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College Preparation in a Low-Income, Urban, Public High School: A Case Study

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

College Preparation in a Low-Income, Urban, Public High School: A Case Study

by

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As I have reflected on the dissertation process, my martial arts mentality reminds me of military recruitment slogans that are remarkably applicable, two in particular. The legendary Air Force slogan: *Aim High*—it points people up, engendering a sense of movement towards greater goals. This is the underlying theme of the support and encouragement I received from friends and family throughout the dissertation process. It also applies to the mindset my parents instilled in me from an early age, which has made it possible for me to realize challenging goals throughout my life.

The second slogan is a Navy classic: *The Navy, it's not just a job, it's an adventure*. Much of the dissertation process was a job—yet it was also a true adventure—a quest, an exploration, and a journey. The English teacher in me remembers the puzzled look on the faces of my ninth graders when I first explained one of the basic themes in Homer's, *The Odyssey:* arriving at one's destination is the goal of the voyage, but the journey is significant as a learning experience, an opportunity for growth.

I have only begun to appreciate the actual journey and all it has taught me. I wish to acknowledge everyone who accompanied me, but that list would be too long. I name my closest and dearest fellow travelers, the key conspirators in the realization of this dream. I mention them with deep appreciation and sincerity.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Paulino Enrique and Cecelia Marian Castillo, my first teachers, their spirits are alive and well.

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ABSTRACT

College Preparation in a Low-Income,

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College preparation for low-income, urban, minority students is the subject of this ethnographic case study. Previous research indicates that for these students the notion that college is the next step after high school graduation may be considered unrealistic, especially if parents or other family members lack postsecondary education experiences.

This was a qualitative case study of one comprehensive urban high school located in a predominantly middle to upper class White neighborhood. People residing in this neighborhood were older and the majority no longer had children of high school age. Therefore, over half the student body (70%) were African-American teenagers bused from surrounding low-income, urban areas.

The purpose of the study was to look for evidence of indicators believed necessary to create and foster a college-going culture in a low-income, urban, public high school. The findings suggested that students from lower socioeconomic groups, those with high aspirations, and even those who qualify for college acceptance, often lack the information and support necessary to negotiate the postsecondary application and enrollment processes. Adopting a college-going mission is as much a mentality as it is an objective, and requires active awareness and participation by all stakeholders including students, families, schools, and the community.

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Introduction

School Setting

Four days a week Ms. Kim's room was the meeting place for 21 ninth grade mentees and 21 mentors, graduate students in a school counseling credential program. Today was the last day of finals and one girl had been working for two hours trying to finish her exam before the bell. "She's one of the two students in class who is likely to pass," Ms. Kim whispered to me. The other likely-to-pass student had finished already and was talking to a classmate. The rest of the class, 14 *eleven-plus* students (kids who failed the class previously, maybe more than once), were taking it easy, or kickin' it, waiting for the dismissal bell. It would be early today because of finals and homecoming.

Ms. Kim told me to make myself comfortable for eight more minutes, so I sat down and started cutting pictures from a magazine for the five-foot by eight-foot collage that mentors and mentees were creating on Ms. Kim's back wall. One girl asked if she could help me, and inquired as to who I was. I handed her a pair of scissors, pointed to the box of magazines on the floor, and told her I was from the local university. Of course, I then asked if she had given any thought to or made any plans for college. She said she was definitely going to go but had not made any plans yet. Ms. Kim rolled her eyes at me and turned away. Another student told me he was going to a college in New York because he had a cousin who went there and liked it. By the time the bell rang, four eleventh graders, all repeating the class, told me they were going to college, but had no working plan for getting there.

During five years of working with ninth graders in a low-income, urban school, I successfully developed many trusting relationships with students. These relationships facilitated gaining insight into their college-going knowledge and perceptions of postsecondary schooling. I encountered students at all levels, even seniors, who envisioned themselves attending college or some other postsecondary institution, yet had no active college-going plan. Unfortunately, Ms. Kim's reaction was also familiar; she missed one of those "teachable moments," an opportunity to initiate a conversation about continuing education after graduation and connect with a student by sharing how she succeeded in navigating the pathways of post-secondary education.

Native to the Environment

Ms. Kim (Theresa, when we are teacher-to-teacher) and I first became acquainted when our paths crossed at the end of a school day. I spoke her language, "teacher-speak," just like a native urban schoolteacher, one of her kind. Though I was an outsider, as coordinator of the local university's mentoring program, I was imbued with the referent power of the university. My assignment to work with new ninth graders at Manchester High School (MHS) (as pseudonym for the site of this study) transformed me into an insider, giving me free rein to move about the campus collecting data.

My previous teaching experience made this urban high school familiar territory to me; I was able to blend into classrooms, the faculty lounge, attendance office, copy machine room, ninth grade academy office, or counselor's office. The faculty and staff were not much different from my previous school, teachers were friendly and accepted me as an extension of MHS's newly formed partnership with the local university.

Teachers welcomed me into their classrooms with full knowledge that I was looking for evidence of a college-going culture. I took the opportunity to talk to as many people as I could, soaking up the local color, getting a sense of the school's culture and climate.

MHS, like other comprehensive high schools, has a college office, college and career counselors, and counselors dedicated to specific small learning communities. The school is located in an upper-middle class neighborhood with an older population, whose children are beyond high school years. For this reason, Manchester High School can accommodate students bussed in from outlying areas, some of which are low-income, minority neighborhoods. Families from these outlying areas take advantage of the low enrollment at MHS and have their children bussed there hoping that a school in an upper-middle class neighborhood will offer greater opportunities for their children to succeed in high school. As a result, the majority of students at MHS are first-generation potential college-goers and/or children from non-traditional families (i.e., living with someone other than a parent, or in a single-parent home) who need the assistance of school personnel to access postsecondary options. Recognizing the need to provide additional college-going support to its student population, MHS partnered with the private university I attended. The mentoring program I coordinated is only one of many ways the university collaborates with Manchester High School.

Field Testing

Being in the school setting enabled me to envision a methodology to collect data for this ethnographic study. I followed what Spradley (1980, p. 77) calls the "grand tour" during my initial observations, noting the major features of the school setting rather than

focusing on the particulars. From September through November, 2008, I tested the waters to see if I would be accepted by the school community, which would assist me in gaining access to the people and places I would observe and interact with during the data collection process. I used every opportunity offered to me, and created as many more as possible, to meet parents, teachers, students, counselors, administrators, custodial staff, and university volunteers at the school site. As a result, I became recognized on campus and, most importantly, welcomed as the person who coordinated the ninth grade mentoring program sponsored by MHS's partnering university.

My primary focus as program coordinator was to facilitate relationship building between university graduate students and ninth graders; I was able to do so within the framework of this ethnographic study because of my prolonged engagement at the research site that allowed me to initiate relationships with both adults and children at MHS. Participation in daily school life allowed me to look for evidence of five conditions necessary to create and foster a college-going culture for all students, particularly those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and minorities.

My personal experience teaching in an urban high school prompted me to take an emic point-of-view as a researcher-participant during data collection. I did not conduct formal surveys or interviews because I believed my interactions with participants during regular day-to-day activities would yield more relevant data. I took field notes and maintained a notetaking-notemaking reflective journal (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995), recording notes of interactions and communications (including telephone conversations and emails) with participants. I recorded my notes within 24 hours of observation and/or

interaction, and returned to them within the following 24 hours to reflect and identify points relevant to college preparation. I also conducted a review of researcher-generated documents, which included emails, photographs, and public documents, including MHS's website, student planner, school newspaper, parent/student handbook, and district publications.

Statement of the Problem

The presidential report, *A Test of Leadership* (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), stated that although one-third of Whites have completed a bachelor's degree by age 25-29, only 18 percent of Blacks and 10 percent of Hispanics have earned their degrees by that age. Two reasons were cited for this problem: substandard preparation for postsecondary education by high schools, and a weak alliance between secondary schools and colleges. To navigate pathways to college successfully, students need support networks of adults and peers who can help them access tutoring, counseling, SAT preparation, coaching about financial aid, and assistance with college applications. Students need successful role models to turn to for answers and advice.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2006) reported that even though the rate of high school graduates from both private and public schools in the United States attending college after graduation was up 70%, that number was unevenly dispersed among high schools. In some Blue Ribbon Schools (designated as such because of high performance or dramatic improvement measured by state tests, referenced against national norms) almost all seniors are admitted to a postsecondary institution the fall after graduation (Giles, 2006). These schools, nominated by their Chief State School Officers,

have been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as either academically superior or as demonstrating dramatic gains in student achievement to high levels (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). By contrast, the number of seniors from other schools, predominantly those located in low-income urban areas, who attended a postsecondary institution, was as low as 20% (Schneider, Conroy, Kilpatrick, Schmidt, & Shavelson, 2007). One possible reason for this disparity is that these students lack the social and cultural capital of students attending Blue Ribbon Schools. In other words, low-income students do not have access to information about steps needed to adequately prepare them for college entrance, nor do students have role models and support, especially if their parents have had no experience with postsecondary education (Oakes, Franke, Hunter-Quartz, & Rogers, 2002; Schneider et al., 2007).

A principal goal of pursuing postsecondary education is to accumulate the academic capital necessary for social mobility (Coleman, 1988; Oakes, 1985; Oakes & Lipton, 2003). Ask any high school student why he or she wants to go to college and the answer is invariably: to get a better job, to make more money. Coleman (1988) suggested that social capital developed within a high school community instills the mental and emotional fortitude needed for students to graduate. Personal relationships fostered within strong adult and peer social networks supporting student academic and emotional development also relate positively to students pursuing postsecondary education (Coleman, 1988; hooks, 2003; Schneider et al., 2007). Alternately, non-supportive or uninformed adults and peers can provide a challenge to formal education. If social capital is not accessible to students, they may turn a toward student subculture for support, which

in turn, can take them down a path leading away from obtaining academic capital (Coleman, 1988).

The vast tapestry of problems with public education today creates a sense of frustration, threatening to overwhelm student hope, especially in areas with high enrollments of low-income and minority students (ACT, 2006; hooks, 2003; Sarason, 1990; Sergiovanni, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 1983; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Only about half of African-American and Latino ninth graders graduate from high school, compared with 79% of Asian Americans and 72% of Whites (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). In spite of what is known about the important role postsecondary education plays in creating a life with options rather than limitations, educational outcomes for ninth graders appear dismal.

The NCES (2006) reported for every 100 students beginning ninth grade, 67 will finish high school in four years, 38 will go to college, and only 18 will earn associate degrees within three years or bachelor's degrees in six years. The notion that college is the next step after high school may seem unrealistic to students coming from low-income or minority families, especially if their parents did not attend a postsecondary institution. Research has indicated that family support and school communities are important for building expectations of postsecondary schooling for all students, regardless of ethnicity or economic status (ACT, 2006; McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002).

Students enrolled in schools situated in urban communities must cope with hardships associated with poverty, immigration, language barriers, and discrimination (Oakes et al., 2002). As a result, these students are more likely to face college-planning

obstacles including limited access to information and counseling, low expectations, limited Internet access, and underestimation of financial aid actually available (McClafferty et al., 2002). Students need to know which educational pathways will lead to their desired goals and how current academic performance will affect their future options. Even though many low-income students express high academic and occupational aspirations, often they do not demonstrate realism of choice or planning. They need to become aware of the relationship between their high school grades and curriculum and their probabilities of being accepted into the postsecondary institutions of their choice.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to look for evidence of indicators believed necessary to create and foster a college-going culture in an urban, public high school. At the beginning of data collection, MHS was in the initial stages of collaboration with a local private university. Data from previous research has identified necessary conditions for creating and maintaining an educational lifestyle that leads students to enrolling in postsecondary institutions (Blumberg-Corwin & Tierney, 2007; McClafferty et al., 2002; Oakes & Lipton, 2003). Though researchers may use different words to describe these practices, basic elements are present in schools having a college-going culture in which a high number of students graduate, gain admission, and enroll in postsecondary institutions.

For purposes of this ethnographic case study, I have designated five conditions apparent in a college-going culture: (a) a clear college-going mission statement based on high expectations for all students; the goals and benchmarks outlined in the statement

define postsecondary admission and enrollment as expected and attainable, thus, all stakeholders recognize the necessary effort and persistence required for college preparation as a normal and expected part of the college-going process; (b) an awareness and understanding of the process by which college-going plans develop; students and their families should be aided and supported by workshops and seminars that build confidence and teach skills to activate the social and cultural capital needed to negotiate college-going, without sacrificing their cultural identity; school administration, faculty, and staff need professional development to train them as facilitators who become resources for students and families; (c) academic momentum, i.e., access to rigorous A-G courses, including honors/advanced placement courses; instruction should engage students in critical thinking skills and academic work of high intellectual quality; (d) systemic and coordinated college-going support, i.e., the entire school community is actively engaged in developing and realizing college goals; activities related to college preparation are coordinated throughout students' high school careers, rather than occurring in isolation; and (e) comprehensive college-going services that include school-site academic tutoring, SAT preparation, and partnerships with postsecondary institutions; collaboration with postsecondary institutions can be invaluable in offering access to the hidden curriculum of the college track, with resources and expertise to address the challenges of the high school-to-college transition. These five points served as the framework for my data collection, analysis, and recommendations.

Studies have also shown that, as a rule, middle-to-upper-middle class, college-going families have these conditions in their schools and communities (Coleman, 1988;

Oakes & Lipton, 2003). It is, therefore, important to recall that MHS is located in a middle to upper-middle class neighborhood, whose population is predominantly White and older, that is, their children are grown and no longer attend the local high school. For this reason, MHS had space to accommodate students who were bussed from lower socio-economic neighborhoods.

In my role managing the ninth grade mentoring program, I looked for evidence of the five conditions at Manchester High School as I interacted with students, parents (and other family members), faculty, staff, administration, and university volunteers at the school site. In ethnographic terms, I employed an emic (experience-near) viewpoint (Emerson et al., 1995), while in my role as coordinator of a program matching graduate students from MHS's partnering university with ninth graders in a one-to-one, school-based, mentoring relationship. My interactions and experiences with people at the school site were recorded as accurately as possible, so that later I could take an etic (experience-distant) (Emerson et al., 1995) panoramic viewpoint.

An etic point-of-view enabled me to reflect upon the emic experience of daily school life through a lens focused on actions the school personnel took to promote postsecondary education. I was then able to use social and scientific language to refer to the same incidents (Emerson et al., 1995; Fetterman, 1998; Silverman, 2006). In this study, I looked for evidence that MHS not only encouraged every student to consider college as a viable option after high school, but also provided adequate information, preparation, and support for navigating procedural pathways (red tape) to access the full range of postsecondary educational options.

Significance of the Study

Focus on Secondary Schools

When the comprehensive high school was created in the early twentieth century, its purpose was to provide access to secondary education for our nation's increasingly diverse population. The educational goal was to graduate students fully prepared to directly enter the workforce after graduation, by offering a variety of educational and vocational paths (Conant, 1959). However, in the 1980s the presidential report, *A Nation at Risk* (U.S. Department of Education, 1983) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teachers (Boyer, 1983) made public certain issues concerning secondary schooling. Secondary schools must address the dropout problem, as well as close the gap between the knowledge of graduating students and the expectations of colleges and employers (California Department of Education, 1992). These research findings highlighted the failure of secondary schools to provide students with academic rigor to equip them to enter the workplace without first undergoing remedial courses, or additional employee training programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Interestingly, these reports neglected to focus on low college enrollments and academic challenges of traditionally underserved low-income and minority students. A report published by NCES (1999) placed the high school dropout rate for Black students at 13.1% and at 27.8% for Latinos. Other studies reported that in urban areas with these populations, dropout rates were closer to 50% (Balfanz, Legters & Jordan, 2004). Obviously, unless the impetus for dropping out of high school is addressed and managed, enrollment in postsecondary institutions is a moot point.

Further, *A Test of Leadership* (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) reported that the United States is no longer the leader in educating citizens to advanced levels. Citing data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *A Test of Leadership* (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) placed our nation 12th among major industrialized countries in the attainment of higher education. The report focused on the importance of postsecondary education in building necessary intellectual capital for social mobility, especially for members of the nation's growing population of racial and ethnic minorities.

According to the Spellings Report, "Ninety percent of the fastest-growing jobs in the new knowledge-driven economy will require some postsecondary education." (2006, p. 1) A postsecondary education makes a significant distinction between those citizens' realizing their goal to attain a credential or degree, and those for whom it is not a consideration for reasons related to access or personal choice. Research findings often point to benefits of higher education in terms of greater employment opportunities and higher salaries; it can be the difference between a life of limitations and a life of options (Blumberg-Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Graham, 2005; Putnam, 2007).

The Standards-Based Solution

In 2001, the federal government responded to calls for reform by reauthorizing the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1997. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) is a standards-based reform requiring schools and districts to measure and report students' annual progress toward proficiency in English language arts and mathematics by 2013-2014. Progress is based on

whether schools or districts meet their Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO), demonstrate 95% participation on standardized tests, achieve their targeted on the Academic Performance Index (API), and for high schools, meet target graduation rates. This one-size-fits-all government answer to the nation's problems in education is criticized by many educators for taking power away from local school boards and community members regarding fundamental issues such as standards, curriculum, and assessment (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Oakes et al., 2002; Oakes & Lipton, 2003).

Though the intention of these strategies is to raise overall K-12 achievement, imposing identical expectations and goals for all children, across curricula, gives no consideration to the multicultural differences among students from different locales. Viewed theoretically through a critical lens, this is discrimination: accountability is based on one set of standards and a single testing program for all students regardless of cultural and/or language issues. It undermines access to education for low-achievers and those with special needs, rather than improving it (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Sergiovanni, 2001).

Education Reform and the Community

Genuine education reform and successful community building are intrinsically linked (Harkavy, 1998). Nearly a century earlier, Dewey's University of Chicago's Laboratory School was founded with intentions of building a learning community, combining teacher training with pioneering research on teacher education, and improving student learning. Dewey found education is a process of identity making, and that identity develops through social interaction and community (Dewey, 1916). The mandatory

nature of schooling does something to detract from the genuine joy of discovery and learning that can occur spontaneously in social settings (Dewey, 2001). Lave (1996) and Lave & Wenger (1991) both discuss the importance of social interactions in learning situations, the importance of modeling for a learner, and the effectiveness of learning by doing.

What can be done for children who have no role models, either in parents or older siblings? Increases in single parents and families where both parents work full or part-time mean more children left on their own to manage their education. By the time students are in high school, parents are often mainly concerned with their children just graduating. The dropout rate among students placed at risk by their ethnic minority and socioeconomic status is over 50%, with many dropping out as early as ninth grade (NCES, 2000; Turner & Lapan, 2003).

While low graduation rates are a serious national concern, negative effects felt by communities are devastating and long term, since children not graduating from high school stand little chance of sustaining themselves or a family in today's economy (Blumberg-Corwin & Tierney, 2007; California Department of Education, 1992; Sergiovanni, 2001). Parents and guardians who are unable, for various reasons, to help their children take the necessary steps toward making postsecondary educational plans are dependent on school systems to provide guidance for their children. Today, some universities, like the one partnering with MHS, have recognized the need to redefine their commitment to serving the community, and are reaching out and exploring innovative ways to collaborate with schools and communities.

Outreach Programs

Colleges have also responded to this need by creating a number of intervention programs designed to fill gaps between the needs of students and families to pursue a postsecondary education, and the resources colleges possess to help. While the first outreach programs were established by private organizations (Perna, Fenske, & Swail, 2000), more recent approaches to outreach have come from federal sectors, state and local government, and colleges and universities, as well as private organizations, foundations, and non governmental sectors (Swail & Perna, 2002). A 1999 study conducted by the College Board, the Education Resources Institute, and the Council for Opportunity in Education, found more than half (57%) of the outreach programs were based at colleges or universities, 16 were based at schools, and 13 were based in communities (Swail & Perna, 2002). College preparation programs have been part of the federal government's agenda since the 1960s with the establishment of the Federal TRIO Programs (Perna & Titus, 2005). The federal TRIO Programs are educational opportunity programs designed to motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO includes six outreach and support programs (Upward Bound and GEAR UP, being the most familiar) targeted to assist low-income, first-generation college students, and students with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to postsecondary school (McDonough, 2004).

Although many varieties of outreach programs exist, few have provided both parents and students with consistent educational information about the college-going processes. The literature on outreach programs stresses the importance of parental

involvement and the need to increase parents' college knowledge, thereby reinforcing their sense of self-efficacy (Auerbach, 2004; Jun & Coylar, 2002; Tierney, 2002). College preparation programs realize that families, specifically underrepresented families, must be included in college preparation processes (Jun & Coylar, 2002). It is through this inclusion that different forms of capital (social, cultural, and academic) are gained and distributed throughout families (Jun & Coylar, 2002). Researchers have suggested strategies to effectively engage parents in helping their children with college and career planning, such as guiding them through specific steps and actions needed to initiate and sustain the college-going process, as well as teaching them skills to activate their social and cultural capital, thus aiding them in expanding social networks related to college options (Auerbach, 2004; Blumberg-Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Jun & Coylar, 2002).

Recognizing and understanding cultural differences and values among families are also critical aspects of successfully engaging parents in outreach programs. When considering cultural differences among families, maintaining cultural integrity becomes essential. In a discussion of schools as communities, Selznick (1992) pointed out their value for students as persons, beyond formal learning. He said, "A school is a setting for interaction, communication, and growth – a center of life as well as learning." (p. 295) Approaches to cultural integrity include viewing education not simply as a means of teaching facts and figures to a faceless population, but also as the process of identity and community development (hooks, 2003; Selznick, 1992; Tierney & Jun, 2001). With this

in mind, colleges and universities have initiated partnerships with local schools to support students and families in planning for and accessing a postsecondary education.

