to get into*

*Marquese' business." "No! Marquese was I getting in your business?" Kylese demanded validation. She quickly moved on and told Ashley she didn't even study and got a hundred on her test. Ashley made sure to praise her, but told her it is still important to study. Again, she aimed to encourage good work habits.*

Such competition among the children is healthy at the COCOA House because a little competition further motivates the children to do their work and do it well. However, challenging each other is a normal occurrence and reflects the need to keep a tough exterior attitude in order to deflect negative influences.

While the volunteers take their time with each child, the children themselves continue to challenge each other. Aliyah walked up to Carina and me trying to answer the questions like Kylese did. Carina was not afraid to tell her to "stop it!" or forcefully tell Kylese to move when she is in her way. The children tend to bicker a lot, disciplining each other harshly to their standards when their teachers, and the volunteers at COCOA House, aren't being tough enough. What they deem fair and unfair is shown through my fieldnotes; the children greatly value respect and fairness. I see this trend throughout COCOA House as well as during my time spent at the Hamilton Hill Arts Center. One day, Carina showed Ashley a bruise on her arm. "Her mom told her to shut up 'cuz she was crying," Aliyah said. This further shows that children are being conditioned at home in a similar way, learning to carry a tough attitude. Doing so ensures that they will not be taken advantage of in the



future, and the world will not always go the way the hope it will. This “get over it” attitude reflects a type of hard individualism that Ms. Val instilled in the children at the arts center as well.

According to Kusserow’s definition of hard individualism, parents and teachers refrain from saving face in front of children. Interestingly, I saw that this is true at the COCOA House.

*Mason is rummaging through old projects and binders, and asks Justin if he has ever been to Zoom Flume. “When my mom gets her big check we’re gonna go to Zoom Flume,” Justin responded.*

*Justin started to tell a story, which led Mason to ask him if he was adopted. “No, I’m with my mom,” Justin told him, nonchalantly. He was in foster care for a year and Mason casually asked him about it. According to Justin, he loved it because they got to ride dirt bikes and do a bunch of “really cool stuff.” I continued to listen in on the conversation, realizing that I was surprised at how normal of a conversation it seemed to Justin, as if foster care is not as serious as I thought it was. I noticed how I was never exposed to foster care or anyone who had been put through that system, but Justin perhaps lives in a community where it is not abnormal. Similar to when Kylese told Maddie and me that her mother was “hotlined.”*

*Justin then said his mother sold their puppy, but told him when she gets her check she will get a house, a car, and have money left over so that he can buy his own pet, "she said whatever I want!" Mason continues asking Justin questions about what he does at school and at the pool.*

From Justin's statements, it was clear that his mother did not refrain from talking about financial problems or personal issues among her children. While this is a hard individualism trait, Justin's mother also exemplified a hard offensive approach to the situation: imagining a future with a new house and fun opportunities for her children. Here, Justin will get the idea that when she works hard and earns enough money, great opportunities will follow. As I will discuss in the next section, this is a positive approach to motivating children to do well in an academic setting.

### The Parents

The parents of the children at the COCOA House are influential in the process of encouraging their children's academic and future growth because they follow a hard offensive approach aiming to grasp onto any opportunity that will benefit their children. This emerged when I interviewed Ashley, the Union student who was the head teacher at Cocoa house.

*Chloe: Have you met some of the parents and do you have any idea what they hope for their kids to gain here?*

*Ashley: Yeah, I have spoken with a few of them most of the time it's when they come pick up their kids. And I think they just really want their children to receive academic enrichment that they are unable to provide. So, as educated college students we have the knowledge and the experiences to provide them with tutoring and homework help, whatever they may need, and the parents maybe recognize the need for that but can't really do it themselves, so they think the COCOA House is the perfect place for their kids to go get that help that you know, they might feel vulnerable they can't provide it, but we do provide it and I think they're very thankful for that.*

After interviewing Ashley, the program's president and fellow classmate, she pointed out the benefits the COCOA House offers families and children, since not only is it located next to MLK Elementary School, but the parents "want their children to receive academic enrichment that they are unable to provide." MacLeod's *Ain't No Makin' It* explains social reproduction and the tendency for children of working class parents to go to school and enter into working class jobs, stuck in their socioeconomic class. MacLeod studied working class children and analyzed whether or not schools are responsible for this reproduction. Their families typically had one or more members in trouble with the law, and parents did

not finish high school or did not go on to attend college so MacLeod concludes that sometimes children have few models of people who have done well through education so assume that there is no point in school (MacLeod 1987, 53).

Through attending the COCOA House, I noticed that the children were there because their parents knew they could not provide the academic help for their children that would help them succeed in school, and therefore found a different avenue to provide such opportunities for their kids; the COCOA House. In a society running on cultural capital, parents do everything they can to get their children into programs that will reap benefits. MacLeod comments on the American ideology of achievement that is based on merit. Unfortunately, geographical locations contain certain local opportunity structures. For example, what parents have is what children grow up to think they will have, and resources are limited, providing a sense of constraint for the working class. Economic constraints mediate aspirations and desires (MacLeod 1987, 149). But the COCOA House, as well as the Hamilton Hill Arts Center, has proved to help children succeed in life and attain a different future than that of their parents, also called a hard offensive projection. Parents in the Hamilton Hill district are not shutting down their children's aspirations, but seeking out any and all extra opportunities and tutoring for their children to be successful, and these programs are a step in that direction.

## INTERACTIONS WITH AUTHORITY

Through observing the children's interactions with authority, I found different responses depending on the authority of the adult. Volunteers receive different attitudes from children as opposed to Dr. Clark, who is an older woman that speaks very little, but still seems to hold a large amount of power over the children's behavior.

As mentioned before, Marquese originally refused to read a book. Ashley threatened to tell Dr. Clark, who would call home if he did not listen to her.

*Ashley walked over to Dr. Clark, Marquese shot straight up, said "no you won't," and she asked Dr. Clark for validation on the mandatory reading time. Without hesitation, Marquese ran upstairs to find a book.*

As soon as Dr. Clark was a possibility, Marquese listened to Ashley. I found that how Dr. Clark speaks to the children, when I do hear her speak, is very blunt.

*Eventually, Carina and Marquese started to bicker. Dr. Clark was filing papers in the cabinet next to the boy's table with her back to Justin and Marquese. "That's not nice! That's not nice Justin!" Marquese and Justin looked at her confused, then Marquese started laughing while Justin tried to tell her he didn't say anything to Carina. "Oh, that wasn't you? I*

*shoulda known, Justin is the good kid," she said with a matter of fact tone, looking at Marquese. "I woulda gotten away with it!" He laughed with Justin.*

She is very aware that Marquese has caused problems in the past, and does not hesitate to comment on it, calling Justin the "good kid." In Adrie Kusserow's *American Individualisms*, working class families value "toughening, hardening, thickening the boundaries of the self," (Kusserow 2004, 26). They do not "save face" in front of children, and teachers do not sit down and talk out a problem with the child. They enforce a direct approach, telling them they did something wrong. In contrast, parents and teachers of middle class children encourage the child to loosen up, express with feelings, and open up into the world. Disciplining revolves around intent, motives, and feelings and coming to conclusions as to how the child could get what they want in a positive manner. Working class children are disciplined by the consequence of the act, and Dr. Clark illustrates this.

*In walked Carina, out of breath, followed by Kylese. Carina sat down at the middle table and exclaimed to Ashley she had to learn about cheetahs in school today. Ashley gave her close attention, but as soon as Carina saw Mason sitting at my table, she quickly got up, ran to hug him, and asked where he had been the past few times. After a few exchanges, he walked outside to his car to grab the TV for today's*

*activity. Carina couldn't control her excitement, "he has a car?" She turned to me, stopped in mid-thought, and asked me my name – she had forgotten since last week. A typical encounter with kids and Mason was a louder, more exciting environment because the children were drawn to him. What was it that made him so interesting to them?*

When the children arrive, they often run up to Ashley and the volunteers to hug us. They are excited to see us and talk to us. They are always most excited to see Mason, usually the only male college student at the COCOA House. Carina is fascinated by Mason, his car, and his long hair. Justin, a few weeks later, asked him to sit at his table and start a "boys table." Justin is very shy and does not speak aloud in the classroom often; however, he could not stop talking to Mason. He opened up about foster care, his favorite foods, and his summer plans.