University-Assisted School Partnerships

Partnerships between secondary schools and colleges or universities provide high school students and their families with access to the resources and expertise that can help students successfully transition from secondary to postsecondary institutions. University-assisted schools are not merely training grounds for novice teachers to practice the newest best practices. University-assisted schools are distinguished by their focus on engaged scholarship, a concept that emphasizes research combined with a pledge to use universities' resources to assist traditionally underserved, socio-economically disadvantaged students (Martinez & Klopett, 2003). The university-assisted school model is designed to immerse students in a college-going culture of high academic expectations that will prepare them to move on to college or other postsecondary institutions.

Additionally, these schools employ highly qualified teachers and offer the rigorous curricula necessary for competitive college admission, and most importantly, connect schoolwork to students' lives in their community (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Martinez & Klopett, 2003). Partnerships between secondary schools and colleges or universities are a means to provide scaffolding that not only transmits essential facts and procedures related to the college-going process, but, by increasing parents' college knowledge, helps them to become effective advocates for their children.

Theoretical underpinnings supporting a social justice agenda are the foundation of university-assisted partnerships to make high quality schooling and successful college participation routine occurrences in low-income and minority neighborhoods. These universities use research and advocacy to develop collaborative alliances empowering traditionally underserved students. Their overarching mission is to build relationships and create caring learning communities, and in the process, they impart knowledge and make possible civic participation committed to continuously confronting ethnic and social class inequalities that block access to postsecondary education (Martinez & Klopett, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in critical theories seeking to identify sources of educational inequities, examining processes maintaining the status quo, and ultimately correcting injustice. These same theories advocate a social justice agenda, rejecting purely technical, social efficiency models of education in favor of the culturally relevant pedagogy of Paulo Friere (2002) and bell hooks (2003), and socio-cultural learning theories of Cummins (2001), Lave (1996), and Wenger (1998). Reframing learning as social and collective, rather than an individual psychological occurrence is necessary to develop human relations in a socially just school culture (Lave, 1996).

Social justice educators argue that traditional education in the United States is used as a form of oppression and control (Freire, 2002; hooks, 2003; Nieto, 2000; Oakes & Lipton, 2003). Schools advocating social justice are interested in humanization of the oppressed, which is, helping individuals recognize how they are oppressed, and

identifying who the oppressors are in order to transform their social and political environment.

These goals may seem idealistic, but it is possible to turn idealism into reality. Despite many obstacles inherent within educational reform, Freire (2002) asserted, "It is imperative that we maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may suggest the opposite." (p. 124)

Research Question

The research question guiding this ethnographic study was:

What practices are evident at Manchester High School (MHS) that contribute to creating and fostering a college-going culture for all students, particularly those from low-income, minority backgrounds?

Research Design and Methodology

I conducted this ethnographic study in a comprehensive urban, public high school in Los Angeles, California, adopting the role of researcher-participant, which was defined by Gans (1982) as one "who participates in a social situation but is personally only partially involved, so that he can function as a researcher" (p. 54). I used qualitative methods to look for evidence of five conditions I identified as necessary to create and foster a college-going culture. In addition, in my position as coordinator of the ninth grade mentoring program sponsored by MHS's partnering university, I had easy access to the school site, students, and school personnel on a daily basis for a data collection period lasting seven months.

As an ethnographer, I was the primary data collection instrument (Creswell, 2003), and therefore, realized the necessity to be attentive to my subjectivity throughout the study. Peshkin (1988) stated that subjectivity is "the amalgam of the persuasions that stem from the circumstances of one's class, statuses, and values interacting with the particulars of one's object of investigation" (p. 17). Avoiding my subjectivity could potentially mute the emic voice, so I was careful to pay close attention to those issues that attracted me, and those issues I wanted to avoid, so as not to denigrate the reality of the daily experiences.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

A limitation of this study was the time constraint dictated by the parameters of this dissertation that would not allow a longitudinal study to evaluate change in school culture over time.

Delimitations imposed on this study were: (a) data were collected from only one urban, public high school; and (b) data were collected only in California.

Assumptions related to the research reported in this study were: (a) field note entries (note-taking) were made within 24 hours of observations and conversations; and (b) reflections on field notes (note-making) were made within 48 hours of observations and conversations.

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter One presented an introduction to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, theoretical framework, research question, research design and methodology, limitations, delimitations, and assumptions, organization of the dissertation, and definitions of key terms. Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature for this study that pertains to the rationale for doing this ethnographic research. This included issues of college access, especially for low-income, minority students, the role social and cultural capital plays in equitable access, and the role of teachers, counselors, and university assistance in preparing students to enroll in postsecondary institutions. Chapter Three includes a description of the research design, methodology, and procedures for data collection and analysis. In Chapter Four I present the research evidence and findings. The analysis of the findings was organized using, as a framework for discussion, the five conditions that I designated were apparent in a school with a college-going culture. Chapter Five discusses implications of the study, again using the five conditions as an organizational structure, as well as makes recommendations for school personnel, parents, and family members. The chapter ends with recommendations for future research and concluding thoughts.

Definition of Key Terms

Academic capital/intellectual capital—A term referring to educational credentials, the value of which can be traded for employment, position, or power.

AMO—Annual target for the percentage of students whose test scores must be proficient or above in English/language arts and mathematics. Meeting the AMO is the first step toward demonstrating Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the 2001 federal law No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

API—The cornerstone of California's Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999. The API measures the academic performance and growth of schools based on a variety of tests and establishes a statewide ranking of schools according to those scores. Most schools have an API, a state ranking (by elementary, middle, or high school), ranking in comparison to 100 similar schools, and growth targets for the following year.

AYP—A goal of the NCLB law that requires schools and districts to measure and report students' annual progress toward proficiency in English/language arts and mathematics by 2013-2014.

Blue Ribbon Schools Program—A program originally started in 1982 and renewed in 2002 to bring it in line with NCLB. It honors schools whose students achieve at very high levels or make significant progress in closing the achievement gap.

College-going culture—The culture within a school wherein all members of the school community see postsecondary education as the next expected step after high school graduation.

Emic analysis—A term used to describe culture based on subjects' own concepts and descriptions.

Engaged scholarship—A term used by university-assisted schools today emphasizing research combined with a pledge to use universities' resources to assist traditionally underserved students.

Etic analysis—A term used to describe concepts and descriptions based on the researcher's own concepts, as opposed to those of research subjects.

Habitus—A word first used by Pierre Bourdieu to describe the environmental conditions, structures, and systems of disposition that mediate and aid between structures and practice of cultural and social reproductions.

Highly qualified teachers (as defined by NCLB)—These teachers are fully credentialed within their state (not on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis), or have passed the state teacher licensing examination.

Postsecondary institution—Any college, university, vocational, or technical training school attended after graduation from high school, or completion of a GED.

Researcher-participant—In qualitative research, this is a researcher who participates peripherally in a social setting, so as to be able to collect data found in that setting (Gans, 1982).

Rigorous curriculum—The A-G requirements, advanced placement, and/or honors classes that are required for college admission.

Social capital—A concept that refers to the social connections within and between social networks as well as connections among individuals.

Socio-economically disadvantaged students—Students whose parents do not have a high school diploma or who participate in the free/reduced price lunch program because of low family income.

University-assisted schools—Middle and high schools that partner with colleges and universities for the purpose of exposing students to a college-going culture and using the Postsecondary institutions' resources and expertise to assist in the transition from secondary to postsecondary school.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the college-going culture in a public urban high school, Manchester High, which was in the initial stages of forming a partnership with a local private university. One category of literature reviewed presents data identifying the conditions necessary for creating and maintaining an educational lifestyle that gives socio-economically disadvantaged and minority students the competence to compete alongside peers for admission to postsecondary institutions. In this study, I evaluated to what degree these conditions existed, or not, at Manchester High School (MHS). As a researcher-participant, I interacted with students, parents (and other family members), faculty, staff, administrators, and university volunteers at the school site. The second category of literature reviewed examined the concepts of social and cultural capital, how they are created and activated, and why they are necessary to ensure college access for traditionally underrepresented students.

Focus on Postsecondary Education

The need for high schools to promote the importance of postsecondary education for all students is substantiated in educational reform literature as well as in government reports and studies. President Bush's Commission on the Future of Higher Education, headed by Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, published the report, *A Test of Leadership* (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), which stated the United States was no longer the leader in educating its citizens to advanced levels. The report cited data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and placed our nation12th

among major industrialized countries in higher education attainment. The report focused on the importance postsecondary education played in building the academic capital necessary for social mobility, especially for members of the nation's growing population of racial and ethnic minorities.

According to the Spellings Report (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), "Ninety percent of the fastest-growing jobs in the new knowledge-driven economy will require some postsecondary education." (p. 1) In other words, a postsecondary education is imperative and makes a significant distinction between those citizens who realize their goal to attain a credential or degree and those for whom it is not a consideration for reasons related to access or personal choice. Research findings often pointed to the benefits of higher education in terms of greater employment opportunities and higher salaries; it can be the difference between a life of limitations and a life of options (Blumberg-Corwin & Tierney, 2007). Barriers that limit access to postsecondary opportunities for all citizens challenge our fundamental democratic values and hinder the achievement of the economic and political security individuals need to function as independent citizens. In the end, increased levels of education serve to benefit local communities and improve the social, economic, and political welfare of all Americans.

This data concurred with another reform report published over fifteen years ago. *Second to None: A Vision of the New California High School* (California Department of Education, 1992) advocated for a strong academic foundation during the first two years of high school, demanding, yet flexible program majors for eleventh and twelfth graders, and an emphasis on creating multiple pathways to postsecondary options. The report

stated that our transformation from a rural, agrarian society into an urban, industrial society makes it imperative that high schools implement an outcome-based approach to meet the challenges of the technological, information-based, twenty-first century global society.

Rigorous Curriculum for All Students

Successful enrollment in postsecondary education is the culmination of a process that begins during middle school and the early high school years or before. Urban students, particularly Hispanic and African-American students who will be the first in their families to attend college, face numerous challenges in finding and using the resources they need to successfully negotiate college admissions and financial aid requirements (Boswell, 2000; George & Aronson, 2003; Giles, 2006; Noeth & Wimberly, 2004). Adelman (1999) also suggested that there was no single factor that predicted college completion for underserved students more than the rigor of the courses taken in high school. When teachers have low expectations for students or believe that race or class impacts their ability to learn, they may offer a less rigorous curriculum, thereby giving students an inaccurate measure of their abilities and a false sense of security (Blumberg-Corwin & Tierney, 2007; George & Aronson, 2003; Gibbons, DiAnne-Borders, Wiles, & Stephan, 2006). The result was that even if they were admitted to a college, they found themselves woefully behind their peers.

Tracking Underserved Students

The phenomenon of tracking students based on expectations of ability has been criticized for providing, and even legitimizing unequal education. The original intent of

tracking was to provide a way for students with different abilities and interests to have a curriculum with features aimed toward their academic level (Oakes, 1985). The idea was that high-achieving students would be held back if they were in a class with lower-achievers, and that students who needed remediation could not receive it if the class were advancing beyond the basic concepts they had yet to master.

Tracking creates barriers to student achievement and postsecondary opportunities because students relegated to lower tracks have less chance of acquiring higher-level academic competencies (George & Aronson, 2003). They spent less time on academic tasks and more time on low-level activities and remediation, and teachers had lower expectations of them. The sad result was that students ended up with low expectations for themselves and accepted their placement in lower tracks. Students in lower track classes had more negative attitudes about themselves and lower educational aspirations than their higher track classmates. Though it was an unintended effect, nonetheless, tracking created barriers to postsecondary opportunities (George & Aronson, 2003; Oakes, 1985).

Outreach Programs

The majority of the literature assumed there were fundamental deficits in the families of underrepresented students. They were portrayed as lacking essential information, knowledge, experience, and the mindset necessary to prepare for, initiate, and navigate the college-going process (Oakes, 1985). For this reason, much emphasis was placed on both the secondary school systems and the postsecondary systems to provide these students and their families with the knowledge and support they were lacking (Blumberg-Corwin & Tierney, 2007). Colleges responded by creating a number

of intervention programs designed to fill the gaps between what students and their families needs to pursue postsecondary education and the support available to them.

While the first outreach programs were established by private organizations (Perna et al., 2000), more recent approaches at outreach have come from the federal and non-governmental sector, the state and the local levels of government, and colleges and universities, as well as from private organizations and foundations (Swail & Perna, 2002). In a study conducted in 1999 by the College Board, the Education Resources Institute, and the Council for Opportunity in Education, more than half (57%) of outreach programs were based at a college or university, 16% were based at a school, and 13% were based in the community (Swail & Perna, 2002). College preparation programs have been part of the federal government's agenda since the 1960s with the establishment of TRIO programs, and later (1998) with the establishment of Upward Bound and GEAR UP programs (Perna & Titus, 2005).

As part of the 1992 Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, collaborative efforts between federal, state, and local governments, such as the National Early Intervention Scholarship and Partnership, were established. Collaborations between local schools and colleges, which typically connect colleges with a middle school serving lower-income students, were also developed (Perna et al., 2000).

Although many varieties of outreach programs exist, very few of them have provided both parents and students with consistent educational information about the college-going process. The literature on outreach programs has stressed the importance of parental involvement and the need to increase parents' college knowledge, as well as

their social and cultural capital (Auerbach, 2004; Jun & Coylar, 2002; Tierney, 2002). College preparation programs are realizing that families, specifically underrepresented families, must be included in the process of college preparation (Jun & Coylar, 2002). By including parents in the outreach and education process, different forms of capital (social, cultural, and academic) can be gained and distributed through the families (Jun & Coylar, 2002). Researchers have suggested strategies to effectively engage parents in the college-going process. Some of these include helping guide parents through specific steps and actions needed to initiate and the sustain the college-going process, as well as aiding parents in expanding their social networks related to college options and reinforcing their sense of self-efficacy (Blumberg-Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Jun & Coylar, 2002).

Recognizing and understanding cultural differences and values among families were also critical aspects of successfully engaging them in outreach programs. When referring to cultural differences among families, maintaining cultural integrity is essential. Approaches to cultural integrity include viewing education not simply as process of teaching facts and figures to a faceless population, but also interacting in a process of identity and community development (hooks, 2003; Tierney & Jun, 2001).

Do School Counselors Help or Hinder?

Some high school counselors, in order to encourage struggling students to graduate, recommend community college because they have much less rigid admission requirements than four-year universities (Adelman, 1999; Lavin & Hyllegard, 1996). As a result, students do not see the relevance of high school performance to future success. Expectations related to cultural biases also find their way into the counselor's office

where assumptions based on race or class not only affect their interactions with students, but also influence their decisions about how to advise students with regard to coursework and career paths (George & Aronson, 2003; Gibbons et al., 2006). According to Oakes (1985):

> Often students at the senior high school level are asked to indicate whether they prefer a curriculum leading to college entrance, one leading toward a vocation immediately following high school, or a more general course not leading to college. Although these choices are made by students themselves . . . they are not free of influence. They are informed choices—informed by the school guidance process and by other indicators of what the appropriate placement is likely to be. (p. 13)

Trusty (2004) found that school counselors needed to utilize a variety of data sources to help create a college-going culture. In addition to initiating and facilitating parental involvement, counselors are needed to help students and their families develop an education-career plan, evaluate the consistency between goals and academic effort, and make sure that students are clear about the postsecondary and career options open to them. During this planning process, guidance counselors can be instrumental in helping students identify unrealistic educational and occupational aspirations and make distinct connections between their future education-career plans and involvement in daily school life and extracurricular activities. Unfortunately, there was little evidence that students received adequate help from their counselors, specifically in schools with large student-to-counselor ratios (Horne, Nunez, & Bobbitt, 2000).

Indicators of Postsecondary Attendance

According to the literature, the postsecondary planning process includes ongoing behaviors and actions throughout the P-12 educational process that contribute to

"developing college aspirations, acquiring skills and knowledge to become a successful applicant, evaluating information about postsecondary institutions and financial support, matriculating as a college student, and successfully completing postsecondary education" (Noeth & Wimberly, 2004, p. 2). A number of factors occurring during high school were indicated to be strong predictors for college attendance and completion, especially for minority and low-income students. These included rigorous academic preparation, peer support, parental involvement and knowledge about postsecondary education, and access to information about college admission and financial aid resources (Martinez & Klopett, 2003; Oakes & Lipton, 2003.) The postsecondary process most often started with making the decision to attend college, which was influenced by family participation in the process (Valadez, 1998; Noeth & Wimberly, 2004).

Long-term educational development was a key component in preparing students for college and completion of a college degree (Blumberg-Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students' success in college was dependent on their preparation during middle and high school including attendance, intensive course taking, and extra-curricular activities. Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Studies, Trusty (2004) examined the effects of gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, eighth-grade reading and math scores, high school attendance, positive school behavior, students' involvement in extracurricular activities, parental involvement, and parental educational expectations for their children. The findings indicated that higher-level mathematics coursework increased the probability of degree completion. For

African-Americans and Asian-Americans, intensive science coursework had an even greater effect on the probability of degree completion.

Aspirations Are Not Enough

The No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) has challenged educators to raise achievement, most often reflected in test scores. However, raising scores is not enough to prepare the numbers of underrepresented students aspiring to attend postsecondary institutions (Baker & Velez, 1996; Boswell, 2000; Giles, 2006; Noeth & Wimberly, 2004). These aspirations are grounded in an economic reality. "The economic reality faced by students and their parents is the understanding that a college education greatly improves an individual's opportunities for economic security in today's marketplace." (Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003, p. 6) It is essential to link student priorities in the present with their future plans and aspirations. Students need to understand the importance of their high school achievement; otherwise even if they get into college, they may not have the solid academic skills necessary to manage the rigors of college-level classes (Roderick, 2006). "Completing a degree, or even enrolling in college-level courses, requires higher levels of academic preparation. In short, simply graduating from high school does not ensure that a student will be ready for college-level courses." (Venezia et al., 2003, p. 7)

Steps to College

Using data from longitudinal studies and many articles published about college-going patterns of the growing number of underrepresented students in the United States, five steps on the path to college enrollment were identified and emphasized in high

schools with a college-going culture. Research has shown that students whose parents did not attend college were less likely to complete each of these steps than their peers with college-educated parents (Choy, 2003). These steps include: (a) making the decision to pursue postsecondary education and identifying the type they wish to pursue; (b) participating in academic preparation for college-level work; (c) taking SAT or ACT entrance exams; (d) choosing and applying to one or more post-secondary institutions; and (e) gaining acceptance and making arrangements to enroll including financial arrangements.

Noeth and Wimberly (2004) studied the postsecondary planning of Hispanic and African-American students attending five large urban schools. Their findings indicated that most students (84%) considered the greatest influence in their college planning to be their mother. The students described their parents as cheerleaders; however, they also noted that parents were lacking the necessary tools and resources to help them with postsecondary planning (Noeth & Wimberly, 2004, p. 15). Students also identified educators as key persons in their postsecondary planning. Counselors (73%) and teachers (73%) were identified as equally important in helping urban students plan for college. Twenty-five percent considered principals as helpful in promoting their college aspirations. The expectation of college attendance by the school, parents, and peer group were important indicators for students' expectation of college attendance and success (Blumberg-Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Robinson, Stempel, & McCree, 2005).

Conditions of a College-Going Culture

Developing a college-going culture requires the belief of all stakeholders that the students are capable of going to college. The administrators, counselors, teachers, parents and other family members, and most importantly, the students must believe that college is an attainable goal (Blumberg-Corwin & Tierney, 2007; McClafferty et al., 2002; Oakes & Lipton, 2003; Schneider, 2007). For purposes of this ethnographic case study, the literature was distilled down to five conditions that are present in schools with a college-going culture: (a) a clear college-going mission statement based on high expectations for all students; the goals and benchmarks outlined in the statement define postsecondary admission and enrollment as expected and attainable, thus, all stakeholders recognize the necessary effort and persistence required for college preparation as a normal and expected part of the college-going process; (b) an awareness and understanding of the process by which college-going plans develop; students and their families should be aided and supported by workshops and seminars that build confidence and teach skills to activate social and cultural capital needed to negotiate college-going without sacrificing their cultural identity; school administrators, faculty, and staff need professional development to train them as facilitators and make them resources for students and families; (c) academic momentum, i.e., access to rigorous A-G courses as well as honors/advanced placement courses; instruction should engage students in critical thinking skills and work of high intellectual quality; (d) systemic and coordinated college-going support, i.e., the entire school community is actively engaged in developing and realizing college goals; the activities related to college preparation are

coordinated throughout students' high school careers rather than occurring in isolation; and (e) comprehensive college-going services that include school-site academic tutoring and SAT preparation, and partnerships with postsecondary institutions. Collaboration with postsecondary institutions can be invaluable in offering access to the hidden curriculum of the college track, with resources and expertise to address the challenges of the high school-to-college transition. These five points served as the framework for my data collection, analysis, and recommendations.

Many of the statistics for urban and ethnic minority students are discouraging. In the 35 largest cities in the United States less than half of the ninth graders complete high school, an African-American male born today is twice as likely to go to prison as to go to college, and Hispanic students who have not completed high school have not completed the ninth grade at almost double the rate of their African-American and White counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Although the NCES (2006) reported that between 1971 and 2005 the high school completion rate improved for African-American, Hispanic, and White students, and the completion rate gap narrowed between African-American and White students, there was no change between Hispanic and White students. Data also indicated that White students enrolled in postsecondary education immediately after high school at greater rates than African-American or Hispanic students. Students from low-income households and students whose parents did not attend college also entered college at lower rates (NCES, 2006).

The other side of the coin was that the average college-going rate in public and private high schools rose to nearly 70%, however, it was unevenly dispersed among

schools (NCES, 2006). The research data suggested several reasons for this disparity, ranging from behavioral factors on the part of students who were uninformed or did not understand the importance of rigorous course-taking for college entrance, to a lack of advanced-level course offerings especially in urban and rural schools. However, another set of explanations focused on the importance of social and cultural capital in postsecondary access for traditionally underserved students (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977; DiMaggio, 1982; Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Lareau & McNamara-Horvat, 1999; Portes, 1998).

Linking Social Capital to College Access

With fewer than 10% of underrepresented high school students entering college, scholars have argued that such students were simply unprepared for the rigors of college-level classes (Kirst, 2004). This statistic included the students who did not go to college because of poor grades, unmet admissions requirements, or insufficient funds to pay high tuitions. This implies that many of these students would have gone to college had they been born into different social circumstances and settings. In other words, a lack of social and cultural capital adversely affects many minority and low-income students (Gonzalez, Stone, & Jovel, 2003).

The accessibility of postsecondary education to socio-economically disadvantaged students depends upon a number of factors, but a consistent theme throughout the research literature was the necessity for strong social and academic support networks to facilitate the successful transition from high school to college (Adelman, 2006; Martinez & Klopott, 2003; Noeth & Wimberly, 2002). These social and

academic networks have been defined by a body of research as social capital (Bourdieu, 1973, 1977; Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977; Coleman, 1988; Gonzalez et al., 2003; Lareau & McNamara-Horvat, 1999; Putnam, 2000).

Social capital is a powerful concept that has found its way from sociology into other social sciences and has been given a variety of meanings by different scholars, each with a different purpose. References to social capital in education and sociology have centered on either the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1973, 1977) or James Coleman (1988). A more recent contributor to the topic, Ricardo Stanton-Salazar (2001), drew his definition of social capital from both Bourdieu's (1973, 1977) and Coleman's (1988) frameworks. Though the definitions have similar themes, such as a focus on individuals or small groups as the primary units of analysis (Portes & Landolt, 2000), it is important to make a distinction among them.

Social Capital as Relationships

The original concept of social capital came from Bourdieu (1973, 1977); he posited that people intentionally built relationships for the benefits they would derive in the future. Portes (1988) stated that according to Bourdieu, social capital can be traded for other forms of capital and can rarely be acquired without first investing in other material resources or knowledge, thus leading to relationship building with others. Bourdieu (1973) described the nature of the reproduction of these structures, which are understood as, "systems of objective relations which impart their relational properties to individuals with whom they pre-exist and survive" (p. 71). This system fills its functional role by transmitting power and privilege and reproduces the structure of class relations.

Bourdieu (1973) gave examples of prestigious individuals who have social capital at their disposal because of inherited capital of relationships and skills. This definition of social capital emphasizes the importance of institutionalized power in relation to helping individuals achieve social mobility and connects it to the process of social inclusion and exclusion (Akom, 2006; Lareau & McNamera-Horvat, 1999).

Bourdieu's concept of social capital has been criticized for not addressing the means by which resources are activated and the difficulties in obtaining social support from significant individuals (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Stanton-Salazar (2001) addressed this in his own definition of social capital. Other critiques charge that Bourdieu did not acknowledge the racial hierarchy that informs local and everyday realities (Akom, 2006; Lareau & McNamara-Horvat, 1999).

Social Capital as a Tool

Coleman's (1988) definition of social capital views it as a tool to help understand the social organization of social systems. Social capital is not seen as a "single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they facilitate certain actions of actors—whether persons or corporate actors—within a structure . . . social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible" (Coleman, 1988, p. 98). He stated that social capital is not lodged in the actor engaged in relationship building, nor in the physical results of social production. Coleman (1988) observed that obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness were integral to sustained relationships and allowed for the movement and exchange of support and resources.

Coleman's (1988) definition of social capital encompasses two streams of thought. The first sees the actor as socialized and governed by social norms, rules, and obligations; action in this stream is shaped, constrained, and restrained by social contexts. The second sees the actor as independent and motivated by self-interest alone; action in this stream serves utilitarian purposes. Critiques of Coleman's (1988) definition of social capital have centered on the notion that it does not fully acknowledge the unequal power relationships in society (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Social Capital as Connections

Stanton-Salazar (2001) defined social capital as, "properties existing within socially patterned associations among people that, when activated, enable them to accomplish their goals or to empower themselves in some meaningful way" (p. 265). This definition mirrors that of Bourdieu's (1973, 1977) as it is rooted in a socio-economic framework and reflects many of the principles found in Coleman (1988). However, the concept of activating capital and institutional support plays pivotal roles in Stanton-Salazar's (2001) definition of social capital.

The notion of institutional support refers to opportunities created to help socio-economically disadvantaged individuals cope with marginalizing forces in society and enable them to socially advance despite these forces (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Important in this concept is the idea of human bridges that connect individuals to influential gatekeepers and social networks, institutional funds of knowledge, advocacy, role modeling, emotional and moral support; and finally, personalized advice and guidance (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Social support and social resources occur as a direct result of activating relationships or ties produced by social interaction. The resources and opportunities that come from social capital are incorporated into the three dimensions of the concept, as described in the following section. However, Stanton-Salazar (2001) has been explicit in saying that this capital must be activated in order to reap the benefits. An underlying assumption is that because an individual or group possesses this capital, that they know how to activate it. Although it is true that activation of social capital can naturally occur as a result of social activity, Stanton-Salazar (2001) suggested that one must be careful in placing a large amount of responsibility to activate social capital on those individuals with less powerful societal roles.

Three Dimensions of Social Capital

A common element in most definitions of social capital is the distinction between its three dimensions or forms. Some researchers depict the three dimensions as obligations and expectations, information channels, and social norms (Coleman, 1988). Others depict them as norms and values, networks, and consequences (Newton, 1997). Either way the three distinct dimensions highlight important aspects of the relational investments, standards, and information transfer created when social capital is activated. Each dimension serves its own purpose and will be discussed further in the following sections.

Norms and values.

Often originating from a subjective perspective, norms are comprised of a range of values and attitudes of social groups that influence or determine how they relate to

each other. Coleman (1988) provided an example of norms as a value that is reinforced by social support, status, honor, and both external rewards for selfless actions, and disapproval for selfish actions. When considering communities and the public good, norms often are important for overcoming the problems that exist within the community (Coleman, 1988). However, Coleman (1988) cautioned that social norms may also constrain members of the community in addition to facilitating certain actions and thus, sometimes reduce creativity.

Of particular importance are the values of reciprocity and trust. These values provide for group social and political stability and cooperation (Newton, 1997). Generally speaking, reciprocity is based on the assumption that good acts will be repaid at some point in the future, sometimes even by someone other than the original recipient. Communities with high levels of social capital are able to benefit from reciprocity because of their ability to trust in others (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, & Tipton, 1985; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

Information channels or networks.

Social networks are considered the means by which information is transferred or channeled from one member to another. Although sometimes these social relations are maintained for other purposes, they provide a means for new information to be acquired and new action to be performed (Coleman, 1988). Unlike norms and values, social networks are observable and objective. The literature is unclear, however, whether establishing trust and norms leads to strong social networks or if social networks lead to strong community norms and values (Newton, 1997). It is clear, however, that these

networks facilitate higher levels of productivity and achievement that would not be made possible without them (Coleman, 1988).

Obligations, expectations, and consequences.

Building on the value of reciprocity, this dimension of social capital depends on two elements: whether or not the social environment is trustworthy, and the extent of the obligations that are held. Individuals in environments with high levels of outstanding obligations have more social capital from which they can draw (Coleman, 1988). Coleman (1988) further explained that within hierarchical structures, such as extended family settings in which there is a patriarch or matriarch, this person holds a large set of obligations that he or she can call in at any time to get things done. However, as Portes (1988) explained, reciprocity in social capital tends to be characterized by unspecific obligations, uncertain timeframes, and the possible violation of expectations.

Critiques of Social Capital

Social capital is often viewed positively as a basis for sustained growth and democracy in communities (Portes & Landolt, 2000) and the catalyst to various resources (Newton, 1997). A critical view highlights some potential negative implications of social capital. Akom (2006) offered a critique of social capital arguing that it recodes structural notions of racial inequality as various forms of capital processes and interactions. Further, issues of racism and discrimination operate just below the surface and allow for racialized social practices and public policies to remain unchanged and invisible. As discussed above, this notion of social capital places the burdens of social change on the individual or on communities of color, continuing to perpetuate White privilege (Akom,

2006). Akom (2006) also argued that traditional definitions of social capital fail to incorporate the ways in which people's identities influence accumulation of social capital and their potential for mobility.

Finally, Portes (1988) argued that the same mechanisms that offer positive outcomes can also lead to less desirable consequences. He points out four negative consequences of social capital: (a) exclusion of outsiders—described as social capital created by the bounded solidarity and trust at the center of a community's economic and social advances; not requiring economic exchanges outside of the community, it therefore restricts outsiders; (b) excessive claims on group members—this allows for access to community resources by all members, with less diligent members enforcing demands on the more successful and skillful members; (c) restrictions on individual freedom—essentially the demand for conformity; because the level of social control is strong, it also can become restrictive on personal freedoms; and (d) downward leveling norms—this function operates to keep members of the community in place and force the more ambitious to leave. Ultimately, Portes (1988) contended that social capital can take the form of social control and can have opposite effects of the positive points often referenced in the literature.

For purposes of this study, social capital is best understood not only by the resources and social benefits developed through participation in social networks, but also by the trust and norms established in these social networks. In terms of equity in college access, this is especially true for low-income, students of color and first-generation college-goers who lack the distinct advantage of having college-educated parents or other

family members who can advise and guide them through the admissions process (Gonzalez et al., 2003). These students need support and assistance from the persons they have developed trusting relationships with who belong to the social networks in school.

Finally, although students may be active in the social networks generating social capital in school, it is actually parents or guardians who are responsible for accumulating and activating social capital (Lareau & McNamara-Horvat, 1999). For this reason, a discussion of stratification and social reproduction must address the cultural differences in parents' and students' attitudes and behavior towards schooling.

Linking Cultural Capital to College Access

Originally, cultural capital represented a theoretical hypothesis used to explain the variations in scholastic achievement of children in different social classes (Bourdieu, 1986), variations that might be obvious from the specific benefits that can be obtained from the academic market (Bourdieu, 1986). Adapted from its French roots, it is used to explain political attitudes, systems of stratification, educational inequality, and the impact family background has on educational success (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Lamont and Lareau (1988) identified cultural capital as "high status cultural signals used in cultural and social selection" which are used to analyze "how culture and education contribute to social reproduction." (p. 153) More to my point, cultural capital is now used to explain the college attendance behaviors of low-income and minority students (Gonzalez et al., 2003). For this research, it was important to explain cultural capital in terms of its original conceptions and its link to an arbitrary power perpetuating social reproduction, how it is used to explain educational inequities, and the three states in which cultural

capital exists (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977). Critiques of the theory will also be discussed at the end of this section.

Earliest Conception of Cultural Capital

Cultural capital is a function of one's habitus, that is, the environmental conditions and structures, and the systems of disposition that mediate and aid between structures and practice of cultural and social reproductions (Bourdieu, 1973, 1977). Conceptualizing social reproduction and the role that cultural capital plays in the reproduction of class relations is best understood through the legitimization and transmission process. Bourdieu explained a sociological practice that reveals legitimizations, misrecognitions of power, and symbolic violence inherent in social systems (DiMaggio, 1982). Bourdieu and Passerson (1977) explained these misrecognitions of power:

> In any given social formation the cultural arbitrary which the power relations between groups or classes making up that social formation put into the dominant position within the system of cultural arbitraries is the one which most fully, though always indirectly, expresses the objective interests (material and symbolic) of the dominant groups or classes. (p. 9)

In other words, there are ruling ideas within the dominant class that legitimize and reinforce its power. Cultural arbitraries can be thought of as the unquestioned foundation of dominant systems. The persistence of this domination depends on the systematic misrecognition of the oppressive nature by both dominators and those who are dominated (DiMaggio, 1982). As power is perpetuated and cultural capital becomes the means by which middle and upper class families transmit properties to their children, this substitutes for or supplements the transmission of economic capital as a means of

maintaining class status and privilege across generations (Bourdieu, 1977). Any given ability can function as cultural capital if it enables the distribution and realization of the cultural heritage of a society. However, this distribution is unequal among its members, and creates exclusion within the society. A key aspect for understanding this distribution is the transmission process.

According to Bourdieu (1986), the initial accumulation of cultural capital starts from being born into a family with strong cultural capital, and continues throughout one's entire period of socialization. He maintains the most powerful factor in the symbolic value of cultural capital is in the logic of its transmission. The process of transmitting cultural capital and the time it takes to transmit depends upon its embodiment in the entire family. Therefore, while one can accumulate cultural capital throughout a lifespan, it is most strongly accumulated through an arbitrary hereditary process.

Cultural Capital and Educational Inequity

Originally, Bourdieu and Passerson (1977) were concerned with the role the educational system and family socialization played in the reproduction of power relationships and symbolic relationships between classes (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). The role the educational system plays is key because it exposes schools as non-socially neutral institutions that reflect the experiences of the dominant class. Children from upper class families benefit because they already have the social and cultural cues needed to succeed (Coleman, 1988).

Schools use specific linguistic structures, authority patterns, and types of curricula with which children from higher social classes are familiar. In addition, they are taught

certain patterns and structures in the home that make their adjustment to school positive. In contrast, children from lower class families must somehow learn these cues and discover how to negotiate their educational experience. Lamont and Lareau (1988) argued that although these students can acquire social and cultural competencies, they cannot achieve the natural familiarity of students in higher social classes.

The transmission of these privileges becomes legitimized because differences in academic achievement are typically explained by differences in ability rather than by the abundance of cultural resources within a family (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). The standard working explanation of scholastic achievement ignores the educational system's role in reproducing the existing social structure by perpetuating the transmission of cultural capital to those in the higher socioeconomic classes (Bourdieu, 1986).

Three States of Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1986) provided a summary of three states of cultural capital possessed by individuals in high-class cultures who have acquired high levels of societal competence: (a) embodied state—a long-lasting part of a person's character or disposition of both body and mind; (b) objectified state—when an individual can turn cultural capital into a physical state of cultural goods such as books, pictures, machines, etc.; and (c) institutionalized state—when embodied cultural capital is recognized; this can take the form of being recognized as academic credentials (Bourdieu, 1986).

According to Bourdieu (1986), the embodied state is the most important state because fundamentally, the properties of cultural capital are linked to the body. However, his focus was not on how individuals gain social class status, but on how the structures

and systems unequally value capital (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Bourdieu argued that the educational system perfectly reproduces the structure of distribution of cultural capital among the different social classes. The culture in which it transmits cultural capital is closest to the dominant culture, thereby reinforcing the dominant culture's place in society.

Bourdieu and Passerson's (1977) contributions to the fields of sociology and education helped researchers and practitioners better understand the perpetuation of social inequities on multiple levels. While the educational system demands the same of everyone (i.e., linguistic and cultural competence), it does not give the same to everyone. It rewards only those familiar with the dominant culture. Through exploring the development of cultural capital, it is hoped the confusion surrounding the use and value of the concept can be diminished.

Critiques of Cultural Capital

Cultural capital theory has been applied to and adapted for a variety of disciplines, and has been utilized to explain various aspects of inequalities in society. Both the theory and its original author, Bourdieu, have been criticized on a number of different points. Stanton-Salazar (2001) and Lareau and McNamara-Horvat (1999) all point to the importance of institutional agents and their role in validating and activating forms of capital. These institutional actors have the power to either legitimize or reject the efforts by individuals to activate their capital, thereby creating moments of social reproduction and social exclusion.

Finally, Lareau and McNamara-Horvat (1999) summarized three important points. Though clearly implied in Bourdieu's work, they call for emphasis and clarification: (a) the value of capital is dependent upon the social setting; (b) a difference exists between possession of and activation of capital or resources; and (c) social reproduction is not a smooth or continuous process. On the contrary, it is uneven, irregular, and constantly being negotiated by social actors.

Making the Transition

In examining the research literature on preparing students for the transition to postsecondary education, a consistent theme was the disconnection between the aspirations and goals of students to attend college, the secondary school's opportunities to realize these goals, and students' success in actually graduating and moving on (Adelman, 2006; Martinez & Klopott, 2003; Noeth & Wimberly, 2002, 2004). Rigorous academic preparation and a strong social and academic support network are crucial for students to successfully enroll in and complete postsecondary education (Martinez & Klopott, 2003). That may be true; however, it is not as easy as it sounds. Guiding teens and their families (from any ethnicity or social standing) through the admissions process of most postsecondary institutions can be complicated and time-consuming. However, with a concerted effort from all stakeholders, a college-going culture can be created in which everyone in the school is focused on achieving the conditions necessary for students to successfully compete amongst peers for college admission (Blumberg-Corwin & Tierney, 2007; McDonough, 2004).

The Role of College/Career Counselors

The eventual enrollment of graduates in college is not built into the secondary school accountability systems. Therefore, no staff member is chiefly responsible for college preparatory advising, nor is there a regular K-12 staff member who is accountable for graduates' college enrollment (Adelman, 2006). College and career counselors would appear to be the logical choices to provide college access preparation and assistance, and are often assumed to be handling this role. In reality, many are inappropriately trained and structurally constrained from being able to fulfill this role in public high schools (Gibbons et al., 2006; McDonough, 2004).

Studies show that counselors influence students' aspirations, plans, enrollments, and financial aid knowledge. Regular meetings with a counselor increase a student's chance of enrolling in a four-year university, and when students, parents, and counselors focus together upon realizing that goal, chances of enrolling in college significantly increase. Some studies have stated that the effect of socioeconomic status on the college enrollment of low-income students is largely explained by the lack of counseling (George & Aronson, 2003; Gibbons et al., 2006; Plank & Jordan, 2001).

Teachers as Significant Others

Teachers have the most direct interaction with students on a daily basis (for the most part); they need only share their own educational journey with students in order to make that connection with students who may have similar struggles. All educators have had some kind of postsecondary experience, just as every teacher has survived high school (or some equivalent). Taking time to reflect on their adolescent school

experiences, looking for similarities instead of differences, teachers can discover ways to relate to their students. Once that connection is made, teachers can share their educational journey with students, especially those for whom the following characteristics may apply after graduation: delayed enrollment after high school, part-time attendance, full-time employment, financial independence from parents, living with dependents other than a spouse, being a single parent, or not having a high school diploma. These non-traditional students comprise three-quarters of all undergraduates (NCES, 2006). Although non-traditional postsecondary students are not the focus of this study, it should be noted that they are represented to varying degrees in almost every postsecondary institution.

Conclusion

The playing field of education is anything but level, and people have become accustomed to reports by policy makers, assessment experts, and researchers about the dysfunctional K-12 system, especially as it pertains to students in low-performing schools (Oakes & Lipton, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2004). Improving K-12 education through effective teaching and offering a challenging curriculum will not only improve college readiness, it will also strengthen workforce preparation and educational accountability. Accountability systems need to shift their attention from minimum literacy standards to college readiness (Blumberg-Corwin & Tierney, 2007). An overabundance of policy reports acknowledge that K-12 schools need more than reform, they need to be transformed (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Giles, 2006).

Policy makers and educational foundations agree that a more inclusive P-16 system would ensure greater alignment between high school exit skills and the skills

required for college entry and success (McDonough, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). To prepare urban students for successful transition to postsecondary education, it is essential that districts include college exploration and planning programs throughout middle and high school (Noeth & Wimberly, 2002). Understanding the link between secondary education preparation and success in postsecondary education requires constant and continual communication and outreach between the postsecondary educational institutions and the high schools (Adelman, 2006).

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to use ethnographic research methods to evaluate the college-going conditions at Manchester High School (MHS), a pseudonym for a school located in Los Angeles, California. Data from previous research has identified those conditions necessary for students, particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds or minorities, to gain access to postsecondary education (Blumberg-Corwin & Tierney, 2007; McClafferty et al., 2002; Oakes & Lipton, 2003). Though researchers may use different words to describe these practices, identified basic elements are present in schools having a college-going culture in which a high number of students graduate, as well as gain admission, and enroll in postsecondary institutions.

For purposes of this case study, I have designated five conditions that are apparent in a college-going culture: (a) a clear college-going mission statement based on high expectations for all students; the goals and benchmarks outlined in the statement define postsecondary admission and enrollment as expected and attainable; thus, all stakeholders recognize the necessary effort and persistence required for college preparation as a normal and expected part of the college-going process; (b) an awareness and understanding of the process by which college-going plans develop; students and their families should be aided and supported by workshops and seminars that build confidence and teach skills to activate social and cultural capital needed to negotiate college-going, without sacrificing their cultural identity; school administration, faculty, and staff need professional development to train them as facilitators and resources for students and

families; (c) academic momentum, i.e., access to rigorous A-G courses including honors/advanced placement courses; instruction should engage students in critical thinking skills and academic work of high intellectual quality; (d) systemic and coordinated college-going support, i.e., the entire school community is actively engaged in developing and realizing college goals; activities related to college preparation are coordinated throughout students' high school careers, rather than occurring in isolation; and (e) comprehensive college-going services that include school-site academic tutoring and SAT preparation, and partnerships with postsecondary institutions. Collaboration with postsecondary institutions can be invaluable in offering access to the "hidden curriculum" of the college track, with resources and expertise to address the challenges of the high school-to-college transition. These five points served as the framework for assessment of the data collected and analyzed, as well as the basis for implications and recommendations for further research.