The children treat us as their friends, but when it comes to doing work and starting a lesson, Ashley has to take control. The other volunteers help keep the kids focused, but are not as successful as Ashley or Dr. Clark. In my interview with Ashley, we touched upon why this might be the case:

*Chloe: So how do they respond to the volunteers as opposed to Dr. Clark?*

*And then as opposed to you too?*

*Ashley: I think they feel more connected to the student volunteers as opposed to the adult director because we were in their shoes you know,*

*not too long ago, and they can still kind of see themselves through us. But, at the same time, of course we're older and have a little more authority, so maybe me specifically, as having a more authoritative position; sometimes they like to rebel against that. But most of the time I think they feel kind of obligated to do what I say or pay attention to the lessons. If not, I direct them towards the director, who can punish them appropriately.*

*Chloe: So how do you guys respond if they're not necessarily listening?*

*Ashley: First, I try to just not draw too much attention to it, and just kind of tell them like "hey, pay attention, this is what you're here for," and if that doesn't work after a few times I kind of change my friendliness to authority and I'll either say, "this is your last chance," and "you're not going to be able to participate in anything else," "you won't have game time today." And then if I can't really exert any authority in getting them to do something, then I will turn to Dr. Clark and she can either call their parents or put them in time out- something more harsh like that.*

Ashley acknowledges why the children might behave more friendly towards the volunteers as opposed to Dr. Clark. Union students are younger and still in school themselves, basically still kids too! The children pick up on that and respond accordingly, perhaps not taking us as seriously as if we were out of college and teachers ourselves. Dr. Clark is closer to their parents' and teachers' age and is



associated with more authority and power to get them in trouble. Therefore, they are more inclined to listen to her. Further, because Ashley does have the role of president and does behave as the teacher at the COCOA House, the children associate her with that role. They may push the limits, but volunteers look to Ashley for help, while Ashley will turn to Dr. Clark. There is definitely a hierarchy of authority.

#### ATTITUDES TOWARDS SCHOOL

*As soon as we got downstairs, Marquese dropped his book on a table and went to the window to look out again. In stomped Leasia, a spunky fifth grader with her hair tied up in a ponytail and black sneakers. She yelled at Marquese, "get your stupid head out the window or you'll get shot!" Before she could tell the story of her brother's friend, Ashley interrupted and told her to get a book and start reading. "I don't need to read, I'm better at it than all of them," pointing and the original three kids and the new group walking in. Leasia is the oldest of the group, knows it, and didn't skip a minute to tell me she didn't want to be there, or that she wanted to go home, watch TV, take a nap, and go to the movies. She seemed like she would have a lot to say, so I decided to sit next to her Leasia continued to talk about the new Jordan sneakers*

*she would be buying soon. I pretended to know what she was talking about. She definitely responded more to me than my fellow volunteer, who continued to ask very simple, perhaps intrusive questions. Leasia didn't want to talk about her parents, school, or the books she liked. I wanted to try and establish a foundation with the kids, and Leasia seemed like the starting point, as she was the oldest and seemed to boss the other children around.*

Leasia's disinterest in talking about her day at school and studies in general holds true for each of the children. Kylese, for example, would rather talk about how much she hates her teacher and principal when asked about her school day. Instead, she is proud she got in trouble because her "teacher was getting on [her] nerves." Additionally, when Carina walked into the COCOA House and started to talk to us about Cheetahs, she saw Mason and immediately switched gears; he was more interesting than school. A few weeks later, we tried to ask her about school once again and she offered one-word answers, clearly disinterested.

The children are much more interested in and tend to gossip extensively over the latest drama or fight in school. Marquese once said, "Kylese, tell Carina what (I did not catch the name) told you today!" Kylese shouted to Carina across the room and told her that someone at school said she would beat Marquese up. The kids like to talk about the latest gossip amongst them, even when the volunteers do not ask

them to. They have not complained about homework or commented on what they did in school that day unless a Union student asked.

During my interview with Ashley, she said “sometimes they kind of are turned off by learning or kind of having to go to school for longer than they have to.” I asked, “So what are some things you notice when the kids talk about their days at school?” “They definitely have a huge fascination with their peers – they’re always talking about you know, the fight on the playground, or whatever it may be, they’re always comparing each other, and just talking about different situations involving their friends, whether they’re good or bad. So I think that’s like the main thing they really focus on. Um, you really have to prod them to get them to talk about you know, their academic experience in school, because most of the time they say it was okay or boring, or ‘we didn’t do anything,’ so it’s a little difficult.” She has worked at the COCOA House for about two years now and has noticed this pattern, as well. It can be very difficult to get information about their days at school. The volunteers want to ask them about it, but eventually have to give up and talk about more interesting topics to the children, in order to get their attention.

At home, children’s social lives are more important to them than their academics, and I believe this carried with them into the COCOA House. The children have not grown up with adults who have succeeded in academics, and therefore the importance of academics has never been stressed to them. Instead, they are familiar with financial matters, social cliques, and violence and typically keep up

conversations pertaining to those matters that come up in their lives more frequently.

## TEACHING: METHODS AND DISCIPLINE

I explored the house my first day as a volunteer and felt as if this was a place that children must love to go; motivational posters plastered the walls, the study spaces were comfortable and decorated according to subject. It felt like a second home specifically meant for the eight children I would meet.

*“The teacher yells at us when she talks, that’s why I hate her,” I hear Kylese tell a volunteer. A student in her class is very disruptive and Kylese does not think the teacher does a good job of telling her to quiet down. “Kids yell at kids in class because the teacher doesn’t,” she said.*

Kylese believed it was justified to put her friend in place when the teacher did not, and was extremely upset when her teacher got mad at her for doing so. One day, I heard Aliyha shout, “Marquese stop! You’re such a troublemaker!” Teachers either do not notice all of the behavior that occurs, or they do not discipline the children the way the kids think teaches the right behavior most effectively. I believe this relates back to the idea of respect. At the COCOA House, volunteers try to

enforce positive habits. Perhaps this influence on the children influences their reactions towards each other when someone does something wrong. Marquese was proud of almost getting into a fight, exhibiting the aspects of “being bad” as in MacLeod’s book, but tattling and being a troublemaker in a school setting is looked down upon at the COCOA House. The children know this, and therefore try to discipline each other accordingly, still exhibiting tough behavior, but directed towards positive school behavior rather than respect on the street.

Further, children tend to one-up each other, bragging when they have more stars on the “Who is behaving at the COCOA House?” or walking up to another child trying to figure out an answer and telling it to them. I found that this behavior motivates them to work harder in school, but also receives backlash from other students telling them to leave them alone, mind their own business, so they could do their own worksheet by themselves.

Kusserow endorses Bourdieu when he says, “education’s most central role is the ‘function of conserving, inculcating and consecrating’ a class culture, including the cultural and symbolic capital that determine who has power in a society,” (Kusserow 2004, 32). Similarly to MacLeod, the school naturalizes and legitimates this whole process by making cultural capital look like natural talents, traits, gifts, skills, or merits, by making social hierarchies and the reproduction of those skills established and ratified by its sanctions, or by converting social hierarchies into academic hierarchies (Kusserow 2004, 33). While the COCOA House is an afterschool program, the children attend schools in the impoverished Schenectady

area, an area that does not have the same economic resources as schools with greater funding. Taking MacLeod and Kusserow into account, perhaps the children at the COCOA House experience this opportunity gap in their education based on what resources are available to them to succeed academically. Therefore, receive a lack of cultural capital that would help bridge the achievement gap and allow for schools to end social reproduction. Meanwhile, the COCOA House tries to combat the negative attitudes towards school by portraying the importance of education to the children, hopefully encouraging them to continue working hard and aim to be successful. We are taking our Union and higher education experiences and trying to be positive role models of the educational system so the children will stay on the right track. At the end of my internship, I realized that how we need to go about this goal would have to be altered according to where the children are from, what they value, and how they respond to authority figures. We need to take into account all of this in order to effectively educate them in a way that does not dissuade them from continuing their education. Middle class children experience school differently, and I have located multiple teaching methods that will help working class children gain the same education effectively.

Before addressing my recommendations, it is important to understand the necessary and direct approach to discipline.

*"I hate my teacher. Whenever I do something wrong, she yells at me," Kylese complained to Ashley. "Mr. Rotzi doesn't yell, he just tells me to fix it."*

*"I don't like Mr. Rotzi, he's gay!" Carina shouted. Immediately, and I mean right away, everyone stopped to discipline her, even the other children. Marquese was the first to yell at her. I was very impressed. "Hey! That's not respectful," Ashley followed up. "Sorry, sorry," Carina said, knowing she should not have called Mr. Rotzi that, but said it as if it was part of her regular vocabulary.*

Similarly, in the case of Dr. Clark constantly having to discipline Marquese, there is no attempt at saving face, but when a child does something wrong, there is a direct and immediate response. Dr. Clark will tell children exactly what not to do. Ashley has learned to take a similar direct approach with her and the Union College volunteers still take an approach similar to middle class values of respecting other people's feelings. Rather than asking, "was that respectful?" she altered the phrase to the form of a statement, adapting to a lower class form of discipline while still retaining her own.