Research Question

The research question guiding this ethnographic study was:

> What practices are evident at Manchester High School (MHS) that contribute to creating and fostering a college-going culture for all students, particularly those from low-income, minority backgrounds?

Only by observing and participating in day-to-day activities are the multiple truths based on the different ways different people interpret meaning illuminated (Emerson et al., 1995). One truth is that students from middle and upper-middle class, college-going families routinely have these conditions in their schools and communities (Oakes, 1985;

Oakes et al., 2002). This is not always the truth for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and first-generation college-goers (Blumberg-Corwin, 2007; Horne et al., 2000).

Research Design

This study was ethnographic in nature, and the primary method for collecting raw data was in the form of handwritten and word-processed notes taken during daily observations and interactions with MHS students and school personnel. Raw data also included notes documenting telephone conversations and email correspondence. Data were processed and recorded in a reflective journal. Secondary data sources were researcher-generated documents, including email correspondence and photographs, and public documents, including the MHS website, student planner, school newspaper, and district publications.

I acted as a researcher-participant (Gans, 1982), a basic ethnographic approach in which the field researcher participates peripherally in daily routines of members in a social setting, in this case, Manchester High School. Gans (1982) refers to it as a "schizophrenic activity" which is difficult to sustain because of the temptation to get personally involved with participants. Though my participation was secondary to my research, by prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) I was able to adopt an emic perspective (Emerson et al., 1995).

I had two advantages in terms of access to the research site. The first was my role as coordinator of the ninth grade mentoring program, and the second, of even greater importance, was my knowledge of the inner workings of an urban, public high school. It

was this knowledge, borne of five years experience teaching ninth and tenth graders from a socio-economically disadvantaged neighborhood that afforded me acceptance by school personnel and students as a native of the urban school environment.

Although this study was not a program evaluation, I utilized a responsive evaluation approach, as defined by Robert Stake (1975) and discussed in the section below. I looked for evidence that MHS personnel were not only encouraging every student to consider college as a viable option after high school, but also providing adequate information and preparation for navigating procedural pathways to access the full range of postsecondary educational options.

Methodology

Research Site

The research site was Manchester High School (MHS), a pseudonym for a comprehensive, urban, public high school located in a predominantly White, middle-to upper-middle class neighborhood in Los Angeles, California. Many students were from either minority or lower socio-economic backgrounds, and were bussed in from outlying neighborhoods. This accounted for the racial/ethnic composition of MHS which was 75% African-American, 18% Hispanic, 3.5% Caucasian, and 3% other. The MHS population was approximately 54% male and 46% female, with 37% of the students participating in the free or reduced-price lunch program.

Data Sources

Sources for raw data in this ethnographic study included daily field notes based on formal and informal observations, conversations, email correspondence, and

interactions with MHS students and school personnel. My greatest advantage as an ethnographer was the acceptance I was afforded as a result of my previous experience teaching, and my knowledge of the inner workings of another comprehensive urban, public high school in Los Angeles. The first time I visited MHS, I felt completely at home; and although the demographics were different, the way of life at Manchester High School was very similar to that of my previous teaching assignment. This gave me confidence in my ability to engage in genuine and meaningful conversations with students, faculty, and staff.

Emerson et al., (1995) discuss the importance of "immersion in others' worlds in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important." (p. 2) I planned observations and conversations with an eye focused on the conditions deemed necessary for promoting a college-going culture. The easy access I had to the site enabled me to focus more on observing and participating, rather than working to gain access. Fetterman (1998) identified the most important component of ethnographic fieldwork as "being there—to observe, to ask seemingly stupid but insightful questions, and to write down what is seen and heard." (p. 9)

Explanation of responsive evaluation.

Responsive evaluation is based on what people do naturally to evaluate things: they observe and react. Another component of this approach is that it considers aspects of value to stakeholders, in this case, ways to guide students towards postsecondary education (Abma & Stake, 2001). This was not an evaluation of a college-preparatory program per se; it was an ethnographic case study of one urban, public high school. As a

researcher-participant, on-site on a daily basis, my field notes allowed me to capture in real-time the daily activities, interactions, and communications that promoted a college-going culture. Using my field notes as the basis of my reflective journal, I made note of instances where properties of the five conditions present in a college-going culture appeared. Borg (2001) stated that reflective writing also has certain process benefits including: articulating and rationalizing concerns, then exploring solutions; acknowledging, expressing, then examining feelings; describing events and procedures; describing and evaluating progress (or lack of); and ultimately developing a greater level of metacognitive awareness. Responsive evaluation relies less on formal communication, and more on natural communication, of which reflection is a component.

This approach relied heavily on the insights of personal observation with the hope of increasing usefulness of the findings to stakeholders (Stake, 1975). The stakeholders, in this case, consisted of students of MHS and their family members, and focused on the strategies they used to pave the way to postsecondary enrollment. Three specific reasons made the responsive evaluation approach appropriate for this study: (a) it was oriented more directly to program (MHS) activities rather than program intents; (b) it identified elements of value to the stakeholders in order to be able to respond to their informational needs; and (c) it referred to the different value perspectives of the stakeholders when reporting the results (Stake, 1975). This last reason bore particular significance when working with ethnically diverse communities for whom maintaining cultural integrity is essential.

In a discussion of schools as communities, Selznick (1992) pointed out their importance to students as persons, beyond formal learning. He said, "A school is a setting for interaction, communication, and growth—a center of life as well as learning." (p. 295) Approaches to cultural integrity include viewing education not simply as the process of teaching facts and figures to a faceless population, but interacting in processes of identity and community development (hooks, 2003; Selznick, 1992; Tierney & Jun, 2001).

Data Collection

Observations and journal notes.

As a native researcher-participant without entry challenges, I was accepted by students and school personnel and promptly became immersed in the culture of Manchester High School. Field notes, organized in journal form, served as the primary means of collecting raw data. I wrote from observations that included formal situations: faculty meetings, common planning, counseling sessions, and classrooms. The informal situations observed included: before and after school activities in hallways, teacher and student lunchrooms, classrooms, and parking lots. I employed note-taking for field notes and organized my note-making (Emerson et al., 1995) in journal format.

Whenever possible I made field notes in real-time, mostly during observations and also during conversations in which I listened but did not participate. At times, speakers would try to include me in their conversations, no doubt because I was present and obviously paying attention. I would turn it back to them by asking what they thought about the issue, at which point they invariably remembered my researcher role and

redirected their conversation back to participants. At times it was necessary for me to use great restraint because important social justice issues related to education would come up and I would want to voice my opinion. Instead, I would encourage those talking to continue their discussion and refocus myself on listening rather than thinking about what I wanted to say. Florio-Ruane (2001) suggested that dialogue and willingness to engage in difficult conversations, to commiserate, especially about issues of social justice in education is desperately needed. My later journal reflections allowed me to express my responses and questions about those conversations, albeit only to myself; those reflections sometimes corroborated my prior suspicions and assumptions.

Janesick (1999) stated that for qualitative researchers, journal writing offers a way to document the researcher's role, triangulate data by the journal itself entered as a data set, and to use the journal in communication with participants. As a researcher-participant, communicating with myself, I reflected on the raw data from my field notes and made journal entries to record my reactions, perceptions, and conclusions as to how that data provided evidence of conditions inherent in a school with a college-going culture. There were no formal surveys or interviews in this study. All participants remain anonymous or were given pseudonyms for referencing purposes. This decision was based upon personal experience and an instinct that convinced me I could obtain valid data without formalized interviews or surveys. Janesick (1999) supported my decision with an example from a researcher who kept a journal while studying an athletic department:

> While I was in the office, staff members came in and were talking about . . . the drawing the staff had the previous day. It was a lottery for a trip to a postseason tournament. One of the winners came in and talked about this. I was able to hear his perspective. The most interesting thing to me was that I saw this as a ritual in

> the department . . . yet, in our interview, this was never mentioned even though I asked the question to uncover this. This teaches me the limitations of a structured interview format, when trying to uncover a construct like organizational culture.
>
> If questions about the symbols of culture can cause respondents to frame their answers in terms of what they think the interviewer wants to know, how much more would this be true, when trying to uncover the basic values of the culture being studied? (p. 520)

Document review.

My secondary data sources included a review of researcher-generated documents (emails and photographs) and public documents (school website, school planner, school newspaper, parent/student handbook, and district publications. The rationale for conducting a document review centered on the instant availability of these data and a desire to inform myself, as researcher, of data that might enhance my interactions with MHS students and personnel, thus resulting in richer analysis of final data.

Data Analysis

All primary source data, including field notes and reflections, and secondary source data, including researcher-generated and public documents, were coded and analyzed using as a framework the five conditions identified as necessary for creating and fostering a college-going culture for all students, particularly those from low-income, minority backgrounds.

In Chapter Four I present the research evidence and analysis of the conditions existing at Manchester High School during the time of data collection. Chapter Five discusses implications and recommendations for future study, followed by my concluding thoughts.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

Fieldwork for my study began a week before the start of fall semester at Manchester High School (MHS). I accepted a position as the program coordinator for a mentoring program matching graduate students in school counseling and psychology, with incoming ninth grade students at MHS. It was a one-to-one, school-based mentoring program designed to support students in making a successful transition to high school, as well as planning and preparing for the future. This fact is noteworthy because, the purpose of this case study was to look for evidence of practices believed necessary to create and foster a college-going culture at Manchester High School, and the goal of the mentoring program was to reach students on the margins and help them succeed in pursuing postsecondary education. Therefore, the mentoring program satisfied two of the conditions I identified as present in a school with a college-going culture: (a) systemic and coordinated college-going support; that is, providing supportive relationships to students related to college preparation, occurring during their first year in high school; and (b) comprehensive college-going services. Since the mentors attended the university in collaboration with MHS, they were savvy to the hidden curriculum of the college track and could impart this information to their mentees. The relationship-building component of adult guidance increased access to crucial career and postsecondary planning information. The social structure included practices that emphasized and improved social relationships among students and staff. Such relationships potentially create a system

through which students can develop strong networks of adults and peers who support them in succeeding in high school and moving on to their chosen postsecondary option.

Coordinating the mentoring program also served as my entrée to the research site. As a researcher-participant (Gans, 1982), I received the principal's consent to explore the campus freely. My additional role as a researcher was overtly known, as the principal introduced me not only as the coordinator of the mentoring program, but also as a doctoral candidate collecting data about college preparation at MHS. In addition to spending considerable time in the college and counselors' offices, I was permitted anywhere on campus where students were allowed, and into classrooms for observations, with the permission of individual teachers. As a former high school teacher, I was comfortable in teacher settings, including the faculty cafeteria and lounges, where I observed and conversed with teachers and administrators.

Case Study Database

The duration of data collection was relatively short (seven months); however, my daily presence at the school site, and my efforts to gather as much raw data as possible generated a large database of information. After my initial "grand tour," (Spradley, 1980, p. 80) specific circumstances at the school led me to a decision to forego formal audio or video taped interviews. The situation impeding the standard interviewing process associated with qualitative inquiry was the absence of permanent administrative personnel, including the principal, Assistant Principal of Secondary Counseling Services (APSCS), and the college counselor. The school was in the initial stages of a governance transition, which ironically, worked in my favor, since no one was at the helm to hinder

my observations or restrict my conversations. I chose, therefore, to compose my data collection of detailed field notes taken during observations, conversations (in person and over the telephone), and a review of documents (researcher-generated and public). Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data collection. I maintained a reflective journal, hereafter referred to as Journal Notes, using Emerson's (1995) note-taking/note-making protocol when recording field notes. Journal entries were made in real-time or within 24 hours of observations and conversations. Reflections on entries were made within 48 hours of observations and conversations. I was resolute in adhering to these self-imposed entry deadlines throughout the data collection process.

I used the five conditions designated in Chapter One as apparent in a school with a college-going culture to organize the vast number of field notes and accompanying narratives related to my observations, conversations, and all the documents. To reiterate, the five conditions included: (a) a clear college-going mission statement based on high expectations for all students; the goals and benchmarks outlined in the statement define postsecondary admission and enrollment as expected and attainable; thus, all stakeholders recognized the necessary effort and persistence required for college preparation, as a normal and expected part of the college-going process; (b) students and their families are aided and supported in learning skills that activate the social and cultural capital needed to negotiate the college-going process, without sacrificing their cultural identity; school administration, faculty, and staff have access to professional development to train them as facilitators and resources for students and families; (c) academic momentum, i.e., access to rigorous A-G courses, as well as honors/advanced placement courses; instruction

should engage students in critical thinking skills and academic work of high intellectual quality; (d) systemic and coordinated college-going support, i.e., the entire school community is actively engaged in developing and realizing college goals; activities related to college preparation are coordinated throughout students' high school careers rather than occurring in isolation; and (e) comprehensive college-going services are offered that include school-site academic tutoring and SAT preparation, and partnerships with postsecondary institutions; collaboration with postsecondary institutions can be invaluable in offering access to the hidden curriculum of the college track, with resources and expertise to address the challenges of the high school-to-college transition.

The purpose of creating a case study database was to organize the voluminous case data into a comprehensive primary resource package that gave me access to specific data during analysis. The database contained all the relevant information used during analysis. I edited the information to reduce redundancies and sorted data categorically to make the case study database as complete, yet as manageable as possible (Merriam, 1998). Once I felt I had a comprehensive database, it took great restraint to avoid spending excessive amounts of time rewriting notes or making additional commentary. Yin (2003) forewarned that obsessive organizing and editing may be a stalling strategy to avoid starting the work of writing the case study report. He said: "The only essential characteristics of the notes are that they be organized, categorized, complete, and available for later access." (p. 103)

The next section briefly reviews the theoretical underpinnings supporting the social justice agenda that are foundational in creating a college-going culture. Finally, I

present the evidence and analyze my findings, describing them as richly and holistically as possible to provide the reader with snapshots of the research site, such that he or she is able to vicariously experience my participation in the Manchester High School community.

Theoretical Framework Supporting a College-Going Culture

As I begin my discussion of the findings, I reintroduce in brief, the theories of social and cultural capital, and their relation to educational models in line with culturally relevant pedagogy, wherein schools become culturally responsive resources for students and their families (Friere, 2002; hooks, 2003). A consistent theme throughout the research literature concerning accessibility of postsecondary education for children from low-income, minority families was the need for effective social and academic support networks, otherwise called social capital. The concept of social capital theory identifies the importance of the interrelationship of the family and school in providing students with the social capital needed to make academic transitions (Adelman, 2006; Martinez & Klopott, 2003; Noeth & Wimberly, 2002). Stanton-Salazar (2001) made the point that simply because a student may possess this capital, does not mean he or she knows how to activate it. While activation can naturally occur as the result of social activity, one must not place the burden to activate social capital on the individual or communities of color who occupy less powerful societal roles, lest White privilege be perpetuated.

With less than 10% of low-income students of color enrolling in college, scholars and government studies have pointed to inadequate preparation by high schools as the primary cause (Kirst, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). However, that statistic

included not only students with poor grades, but those with insufficient knowledge to negotiate the college-going process, those with inadequate funds for tuition, and those who lacked knowledge regarding financial aid options. This implies that had these students come from different socio-economic backgrounds, they would have gone to college, again, making the point that minority and low-income students are negatively impacted by a lack of social and cultural capital (Gonzalez et al., 2003).

Race and culture play an important role in shaping students' college-going identities, and this role is related to the historical under-representation of minorities in postsecondary institutions (Oakes, 1985). Minority students, especially first-generation college-goers, may not envision themselves as college material (Choy, 2001). They may harbor the belief that their cultural background and personal history are liabilities when, on the contrary, the cultural funds of knowledge they possess are assets and the basis of their cultural capital (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Overcoming the belief that one's cultural identity must be sacrificed in order to be a high-achiever is imperative to developing a multicultural college-going identity.

A school-wide affirmation that college attendance is the next logical step after high school serves to counteract negative stereotypes based on race or economic status, or labels imposed by certain behaviors or mere association with particular groups. The socio-cultural learning theories of Cummins (2001), Lave (1996), and Wenger (1998) are grounded in the notion that learning occurs in social situations. Therefore, it is essential to create school-based and community programs to teach students and their families the skills to activate their cultural capital, and techniques to enable them to navigate the

myriad components of college preparation. In addition, it is equally important to highlight the fact that extra effort and persistence are a normal and expected part of the college-going process for all students.

Data and Analysis of Findings

Merriam (1998) clarifies a point about data collection in qualitative research, which I feel applies in this case, and bears mentioning. She clearly stated:

> Data analysis is one of the few facets, perhaps the only facet, of doing qualitative research in which there is a right way and a wrong way…the right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection…Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed. Data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating. (p. 162)

Following is a content analysis of data gathered from observations, conversations, and documents, organized using logical and consistent sorting procedures, and based on recognizable categories identified during the analysis. As a structural outline for presenting my findings and analysis, I used the following headings: (a) college-going mission statement; (b) students/families access to college knowledge; (c) academic momentum; (d) systemic/coordinated college-going support; and (e) comprehensive college-going services. I begin with a description of how I conducted my observations, followed by the analysis.

Observations

This study, being ethnographic in nature, required my daily presence on campus. As a result of being well known around campus, I was permitted to conduct observations during classes and in guidance counselors' offices, as well as attend faculty and common planning meetings with teachers and administrators. My previous teaching experience

made the urban high school familiar territory to me, hence, my ability to be unobtrusive during my observations.

College-Going mission statement.

Classrooms.

I conducted observations in two classrooms in each of the five small learning communities (SLCs) at MHS. A college-going mission statement was prominently displayed in each of these classrooms. Although the wording used by individual SLCs differed, each one stated goals aimed at postsecondary education. Listed below, in no particular order, are excerpts from the mission statements of each of the small learning communities:

- vision to develop strong and confident students with the ability to keep up with changing technology and social environments;
- well-rounded program for academic success in high school and beyond, dare to dream;
- committed to succeed by increasing our students' marketability for postsecondary education and careers;
- students will be well-prepared to rigorously compete for admission to the most challenging postsecondary institutions; and
- promotes academic excellence and responsible citizenship to meet the challenges in pursuit of college and career goals.

All the displayed statements used verbiage acknowledging the difficulty of attaining such goals, for example, phrases such as: meet the challenge, dare to dream,

strong and proud, rigorously compete, and committed to succeed. Also, words like: challenge, dare, strong, rigorous, compete, commit, and succeed connote a sense of pushing oneself, taking a stand, moving in a particular direction, and/or persisting as long as necessary to realize goals. Clearly, to be a participating member in good-standing in any of the SLCs, a student must subscribe to its mission statement, thus implying knowledge and acceptance of the expectation to graduate from high school and move on to some form of postsecondary institution.

The design of each SLC's poster expressing the mission statement varied. Three of the posters were student-made, i.e., handmade using markers or stencils to create the text, with hand-drawn designs and/or pictures cut from magazines or generated by a computer (printed from the Internet or using a computerized drawing program). The student-made posters all proudly listed the names of the students who participated in producing the poster. In two of the cases, the signature of every student belonging to that SLC appeared; in one case, a digital group photo was placed top and center above the text; and in another, individual, wallet-sized, photographs of each student framed the mission statement. Oddly enough, the SLC whose name clearly implied a college-preparatory theme (e.g., Academy of Collegiate Empowerment) did not display the names or pictures of its members. Instead, the acronym for the SLC's name (ACE) appeared in large, bold letters in the center of the poster, with the text of the mission statement wrapping around it. When I asked an SLC member who made the poster, he responded by pointing to a cardboard box with the brand name of a chain of copy and print shops on it. Another student told me a teacher in their small learning community

created the sign on a computer then had the copy and print shop print and laminate the posters.

College and career center—before and after.

As mentioned in the beginning of this case study, Manchester High School was undergoing a major reconfiguration of its governance and decision-making structure, as well as going through the procedures required to replace the interim principal with a permanent principal. There were other unfilled positions at the time including: magnet counselor, special education, English, and math teachers, Assistant Principal of Secondary Counseling Services (APSCS), and the position of college and career counselor. Therefore, my first observations in the College and Career Center occurred during the absence of any personnel dedicated to the responsibilities associated with the Center, of which the APSCS and college counselor were key figures. Cognizant of this fact, I pursued several methods of investigation to discover the steps that were being taken to fill these two essential counseling positions. It is important to provide the following background information before discussing my observations conducted in the College and Career Center.

Since there were no administrative personnel to whom I could directly address questions, initially I relied on the MHS grapevine. This included information discussed during observations in faculty and common planning meetings, and perceptions pertaining to college preparation communicated among and between parents and students who participated in the ninth grade mentoring program I coordinated for Manchester's partnering university. I was at last able to verify or disqualify what I had heard by

examining minutes taken during SLC faculty common planning and transition meetings between MHS and the university. The agendas primarily included issues related to governance and decision-making, and secondarily, hiring concerns. They are referenced hereafter as Minutes, followed by the date of the meeting.

A convoluted saga of hiring problems emerged, revealing that as far back as June of the previous school year, the positions of principal, APSCS, and college and career counselor were unfilled, and the job descriptions for the APSCS and college counselor had only recently been written. In July the suggestion to hire an interim APSCS was posed, and in August they hired an interim APSCS who was a friend of the newly hired interim principal, because "he had a lot of experience" (Minutes, October 2, 2008). In September the administration decided to post the job position for a generic assistant principal, that is, one who did not have a Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) Credential, which is a requirement for an APSCS. In the beginning of November an AP was hired who would also serve as interim APSCS. This was permitted because of the need to fill the position, and because again the candidate, had a lot of experience [in school administration]. I later discovered he had also applied for the position of principal, but his qualifications were not equal those of the newly hired principal (Journal Notes, November 3, 2008).