## SOCIAL CLASS, CULTURAL CAPITAL, AND SCHOOLS

Scholars suggest that middle class teachers are unfamiliar with behavioral patterns instilled in working class children and so respond negatively to inner city children thinking they are being defiant and that they don't understand school material. I suggest here that programs like Cocoa House can act as bridges when middle class college students and inner city children each adjust their expectations of each other. Thus Cocoa house acts as more than a holding tank, keeping children safe, and instead also helps to give the children skills that they will need interacting with middle class adults, if they make it to college.

According to Ashley, "Its primary goals are to provide free tutoring and homework help to at risk youth but also to provide them with just general life guidance that they could be missing otherwise, or life skills. Ideally, so that they can continue their education and not really fall off the right track, and just give them like an initial understanding of the importance of education at a young age so it can stick with them throughout their life." There are multiple ways in which the COCOA House lives up to its goal, from how the volunteers interact with the children, to the lessons, to the house itself. The COCOA House exhibits different teaching techniques according to who walks through the doors. Instead of endorsing middle class habits, teachers need to learn to understand the ways of each community and recognize that children from different social backgrounds have been socialized into different ways of interacting



## ACTIVITIES

Some of the generalizations of lower class programs seemed to prove true but in fact, a closer look, the Hamilton Hill district programs contain the same principles and goals as a middle class enrichment program.

### Catering to the Individual Child

The COCOA House is a house set up like a classroom, however it has a kitchen where the volunteers make snack for the children everyday, and engage the children in different chores from serving snack to saying the pledge. Since the children love hands on activities, Ashley incorporates their creativity in all of her lesson plans.

*“That was like the best day of their lives” Ashley said on the bus ride to COCOA House, remembering when the kids had to make paper boats and put as many M&M’s in them as possible before they sunk. It is obvious that the children love hands on activities that are not only educational, but they get something out of it as well, such as candy to snack on. Ashley comes up with lesson plans that helps get each child involved and interested, or else it is typical they refuse to do their homework or contribute to the lesson.*

When the children get to be self-sufficient and independent, they get to express their own desires and create a project that they are interested in and therefore put in their best efforts. Marquese is perhaps the most creative, always finding a way to walk away from a worksheet and create a masterpiece out of a tissue box and string instead. However, certain things encourage him, and others, to put effort into a project Ashley has assigned.

*Today, the volunteers wanted to make a video promoting the COCOA House and in order to get Marquese involved, they knew to ask him to create a microphone out of materials around the room. When this idea was proposed to Ashley on the bus ride to the house, each of us said what an awesome idea that was because Marquese was going to love it. Rather than being center stage and filmed, they knew he would be perfect at making the props because he loves being creative. He would be involved and extremely engaged because this part of the project best suited his interests.*

As soon as Ashley handed out the organizer that they had to fill out, they realized they got to be in charge of their own story; they were the authors and got to choose the topic, the characters, and every direction of the plot. Seeing Marquese dive right into the chart was proof of the effective individualized method, as was

assigning him a task that got him included in the video in a way that he would be content with.

Identifying what each child excels at, building on that individually, and recognizing that not every child learns in the same way is an important teaching method that incorporates each student equally. There are enough volunteers that each kid can get one on one help. "It's more personalized that way, so that that volunteer can help them do it at the level that that student can do it," Ashley said. Perhaps my most favorite day at the COCOA House was when I was asked for the first time to help Carina with her homework:

*When the pledge was done, Carina asked me if I could help her with her homework. We grabbed her backpack and walked up stairs to the science room. She had a practice test to complete within two days, so we were only going to accomplish half. As we went through each question, I would stop and help her pronounce words she overlooked because she did not know them. I made sure she knew what them meant and that knowing the definitions for "example" and "explain" would help her answer questions more easily. There came a question about the earth's rotation around the sun that stumped her. I used a tape dispenser and a water bottle to reenact the path the earth takes around the sun. She was able to pick up on the concept and answer the question correctly. Once we finished, we rejoined the group downstairs, who was working on*

*memorizing the seven continents. We sat back down at the middle table with Kylese who refused to take the time and not cheat by looking at the numbered answers on the worksheet. Carina was more than willing to practice memorizing, so we devised a plan to help her remember them. She was able to point out which continents were what, but was having trouble on remember the pronunciation. Instead of a numbered answer sheet, I wrote out the names of each continent on a separate piece of paper, out of order, for her to refer to when trying to pronounce the names. I found that this not only helped her memorize the names, but made her feel like she was able to accomplish the task by herself without having to sneak a peek at the answer sheet.*

Carina not only took the initiative to ask for help and do her homework, but she was responsive and excited to have me help her learn in a way that was meant for her and her only. Kylese was learning the continents a way that she wanted, while that method was not helping Carina. I took a different approach at teaching her the locations of the continents, which ultimately helped her more than the method that Kylese was using would. Further, while we were working on her science packet, I made sure to take time on each question and explain each answer in a way that was easier to comprehend than simply checking the answer, not knowing exactly why it was correct or not.

## The Point of the Activities

*I followed behind Marquese, almost tripping up the steep staircase. I was surprised to see the setup exactly as if bedrooms were supposed to occupy the second floor. Instead of beds, each room was designated to a specific subject: social studies, language arts, math and sciences. In the science and math room, a poster reads, "Future detectives," with a computer, desk, rug and textbooks in the far corner. Language arts had about "a thousand" books in bookcases and a comfy rug for kids to sit on and read. Social studies had walls covered in world maps and history textbooks. In the hallway was an award for excellence for the enrichment of kids. I felt as if this would be haven for a little kid, every room was comfortable and private, full of exciting materials and endless possibilities.*

*I chose to write my field notes in a notebook rather than on my phone because I thought it would be less distracting to the children and pose as a good role model. I didn't want to show them that it was okay to use their cell phones in the classroom, and the importance of paying attention to the teacher. When they asked me what I was doing, I told them I was doing homework, too. They looked over my shoulder, couldn't read what I was writing, and told me I had bad handwriting. I had my notebook out, which automatically sparked the kids' interest:*

*“You’re fake writing!” said Christina as she looked over my shoulder. “Is that cursive?” “No,” I said, “That’s just my handwriting,” my sloppy handwriting once again commented on. She then started to read the first line in my notebook, and realized that it was about her. After a “Hey!!” she patted me on the back and said, “keep up the good work!” and went back to eating her fruit snacks.*

Eventually, we got started on the project. “Is it boring?” Kylese groaned. Ashley told them that they would be publishing a book compiled of all of their stories, getting everyone excited about it. If they knew other people would see their work, perhaps they would put a lot of effort into it. An organizer was handed out, and my table of children whispered their topics of their essays to me, and excitedly wrote them down on their paper. Heamawattie said she was going to write about a haunted COCOA House. Meanwhile, Revin attempted to organize his binder. “Here, Revin, why don’t I do that for you while you think of a story,” said one of the volunteers.

Marquese seemed to get right into the organizer, and I peaked over and saw that he was going to write a story about football. What gets kids interested in what they are learning? Writing this story could be a lot of fun for Marquese because his topic was definitely something that was of great interest to him.

*Carina refused to try the pesto and broccoli pasta and pouted. Maddie asked her why she wouldn't try a bite. Kylese agreed with Carina and said, "I do not like broccoli too, disgusting." Carina asked, "How do you guys like it?" Looking at the volunteers in confusion. We tried to reassure them that the pasta was delicious and that if we liked it, they would too. "Ok, at least I ate some of it," bragged Marquese. Maddie gives him a fist bump. Carina then decided to try a bite, but spit it out. "At least she tried it," Marquese said, perhaps backing her up because he initially refused to eat the pasta, too. This seems to be a pattern- Marquese usually ends up enjoying the snack in the end. He continued eating his snack while Carina hid under her sweater, huddled in her seat. "There is a little bit of spinach," Marley said. "Oh my god you're trying to kill me," Carina said dramatically.*

The COCOA House fosters curiosity by motivating them to create their own stories and projects based on their individual interests. It also allows the children to experience new things that they may not get the chance to experience otherwise. All the while, building confidence, challenging children to step out of their comfort zones, and encouraging them to keep working hard.