Just as disconcerting was the chronicle of events pertaining to filling the college and career counselor position. As far back as July, it was common knowledge amongst the MHS faculty and staff, that there were insufficient funds to hire a counselor dedicated to college and career advising. In the meantime, two staff members were paid a flat rate

and began the daunting, yet key and time-sensitive task of scheduling students for the upcoming semester. Minutes from the next staff meeting included the proposal to hire an interim part-time counselor; however, lack of funds posed an unquestionable roadblock. The budget only allowed a person to be hired at a substitute teacher pay rate, i.e., the same pay allotted a substitute teacher who had no formal counseling knowledge or experience. The state of immediacy necessitated hiring a person to work for two weeks prior to the opening day of school to complete scheduling classes for students about to return. At a subsequent meeting in mid-September, discussion illuminated certain facts, namely that they needed a magnet counselor and a college counselor. Because they only had funds to hire one or the other, it was suggested that possibly a current faculty or staff member could fill both positions. However, that would leave open whatever position that person had previously held. One teacher was recommended and considered for the dual-position of magnet and college counselor. That idea was ultimately abandoned and the teacher filled the magnet counselor position. In mid-October a former high school counselor was hired part-time at sub pay. She worked for only a little over two weeks and then quit, leaving the College and Career Center again without a director or counselor.

At this point a representative from the partnering university was hired part-time to conduct a needs assessment at MHS. An outreach specialist, also a part-time community college counselor, came in to assess all areas in which the university could potentially assist MHS, but particularly ways they could assist the school's college-going mission. It was this intervention that led to hiring another interim college counselor. Unlike the first, this was a fully qualified college counselor (retired) who was fully credentialed. This is

an important point to note because the changes that occurred between the period of time with no college counselor in the position, and the subsequent hiring of the current interim counselor were significant, and will be discussed later.

During my first week of observations in the College and Career Center, I noted the prominence and obvious importance of the college-going mission statements posted in SLC classrooms which contrasted with the Center's seemingly forsaken atmosphere. At first glance upon entering the Center, the college-going theme was apparent with recruiting posters from various colleges covering bulletin boards, pamphlets and brochures on small tables or bookcases, a stack of college videos, and college catalogs on shelves and scattered on round tables. The perimeter of the Center had small offices identified as belonging to the College Counselor, Peer Counselor, College Outreach Counselor, and Dropout Prevention Counselor. On a high counter with five computers (none turned on), a bulletin board behind them listed names of students who had been accepted to various colleges or awarded scholarships. Another bulletin board had information posted by the individual SLCs. However, upon closer inspection I noticed the bulletins posted were outdated, as were most of the college catalogs. The shelved books and counter space were covered with a light coating of dust, and the application forms for financial aid were for the previous year (2007). As I considered the implications of an unused college information center, I scanned the room and noticed for the first time, a bulletin board partially hidden behind the computers; I was surprised by what I found.

In the middle of the large corkboard was a hand-printed sign with the question, "Got job?" This was the busiest and clearly most updated of all the bulletin boards; it was

covered with different sizes and colors of Post-It™ notes, index cards, and small pieces of paper comprised of micro-mini resumes such as: Senior female babysitter—honest, has car, will pick up and deliver, $10 per child, family-rate available, references upon request, call this number; or, Algebra tutor—serious straight-A senior, will help you with homework or test study, passing grade GUARANTEED, only $8 per hour; and my personal favorite, DJ—have karaoke-will-travel, will perform for meals and $10 per hour, on-call 24/7. There were also wallet-sized photographs with Post-It™ notes below the pictures indicating the student's name, expected graduation year, cell phone number, and anticipated job, college, or in some cases, armed service commitment. I later discovered the photos were self-posted and functioned as a means for students to stay in touch with each other either after graduation or after moving to another school. All appearances indicated that no one in authority was monitoring the content of the messages; students alone were maintaining the only active bulletin board in the College Center with postings related to everything except college preparation issues.

During the subsequent two months, whenever I visited the College Center, there were no adult counselors or administrative personnel present. I arranged to be there during the times I was told a counselor would be there, yet I never met any of the four previous interim counselors. I made a point to observe the room at different times on different days, which was not difficult as it was centrally located in MHS's Administration Building, directly next to the visitor's sign-in table at the top of the stairs. This was also the public and primary access to the administrative offices including the main and attendance offices. A sign prominently designated it as the College Center, yet

during the first eight weeks I was on-site, sometimes the room was completely empty. Other times I encountered anywhere from one to five students in the midst of varying activities (using cell phones to talk or text, listening to iPods™, talking to each other, drawing, doing homework, writing standards) sometimes with each other, sometimes alone. Further investigation revealed that three of the students most often there were peer counselors, trained by the college counselor who had quit. The other students who used the facility were often friends of the peer counselors, or students who actually were hoping to get information about college or careers. In conversations with students and teachers, the school's transitional state during the restructuring of its governance system, as well as the hiring of a new principal, were cited as the probable causes for neglecting this crucial area of concern to MHS students.

Ten weeks into the semester, the current college counselor began her challenging task of reorganizing the College Center. The presence of an authority figure was obvious the first day I walked in and Ms. Campbell was on the job. The configuration of the room had been changed to position a teacher's desk, with computer and printer, as the first thing seen upon entry. Ms. Campbell, surrounded by stacks of forms and papers, was busy keying in data, but stopped long enough to catch my eye with a questioning look. I introduced myself as the coordinator of the ninth grade mentoring program from the partnering university. We shook hands as she told me her name, commenting that she recognized my name and was pleased to meet me. I said she must have spent a lot of time and energy to produce such a transformation; she smiled, nodding her head. I told her it was obvious she was in the middle of a project, and asked if I could just look around.

"Oh, please be my guest. You're the first person who seems to really understand what I've been up against" (Journal Notes, November 3, 2008). I briefly explained the purpose of my research and told her I'd like to stop by one day when she had some time to talk about what she had done and listen to her other plans for the Center.

As I looked around the room, it bore little resemblance to the College Center I was accustomed to seeing. All the computers were turned on and available, and the bulletin boards had been completely redone with up-to-date recruitment posters and current information about application deadlines and upcoming dates to remember. The got job bulletin board had been removed and replaced with pictures and contact information for a variety of college campuses. One of the bulletin boards listed the A-G requirements for UC colleges, and a check off form that students could get a copy of to keep track of their progress toward fulfilling those requirements. Another bulletin board had posters and information pertaining to financial aid, scholarships, and military enlistment options, emphasizing the opportunity to continue one's education after graduation while serving our country. Bookcases had been reorganized by topic, with books about vocational options and technical training programs available to high school graduates, manuals about financial aid, and three-ring binders with assorted articles and handouts related to college and career planning. Current college catalogs and handbooks were arranged alphabetically, and a corner of the office was dedicated to a small television/VCR/DVD player. Students could view a wide range of videos pertaining to different careers as well as videos about the process of college and career planning.

All the areas of clutter had been removed from shelves and tables and replaced with neatly organized areas for reading, taking notes, meeting, and having conversations. The previously forlorn atmosphere was now an inviting, functional college and career information center. As I left, I handed Ms. Campbell an index card with my contact information, thanked her and asked her to let me know when would be a good time to chat. Walking towards the door, I noticed the school's eye-catching slogan, Cougars to College, strategically posted above the exit sign, and I marveled at the impressive makeover the Center had undergone in a matter of less than two weeks. I made a note to have a conversation with Ms. Campbell at a later date about her plans to maintain and sustain the Center once she was replaced.

The mission statements of all the small learning communities at Manchester High School fulfill the guiding principles of a college-going mission statement. They each state that their ultimate goal is to prepare students to pursue postsecondary education. Within the various wordings of these statements is recognized the expected difficulty of negotiating the college-going process. Therefore, students are made aware early on that they must be advocates for themselves to ensure they are taking the appropriate steps towards their college and career goals.

Students/families access to college knowledge.

At the beginning of my observations at MHS, there was no organized school-centered college preparation program in place, no type of outreach specifically designed to support the majority African-American student population and their families with learning skills necessary to activate their social and cultural capital, or negotiate the

college-going process. As noted earlier, the majority of students at MHS are bussed in from outlying communities; therefore, the racial/ethnic composition of Manchester High School is 75% African-American, 18% Hispanic, 3.5% Caucasian, and 3% other. In addition, the MHS population is approximately 54% male and 46% female, with 37% of the students participating in the free or reduced-price lunch program. These demographics can be accounted for by the fact that the surrounding neighborhood is comprised primarily of long-time White middle-to upper-class residents whose children have grown beyond high school age; consequently, MHS has the space available to accommodate children from other communities.

According to the literature, minority students and those from low-income families and/or from families without college-going experience or knowledge, often lack the social and cultural capital to fully understand the academic requirements and college application processes. Parents often verbalize their support of their children for obtaining a higher education, "Why else would I struggle so hard," is a comment heard regularly from parents in social settings. Then they recite a litany of sacrifices they willingly make to ensure their child has opportunities they did not have (Journal Notes, October 20, 2008). It is precisely these sacrifices, largely financial (e.g., living in a certain neighborhood or country, both parents working, one parent working multiple jobs, dropping out and not graduating high school to raise a family), that take priority over real-time participation in the planning and pursuit of postsecondary education. This is why children need connections with people who are different from their family, i.e., with college-going knowledge and experience, yet who are similar in cultural, economic, or

some other aspect of their life with which the student is able to identify. Gandara (1999) and other scholars asserted that the most effective college outreach programs pay specific attention to students' cultural background and incorporate this in the structure and content of the college-going preparation.

Prioritizing procedures over people.

Through persistent observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) I became aware of administrators' and consequently, teachers' pervasive pressure to comply with standards and state approved curriculum and testing procedures. Given the nationwide push to meet minimum testing requirements, this prioritizing is understandable, yet fails to address the needs of our increasingly diverse nation. Having personal experience in a large, urban high school, one also undergoing a transformation on the same scale as MHS, I recognized the constant focus on test preparation as a clear sign of prioritizing procedures over people. These procedures determine who will be permitted to participate in the educational process, as well as how they will be treated, expected to behave, evaluated, and ultimately, which path they will be directed towards. Reasons for the procedures sound equitable, "for the benefit of all students so they will be adequately prepared for college or the workforce" (Journal Notes, November 12, 2008). However, my observations concurred with previous research findings related to tracking which confirmed that certain facts and essential steps leading to success in college and career planning are undisclosed to students who are not a part of the dominant White culture (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999; Oakes, 1985; Oakes & Lipton, 2003).

My observations in classrooms and during disciplinary (with an assistant principal) and counseling sessions also revealed that most teachers and administrators neither acknowledged nor made direct efforts to understand and respect the cultural differences of their students. I found no evidence of efforts to incorporate the home language and culture of students who were not native English speakers, into learning or social activities. In contrast, counselors, both the specific SLC counselors and the newly hired interim college counselor, were all very culture conscious. During a programming session, I observed one counselor advising a Hispanic student to take Spanish instead of French in order to, "polish and refine his reading and writing in Spanish, as being truly bilingual is a huge asset when applying for jobs" (Journal Notes, December 4, 2008). On several other occasions, I observed the college counselor pointing out specific scholarships to students that were related to their ethnicity. She also informed students about certain colleges that proudly identified themselves as historically black, and consequently offered full rides to African-American students who met the application requirements and deadlines.

It is important to note that observations in common planning meetings revealed differing priorities when the observations were conducted with the interim principal in attendance, and later with the newly hired permanent principal. During the interim principal's tenancy, meeting agendas consistently focused on day-to-day school business, i.e., individual small learning communities' teacher needs and complaints, fieldtrip planning, concerns about specific students, and without fail, discussion about the district testing calendar and its affect on the daily schedule. Teachers also invariably inquired as

to the status of hiring a permanent principal, and expressed concerns about the unfilled counseling positions. The response from administration was always the same—they were "working on it" (Journal Notes, October 21; November 4, 18; December 2, 2008; January 13; February 10, 24, 2009).

When the current permanent principal took office, meeting agendas changed considerably, though not necessarily for the better. For example, instead of the SLCs submitting their own agendas before the meetings, as was their previous practice, the agenda was provided for them by the principal, to which additional agenda items could be added, time permitting. As anyone who has worked in a large urban school knows from experience, there is rarely time permitting after discussing best practices in teaching methods, compliance with standards, union concerns, and of course, mandated testing. Moreover, now with a new principal at the helm and instituting procedures toward the realization of his vision for MHS, the faculty, staff, and other administrators were jolted out of their comfort zone.

The reality is that teachers and administrators are bowed by the weight of the requirements driving the countdown to 2013-2014, the deadline imposed by NCLB (2001) obliging schools to measure and report students' annual progress toward proficiency in English/language arts and mathematics. As a result, school-based programs specifically designed for assisting students and families in learning skills that activate social and cultural capital essential to accessing postsecondary options have been neglected. The professional development needed to train educational leaders and teachers

to be culturally responsive resources for students and families is superseded by professional development aimed at meeting required standards and raising test scores.

At MHS, virtually all available energy and effort was being directed toward hiring a new principal. Despite knowing a new principal meant change was imminent, faculty and staff had become comfortable living with an indeterminate state of affairs, an effect of governance by temporary leaders. During the new principal's first few weeks I observed many people exhibiting a deer-in-the-headlights look, signifying their sense of upheaval, uncertainty, and confusion about the future. In a sense, everyone was in a state of survival mode, bracing themselves for the unknown, and thus blind to seemingly unrelated and inconsequential issues such as cultural sensitivity training.

Academic momentum.

Ninth and tenth grade mathematics.

In addition to providing students with access to college-preparatory courses, instruction should engage students in critical thinking skills and work of high intellectual quality (Horne et al., 2000; Kirst, 2004; Kirst & Venezia, 2001; Martinez & Klopett, 2003; Perna et al, 2000; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Roderick, 2006; Sarason, 1990). Implementation of this initiative was not apparent in the regular ninth and tenth grade geometry and algebra classrooms I observed. Instead there was a preponderance of repetitious direct instruction, work sheets, and independent study time, which translated into unfocused class time. I found this perplexing, especially given that my role as a researcher looking for evidence of a college-going culture was well known to the faculty and administration of MHS. I found myself thinking that had I been a teacher with

someone observing my classes, I would have made extra efforts to demonstrate teaching that was responsive to the college and career needs of my students.

Eleventh and twelfth grade language arts.

Conditions were different in the junior and senior English classes I observed, where there was a strong emphasis placed on literacy. Teachers in both classes stressed the importance of reading and writing skills not only in English class, but, as these skills related to success in all classes. Both teachers also consciously looked for and took advantage of opportunities to talk about getting ready for college. Each one stressed that resumes, personal statements, and letters of intent for college or employment preceded in-person interviews, thus one's writing was an applicant's first opportunity to make a good impression. One teacher repeatedly told her students, "people will judge you based on your writing first and how you speak second. So if you write poorly, you'll never get the chance to impress them with how great you can talk" (Journal Notes, December 10, 2008). The other teacher spoke directly to her students about the research stating the importance of pursuing rigorous academic goals in order to be ready for college, especially for African-American and Latino students (Adelman, 1999, 2006). Every day, as she opened her classroom door before the dismissal bell, she would ask her students, "And what do I always tell you?" She would begin her rap and the students would chime in: "It's up to us to open the doors of opportunity. And don't just tap on them, we got to knock hard so somebody can hear us. And once they open even a crack, we got to get our foot in there and push with all our might! They're not automatic doors like at the grocery store" (Journal Notes, December 4, 2008). She repeated this daily, and I observed her

many times after school having discussions with her students about keeping up with college preparation.

Advanced placement classes.

Circumstances were also encouraging in the eleventh grade math and biology advanced placement classes I observed. Students were well prepared with homework assignments ready to submit, and I observed them consistently on-task when working collaboratively on group projects. Teachers in these classrooms provided guidance instead of enforced control over the students. The periods of direct instruction were minimal, usually mini-lessons that were related to a particularly difficult concept or in response to questions posed by students. Most notably, I observed students engaged in class discussions that demonstrated critical thinking skills. The teachers in both classes encouraged debates that required the students to provide references or sources to support their arguments. Later I discovered that these two particular teachers collaborated in their lesson planning, explaining to me they felt it provided consistency in expectations for their students.

The knowledge and skills AP courses provide are particularly important for students from communities traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary institutions. Taking AP classes is considered a strong predictor of college-going behavior because they are representative of academic rigor (Adelman, 1999, 2006; Choy, 2003; Gandara, 1991; Gibbons et al., 2006; Martinez & Klopett, 2003; McDonough, 2004; Oakes & Lipton, 2003; Perna et al., 2000). Research has shown strong correlations between AP success and college success, i.e., students who succeed on one or more AP exams are

more likely than their peers to complete a bachelor's degree within four years (Venezia et al., 2003). Furthermore, by successfully completing AP classes and exams, students create the option to enter college without needing to take remedial or entry-level courses.

Systemic/coordinated college-going support.

During my first day on-site I observed large, red banners proclaiming, Cougars to College, above the doors at the end of all the hallways in each building. This constant reminder to students that college is their next step after graduation was one visible example of how the entire school actively engaged in encouraging college goals for all students. I also observed counselors during programming sessions with students, in which they took the time to explain to each child exactly where they stood in terms of their graduation requirements. There were fewer choices for ninth and tenth graders, but counselors pointed out that in their junior and senior years, there would be more options dependent upon which college they planned to attend. Students were advised as to what they needed next in order to ensure their graduation, and they were pointed in the direction of college preparation programs such as Upward Bound, and encouraged to explore the Internet for information about colleges they might consider attending. Each student walked away from the programming session with a list of the classes and credits he or she had completed thus far, and on the back was a list of their classes for the next semester.

This type of continuous monitoring of students' progress focusing on their accomplishments, encouraged them to stay motivated towards graduation, and thus supported their pursuit of postsecondary schooling (Gibbons et al., 2006; Horne et al.,

2000; Kirst & Venezia, 2001; Martinez & Klopett, 2003; McDonough, 2004; Noeth & Wimberly, 2002, 2004; Perna et al., 2000). It also helped students by giving them positive information to communicate to their families, thereby helping them make discussions about school progress and future plans a routine part of family conversations.

Comprehensive college-going services.

School-site services.

The components associated with comprehensive college-going services include school-site academic tutoring, ACT and SAT preparation, and the development of partnerships with postsecondary institutions (Baker & Velez, 1996; Blumberg-Corwin & Tierney, 2007; California Department of Education, 1992; Gandara, 1991; Haycock & Huang, 2001; Kirst & Venezia, 2001; McDonough, 2004; Roderick, 2006). Collaboration with colleges and universities offer access to the hidden curriculum of the college track. In the beginning of my observations, due to the unfilled college counselor position, I was unable to locate updated bulletins or announcements indicating dates for SAT or ACT preparation or testing. Although I observed school-site tutoring in the library after school, it did not focus specifically on preparation for the SAT or ACT. The California Department of Education funded the organization responsible for providing tutors, whose overall mission was to help close the achievement gap. Their informational fact sheet claimed to provide a variety of school-integrated services and activities. However, except for the after-school tutoring, I did not observe any other services, nor did I find evidence that their program explicitly promoted postsecondary attendance.

Ensuring a successful transition to postsecondary education has become the number one priority for the K-12 educational system (Consortium of Social Science Association, 2006). Individualized encouragement and guidance to navigate the bureaucratic pathways leading to postsecondary options is especially critical for first-generation college students who depend, for the most part, on school staff for information and support. Though studies have indicated that traditionally underrepresented students struggle with a myriad of social and educational inequities when pursuing higher education, their under-representation has not been blamed on a lack of academic ability or potential (Gonzalez et al., 2003). The primary barriers identified by scholars and governmental studies have pointed to other factors including: inadequate preparation in high school, continuing rising tuition rates and admissions criteria, and a lack of cultural and social capital (Auerbach, 2004; Perna & Titus, 2005; Tierney, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

The fundamental component in an effective college outreach program is family education about college awareness, providing concrete strategies for actively engaging parents in the college process. Parents need more than random information about postsecondary options; they need personalized guidance focused on the steps leading to college access and admission. To this end, with the hiring of MHS's current interim college counselor, I observed the beginning of an organized dissemination of college-going information including: financial aid information, college applications, notification of important college related deadlines, and dates of scheduled visits by college recruiters. All these resources were available to students who visited the College and Career Center.

During the daily announcements students were invited to stop by the Center and make appointments to be advised about college and career planning.

The continuation and further development of ongoing school-site support seems likely. However, the greatest number of college-going services available to students during my data collection period was sponsored by the private university collaborating with MHS. This partnership was established based on studies showing that collaboration with postsecondary institutions can increase students' college preparedness by offering access to the hidden curriculum of the college-going track (Martinez & Klopett, 2003; McClafferty et al, 2002; McDonough, 2004).

University services.

Specifically, I observed four programs offered by the partnering university. The first was the Upward Bound program, funded by a grant from the U. S. Department of Education and designed to serve high school students from low-income families who are first-generation college-goers. One of the small perimeter offices in the College and Career Center is dedicated to Upward Bound and shared on alternating days by representatives from the partnering private university and from a UC campus. A cohort of fifty students was introduced to college life during a residential summer school experience. It was offered at no cost to the students who were recommended to participate by their former teachers. Throughout the school year the cohort participated in various career planning and academic advising workshops, took fieldtrips to colleges, and began learning about the processes for applying for financial aid and college admission.

Students were recruited in their freshman year with the goal of continuing participation through their senior year.