One day, Kylese decided she was done with an activity, so she started to test herself on telling time with flashcards. She was proud of her skills, however, I noticed she would see the answer, flip the card over, pretend to guess the answer

correctly, and boast to Ashley that she got the answer correct. “What? I’m good at my time, you’re not gonna stop it!” she said when I tried to mix up the cards out of order. I took the pile of cards she had deemed “correct” and held each one up, trying to stump her while not allowing her to look at the answer on the back. To my relief, she was able to get the answers right, stumbling a few times here and there. I reminded her to check the position of the little hand because that could be tricky. Kylese was able to tell time almost perfectly, and the fact that I tried to trick her, and she was able to prove me wrong, she was extremely satisfied with her skills. She made sure to announce to the class that she passed two tests (the continents and time telling). I turned to Carina who was taking a bit more time with the clocks. She took to Kylese’s strategy of looking at the answers first, but I tried to help her arrive at the answer by herself. When Carina was struggling, Kylese stepped in and told me the answer. “STOP Kylese!” Carina yelled. I tried not to pay attention to Kylese’s interruption, and remained focused on Carina. This let Carina know that I was not giving up on this lesson with her, and I was going to do everything in my power to make sure she understood how to tell time. I made sure to tell her I am 21 and I still have trouble telling time quickly on a regular clock, as sad as it is. I find that when I assure the kids that even adults and Union students have trouble learning sometimes, that we are not always right, allows them to take a small amount of pressure off themselves. They take a breath, think a little longer, and arrive at the answers when they have thought it through.



Further, the COCOA House incorporates volunteers into its activities. These volunteers come from Union College, University Albany, and other organizations and schools. Although Jamal and the community group were very emphatic that it was better to have people from the community rather than an outsider whose qualifications to teach aren't looked at, it is good for kids to be exposed to students in college. They develop good relationships with them and get to see something they can aspire to they wouldn't normally see if they didn't have such opportunities. In their community, those that have succeed in school and achieved higher ranking jobs are no longer living in the neighborhood. Therefore, children only see people like themselves in the sense that they have not made it through education to become a nurse or engineer for example. In order to get the message that you need to buckle down and do well in school, you need to see first hand how perseverance and motivation will benefit them.

Additionally, the COCOA House teaches the importance of scheduling, which is thought to be a middle class value. On the wall near Dr. Clark's desk is a list of standards that is expected if one joins the COCOA House. These include paying a fee, arriving on time, and punishment for lateness. Joining COCOA House is a commitment, not a drop by center like the Hamilton Hill Arts Center. The children are members specifically for tutoring and extra academic opportunities every Tuesday and Friday. They are given strict guidelines they must abide by in order to continue attending the program. The program is meant to encourage strong work habits and help students achieve academic enrichment.

## CONCLUSION: LOW-INCOME PROGRAMS

Like the Arts Center, Cocoa House the arts center is not just a holding center to keep kids safe, but aims to increase the aspirations of inner city children and give them pride in ethnic identity and community. Both programs acknowledge the bigger picture; children's futures and the importance of education. Stereotypes about the community and a child's lack of motivation to do well in school only marginalize students of low-income backgrounds and set them up on a cycle of social reproduction. It is important to recognize programs such as the COCOA House and Hamilton Hill Arts Center for their efforts and accomplishments in helping at-risk youth achieve academic excellence and encouraging children to aspire to education and futures outside the realms of the Hamilton Hill district.

These programs may cost little to nothing, but are they not fulfilling the same needs and goals as more expensive programs are? I argue that such programs in low-income neighborhoods meant to be easily available to the community simply lack the necessary cultural capital children need to rise academically. In reality, the programs in which children from middle class families attend will prove to be of little difference from the programs that working class families can afford. But programs like SIG give the child much more cultural capital since they look prestigious on the resume. However, in a society based on merit, middle class children can afford extra tutors and courses to help push them to the next academic level, while working class children are limited in academic endeavors based on

income. In the following chapters, I will examine a program that attracts children from middle class families, define the program's middle class attributes, as well as define ways in which it is not much different from Hamilton Hill's programs. Thus, showing the need for educators to step back from a generic Western middle class assumption of the child and education, and take into account cultural differences and societal means, treating each child fairly and taking into account their cultural backgrounds. Ultimately, bridging the achievement gap.

## **CHAPTER SIX MIDDLE CLASS CHILDREN**

### **THE SUMMER INSTITUTE FOR THE GIFTED**

Similar to the Hamilton Hill Arts Center and the COCOA House, the Summer Institute for the Gifted aims to create a space that allows children to explore new avenues and expand on their academic studies. However, this program attracts middle class children and ultimately reflects Kusserow's idea that the middle class encourages soft individualism through its daily activities, interactions with children, and structured courses. During my summer at Fairfield University in 2015 and the University of Chicago in 2016, I noticed many patterns in children's behavior as well as in instructor's discipline that would further classify SIG as a program aimed at middle class families. In many ways the program confirmed the generalizations about programs aimed at middle class children and yet I could not help but notice that many of the individually tailored activities amounted to little more than the projects at Cocoa House and the Arts center.

### **MIDDLE CLASS CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS**

According to the literature I reviewed, middle class families valued different characteristics than working class families, and I saw these traits in the children at

SIG. Most apparent was the idea of soft individualism and encouraging the individual to open up into the world. With this idea in mind, middle class families encourage children to have emotions and share their emotions, while respecting other people's feelings. A successful individual must be caring, gentle, kind, selfless, helpful and empathetic, but must acquire self-confidence so that people do not walk all over you (Kusserow 2004, 35). As a result, children are encouraged to "loosen the self" and express their views. They are encouraged to have unique individual traits rather than to conform to social protocols and adults tend to treat them almost as equals with rights to choose what to do and say. These values are linking with success, achievement, and leadership in a competitive society (Kusserow 2004, 81) and crucial for successful future career. As well, these patterns train children to act in ways that middle class school teachers see as "gifted."

Interestingly, discussions between parents and children are hallmark of middle-class child rearing. Therefore, a child's needs are heard and negotiated rather than ignored. Children learn how to navigate the world to fit their needs according to the achievement ideology that American society is open and fair and full of opportunity (Lareau 2003, 3). Middle class children are raised based on this ideology, which highlights the importance of merit and economic success, and therefore the importance of ambition and ability to attain their goals.

Cultural capital is thus more attainable based on the role of resources and the ability to afford extracurricular activities and academic opportunities (Lareau 2003, 248). Middle class families are able to "cultivate [their children's] talents in a

concerted fashion” through organized activities by their parents and gain a sense of entitlement. Costs of such activities are taken for granted and often never discussed in the vicinity of a child. “It was the interweaving of life experiences and resources, including parents’ economic resources, occupational conditions, and educational backgrounds, that seemed to be most important in leading middle-class parents to engage in concerted cultivation and working class and poor families to engage in the accomplishment of natural growth,” (Lareau 2003, 250). Unlike working class families where money is a limiting factor, middle class children have the resources to participate in extracurricular activities, and gain an advantage in the institutional setting (Lareau 2003, 254).

Middle class interventions on behalf of their children are quite common, as seen at SIG (Lareau 2003, 165). To ensure the program is specifically tailored to meet their child’s needs, parents make many decisions for their children. On the first day of SIG at UChicago, Randall, the instructor, asked why the children were taking his “Shark Tank: SIG Style” class. A nine-year-old named Phillip said, “my mom chose this class, she knows what’s best for me.” Similarly, at Fairfield University, many of the children did not know which courses they were signed up for, since their parents had chosen them for them. Phillip and the other children were aware that their parents were making decisions meant to benefit them. Middle class children trust adults and have not been given reasons to assume otherwise. “This gap in the connections between working class and poor families and schools is important. It undermines their feelings of trust or comfort at school, a feeling that other

researchers have argued is pivotal in the formation of effective and productive family-school relationships," (Lareau 2003, 231). This aligns with how children respond to authority figures, which I will discuss in later sections. In school, middle class parents are more likely to request particular teachers for their children and pursue problems and extra academic opportunities until their children get what they fought for. Children learn to be assertive, as well as gain a greater sense of entitlement.

According to Kusserow, "parents often envision trajectories that they hope the child will head down, but the nature of these trajectories obviously can differ tremendously from culture to culture, class to class, subculture to subculture, parent to parent," (Kusserow 2004, 28). In past studies, "children of highly educated mothers continue to outperform children of less educated mothers throughout their school careers," (Kusserow 2004, 29). As a result, it is easy to assume that parents' social class will be passed down to their children. As I mentioned earlier, middle class families are able to afford extra opportunities to get them ahead in academics and skill sets. "By encouraging involvement in activities outside the home, middle-class parents position their children to receive more than an education in how to play soccer, baseball, or piano. These young sports enthusiasts and budding musicians acquire skills and dispositions that help them navigate the institutional world. They learn to think of themselves as special and as entitled to receive certain kinds of services from adults. They also acquire a valuable set of white-collar work

skills, including how to set priorities, manage an itinerary, shake hands with strangers, and work on a team," (Lareau 2003, 39)

Typical of middle class families are country club memberships, degrees from Ivy League colleges, nannies, house cleaners, and jobs that offer flexible hours for parents to attend children's school events or other activities. Great emphasis is put on the children's activities, and they are able to adjust their own schedules to work with the kids', further emphasizing entitlement. Kusserow mentions that parents tend to refrain from using loud voices to discipline their children, and always make an effort to appear interested and gentle in what their children was doing. Everything the parents do is to ensure that their children are competitive. For example, one day, an 11-year-old named Tiffany said to me, "my mom was wondering why I haven't played the piano." The next week, Tiffany said her mom wanted her to play a classical piece in addition to another piece with her friend for the talent show. Tiffany was one of four of my campers requesting to play the piano. During the duration of this session, all of the children and staff were residing in a college dorm and access to a piano was limited to a room that was generally occupied by classes or counselor groups doing homework. However, because of the parents' insisting that their children practiced the piano, I had to work with the other counselors and the directors to allow my campers to have practice time.

I had met Kathryn's, one of my campers, father at the start of the session as well as throughout the program when he would pick her up for dinner a few nights. Each child had a phone in their dorm rooms, and Kathryn's father was able to figure



out the number to reach her on hers, perhaps because their phones did not work well in the US, or to more easily check up on her when cell phones were not permitted. However, after reading “Only Hope,” it occurred to me that perhaps the perception of the importance of academic achievement was a factor in why most of the campers at UChicago were from China.

### ATTITUDES TOWARDS SCHOOL

To sum it up, most, if not all, of the children were excited and willing to learn at SIG. As a three-week program, SIG is a commitment, whether it is a day program or residential program, the children were essentially attending an “enrichment” summer school. Perhaps my most favorite and most memorable quote from UChicago was from Philip when asked, “Why are you here? Do you want to be here?” Philip responded, “Of course I do! I’m smart! I need to get smarter!” Not only did this show that at some point Phillip was told he was an intelligent and capable child, but it motivated him to attend SIG and learn. Additionally, all of my campers truly wanted to be at SIG, some had even attended the program for five years.

In Music, Amara was always the first person to raise her hand and answer questions about what she knew about music. Amara was one of the youngest kids at camp but perhaps one of the brightest and I was truly impressed with everything that she said, as well as impressed with how confident she was. She was a little diva,

and always the center of attention, never afraid to speak her mind. Other students had similar attitudes, saying “I love correcting my teacher, she turns bright red,” and “I love doing homework!” They showed true interested in the lessons and courses they were taking (as well as a sense of being equal to teachers). I also noticed how quickly frustrated and upset they would get when they did not understand a particular topic. While some would ask for clarification, others started to cry until I sat down next to them, or took them to the hallway, to help them.

I was impressed with how attentive the children were, for the most part, in their classes (after all, they were still nine years old). But overall, they would sit quietly, listen attentively, and face the instructor. Still, never hesitating to chime in when they had a question or comment to add. They seemed to see an importance in education. For example, while my group of campers were walking to the dining hall for breakfast, I overheard Kathryn say, “we get points for doing the talent show, like for music, I can get a good grade for the future so I can get a scholarship.” She is 10 years old and already worrying about her academic future.

## ACTIVITIES

SIG is incredibly structured; typical of middle class values. “Teachers also promote the concerted cultivation of their own children through a busy schedule of organized activities,” (Lareau 2003, 25) which was reflective throughout SIG, even

as summer programs. Further, Kusserow comments on the importance of privacy to the middle class self. Parkside parents regarded privacy in psychological aspects of the child's self; as a way to emerge on their own, in their own unique way and to establish a sense of self distinct from the group (Kusserow 2004, 91). During evening tutorial on the first day of UChicago, all of my campers asked for "peace and quiet" in their dorm rooms but SIG wanted them to stay in common space to do their work. Children were visibly frustrated, and some complained to their parents, who then complained to me. This led me to request dorm time during recreational hour as well as during evening tutorial, something other counselors also wished for their campers. It was obvious that the children were used to spending alone time, whether to get work done in a quiet space, or to calm down and collect themselves after a stressful day of school and classes; privacy was highly valued and protected.

*In each class, children created goals and a plan for a final project based on what they wanted to learn about, individually on their own, in relation to the course they were taking. For example, in Future Fitness, children learned about healthy habits and exercises, as well as technology of the past and present. Their projects could be a poster about a specific sport's health benefits, creating a new technology that is beneficial to the human body, researching the human body more in depth, or creating a new sport. We would discuss some of the topics during lessons, but the kids were able to expand their learning and*

*research their own topics they wanted to learn more about. By the end of the three weeks, they would have a final product and presentation for the whole camp and their parents to see.*

SIG prides itself on the individual attention it gives each child, as well as the individual freedom children have to choose their own projects. One day, Lillia was having trouble knowing where to start, she was very overwhelmed so I worked with her alone doing research about gymnastics, getting her started on what and how she could proceed based on her preference, and showing her how to use the internet to do research. She didn't have her own computer so we used mine. Another day, one of my campers, Erica, 10, wanted to play the violin for the talent show but she was not able to bring it from Beijing. I went to the main office and spoke to the Academic Dean and the Director to see if we would be able to find a violin for her to play. It took a few days to figure out, but eventually they were able to rent a violin from a local music store for Erica to borrow. Erica and Lillia are typical examples of the staff devoting time to individual children and making sure their needs and interests are met.

Additionally, Linda, the instructor for Future Fitness, led a meditation each day at the start of class. Everyone was always excited to relax and nap first thing in the morning to the sound of the ocean or a rainforest. Most kids take it seriously and learned to love it. The point, Linda said, was to expose them to something they probably have never done before. Samantha, a teenage camper, brought in her

Chinese flute to music one day and played a piece for the class. Tammy, the Director of SIG, then asked her to play for the closing ceremony at the end of the three weeks for the entire camp and their parents. SIG was meant to expand their horizons, take them into downtown Chicago, to museums, on speedboat tours, and allow them to watch students perform on instruments they had never seen before.

## TEACHING AND DISCIPLINE

Many teaching methods I mentioned in my previous chapters on the Hamilton Hill Arts Center and COCOA House apply to SIG as well. However, it is important to note that the education system generally takes a middle class approach to teaching and discipline. As a result, I will then discuss how and why educators and institutions should learn to cooperate with students from different socioeconomic backgrounds in order to bridge the achievement gap.

During the orientation for both SIG programs I worked at, the staff was constantly told not to dismiss children as dumb or interruptive because they are gifted and simply have a lot going on in their minds. Additionally, the directors kept reminding us that parents paid a lot of money for their children to attend the program, so often times we had to incorporate parents' requests for their children and behave accordingly. Since parents were spending so much on the program, staff was expected to maintain an interested, gentle, warm attitude towards children that

middle class parents encourage; avoiding raising our voices and disciplining indirectly with questions such as, “do you think you should be doing that?” (Kusserow 2004, 52). If a child was “stubborn and willful” or tough to raise, it was because they were unique, assertive, creative, and spirited individuals who don’t back down (Kusserow 2004, 101). Teachers value reasoning and verbal interactions over directives to help raise a child’s confidence and belief in their self (Kusserow 2004, 26).

As a result, it is important to middle class values that a child is taken aside and spoken to gently to get to the base of the problem. For example, at Fairfield University, Ben who was about six-years-old, lost a game of Simon Says and was so furious that he bit me. Another day, he refused to do the classwork. As a result, the instructor asked me to guide him out into the hallway and sit down with him to talk about why he did not want to participate in class because he was disrupting everyone else. I had to focus on one child’s individual needs, in private, and come up with a way to get him to be excited and engaged again.

Privacy is an important factor in teaching and discipline in this case. It gives them time to “explore their emotions,” think to themselves, and share their feelings if they want to.