A second program sponsored by the partnering university was a resume building and employment skills workshop. This was offered twice in the school year to more than one hundred MHS students. It was an all-day event coordinated by members of the university's career center, where volunteers attended a one-hour training session to prepare for answering questions and giving guidelines to students who attended the workshop. The volunteers were mostly university students, including graduates and undergraduates, and some staff, as well as non-university people from the business community. Students were prepared before the day of the workshop by several business and English teachers at MHS who had worked with students to create resumes. Also discussed were the job interviewing process, etiquette, and proper dress. On the day of the event students arrived in business attire, resumes in hand as instructed and met with the volunteers. Most volunteers attended to three students, critiquing their resumes one-by-one, and then conducting mock interviews with each student. The program was introduced by the university's career center in collaboration with one particular business teacher at MHS, and was intended to encourage students early on to begin practicing necessary job seeking skills. Although the focus was on job seeking skills, the students were also told that these same skills would be useful in making application to colleges and universities as well.

The third program, Start on Success (SOS), a nationwide program sponsored by the National Organization on Disability (NOD), provides introductory job training and an

internship program for high school students with physical, mental, or sensory disabilities. It was created in response to the findings from a survey on the attitudes and experiences of Americans with disabilities; of the two-thirds between the ages of 16 to 64 who were not working, 79% said they wanted to work (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). SOS recruited between ten and fifteen special education and at-risk students in their senior year at MHS to work part-time at the partnering university. The students were paired with managers in the workplace and supervised by a teacher at MHS who provided academic coaching. This program, also initiated by the university's career center, was designed specifically to help these seniors become career and/or college-ready by the time they graduated, and to assist in job placement or pursuit of other postsecondary options. It was the program's first year at MHS so its effectiveness was still unknown; and it continued beyond my data collection period. However, the workplace mentors reported that the experience was both "interesting and rewarding so far," and they believed it would have a "positive impact on the students in the long-term" (Journal Notes, January 22, 2009). The MHS teacher who coached the students said of the program, "Any outside help we can get for these kids is going to be beneficial. I see positive changes in kids' attitudes and overall behavior, and I know it's from having additional adult support and getting out into the real world" (Journal Notes, January 28, 2009).

Lastly, the mentoring program I coordinated, also in its pilot year at MHS, was designed to support ninth grade students in making a successful transition to high school, as well as to begin planning and preparing their pursuit of postsecondary options. Twenty MHS students were partnered with twenty graduate students working towards completing

a master's degree in school counseling or psychology. In the beginning, mentors and mentees used their one hour, one day a week to tour the campus, thus giving the mentee a chance to show the mentor around his or her turf. Sometimes they played board games, cards, or worked on a group mural/collage. On rare occasions, students asked for help with homework assignments. When everyone returned from Christmas break, mentors and mentees were noticeably more comfortable with each other, which I attribute to the fact they were returning to familiar faces, to continue the relationship they had begun and then nurtured for three months of the previous year. Mentors began introducing mentees to college and career websites that would help them determine specifically what steps they needed to take in order to reach their future goals. Although mentors were certainly capable of tutoring mentees in academic areas, that was not the exclusive goal of the program. The goals of this one-to-one, school-based mentoring program were to help students learn skills for developing relationships with caring adults, and provide them with the opportunity to build a relationship with an adult actively engaged in the college-going process.

Between the services offered by MHS's partnering university and the school-site services the current interim college counselor was reactivating, students at Manchester High School have some resources related to college preparation from which they can draw. The difficulty lies in convincing students to participate in programs and take advantage of the assistance offered. Parental involvement may be a positive factor in achieving student buy-in because virtually all parents aspire to a postsecondary education for their children.

Observations and Conversations

At the onset of my study, in the early fall before school started, I initiated relationships with administrators, faculty, counselors, and other staff members to establish my purpose as a researcher, gain their trust, and thus lay a foundation for future conversations. I took copious notes during and after conversations, later reflecting upon those notes, and making comments as to the implications these conversations in showing evidence of the conditions needed to create and foster a college-going culture. My greatest advantage as an ethnographer was the acceptance I was afforded as a result of my previous teaching experience, and my knowledge of the inner workings at another comprehensive urban, public high school. From my first visit to MHS I felt completely at home, and despite a different demographic makeup, the way of life at Manchester High School paralleled in many ways my previous teaching assignment. That previous teaching experience, paired with my role as researcher participant, enabled me to engage in genuine and meaningful conversations with members of the MHS community, always with an eye for evidence of conditions promoting a college-going culture.

In the next sections, I present evidence of a college-going culture revealed during conversations with students, teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents. My decision to initiate and participate in conversations (taking and making notes after the fact) instead of conducting interviews was based on a strong intuition that more frank and useful data would be corollaries of less formally structured and spontaneous interactions. Whenever I saw an opportunity to introduce the topic of college preparation into a conversation, I did so. I also initiated conversations both directly and indirectly related to

the topic on numerous occasions. In some instances the topic was broached by someone else, often as a question about attending college, which can likely be attributed to my known role as a graduate researcher and coordinator of the university outreach program (mentoring program). Again, I use my five coding categories as a structure to organize data presentation and analysis of conversations.

College-Going Mission Statement

One of the requisites in a school with a college-going culture is a clear college-going mission statement based on high expectations for all students. The goals and benchmarks outlined in the statement define postsecondary attendance as expected and achievable. Therefore, all stakeholders recognize the necessary effort and persistence required for college preparation, as a normal and expected part of the college-going process. Except for conversations I initiated directly connected to this study, I did not participate in or overhear any conversations during my fieldwork that specifically discussed either Manchester High School's public mission statement or the mission statements developed by the individual small learning communities. Since I was not present when the mission statements were conceptualized and written, I began conversations with members of the SLCs and with administrative personnel in the effort to discover who the authors were, and why they chose their particular verbiage when crafting the mission statements.

Small learning communities.

The mission statements for each of the SLCs included language that could be construed as encouraging pursuit of postsecondary education. All the small learning

communities were thematically designed, their theme more or less apparent from the name chosen: Multimedia (MM), Ecology, Fitness, and Wellbeing (EFW), Performing and Liberal Arts (PLA), Academy of Collegiate Empowerment (ACE), and the MHS Aerospace Magnet (AM). Invariably, the mission statements were designed by teachers collaborating during the developmental phase of their SLC. Many of those teachers no longer taught at MHS; however I was able to talk with three of the teachers who had participated in the "naming" of their SLCs, as they were also members of their small learning community's original design team. In one way or another, all the teachers echoed the words of one colleague, "We knew there had to be something in there about going to college or some kind of job training after high school" (Journal Notes, November 5, 2008). I asked if they identified some students as more likely than others to go to college rather than vocational school. All were quick to agree that most of the time it was obvious who probably would not go to college, but difficult to predict who would go. When asked why that was, all responses concurred with one of the veterans who said, "Sometimes the ones you had the most hope for, the really smart, good kids, end up pregnant or mixed up with the wrong crowd—you know, like getting hooked on crack or something" (Journal Notes, November 13, 2008).

Four of the SLCs: MM, PLA, ACE, and AM also received input from their SLC's counselor whose primary responsibility was to program classes for the students each semester. A secondary function was to provide advice and support to students exhibiting distress related to personal problems associated with adolescence, family issues (such as divorce, separation, death, issues with siblings), or disciplinary issues at school. When

asked if their advice included academic counseling or college-going advice, two of the four counselors reported always telling students to make a plan to go to college, then advising them to see the counselor in the College and Career Center. The other two counselors said they never gave college-going advice because they were not qualified and did not want to give students incorrect information. Instead they advised students to see the college counselor and then to come back when they had her recommendations (Journal Notes, December 2, 2008).

EFW was the only small learning community that solicited input from students. According to one teacher, that was because there was a core group of students in leadership classes who had worked together for one to three years (i.e., there were sophomores, juniors, and seniors), so it seemed natural to include them in the discussion. He also reported that the students were, "savvy enough to know college had to be mentioned directly or at least definitely implied" (Journal Notes, December 11, 2008).

The only small learning community that included parents in the naming discussion was ACE. It should be noted that ACE is dedicated to ninth grade students, and their counselor was highly proactive in contacting parents of the incoming ninth graders. The majority of these students came from one feeder school and participated in a summer transition program directed by ACE's counselor. She recalled, "These parents already knew they wanted their kids to go to college, some of them [the parents] went to college themselves or had other kids there now" (Journal Notes, December 11, 2008). She said they were adamant that the name of the SLC be one that was clearly associated with going to college, as one parent said, "We want them to be thinking right from the

start about why they're here [in high school] and why they have got to get the best grades they can, because there's lots of competition out there" (Journal Notes, December 11, 2008).

Manchester High School.

The overall mission statement for MHS was conceived of long before anyone currently working there was employed. Therefore, I was unable to discover who authored the statement, but was told it was based on the district's Expected School-wide Learning Results (ESLRs): achieve academically, communicate effectively, think critically, and the school motto, achieve with honor (Journal Notes, December 17, 2008).

The conversations with mission statement authors confirmed invariably their intentional efforts to create a statement that supported the pursuit of college or some other postsecondary option. Even the ESLRs and school motto entail principles associated with tenets fundamental to a college-going culture.

Students/Families Access to College Knowledge

Another requisite of a college-going culture is school-based support of students and their families in learning the skills for activating the social and cultural capital needed to negotiate the college-going process while maintaining their cultural identity. School administration, faculty, and staff need professional development to train them as facilitators and culturally responsive resources for students and families.

Parents and guardians who are unable to help their children take necessary steps towards making a postsecondary educational plan are dependent on schools to provide guidance for their children.

Teachers, counselors, and administrators.

Although these findings pertain to observations, I present them here, as they relate to how I laid the groundwork for conversations with the teachers and counselors. Prior to engaging these adults at MHS in conversations pertaining to their professional development experiences, I deemed it necessary to discover the extent to which teachers and counselors understood the concept of activating social and cultural capital. In order to accomplish this, during my observations of teachers and counselors, I paid attention to the distribution of power in the classroom and the counselor's office (teachable moments abound in counseling offices). That is, I watched the teacher interaction with his or her students in terms of sharing control of certain aspects of the learning process. For example, I watched for instances when the teacher gave students voice in how their curriculum was disseminated. In a senior English class, the teacher used a short PowerPoint presentation to introduce the historical background of the novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston (1937). He then offered students various choices regarding the culminating project, each choice requiring them to practice critical thinking skills to demonstrate their understanding of the novel's theme (Journal Notes, September 22, 2008).

In the counseling office, I noted whether the counselor made an effort to remember students and get to know them. For example, did the counselor call students by their names and/or make inquiries into some aspect of their life situations? Were counseling sessions largely about discipline issues or only informational in nature, with the counselor directing the interactions in order to accomplish his or her agenda? For the

most part, counselors remembered the names of students they saw regularly, usually the result of the student being referred by a teacher for some disciplinary issue. The students who voluntarily came to counseling often asked for schedule changes; however, sometimes a student had questions regarding family or peer issues. In those cases, the counselor demonstrated sensitivity and responded in accordance with the seriousness of the student's situation.

I used a similar tactic to observe administrators during common planning and faculty meetings. When I reflected on my observation notes (i.e., note-making), I questioned myself: How much power do administrators give up to the teachers? Do administrators show they value the teachers for their varying levels of classroom expertise (not exclusively determined by the number of years they have been teaching)? How do administrators make use of teachers' diverse points of view based on their various levels of education, their disparate amount of teaching experience, and their own diverse cultural backgrounds? As previously noted, when I began my fieldwork the MHS administration was in flux; no one person held the power. Therefore, it appeared that interim and permanent administrators were inviting faculty members to share their knowledge and experience, even asking that teachers volunteer to facilitate meetings and impart their teaching wisdom to colleagues.

Observations and conversations with teachers and counselors revealed comparable results—they clearly understood the need to involve students in determining the structure of learning and direction of conversation in the classroom and in the counseling office. One teacher explained it as, "empowering the kids by asking for their

input," another explained it as, "delegating teaching responsibility to them so they'll turn it in a meaningful direction" (Journal Notes, October 21, 2008). In addition, the counselor verified my conclusion that her practice of coming out from behind her desk, moving with students to an area where they could sit directly across or side-by-side to each other was her way of, in her words, "getting on the same plane of existence with them" (Journal Notes, October 30, 2008). She went on to tell me she was actually retired and this was an interim position; college and career counseling was her expertise and she was confident in her ability to get the college office back on track and help transition to a permanent counselor, whenever one was hired.

Assured that teachers and counselors had at least a basic understanding of the roles social and cultural capital play in aiding students as they negotiate the college-going process while maintaining their cultural identity, I pursued the topic of professional development (PD). I was looking for evidence that the professional development training provided for teachers, counselors, and administrators included at least the fundamentals of culturally responsive pedagogy techniques. When asked if their PD trained them to be culturally responsive resources for their students and families, teachers, counselors, and administrators alike said that respect for students' cultural background was expected. One counselor described it as, "a given" (Journal Notes, January 14, 2009). When asked what she meant, she explained, "There's no training involved except on the job; anyone in an urban school knows it's up to us to get these kids hooked up with the right people. I may be from another generation, but it's still more about who you know than what you know. We've got to let them [the students and families] in on that dirty little secret ASAP so

they can jump on opportunities to get in with the right people" (Journal Notes, January 14, 2009).

Very similar to the experience of counselors and administrators, teachers depended on their personal experiences to bring to light the value of social and cultural capital. Professional development for teachers was not focused on training them to be culturally responsive resources who could then act as facilitators to assist students and their families in understanding the concepts of social and cultural capital, and teach them skills to activate that capital. One of the teachers I engaged in conversation about teachers' PD explained she would tell her students about her father coming to the United States from El Salvador and enrolling in night classes to learn English. She went on to explain that because of a good career counselor at the community college he attended, he began taking core courses that would allow him to transfer to a state college. She said her father always referred to that counselor as "an angel sent to make sure he didn't end up like most of his friends" (Journal Notes, January 27, 2009). When I asked what that meant, she said that many of his friends got deported or just learned enough English to get by and then moved on to day-labor jobs. Another teacher discussed her personal experience returning to school after her divorce, a non-traditional student, single mother, working full-time, trying to complete her general education requirements at a community college. It took her almost eight years to complete the courses needed to transfer to a four-year college, and when she was making her application to a state college, her statistics professor advised her to attend UCLA. She told him she could not afford it, to which the professor explained that her gender and ethnicity were assets and she needed to

"capitalize on them" by looking for scholarships that were geared towards her specific background and interests (Journal Notes, January, 27, 2009). He also gave her the names of several of his colleagues she could contact at UCLA, using his name as an introduction. With some encouragement from her husband and research into scholarship and financial aid options, she submitted her application. Accompanying her application was a letter of recommendation from her mentor professor and a letter of recommendation from one of his colleagues she had volunteered her time to serve as a teaching assistant. She was accepted and eventually pursued graduate studies at that same university.

During most of the time dedicated to my data collection, MHS was under the direction of an interim principal. I mention this point to highlight my supposition that anyone working in a temporary position may be less committed than someone permanently placed. Also implied in the role of an interim principal is the idea of being in control of faculty, staff and the student body, and keeping a forward momentum until the permanent principal takes over. Therefore, it was not surprising that I observed very little interaction between the interim principal and other members of the administration, who were admittedly, holding back on "investing themselves in a temporary leader" (Journal Notes, November 6, 2008). Leadership has an effect on all school personnel, and when leaders change, there is confusion and challenges to change even though the changes may be positive. Bridges (2003) says, "It's this process of letting go that people resist, not the change itself." (p. 16) Teachers and staff seemed to be hunkering down and doing their jobs, but not wanting to draw attention to themselves. Teachers, counselors, and assistant

principals stayed close to their small learning communities, avoiding collaboration with those outside their SLC.

There was a silver lining to the virtual cloud of uncertainty that hovered over Manchester High School. It was the fact that when the current permanent principal took over, he voiced a clear commitment to, "change, revision, and renewal," leading to "equity in access for all children," and his pledge to, "make a difference in the lives and outcomes of all our students" (Journal Notes, January 16, 2009). Even before I heard him explicitly state these goals in a faculty meeting, the principal and I discussed the topic one day in his office. I was there obtaining his signature on a consent form and telling him about my study. He nodded knowingly and pointed to a book on the shelf behind me, asking if I had read Stanton-Salazar, and then proceeded to tell me about his dissertation. The new principal's mission statement clearly indicated his knowledge and understanding of social and cultural capital concepts, and when I asked if he would share that knowledge and understanding with his faculty, he said that was his intent. He continued further to say he was currently working on a professional development schedule focusing on family outreach. His goal was to let the families' cultural capital inform teaching practices and assist in developing creative techniques for covering the curriculum.

Students and their families.

A characteristic of the ethnographic study methodology is that it affords the researcher a period of prolonged engagement needed to develop trusting relationships with participants. Only through an investment of sufficient time at the research site is it possible to gain an understanding of the culture, while maintaining a watchful eye for

distortions that may occur in the data, as well as to recognize personal biases that may occur (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged engagement allowed me to have mutual experiences with the MHS community on a daily basis and demonstrate my trustworthiness by commitment to their anonymity, and by acknowledging and sharing the overwhelming obligations inherent in teaching, counseling, and parenting the next generation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I rigorously maintained a clear demarcation line between myself as researcher and myself as participant, which improved the possibility to obtain rich and valid data, and consequently increased the scope of my study.

Some of the students and their family members were unaware that their culture could be used as an asset in the college-going process. They associated highlighting their cultural background with, as one Hispanic mother said, "trying to make people feel sorry for me" (Journal Notes, February 12, 2009). She continued to say that her mother raised three children on her own as a single mother, and always felt uncomfortable because she spoke English poorly. For that reason, she did not want her children to speak anything but English, and she pushed them to read and write only in English. Another parent, an African-American father married to a Salvadorian woman, had a strikingly beautiful daughter with very light skin sprinkled with freckles, reddish brown hair, and green eyes. I engaged the daughter in conversation about using her African-American heritage to apply for a particular scholarship. Shaking her head, she said, "No way. My mom says that if anyone asks what I am, I should say I'm Swedish. She thinks I have a chance at being a model because I'm so tall and I have long legs" (Journal Notes, February 11, 2009). A very light-skinned African-American student told me his father (a very dark-

skinned African-American) told him to, “take advantage of looking White every chance you get” (Journal Notes, February 13, 2009). I asked that same student if his father embraced the Black culture at home or imparted any of its beliefs to him and his younger brother and older sister (both also light-skinned). He responded by saying, “Oh, yeah. He don’t want us acting White at home,” then making a sweeping motion with his arm and hand, “just when we’re out there” (Journal Notes, February 13, 2009).

It was clear from the comments of parents or what their children reported them saying, that certain ethnicities still considered their culture of origin to be a handicap or liability. This strikes me as odd in this day and age of social justice agendas, yet perhaps it is a vestige of past cultural and racial attitudes that leads students of color not to identify themselves as college material. Students also may have been led to believe that maintaining their cultural identity and home language was not congruent with the identity of a high-achiever. This indicates the need for adults to work to create and foster a school culture that does not force students to choose between the language and values of their home culture and those of the dominant culture. During the time frame of my data collection, I did not find evidence of workshops or organizations for parents and/or other family members that introduced and supported the learning skills needed to activate social and cultural capital. There were a few times in conversations with parents or students when someone would comment on the need to be in the right group or hanging with the moving [up] crowd, both comments implying that social connections were important to be successful.

Once more I should point out that my data collection period ended before any of the goals of the new principal could be fully realized; yet it should be noted that he proposed, "equity and access for all children, and engaging our community and stakeholders" (Journal Notes, January 15, 2009). Given time and assistance from its partnering university, coupled with the new principal's positive initiatives for revision and renewal, the culture of MHS will likely grow and change. It will hopefully lead to more action towards valuing cultural identity and fostering an educational environment that places high value on diversity and multiculturalism.

Academic Momentum

The courses that students take are foundational and crucial to their success in applying and enrolling in postsecondary institutions. In reality, the proper sequencing of these courses will lead to upper level classes in high school, but this must start in middle school and at the latest in ninth grade. Most universities require those admitted to have taken some advanced courses, otherwise when students get to college they find themselves far behind their peers. They discover that the courses in which they got an A in high school did not prepare them with the skills or knowledge necessary to produce true college-level work. The only option for those students, if they can sustain their motivation, is to take remedial classes to catch up with their adequately prepared college peers.

My conversations pertaining to access to rigorous A-G courses, including honors and advanced placement courses, were limited to students, but included all grade levels. I felt that their ability to talk with me about the concept of academic momentum, which is

built upon student engagement and critical thinking and writing skills, would act as a barometer for the level of its presence or absence at MHS. Manchester High School offered AP English, AP Calculus, AP Chemistry, and AP Biology, and students who took algebra in eighth grade almost invariably were programmed into AP classes. In a conversation with Janice, a junior who had AP English, I asked how she got into the class. She told me in seventh grade her English teacher put her in honors and she stayed in Honors English for the rest of her middle school career. When Janice got to MHS, they just put her in AP English. She said that compared to two of her friends who had taken only English as a second language (ESL) classes (she was an ESL student in sixth grade, but tested out in seventh grade) her reading and writing skills were far above theirs and she often tutored them (Journal Notes, February 17, 2009).

I also had a conversation with Donovan, an eleventh grader whose sister started college this year. He shared with me a conversation he had with her related to AP classes she took at MHS. She encouraged him to take as many AP classes as he could get into and attributed taking AP Biology at MHS as the reason her first year of biology in college seemed, practically remedial. She also told him that she was glad she had taken AP English because even though it was, "the class she actually had to study for otherwise she'd fail," it "made her a better critical thinker" (Journal Notes, February 25, 2009). Donovan went on to tell me that his sister had explained to him that critical thinking was not "just pointing out what you don't like about something;" it was about analyzing, which was "a totally different way of thinking" (Journal Notes, February 25, 2009). When I asked Donovan if he would heed his sister's advice, he told me yes, because, "Liz

and I are going to get an apartment together when I get to college" (Journal Notes, February 25, 2009).