*One of my girls, Danielle, stood out in particular. She was the kindest girl I met, always smiling and laughing. However, she was going through a lot of personal situations, but she never discussed it with the*

*other girls. Instead, she and I talked about it a few times, and I let her know she could always come to me, whether she needed a rest, if she needed to vent, or if she needed advice. One day, she told me, "I don't want you to think all I do is complain." Danielle is so bright, and so sweet that by looking at her, one would never know she was going through a hard time. I told her, "you aren't complaining, everyone needs to talk sometimes, and you know what? I want you to vent to me. I want you to talk to me because I know I would want that if I were in your position. I am also here if you just want to hang out. I will never act on anything unless you asked me to, I would never tell someone what was going on with you without your permission. I am just here as a friend."*

After my conversation with Danielle, I was able to let her stay in her room alone while I sat in her hallway, and another counselor was watching the rest of my campers. Looking back, I noticed I handled the situation according to middle class standards. I let Danielle know she could express her feelings, while also allowing her some privacy and time to herself. According to Lareau, it is important for middle class teachers to be aware of children who may show signs of needing space or privacy (Lareau 2003, 94).

When a child acts out, they are encouraged to assert their own thoughts and feelings as valid in their own right but while still accommodating certain basic societal constraints. But a child is also encouraged to release their thoughts and

emotions. "One preschool teacher, Sara, spoke of the importance of teaching the child to explore and release the emotions and how this was tied to leadership and a sense of liberation," (Kusserow 2004, 84). During Music, Barbara and Amara are super interested in music and not afraid to ask questions without being called on. They both took out their name tags they made in a previous class and placed them on the table in front of them (Amara had two). After each assignment, Amara would shout, "I'm done!" "The ability to communicate the child's feelings as of utmost importance in the child's development," (Kusserow 2004, 97) and the fact that both little girls were assertive and confident was a clear sign of a middle class valued characteristic.

### Individualized Approach

It is important to approach problems on an individual basis, but what would have happened if there was only one teacher in the room and I was not there to assist with Ben? I argue that there are more bodies taking care of children of middle class backgrounds, attending to each of their needs right away and with the material means to do so, while children of lower class backgrounds are used to being limited from what they want and thus learn to be given a direct command that gets them back on track and listening without needing to take a child away from the group.(You can perhaps see this in the way that the Hamilton Hill kids look after their younger siblings instead of expected an adult to do it). It is also important to



work one on one with children if they are struggling with a lesson. In Shark Tank, I worked closely out in the hall with Talal to determine his product, which turned out to be a virtual soccer game. We defined his product, what it would do, why people should buy and, and how much he should (hypothetically) sell it for. When we were finished, he gave me a high five for a nice job. (Then, he asked me how to get a patent and sue someone for taking his idea...) Other times, I went into the hall with William to write up his idea because he had trouble spelling. I told him it's totally ok, he has a great idea, and I'll always help if he needed it. Working with Talal and William noticeably increased their confidence when they returned to the classroom.

Lareau emphasizes the middle class idea that organized activities are good for kids (Lareau 2003, 24). A typical school day is run on a schedule, also reflecting middle class families and their schedules based on their children's extracurricular. In the middle class school setting, artwork is seen as "a manifestation of the child's self," and is thus praised and appreciated, regardless of artistic ability (Kusserow 2004, 9). During these activities, children's work supposedly expresses the child's unique self more fully than a grade or report card. They are aimed to be more sensitive, not damaging the child's self-esteem, and showing appropriate appreciation for their uniqueness and individuality. Creativity is an outlet for child's subjectivity, channeling true self, and a catalyst in the individuation process (Kusserow 2004, 95). Structure, line, color, voice, song, design, shape, and form all represent personality traits (Kusserow 2004, 96). Each class at SIG gives the students time to think about their own ideas for a project while I go around to each

child to make sure they are on track, that they know what to think about and aren't stuck, or help them spark new ideas. But at SIG, it was important to let the child know they can do something in their own way, and develop self-confidence, while giving them authentic praise on specifics (Kusserow 2004, 97).

Like every program, it is important for the teachers to be enthusiastic and for the lessons to be engaging. SIG was very successful in this department. Linda always maintained a positive and happy attitude with them, with a calm and energetic tone of voice. She stressed individual projects, how exciting they could make them, and how important it was to come up with an idea. After watching snowboarding virtual reality videos and videos on insane new fitness technology, the kids were excited to create their own sports and have the freedom to choose what they wanted to do for their projects. Such interesting videos and lessons kept them interested and engaged. Additionally, continual encouragement and praise helped children stay on task and motivated. Linda reminded kids they were smart or else they would not be at SIG in the first place, and emphasized that if they enjoyed a specific lesson more than another, speak up and she will spend more time on what they like rather than what is boring.

Similarly, Tammy taught music one day and showed a Bill Nye the Science Guy video with a worksheet component. The video was meant to spark ideas, instruments ideas, and goals for the students to aim for in their individual projects. After the video was over, Tammy went around the room asking each student to fill in the blanks on the worksheet and explain each question. Not only did this help

engrain information into the children's brains, but Tammy continuously congratulated them, "Awesome you guys were really paying attention!" Even when George was speaking out of turn, he answered correctly and Tammy said, "very good George! Ah we know who the musicians are!"

Very successful lessons incorporated students into them. "Chime in if you know things about flexibility because you might know more than I do," Linda said because there were dancers in the class and she allowed the students to feel like they knew more than she did for a moment, putting her and the children on the same level, further encouraging confidence. As mentioned before, Lillia was a very shy, timid girl but when Linda asked Lillia about stance stretch and how long to hold it, very quietly she answers, "10 seconds." Linda incorporated what Lillia loves to do into the lesson in order to encourage Lillia's participation and motivation.

Other instructors used games or other means to make lessons fun and to get children involved. In Acoustics, Tim, the final instructor, brought in Coca Cola, Snapples and chips and said, "If you answer a fun fact about yourself, you get a drink," then did the same by asking them to define vocabulary words. "Who's smart?" Randall asked the students in Shark Tank. Some raise their hands, some ask what kind of smart did he mean, and he said they have to be smart to be here at SIG, similar to what Linda said. He loved telling stories about his inventions growing up and used wide eyes, expressions, emphasis on words to engage the kids. He decided to write question on a word document and projects them onto the screen with funny pictures. The students laughed every time and left each class smiling.

## CONCLUSION

The Summer Institute for the Gifted is a program devoted to children who have been tested gifted and a place for those children to receive extra academic opportunities in a widely creative capacity. As I have noted, teaching methods and discipline techniques speak to the general middle class ideologies of the child's self, as a unique individual channeling his or her inner potential, ultimately able to open up to the world and be successful. However, I continuously asked myself, did SIG create an opportunity much different than the programs in Hamilton Hill? While SIG is more expensive and receive credentials based on the names of the universities the programs take place at, does it benefit children or provide better academic enrichment more so than the Hamilton Hill Arts center or COCOA House does?

My answer to this is no, all of the programs I attended aimed to benefit children's academic performances with creative projects, individual help, and enrichment opportunities. I would like to point out that while the Summer Institute for the Gifted prides itself on it's individualistic approach and ability to expand a child's horizons while pertaining to the gifted child's mind, programs in Hamilton Hill did not differ dramatically. The arts center and the COCOA House both provided volunteers who gave the necessary individual attention that at-risk youth needed in order to complete school assignments and homework, all the while aiming to encourage a love of learning and continuing to foster motivation to succeed academically. Both respect cultural values and volunteers take into account cultural

differences, altering their teaching and discipline styles accordingly. Similarly, SIG aims to motivate children who have tested gifted, to build their confidence and make connections with other children like them. All of the programs I have been a part of strive to create a safe place for students to learn about themselves and their peers, and to learn to be accepting of others. In every circumstance, there are necessary methods educators must keep in mind to ensure that every child is getting the best education possible, regardless of their social background.

Hamilton Hill simply does not have the economic means to afford a location at a “prestigious” school or the ability to hire hundreds of employees with teaching experience. Thus, I argue that the Hamilton Hill district has programs such as the arts center and COCOA House to provide an avenue for working class children to become even the least bit closer in achievement opportunities as the middle class children able to afford academic help from professionals. But ultimately, SIG contains projects and assignments that do not dramatically differ from those in low-income programs that provide music lessons, science lessons and other artistic opportunities that families would not be able to afford elsewhere. Why doesn't a program in Hamilton Hill receive the same amount of cultural capital as a program like SIG? If we can answer this question based on my research on two opposite socioeconomic backgrounds and take into account different teaching methods that reflect each child's individual perspectives, I believe educators and the education system will be much closer to bridging the achievement gap.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN CONCLUSION**

What I found in some ways confirmed the general patterns of socialization I addressed in my literature review, and in some ways did not. I found that the programs I examined socialized middle class children to think of themselves as unique and talented individuals and inner city children to be tough and self sufficient. Otherwise, however, the programs were in fact similar in the degree to which children were encouraged to be creative and received individual attention. It was just the rhetoric that was different and the result was that middle class children got great resume building items on their resume while Hamilton Hill's children just went to after school programs. I conclude with two suggestions. First, as a cultural anthropologist, I think that society should recognize the diversity in styles of behavior and that teachers should realize the inner city and middle class children behave differently and will respond best to methods that they are familiar with. Second, I think society as a whole should recognize that middle class children receive a lot of "cultural capital" that doesn't necessarily amount to be more creative, more gifted or a better employee.

### **MY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Teaching Methods That The Children Will Respond Positively To

## Making Connections

*First, I asked her what grade she was in, trying to make small talk. She responded with one-word answers. I decided to try a different approach, and agree with her when she made a smart comment. For example, she said she read Junie B. Jones books when she was a baby, and I said, “ugh I haven’t read those since I was in first grade!” I got a laugh out of her, and so I tried to keep up the bonding. We talked about our brothers; she was amazed I only had one sibling while she couldn’t recall how many she had. “You’re so lucky! But I’m the youngest, I got my sister’s presents [for Christmas] this year because she didn’t want any.” Dr. Clark overheard and said, “Leasia you’re so spoiled, you have everything, you’re mother got you all of that stuff.” Leasia continued to talk about the new Jordan sneakers she would be buying soon. I pretended to know what she was talking about. In my attempts to have the children get to know and like me, trying to find what they respond to and what they ignored, Kylese mentions she is a ballerina. This sparked the inner side of me that wished she had stuck to ballet growing up, “I’m so jealous,” I told her. She got the biggest smile on her face and tried to hide it by looking down at her French fries.*

Knowing that the children were not going to hold up a conversation based on school, I tried to connect with them instead. I took my own experiences and likes and dislikes and incorporated them into my interactions with the children. Similarly, the volunteers do so too. One day during snack, one of the volunteers heard a child say she loved Doritos, so she said she loved them, too. Interestingly, a long conversation about snack foods developed. Being able to establish connections allows the children to open up about themselves, trust the volunteers, and feel comfortable talking to us.

### Picking Up On Cues

While speaking to the children, there are often conversations that surprise us.

*I was sitting at my usual table in the back of the room near the window looking out at MLK Elementary School when Kylese sat down next to Maddie and me and told us her mother was "hotlined." I had no idea what this meant. "You don't know what that means? Case worker comes to make sure we're ok," Kylese said, pointing to her house across the street, "Everyone thinks I bit my arm." "Everything will be ok," Maddie assures her, rather nonchalantly. Kylese told us about her mother being "hotlined" as if it was no big deal and it was a common occurrence, perhaps for other people she knew, too. As a result, Maddie and I tried*



*not to make it a big deal or sound extremely concerned, even though we looked at each other and knew we were.*

The situation surprised the volunteers because we were not normally exposed to foster care or social services. The children at the COCOA House come from a neighborhood where these are normal situations that affect their everyday lives. It is important to pick up on those cues from the children, realize that they are speaking nonchalantly and not to show surprise or alarm for what they are discussing about their personal lives. Educators need to take into account different backgrounds of children from different socioeconomic classes and address them without bias in order for the children to continue to feel comfortable and confident. Additionally, as volunteers and not professionals quite yet, we are able to freely speak to the children using similar language. "Do your homework now so it doesn't suck when everyone else is playing outside," said Ashley one day. "Suck" would not be tolerated in most educational settings, nor do I know if the teachers at MLK speak similarly. However, as I previously stated, according to Kusserow, teachers in inner city areas and working class backgrounds save little face in front of the children and are not worried about hurting their feelings. The children respond to it positively, in a way that keeps them on track in that setting. Ashley picked up on this language, as used it in a way that the children understood and were most likely accustomed to.

## Addressing Bad Behavior While Encouraging Good Behavior and Work Habits

Bad behavior in the classroom includes speaking when the teacher is speaking, being disruptive to other children's learning, and not obeying rules. Ashley said, "first, I try to just not draw too much attention to it, and just kind of tell them like 'hey, pay attention.'" Kusserow also notices how children of working class backgrounds will try to interrupt their teachers, but the teachers will continue their conversations with another teacher until they are done, then acknowledge the student's needs. Middle class teachers will stop what they are doing, bend down to the child's level, and address their needs right away. Ashley learned to not pay attention to the behavior until it gets too disruptive. One instance in particular stood out where this occurred:

*Ashley then started off the class by asking the children what the importance of writing is. Most of them raised their hands to answer. Marquis stood behind Ashley, near the white board, walking in front of her every so often, grabbing his juice from the table or finding a marker to doodle on the board with. Ashley kept talking to the class, as if Marquis was not in her way. Kylese walked up to the white board and joined Marquis. Marquis wrote on the board, Ashley said, "Marquis," acknowledging that he was in the way, and continued teaching. He stopped once Ms. Graham said his name.*

Eventually, Ashley needed Marquese to sit down and stop being disruptive to the class, especially when Kylese decided joined him. In order to prevent this behavior in the first place, incentives are put into play. There is a poster on the wall farthest from the teacher's desk that says, "Whooh behaved at Cocoa House?" Underneath are cards with owls on them and each kid's name. Every day, they would receive a sticker for being good or doing a kind deed. For some reason, children love stickers! They are a great incentive for them to behave in order to fill up their owls and get a prize. Additionally, when the children are done with homework, they get to have game time or play outside. Ashley warns them that they cannot go outside unless they finish their work. This not only motivates them to work, but encourages good work habits.

*Chloe: Is there a time when a child was exceptional, so how are they rewarded and praised for listening, doing their work, or reading when you ask them to?*

*Ashley: There's definitely a couple children there who are extremely well behaved and I think just acknowledging that, not overly acknowledging it, but not under acknowledging it, just telling them that you appreciate their respect and how well they do their work. But, it's hard to balance like favoritism or you know, something like that, versus just being encouraging. So I just think, you know, friendly reminders like, "oh you did a great job today," or "look how well you did that," something like*

*that is like a small reminder that they should continue what they're doing. It seems to work and boost their confidence.*

As the teacher, Ashley sees the importance and benefits from acknowledging good behavior and praising children for their accomplishments. She tries to praise children for respect and point out positive habits. During a lesson about writing, Ashley called on Justin, a very quiet boy, who said, "you need a strong introduction," in your writing. He got applause for an awesome response to the teacher's question. This helps boost his confidence, and other children who answered were also told, "great answer, can we expand on that?" to assure them they had a good idea and encourage them to think in more depth.

*Kylese decided she was done with this activity, so she started to test herself on telling time with flashcards. She was proud of her skills, however, I noticed she would see the answer, flip the card over, pretend to guess the answer correctly, and boast to Ashley that she got the answer correct. "What? I'm good at my time, you're not gonna stop it!" she said when I tried to mix up the cards out of order. I took the pile of cards she had deemed "correct" and held each one up, trying to stump her while not allowing her to look at the answer on the back. To my relief, she was able to get the answers right, stumbling a few times here and there. I reminded her to check the position of the little hand because*

*that could be tricky. Kylese was able to tell time almost perfectly, and the fact that I tried to trick her, and she was able to prove me wrong, she was extremely satisfied with her skills. She made sure to announce to the class that she passed two tests Ashley gave her.*

This situation covers a few different areas of observation. First, Kylese was cheating and I acknowledged this by taking the cards away to test her myself. Second, she was proud of her skills and made sure to boast about it to the class, one-upping them. Lastly, when I tried to trick her, she still answered correctly! This greatly boosted her confidence more than it had before I stepped in. Therefore, I made sure to act surprised, impressed, but not encourage her bragging. I intended to make her feel like she was so good at the test that she should work on something new because she was clearly capable of doing so. Kylese, such a funny, stubborn kid, was excited to ask Ashley for the next assignment. How I went about the situation proved that it was good encouragement and motivation for Kylese to challenge herself and have confidence in her abilities.

A few weeks before, Kylese told Ashley she received a 100% on a test without studying. Ashley applauded her for doing so well, but reminded her that studying was still important especially for future tests, demonstrating the importance of taking exams seriously.

## Motivating the Kids

Programs such as Cocoa House also help to address the low aspirations of children who have never seen anyone succeed through education by introducing them to college students. Motivation is key when it comes to education. Children do well academically if they are motivated to work hard and try in school. At the COCOA House, children attend because they want to be there, whereas if they do not like it, they may drop it. The volunteers aim to keep them interested and attending by showing excitement and interest in the children's work and ideas.