Gloria, a senior, also had some advice from her sister who graduated from Manchester High School two years ago and was currently enrolled at a UC. Her sister recommended that Gloria take the college prep math class offered at MHS. She said it was a combination of algebra and trigonometry, which helped her in the business classes she was taking. This advice was a response to her sister's hearing from their mother that Gloria was struggling and getting poor grades in her pre-calculus class. Gloria's goal was to follow in her sister's footsteps, that is, by testing out of her first college math class. "My sister said it really helped her schedule, especially that first year when she was going a little crazy" (Journal Notes, February 26, 2009).

Students at MHS can have access to rigorous A-G courses, including honors and advanced placement classes, but they have to know to ask for those classes. Sometimes students were programmed based on their schedule and available space in classes. If students did not advocate for themselves and communicate to their counselor their intent to go to college, they could be scheduled into classes that would allow them to graduate, but not necessarily to be admitted to the college of their choice.

Systemic/Coordinated College-Going Support and Comprehensive College-going Services

At the beginning of the data collection period, due to the absence of a college counselor, the College and Career Center was not functioning at a level congruent with its potential; systemic and coordinated college-going support and comprehensive college-going services were lacking. Therefore, it made sense to present the data and analysis for

the last two categories simultaneously. The conversations related to those categories, many of which I initiated by first making email contact, were for the most part, with school personnel. I do, however, present some pertinent evidence gathered in conversations with the mentees and mentors who participated in the mentoring program I coordinated for MHS's partnering university.

It is important to bear in mind the context in which the word "coordinated" is used, which is college-going support organized in logical, incremental steps leading to postsecondary enrollment. The only evidence of coordinated college-going support present at MHS at the beginning of my data collection process was the Upward Bound program. The College and Career Center included a small perimeter office dedicated to this outreach program. The office space was shared by two different Upward Bound representatives, one from a UC and one from Manchester High School's partnering university. Each of the Upward Bound representatives was responsible for fifty students, all from low-income families in which neither parent/guardian had completed a college degree. The program began with a residential summer school session where ninth grade students lived in the dorms on campus and took various college preparatory courses. After their classes, students debriefed in small groups and had discussions related to their career aspirations. Those who had not yet made specific choices about their career paths, got together and spent time using the Internet to research possibilities.

After a debriefing session, Morgan, an African-American girl, talked with me about how she discovered that her understanding of the amount of education needed to be a veterinarian was all wrong. "It was a website where it tells you the different

requirements and how long it takes to be a vet, boy was I surprised," she said, shaking her head and rolling her eyes (Journal Notes, February 18, 2009). At first, she was disappointed because it would take more time than she thought; she almost changed her mind. Then during one of the group discussions, she told me that almost everyone encouraged her to, "go for your dream" (Journal Notes, February 18, 2009). She said, "It really helped talking it through, especially with people who know me and how I am with animals, and how I've got a special way of connecting with hurt animals" (Journal Notes, February 18, 2009).

Many students, like Morgan, underestimated the amount of education needed to pursue particular careers. Students also overestimated the cost involved in going to college. Daniel, a young man who lived with his paternal grandmother, said all he heard was that it was expensive. He said, "All I know is that unless I have straight A grades so I can get a scholarship, there's no way I'm going; we're not rich" (Journal Notes, February 19, 2009). It was during the summer session with Upward Bound that he learned about student loans and scholarships based on criteria other than a 4.0 grade point average.

As mentioned at the start of this case study report, MHS was in the early stages of collaboration with a private university. The services and programs associated with the partnership were really the beginning of what could be considered comprehensive college-going services. Through the university MHS students could sign up to participate in SAT and high school exit exam preparation sessions. In the short time Ms. Campbell had been the interim college counselor, she had collaborated with the college outreach specialist from the partnering university to ensure that college field trips, financial aid

workshops, and other college preparatory events were announced in a timely fashion, and sign-up sheets were posted in the College Center. She also sent any flyers with college-going information to juniors' and seniors' homerooms. During one conversation, Ms. Campbell expressed her regret that by the time she was hired, it was too late to organize a college fair. However, with the help of the partnering university, representatives from two community colleges, two state colleges, and one UC were scheduled to visit MHS and gave presentations to juniors and exiting seniors.

MHS's partnering university also sponsored the mentoring program I coordinated. Twenty students in ninth grade were matched with twenty graduate students who were working to obtain their master's degree and credential in school counseling. Mentors attended an orientation and training session before mentoring began. As program coordinator, I was charged with preparing them to work with their ninth grade mentees, a formidable task considering the majority of mentors had no experience working in an urban high school, or with adolescents making the challenging transition from middle to high school. The mentoring program was designed to give transitioning ninth grade students an opportunity to build a trusting and supportive relationship with a college savvy adult who could provide academic as well as social support by listening and/or offering guidance and advice.

Once a week, mentors and mentees met for one hour after school, during which they could spend their time doing homework, playing games, using the Internet to do research on careers or colleges, or just talking. During their orientation/training mentors were advised to make plans with their mentees in order to make the best use of their

limited time together. In reality, however, many plans were abandoned because mentees often arrived with more pressing issues they wanted to address with their mentors. During their training mentors were asked to discuss with their mentees the hidden curriculum of the college-going track and begin exploring their future goals. Since the mentees were all ninth graders, many of them were undecided about their career paths. The most common aspiration mentioned by boys was professional athlete; the girls talked about wanting careers in modeling and entertainment. In both instances students were not able to describe the steps to becoming a professional ball player or the process to get their first modeling job. Even students who expressed their desire to become doctors, lawyers, nurses, or other mainstream professionals were unfamiliar with the educational requirements and costs to attain their dream jobs. Jennifer, a mentee who was uncertain about her career path said, "I was lucky my mentor's mother was a nurse because she was able to tell me how her mom did it" (Journal Notes, February 27, 2009). The same was true for Anthony, who was determined to be a musician until having a discussion with his mentor about it. He discovered his mentor had already been down that road and was able to give him first-hand information about the challenges and responsibilities he had not thought about and consequently, had learned the hard way.

Despite the apparent lack of systemic and coordinated college-going support present at Manchester High School when I began my study, the prognosis for the future looked positive. The interim college and career counselor was already prepared to orient and train her replacement, once one was hired. With assistance from the partnering university and the new principal's exciting vision for change, MHS had already made

strides toward developing the type of college-going support that would assist students in aligning their educational goals with their career goals. They would then be able to form realistic plans for achieving those goals, and identify and implement strategies corresponding to their realization.

Document Review

The documents reviewed in this study were divided into two categories: researcher-generated documents and public documents. Two types of researcher-generated documents were collected: emails sent to and received from various stakeholders, including parents and friends, and digital photographs taken at the research site. The public documents included: Manchester High School's website, student planner, and school newspaper. I also reviewed two local school district publications: the *Parent/Student Handbook* (LAUSD, 2008) and the *Plan for Student Achievement, New Title I Schools* (LAUSD, 2008).

Researcher-Generated Documents

Researcher-generated documents can be defined as journals or diaries a researcher asks respondents to create. They can also be photographs taken during observations to be used as a tool for remembering and analyzing the situation as it was. In either case, researcher-generated documents are created for the express purpose of enhancing and expanding data collection (Merriam, 1998).

Email was used to corroborate observations and conversations and to check findings as they emerged. An advantage of using email was the ability to obtain the perspectives of many participants without having to schedule additional conversations or

meetings with them. The second type of researcher-generated documents was digital photographs of trace material taken at the research site. Merriam (1998) defines physical traces as, "any changes in the physical environment due to human actions." (p. 117) The ease and convenience of digital photography enabled me to produce documents of potential physical evidence related to the existence or non-existence of a college-going culture.

Emails.

A task greatly facilitated by using email was conducting member checks to verify accurate recording of data, which is, checking with the participants in the study to ensure that their thoughts and comments were accurately portrayed. I emailed my tentative findings to participants to provide them with an opportunity to verify that the information presented was represented in the way they intended it. For example, a conversation with a representative from MHS's partnering university led me to believe that teachers were not encouraging students to pursue postsecondary options. I emailed him asking that he confirm that as a fact, his reply was, "That's partially true, but I didn't mean all the teachers. Also, I meant that some teachers were pushing certain students to go to college and not making the same effort with students they perceived as unmotivated" (Email, March 2, 2009). I replied to him asking what criteria teachers used to determine a student was unmotivated. He replied, "Students who are failing one or more classes, especially their class, as well as kids who are late or absent a lot, kids who never come to parent conferences when reports cards are distributed, and kids who rarely or never do homework assignments" (Email, March 3, 2009). I followed up once more asking why he

thought these teachers did not consider motivating students as part of their jobs. He replied, “I think their rationale is that they only have so much [energy] to give, and so they’d rather spend it on kids who at least look like they’re trying to pass the class” (Email, March 5, 2009). Our emails not only enabled me to verify what I heard in our face-to-face conversation, it also allowed me to continue the conversation and thereby gather information about teachers’ perceptions of students and which were worthy of their time and efforts. It was disappointing that some teachers singled out and directed their time and efforts toward certain students and did not believe them all worthy of the same consideration.

My previous teaching experience afforded me acceptance into the MHS school community and through prolonged engagement I got to know many of the teachers, administrators, and staff members well enough that my presence came to be expected. Although I was acquainted with most of the adults on campus, with three people, especially, I developed professional relationships based on our common goals as educators: Ms. Jenkins, a counselor; Ms. Garrison, a special education teacher; and Mr. Nguyen, an assistant principal. All were aware of my dual role as mentoring coordinator and researcher, and they extended their support because they believed the university partnership would yield benefits for everyone at MHS. Over a period of six months we forged an alliance dedicated to serving the best interests of our kids, and I utilized that relationship to confirm information gathered during my fieldwork via email checks.

I addressed Mr. Nguyen in an email asking him to verify my data related to the college counselor. I asked if it was true that the last permanent college counselor had left,

without an explanation, and was it true there had been three interim college counselors before the current interim counselor, Ms. Campbell. Additionally, I asked what effect he believed the unfilled position of college counselor had on MHS.

Mr. Nguyen confirmed my information about the exiting counselor and her multiple replacements, but added:

> That's not written down anywhere, it's just what I know because it's common knowledge. Obviously, the college counselor is an indispensable player on the team and the fact that we still don't have a permanent person is frustrating to all of us, especially the kids. The rest of us depend upon having someone knowledgeable about college requirements/deadlines, etc., and so it puts us in a bad light with students because there's no one to refer them to with their college and career questions. At least Ms. Campbell has been able to get the College Center organized and she's working hard preparing to train whoever they finally hire. We know the university has responded to some of our students' needs like arranging visits by college reps and organizing application workshops for our seniors. I think we're heading in the right direction and if we can keep moving forward at a steady pace, especially once we have a permanent college counselor, we'll see many improvements borne out of all this chaos (Email, March 9, 2009).

Data collected during faculty meetings and professional development days indicated that some teachers had mixed feelings about university assistance and others had made assumptions about how students would be served through the partnership. In an email to Ms. Garrison, the special education teacher, I said it sounded as if some teachers were pleased with the university assistance but also mistakenly believed the university was taking over responsibility for college counseling; and other teachers and some staff regarded university representatives (including me) as intruders.

She replied:

> At first we all thought you were coming in because of the problem with keeping a college counselor, and it made sense that the college would help us in that area first. I know I thought we'd be able to start sending kids down there [to the College Center] and one of your people would be there. It wasn't until later that I

> found out it was more about school politics and governance. When I heard about the mentoring program I figured there would be mentors available for any student who wanted one, but Ms. Jenkins told me it was only for ninth graders. It was actually the transition teacher, Ms. Collins, who clued me in because she works with our [special education] seniors and knows more about college requirements than most of us. In a way our department is lucky because we have a transition teacher, that's her job, to help special needs students with graduation requirements and then college and job placements (Email, March 14, 2009).

To my question about perception of the university, she replied:

> There are a couple of faculty members who just don't like private schools because they associate them with spoiled, rich, White kids, and they can't see how anyone from your school could mentor our students, for instance. Then I know a couple teachers who don't like the idea of losing control, as if we had control in the first place. There are a lot of political things going on here that no one really explains to us. We get notices about meetings in our boxes but frankly, most of us just sort them into the trash. We don't have time or energy for more meetings. But between you and me, I think the attitude is becoming more positive because we see the principal working with people from the university and he talks about working together for change. The truth is that we're all really anxious about change but we're hoping for the best (Email, March 14, 2009).

Certain professional development days were designated for counselors to meet together, rather than with their assigned small learning communities. I emailed Ms. Jenkins, ACE's counselor, for verification on two issues discussed during those counselor-only meetings. First, on more than one occasion counselors complained that their SLC's stated goals were not being met because they did not have the classes required to meet those goals. For example, the Aerospace Magnet did not have aerospace related classes. The students were just required to take more courses in math and science. The second issue I wanted to confirm, especially with a counselor, was that during the absence of a college and career counselor, SLC counselors were expected to take on that role as well. Ms. Jenkins was quick to reply to both points.

To the first issue about SLCs meeting their goals, she wrote:

Taking extra math or science is not negative, however, sometimes they don't get other classes they need for college, like two years of a foreign language, and don't find out about it until they're seniors. They hate that because it could mean they sit in a Spanish class with ninth and tenth graders who, they're afraid think they failed the class before and are retreads. They may be taking what they need to graduate but that doesn't mean it's what they need to get into a college or university. We just think why call yourself something you're not, and besides that coming up with a focus and a name for an SLC can be kind of arbitrary. For ours we went on a retreat and brainstormed, I'm not really sure how others came up with theirs. It's not that we don't like SLCs but if a counselor position is open, like it was in the magnet, guess who get those kids (Email, March 2, 2009)?

Regarding the counselors' added duties pertaining to college and career counseling, Ms. Jenkins confirmed my supposition. She wrote:

> It's true that part of our job is helping kids plan for the future, but I know I'm not always up to speed on college or tech school requirements, that is the college counselor's job. Honestly, what most of us do is get the student to go online and research the school they want to go to. I usually tell the student that once they print out the information from the school's website come tell me and I'll summons them out of class and we'll go over it together. That way they get their information and I copy and file it so I have it as a reference for some other kid down the line. If it sounds like we're whining we probably are! But it's not so much we don't want to focus on college and career planning, it's that we've got programming to do and supervision and when we first got ISIS (Individualized Student Information System) we were doing attendance checking too, we just don't have the time (Email, March 18, 2009).

Since the mentoring program was an obvious resource and component of a college-going culture, I made note of specific events or instances when a property of the college-going culture was manifested. For example, about six weeks into the mentoring process, I observed mentors spending more time talking to each other rather than working with their mentees. Understandably they were discussing their own school issues; many of them had classes together and were even working on projects in pairs or small groups. Meeting at MHS to mentor made it convenient for them to check in with each other and

discuss their own assignments. I knew I needed to address this problem with mentors; however, I recognized they were also in the process of relationship building amongst themselves (and I with them). In view of that, I sent an email in which I advised them:

> It's important that you be yourself with your mentee and share with him/her about what you're currently doing in school. However, you want to remember that one hour is a very short time; so maximizing time with your mentee should be your priority. Modeling how you work with your colleagues on group projects can be a part of your mentoring but it's important to then make a direct connection with your mentee about how he/she might do that. You might ask if they ever had to do group projects, discuss the problems or issues that come up when working in a group, etc. In other words, you want your mentee to know that you are there to meet with him/her, not your colleagues (Email, November 5, 2008).

The ninth grade mentees were thus exposed to university students as they were dealing with the daily realities of taking college classes. For students just beginning to explore college and career options it was valuable for them to have the support and guidance of a personal mentor engaged in the college-going process. In later discussions with mentors, I impressed on them the great importance of sharing their school experiences with their mentees and helping them relate it to their own school lives.

Sometimes mentors would email me with questions or ask for advice. One mentor felt as though she was not connecting with her mentee.

> He's so quiet sometimes; maybe he'd be better off with a guy mentor. How do I know if I'm doing any good? He asked me if I knew anything about Yale and I felt bad because I don't even know where it is. I'm worried about what I'll do if that happens when I'm actually working as a counselor in a school (Email, November 15, 2008).

My teaching experience at another urban high school enabled me to reassure the mentor.

> Remember that every meeting won't necessarily be an earthshaking event. I can tell that you and Sam are building a relationship just by the fact that he shows up every week and he's smiling and happy to be there. It takes time to get to know each other and you're only meeting once a week. Try planning with Sam to do

> something specific at your next meeting, like checking out the College Center or even doing some Internet research about something he's interested in. That way you'll see how computer savvy he is and you'll discover some of his interests. If he's interested in Yale and you don't know about it you just need to be honest and say you don't know but tell him that's something the two of you can research (Email, December 10, 2008).

Although this mentor was having doubts about her effectiveness as a future counselor, clearly she had the best interests of her mentee at heart when she sought advice and guidance for herself. At their next meeting she and her mentee explored the Yale website and even wrote a short email of introduction to a contact person they found on the website. This was an excellent example of how the MHS mentees had the opportunity to learn how to start networking and making connections with people who might provide them with valuable college knowledge and help them keep their momentum going. It was also an opportunity for this mentor to see that by collaborating with someone and asking for help, she could turn a doubtful experience into a successful one. In so doing, she gained confidence in her counseling skills and her ability to effectively connect with students.

Reviewing emails similar to the examples above attested to the fact that students at MHS, at least the mentees, were receiving coordinated support and access to the hidden curriculum of the college-going track. This support, however, was provided by MHS's partnering university. As previously stated, school-wide engagement to develop and realize college goals was in the beginning stages at Manchester High School. The university partnership was providing assistance by reaching out to MHS students with opportunities such as the mentoring program.

Finally, email yielded an unanticipated benefit in terms of making connections with MHS families and friends. In an email to mentors I sent the link to a free career planning website, which was very user-friendly yet comprehensive. It allowed the user to conduct a self-assessment to determine which jobs best matched one's personality, an interest profiler to discover one's interests and how they related to the work world, and a work importance profiler, to discover what was important to the user in a job. The response from the mentors was positive, and for the next few weeks many of them were engaged in the website's various activities with their mentees.

The mentors gave such positive feedback about the website that I decided to send the link to parents of mentees, even though I only had email addresses for five of the parents. I did this in part because I sought opportunities to make contact with the parents of our mentees, and also because many of our mentees had older siblings who I thought might find the website beneficial. In my email to parents I said, "This is a great way for you and your child to spend time together exploring his or her interests—you might even learn something about your child you didn't already know" (Email, January 14, 2009). At the end of the email I told them to contact me if they had questions and to feel free to share the website with any other parents they knew. Having sent parents emails in the past, I did not really expect anyone to reply, especially since the nature of my email was to inform. To my surprise, all the parents replied, and they all forwarded the message to friends and other family members. I learned a lesson about the risk of globalizing and having expectations based on previous experiences that only appear to be the same. It

was clear that parents replied to this particular email because it was of interest and important to them.

They were spreading the word, which helped to engage others in their family and community in creating a college-going culture. Every time someone who received my forwarded email, forwarded it to someone they thought could find the website useful, the potential network of college knowledge grew. It was only after receiving a voicemail from a parent calling to thank me that I made a connection between the unusually large number of messages in my junk folder (normally I delete them after a cursory skimming of subject lines and addresses) and the rest of her voicemail. Her message finished with, "I forwarded your email to a lot of my family, most of them adults, and I also bookmarked it so I can go back again when I have some more time." (Voicemail, January 25, 2009) Once I began looking in the junk folder I was amazed to find emails from extended MHS family. At first, the majority of the messages were simple thank yous, but after a few weeks they changed, and the same people sent emails with rave reviews of the website. The adults who used it said they thought it was an invaluable resource for students and non-students alike.

Each email mentioned plans to spend time with sons or daughters exploring the website. A suggestion even came in from the friend of the mother of one of the kids (mentees). She was going to have her daughter watch and listen to her (the mother) answer the questions first because she recognized points of interest her daughter might relate to but, as she wrote, "never found the right time to bring it up" (Email, February 4, 2009). The uncle of one of the mentees wrote, "I wish someone had turned me on to

something like this when I was younger" (Email, January 18, 2009). My favorite email came from a mentee's grandmother who wrote, "Kids are so lucky today to have computers and things like this. When you're young and struggling with making important choices about your future you don't want to hear nobody, you just want to make your own decisions and sometimes they're bad ones" (Email, February 11, 2009). She ended her email by making the point that many children today are alone when the time comes to make important life altering decisions. One parent thanked me and said that as a result of working through the work importance profiler, he understood better why he was unhappy at his current job. He wrote, "I'm not going to quit or anything, at least not right now not with everybody losing their jobs, but it just seems to help knowing why I feel so dissatisfied. I could never put my finger on it before. Now I know it just has to do with the people at my job not matching up with my personal standards" (Email, January 30, 2009). The website functioned almost like an online counselor with the added benefit of access twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. It gratified me to see these family members and friends engaging in their own self-awareness, growth, and learning.

Physical artifacts (photographs).