*In my interview with Ashley, she focused on the importance of encouraging the children to keep up their schoolwork and have a positive attitude towards learning. This shines through each volunteer, as Maddie asked, "What was the best part of school today?" A few children shrugged while Carina offered up a one-word answer: "Cheetahs." Mason stepped in and asked, "What about cheetahs?" This continued the conversation, even when Carina offered up vague responses such as, "they eat and hunt." Regardless of Carina's disinterest in science at school, Mason and Maddie made an effort to show Carina that they were genuinely interested in what she learned.*

Carina again was not interested in talking about cheetahs but Mason and Maddie would not give up showing interest in her school project. Similarly, one day

the children had to watch a movie and asked if it would be boring. Mason told them, "This is my favorite movie of all time!" and asked them questions about the Earth before the video got started. Most of the kids were excited to raise their hands, even when they didn't have the right answer. Mason's excitement for the movie got the children excited as well and engaged in the lesson. If the children have role models that show appreciation and passion for learning, they will hopefully in turn develop a similar attitude.

*Kylese lugged a bubble wrap and pipe cleaner worm she made in art class, to my table. "I don't like this," she was not impressed with her masterpiece. "Dude, I wish I was that creative, I lost my creativity," said Mason, continuing to point out aspects he liked best about the worm. Ashley then walked by and exclaimed an impressed "whoa!" at the worm. It was quite colorful and very creative, I have to say.*

When a child feels bad about their work, the volunteers try to change their outlook. They don't want a child to feel discouraged and thus not try again. This interaction with Kylese was meant to motivate her to stick with art and not give up on trying to create another masterpiece she could eventually be proud of.

*I overheard Ashley and a few other volunteers talking about one of the older girls who missed COCOA House today because she does track. "I have to remember to compliment her when she comes so she stays with*

*it,” referring to the need to keep on motivating the girl to be involved in the school activity. How hard is it to keep kids motivated? Do they usually quit or stick with an activity? Others chimed in, “That’s so awesome so happy she is doing that.”*

The volunteers are genuinely trying to motivate the children in everything they set their minds to. It may not be academically related, but track is a team and commitment that they hope the girl continues to be a part of.

Moreover, Ashley plans the lessons for each day.

*Chloe: So you try to find activities as opposed to class work, kind of like a classroom setting, because the ages are so different and it’s more engaging especially after school.*

*Ashley: Yeah!*

*Chloe: So you definitely see the kids react positively to those forms of teaching?*

*Ashley: Yeah, I think even just framing it as more of an activity as opposed to a lesson, you know, is more interesting to them and they don’t think, “oh this is another period I’m in school,” like no, “it’s an afterschool activity that we are dealing with these friendly college students,” not assigned by one teacher. So I try to keep the more casual context. And as you said, yeah the activity approach is also effective in*



*allowing students of different abilities to be involved to whatever degree they can be. If I were to present a specific lesson, it wouldn't be geared towards all of them, only some of them.*

Framing the COCOA House as not another period of school, but a more exciting and a more interesting place to be with activities rather than boring lessons, greatly sparks the children's interest. Ashley notices how curious they are and that they love hands on activities.

#### OVERALL

As I am coming to the end of my thesis, I am also in the process of applying to graduate programs for elementary education. Part of the process requires me to write essays regarding my academic experiences, professional endeavors, and ultimately why I want to become a teacher. In my essay to Boston University, I state:

“As an anthropology major, I have learned that there is an immense diversity of human cultures that run on specific, unspoken principles that are important to each individual society. Anthropologists bring light to these often unspoken cultural themes, combatting stereotypes and personal assumptions, and putting an individual culture in the context of its own social organizations. The biggest thing I have learned from my experience as an anthropology major is that every culture

makes sense in its own context. How I have been conditioned cannot be compared to that of someone from another country, state, or even neighborhood. I may have known this before taking an anthropology course, but I have an ever-growing appreciation and understanding for diverse cultural backgrounds and am constantly curious to learn more.

My senior thesis explores different teaching methods of different socioeconomic backgrounds and I make recommendations as to how to bridge the achievement gap. Through my internships and job opportunities in low-income neighborhoods in Schenectady, NY and more high-cost programs in Fairfield, CT and Chicago, IL, I have experience working with a diverse range of students and I have researched ways to help at-risk youth succeed academically. I believe that my ability to notice cultural barriers and my passion to teach children a love of learning will combine to help make me a successful educator, as I will take into account the individual needs of each student that walks into my classroom.

One of the most rewarding teaching experiences I have had to date was my internship at the Hamilton Hill Arts Center in Schenectady, NY. Educational opportunities for children living in low-income neighborhoods may be restricted, and many children will not receive the attention and schooling they need to learn, or have enough money go on to college. I want to inspire students to become successful and proud of who they are while respecting the differences of their peers. Throughout my research, I was mainly surrounded by generational poverty. Children from all over the Hamilton Hill district attend the arts center and it is

evident that the poverty they face is a result of the environment in which they, as well as their parents, have grown up. Those in generational poverty are usually offered different and often limited resources that could potentially help them out of poverty if available. Coping strategies, support groups, and motivation are lacking when the environment they live in can easily suck them back into a life of crime, drug abuse, and poverty. Often in the Hamilton Hill district, academic encouragement is scarce. The arts center I worked at is a non-profit cultural arts center that promotes the development of youth through educational and character building activities. Part of its mission is to “bring hope to an inner-city neighborhood,” bringing the community together and offering lessons in art and music they may not get to learn elsewhere. The center is often crowded with children of all ages. As a volunteer and tutor, I worked one-on-one with children to help finish homework and school assignments. Typically, while helping an individual child, three other children may have been trying to ask me questions about my personal life, or trying to braid my hair. However, without volunteers, children would not have gotten assistance with homework. There will always be a need for more volunteers because such individual attention was necessary and beneficial to the children at the arts center who would not otherwise receive sufficient attention to succeed academically. With the large number of children, volunteers were vital resources to the arts center.

I am committed to, and appreciate, equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice. I believe I can further instill such commitment in my future students and

teach them the importance of acceptance, not only encouraging them to learn about each other, but to learn about themselves and their own perspectives on the world. The teacher should urge students to explore new ideas and keep an open mind, welcome to those different from them. Most importantly, the teacher should work to encourage each student, regardless of their background, to successfully complete assignments, while making sure the students truly understand the material they are being taught. This will not occur overnight, but one-on-one interactions will help to instill this in children, and provide the resources necessary to become accepting individuals.” (Bartlett)

This individualized approach is effective on all children of different socioeconomic backgrounds. I argue that the school system does not recognize different learning abilities and methods according to different socioeconomic backgrounds. Educators tend to adopt a generic teaching style. According to Kusserow, “the problem with the notion of a ‘Western’ conception of the self is the way in which individualism is treated as if it had the same meanings and uses for all groups,” (Kusserow 2004, 21). The Western self is usually flattened and generic that usually describes middle class America. I argue that this prevents children of working class families from receiving an education that actually benefits them and helps them move up into the world rather than reproducing the social cycle. By identifying the children’s interactions with each other and authority, I’ve explored why they behave the way they do, and it’s rationality. By identifying the children’s attitudes towards school and what they prefer to discuss, I’ve explored why they

may feel resentment towards the education system. The school should cater to the needs of children of all backgrounds. The COCOA House and Hamilton Hill Arts Center are great examples of using different teaching methods for students of working class families that ultimately encourages, motivates, and gives confidence to the children that their school may not otherwise provide.

Looking back at my interview with Ashley, I asked her, "What were your initial impressions of coming to the COCOA House? What did you expect and how have those changed?" She responded:

I don't think I really knew what to expect. Of course I knew that the children were poor but apart from that, I hadn't really had any exposure to that degree or poverty essentially, so I was curious. I guess after the first time I kind of saw, you know, where they were coming from. And it was just, I mean pretty shocking when you really recognize how they live at home and what they do and don't have access to. Now, apart from now, it's a long time after the initial shock and I'm kind of realizing that these kids really aren't any different- they're in different circumstances but they are kids themselves, they're just kids. And they have the same potential as any other kid. I think it's important to recognize that and treat them, you know, as a normal kid, and not as some disadvantaged kid.

High cost programs prevent low-income families from being able to afford the program, thus not allowing those families a shot at equal cultural capital, while programs in low-income neighborhoods such as Hamilton Hill strive to bridge the gap by guiding students towards a path that ultimately sets them up on an equal playing field as middle class students. However, in a society based on merit where academic help and tutoring is now a profitable business, schools continue to produce social classes. I hope my research on programs of two immensely different social classes and their academic enrichment programs for children will bring light to why children are left behind in the school system and the need to bridge this achievement gap in a way that responds to, and acts in accordance with, their own cultural contexts. Educators cannot maintain an generic, Western ideology of the child's self and potential, but must take up an open mind able to be account for each child individually.

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