Merriam (1998) described two ways of studying physical traces: one way was to note their erosion or degree of wear, and alternately, to note their accretion or degree of accumulation. The photographs taken of MHS's College and Career Center before Ms. Campbell was hired corroborated my tentative conclusions based on observations: first, MHS was operating without a college counselor and; second, students requesting assistance received no responses. Photographs showed an accumulation of outdated

college-related flyers on the bulletin boards, evidence that no one was receiving college-related mail or disseminating it to students. This issue by itself was cause for alarm due to the time-sensitive nature of applications for financial aid, SAT tests, and enrollment deadlines. A photograph taken in September showed an inbox piled high with appointment requests, and the whiteboard calendar marked, "Appointments—remember to cross out your name when you leave," still displayed the month of July (Journal Notes, February 19, 2009). This indicated that students who had requested counseling appointments had neither been scheduled nor summoned. Its non-use also implied that no one had been given an appointment since the previous school year had ended.

It is important to remember that without an individual who is, at the least, dedicated to maintaining the College Center and its many daily duties, the state in which I found it and the photographs merely recorded the reality at that time. Looking at the bright side, the College Center was and is fully equipped with everything needed to conduct its business. There were three large, round tables with chairs; plenty of bookcases and shelves with catalogs and other college-related materials; Internet access was provided by five computer stations; the mini-offices around the perimeter provided dedicated space for programs like Upward Bound; in addition, students could work with a counselor on college related business with some degree of privacy. Also, of great importance were its prime central location and physical characteristics; it was at the top of the stairs entering the Administration Building; there was a security guard and small table with the visitor's sign-in book directly next to the entry door above which was a sign that read, College and Career Center. The Main Office was next door; the Magnet

Office was across the hall, and next to it was the Attendance Office. Finally, though not exactly a physical characteristic, the room was particularly well lighted, receiving natural light through windows and open doors. When the lights were turned on it was especially bright, conducive to doing something rather than napping. (On three separate occasions when the lights had been turned off, I observed students, heads down on the tables, napping.)

Public Documents

One of the benefits of reviewing public documents was that data could be analyzed and reanalyzed long after it has been collected. Another benefit was that documents were helpful in verifying the correct spelling of names and organizations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) agreed that a great deal of data could be culled from documents. However, they also contended that only a researcher-in-situ could catch sight of divergences and subtleties that may prove more important than data produced by any predetermined categories of observation. With that knowledge, I continued to go to MHS regularly, at least four days a week even after I was no longer formally trying to add data to my database, but still keeping my eyes or ears open to relevant communication among school personnel or students.

Numerous sources of public documents pertaining to education were available, the majority of them readily accessible online, others available at the public library. It was important to remember when reviewing these documents that they were created for a purpose other than the purpose of this study. As Yin (2003) stated, "the case study investigator is a vicarious observer, and the documentary evidence reflects a

communication among other parties attempting to achieve some other objective." (p. 87) In this study I concentrated on in-house publications: the MHS website, the school newspaper, and the student planner. The district materials included the *Parent/Student Handbook* (LAUSD, 2008), and the district's *Single Plan for Student Achievement, New Title I Schools* (LAUSD, 2008).

Manchester High School website.

The MHS website's home page contained all the pertinent information regarding location and contact information. It listed the typical links for faculty and staff, students, parents and community, news and events; some links had drop-down menus with access to the bell schedules, the list of A-G requirements of UC campuses, and an online version of the newspaper. In the beginning, I visited the website at least three times a week, checking how it was updated and looking for new postings; but after about three weeks of not seeing any notable activity, only a calendar that was minimally maintained, I cut back to twice a week. I continued this practice until the end of October, 2008 then went back to three times a week because I observed an increase in activity between MHS and its partnering university which I anticipated might be reflected in the website.

Except for some meeting postings on the calendar, nothing significant changed on the website from the first date I printed copies, which was September 9, 2008 until the last official printing of it on February 28, 2009. I say official because I did not plan to go back to it again and print more copies of the same just to add to the database. However, in the second week of March, MHS released a completely revised website with updated pictures and a flashier format. It was understandably a, work in progress, with one

particular person doing most of the work. It showed great promise if it continued to move in the same direction it was going. I restricted my comments regarding the content of the website to September 9, 2008 through February 28, 2009.

As noted above, the basic content of the website did not change and the contact information for the faculty, staff, and administration was readily available. Of interest to me was, of course, the College Center page and associated links. The home page gave general instructions about how to participate in fieldtrips to colleges, a list of what materials were available in the College Center, information on two separate scholarship opportunities and finally, a list with the names of College Peer Counselors, alas, outdated by four years. One of the links, AP Exams 2004, and on the next page, under the heading College News, had a single line explaining that the page was under construction. That was its status in September, 2008, and that is how it stayed until the end of February, 2009. The new website (at the time of this writing) did not yet have a College Center page, but Mr. Nguyen reminded me that there was only one person managing it and she fully intended to create college pages.

Student planner.

The student planner was created from a district template allowing the Manchester High School logo to be printed on the front, followed by eight pages that could be formatted to say whatever a school or organization wanted them to say. Page one had their vision, which was based on, the pursuit of college and career goals. The next page was a student and teacher contract listing ten school-wide goals all students and teachers agreed to strive towards. Specifically related to postsecondary options, students would

actively participate in a college-bound culture by setting goals and meeting expectations. Teachers agreed to provide information related to SLC and college choices. Next was a fill-in-the-blank page entitled, "Setting my Goals in 2008-09." This page was divided between a behavior goal (only one) and an academic goal (again only one). Page four was entitled, "What you need to earn a high school diploma and graduate." For each department it listed actual class titles (e.g., English 9AB, Algebra 2AB, etc.), but for AP classes, it listed only AP options. The next page read, "Staying on track for graduation," with a checklist on which students could literally check off classes they had completed that were required for graduation. Pages six and seven entitled, "Guiding principles for the school community, and culture of discipline—student expectations," contained no content related to college-going or postsecondary education. The last page encouraged students to join a club or student organization, with a list of eighteen clubs and twelve academic organizations at MHS.

The usefulness of a student planner may be obvious to adults, but students need guidance as to why and how to use this planning tool. I asked mentors to show their mentees different ways to use the planners, and to take time to talk about the various pages, for example, to explain why participation in extracurricular activities was often considered a part of college admission requirements. Mentees would then have a better understanding of the benefits of joining a club, and mentors could take the opportunity to suggest and explain why joining one of the academic organizations may carry more weight in terms of increasing their chances of admission.

School newspaper.

The school-published newspaper, *The Star*, was impressive in content and size, and was produced jointly by the Journalism Club and the Journalism class. It covered current events at MHS and gave dates for upcoming events. Surprisingly, the newspaper had more current and up-to-date information and news than the website, again no doubt, because the website depended on only one person and the newspaper had a staff managed by a teacher. None of the newspaper issues I reviewed contained any college-related material, except for references to some UC games students attended. My review of the newspaper coincided with the period of time during which I collected my data, which was from September 9, 2008 through February 28, 2009.

Parent/student handbook.

The *Parent/Student Handbook* (LAUSD, 2008) was a district publication. There were no references specifically to Manchester High School; it was a handbook that could be downloaded and printed off the Internet. Despite an extensive table of contents nothing directly pertained to postsecondary preparation or planning. It may be a stretch, but the information regarding testing and the high school exit exam could be construed as college preparatory.

Single Plan for student achievement, new title I schools.

The *Single Plan for Student Achievement, New Title I Schools* (LAUSD, 2008), was the other district publication reviewed, and was also available on the Internet. This was a two-inch, three-ringed binder containing a mass of information. Unlike the *Parent/Student Handbook* (LAUSD, 2008), this publication contained information

specifically pertaining to Manchester High School, interspersed with boilerplate pages containing general information appropriate for any high school. One reference to college preparation appeared on a page headed, "Mission Statements and School Description." Unfortunately, the paragraph that was titled, "College Counselor and College Office," listed information for the 2005-2006 school year. At that time, there was a permanent counselor and functioning college office at MHS.

The combination of public and researcher-generated documents provided a considerable amount of insight into the presence of the conditions existing at Manchester High School conducive to a college-going culture. The email and website data were undoubtedly the most prolific sources of information, with the photographs corroborating some of the data. The review of district documents proved to be the least productive in terms of data pertaining to the existence of a college-going culture at MHS.

Summary of Findings

Manchester High School, although in the midst of transitioning to new leadership and a new governance and decision-making structure, demonstrated elements in accord with conditions apparent in schools with a college-going culture. The mission statements of all five small learning communities communicated high expectations and stated goals appropriate to pursuing postsecondary education. Students were made cognizant of the need to make their college-going intentions clear to their teachers and counselors, and to also communicate those intentions to peers and family members.

An area in which MHS was deficient was in providing school-based programs specifically designed to assist students and families in learning skills to acquire the social

and cultural capital needed to access postsecondary options. This could be explained by two factors: First, tremendous pressure was exerted upon teachers and administrators to meet specific requirements imposed by NCLB (2001) by the 2013-2014 school year. Therefore, the priority of professional development was to raise students' test scores. It may be possible to have PD that focuses on how to raise test scores, and concurrently trains teachers as facilitators who are culturally responsive resources for students and families, but the likelihood of this is not great. Secondly, during the time of data collection, the majority of Manchester High School's administrative energy was focused on hiring a new principal, an event that subsequently occurred. However, it took time for the teachers, administrators, and staff to develop a trusting relationship with their new principal, and begin to work toward a shared vision of creating a college-going culture at MHS. One of the new principal's goals was to allow students' cultural capital to inform teaching practices and assist in developing culturally relevant pedagogy.

Students at MHS did have access to rigorous A-G courses, and honors and advanced placement courses. However, unless students were made aware of the need to advocate for themselves to be given the classes they needed to be on a college-track, they ran a risk of being programmed into classes that met high school exit requirements, but fell short in meeting college requirements. Between the services offered by Manchester High School's partnering university and the school-site services provided by the current interim college counselor, students would eventually have a comprehensive variety of resources pertinent to pursuing postsecondary options. Outreach to parents and other family members would also be an important component of school-site services because

research has shown that low-income students of color, especially first-generation college-goers, need the support and approval of their families to maintain their motivation to achieve their goals. MHS had already taken significant steps towards developing college-going support that would ultimately help students align their educational goals with their career goals. In Chapter Five, I conclude with a discussion of implications and recommendations for further research brought forth as a result of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Introduction

This ethnographic study sought to discover practices at Manchester High School that contributed to creating and fostering a college-going culture for all students, particularly those from low-income, minority backgrounds. The student population at MHS falls into this category and also includes many first-generation college-goers. Adopting a researcher-participant role (Gans, 1982), and through prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), i.e., being at the school site five days a week for six months, I developed a rapport with students and adults that allowed me to pursue conversations related to the five categories I used to ascertain the presence of a college-going culture. Prolonged engagement, combined with persistent observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), enabled me to identify the areas in which MHS strongly promoted and supported students' college preparation, and the areas in which it was lacking.

Since a school is sometimes thought of as a microcosm of the community at large, I am prompted to remind the reader that the majority of students at MHS did not reside in the immediate neighborhood. The surrounding neighborhood is comprised of older residents who no longer have children of high school age, thus accounting for the fact that MHS has space to accommodate children bussed in from other areas. With its five small learning communities, Manchester High School functions as a macrocosm that includes its four feeder schools, one middle school, and three elementary schools.

It is also important to note that in addition to being in the process of transitioning from an interim to a permanent principal, MHS was in the initial stages of an innovative

partnership with the local school district and its partnering university. This collaborative reform effort was designed to address disparities and injustices visible in public, urban classrooms, and to close the increasingly apparent achievement gap between low-income students of color and their White counterparts. Working together to strengthen the existing network of schools within a common geographical area, the aim of this partnership was to provide students with educational experiences of greater coherence and consistency, thus increasing the number of traditionally underrepresented students who graduate from high school and successfully matriculate to postsecondary institutions of their choice.

Implications

College-Going Mission Statement

The mission statements developed by small learning communities at MHS were all clearly focused on encouraging students to pursue postsecondary options after graduation. In each case, the word choice was deliberate, based on the authors' belief that " . . . there had to be something in there about going to college or some kind of job training after school" (Journal Notes, November 5, 2008). The words chosen—challenge, dare, strong, rigorous, compete, commit, and succeed—imply the serious and sizable nature of making the decision to continue education beyond high school graduation. Making that commitment is difficult because students are often anxious to begin living a life not focused on school and not directed by adults. The inherent power of words is part of the rationale for creating a college-going mission statement, which is the first expression of an organization's direction and objectives. In choosing to be members of a

particular SLC, teachers and students signify their acceptance of the tenets put forth by that SLC's college-going mission statement.

Developing a college-going identity for low-income, minority students, especially those who will be first-generation college-goers, must begin long before their first day in college. For those students who have not been exposed to intensive academic and social support that naturally lead them to college-going aspirations, the school's or SLC's mission statement is key. A mission statement expressing high instructional standards and a rigorous curriculum for all students must also provide an extensive system of academic and social support in line with the SLC's theme or focus (such as performing arts, science and mathematics academies, technology, etc.). Without the scaffolding necessary to give access to all students, a college-going mission statement is only words and will be both inequitable and ineffective in providing a foundation upon which to build.

The most important element of a college-going mission statement is that it enables students to believe that college is for them and not reserved for an exceptional few. It is also essential that the mission statement be reinforced in concrete ways, i.e., that the college application process, including writing college essays, becomes a regular part of the student's college preparation. A college preparatory curriculum is symbolic of the high expectations the school and its SLCs espouse, and may compete with familial expectations. For this reason, a college-going mission statement can provide the momentum that gives students a voice and develops their confidence in speaking to their families about opportunities that may seem foreign to those without college-going experiences.

Students/Families' Access to College Knowledge

Teachers and counselors.

A lack of school-based programs designed to teach students and their families the skills to activate their social and cultural capital implies that the energy of school personnel is focused elsewhere. The most obvious place this energy is directed is in meeting the requirements imposed by the state and local school district to raise students' test scores, which is the overall focus of professional development for teachers and counselors. The teachers who do know the importance of, "empowering the kids by asking for their input [in determining the way the curriculum is disseminated]," and, "delegating teaching responsibility to them so they'll turn it in a meaningful direction" (Journal Notes, October 21, 2008), are compelled by required assessments and standardized testing to relegate implementing a culturally relevant pedagogy to a secondary priority.

The research on the college preparation practices of middle to high-income students shows that parents, teachers, and counselors invest considerable energy in developing students' portfolios and connecting them to college admissions officers. Since the parents of many of the students at MHS have not graduated from college, they often lack the social and cultural capital needed to make these connections. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the school's counselors to assume these responsibilities on behalf of the students. This includes ensuring that students take the requisite admissions tests, secure fee waivers, obtain letters of recommendations, and submit applications to colleges.

Just as the expectation that respect for students' cultural background is a given, teachers' and counselors' knowledge of the skills that activate social capital is also an expectation. Lacking professional development in that area, teachers and counselors are dependent upon personal experience to highlight the value of social networking. Some teachers shared stories with students about people who have succeeded in college by, "getting hooked up with the right people" (Journal Notes, January 14, 2009). One teacher told the story about her father who had a guidance counselor that saved him from the fate of his friends, many of whom quit school after learning enough English to "get by" (Journal Notes, January 27, 2009). Not all teachers have stories like this to share with students, and therefore some may not even introduce the concept of activating social capital.

It is most important that teachers and counselors strive to help students see the acquisition of academic skills in the majority language and culture as additive rather than subtractive. Students should not feel they have to forfeit their cultural identities in order to form their academic identities; ideally their academic identity will complement their cultural identity.

Students and their families.

It is clear from the comments of parents or the comments their children report they say, that certain ethnicities consider their home culture to be a handicap. To highlight one's ethnic background might be an attempt to, "make people feel sorry for me" (Journal Notes, February 12, 2009), as one student's mother expressed, and advice to, "take advantage of looking White every chance you get" (Journal Notes, February 13,

2009), implies that some parents believe being a part of the dominant White culture is a key to success. Therefore, maintaining one's cultural identity and home language may not be perceived as compatible with the identity of a high-achiever. Students should not be forced to choose between the language and values of their families and those of the dominant culture.

The process of negotiating home and school identities has much to do with learning to express the appropriate behavior in each setting. Family members who have no college-going experience may not be able to support students' attempts to maintain two fully functioning identities. Teachers, counselors, and administrators can help students accept this reality and assist them in learning to switch between the speech patterns and behavior expected in a college-going culture and expectations of them at home. Ultimately, school personnel should help students recognize that adoption of an academic, college-going identity is not a stripping away or sacrificing their home-based identity, but is a normal progression leading them towards higher educational opportunities. Students can learn to realize they are participating in two distinct worlds—one at home and the other at school—and that both identities can live simultaneously in harmony.

Academic Momentum

The rigor of courses taken in high school is the most powerful predictor of academic achievement, high school graduation, and enrollment in postsecondary institutions. This is especially true for low-income, minority students who need their school culture and climate to encourage the pursuit of rigorous academic goals to offset

the lack of college-going knowledge they have at home. The standards movement was intended to address this need with the recommendations made in *A Nation at Risk* (U.S. Department of Education, 1983) and the implementation of the New Basics Curriculum. This curriculum consisted of four years of English, three years of math, natural science, and social studies, and a half-year of computer science. It was also recommended that college bound students complete a course in the arts and two years of a foreign language.

Despite these recommendations, the majority of American high school students do not take course loads that meet these standards. Researchers and educational leaders have called upon policymakers to make the components of any college preparatory curriculum the default curriculum for all students. Because the standards are designed to increase student participation in academically rigorous classes and create common high expectations for all students, the standards movement was seen as a means to improve student achievement and preparation for postsecondary education. Unfortunately, inadequate content standards and alignment with grade level coursework and college entrance requirements have limited the usefulness of the standards movement in improving student achievement and college preparedness.

The students at MHS have access to rigorous A-G courses, including honors and advanced placement courses. However, the fact remains they may acquire the number of credits needed to graduate, but not meet certain college and university requirements. This implies, as was previously stated, that MHS suffers from a deficiency in college and career guidance. Students were not properly advised prior to programming their classes, and not all students were as fortunate as Janice, who enrolled in AP English because she

had honors English in middle school; it was not part of an overall college-going plan.

Other students talked about receiving advice from older siblings already in college; they were pushing their younger siblings to take classes that would give them the critical thinking skills needed in college classes. This implies that students were open to being advised, at least by their older siblings. Thus, when given the opportunity to meet with a qualified career counselor, they should first explore their career interests, and later create a college-going plan that includes taking courses that prepare them to succeed in college coursework.

Systemic/Coordinated College-Going Support and Comprehensive College-going Services

The essential components for urban schools to foster a college-going culture were defined, for the purpose of this case study as: (a) a clear college-going mission statement based on high expectations for all students; (b) an awareness and understanding of the process by which college-going plans develop; (c) academic momentum, i.e., access to rigorous A-G courses, honors/advanced placement courses; (d) systemic and coordinated college-going support; and (e) comprehensive college-going services that include school-site academic tutoring, SAT preparation, and partnerships with postsecondary institutions. The last two components are largely dependent upon a school's administration and leadership.

Systemic, coordinated, and comprehensive measures towards creating and nurturing a college-going culture must be aligned across all grade levels, beginning in middle school; even elementary school is not too soon to begin. Research on effective practices in high school restructuring aimed at increasing student achievement and

equitable outcomes shows that these practices are consistent with predictors for college enrollment and success; this is the good news. The bad news is that large scale restructuring is necessary to see these practices become systemic, coordinated, and comprehensive.

The absence of a permanent college and career counselor obviously affected the systemic and coordinated college-going support provided for students at Manchester High School. Coordinated support means receiving information and guidance at the proper time, i.e, as early as possible students need to align their educational goals with their career goals. They also need to distinguish between aspirations that are in reality pipe dreams, such as becoming a professional athlete or a movie star, and careers that coincide not only with students' aspirations, but also with their inherent skills and interests.

During the time of data collection, students at MHS were reliant upon outreach opportunities provided by external programs like Upward Bound and Start on Success (SOS), and the mentoring and resume building programs sponsored by the partnering university. The interim college counselor made considerable progress in organizing the College and Career Center and preparing to train a permanent counselor as soon as one was hired. The implication was that eventually, students would have access to a comprehensive array of college preparatory and career resources that included the entire MHS community actively engaged in developing and realizing postsecondary educational goals.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Teachers

Classroom teachers have the greatest opportunity for affecting students' perceptions of themselves and their abilities to be successful in school because of the amount of time students spend with teachers. Therefore, teachers should recognize and use every opportunity to emphasize the importance of postsecondary education. Teachers are also in the position to share their own educational experiences with students. Students respond positively to teachers who are willing to share parts of their lives with them. When teachers develop relationships with students built upon shared backgrounds or experiences, students are more likely to ask for and follow the advice given.

Trusting relationships with students open a door of opportunity to help those students envision themselves as college-goers. This is especially true for students who do not have parental or other family support in making college-going decisions. However, much more is needed than verbal encouragement, which though important can lead nowhere. Once a decision is made to pursue any of the numerous post-secondary options available, the process becomes in many ways, black and white. Tests need to be prepared for and taken, applications must be submitted by specific deadlines, essays of intent must be written, letters of recommendation need to be procured, and for students from low-income households, the financial aid process must be embarked upon simultaneously. A teacher's role in leading the way, by virtue of the fact that he or she has successfully applied to and graduated from college, lends credibility to the guidance and advice that is given.

Teachers are in the position to help students acquire the learning and time management skills necessary to meet deadlines associated with the college-going process. Teachers are also the adults who can access a student's academic strengths and weaknesses and assure that the student does not develop a false sense of his or her abilities. Helping students succeed in the college-going process and in other academic settings, means making every effort to teach those important skills that enable students to find answers on their own. In other words, teachers cannot give away information too readily simply because they want to see students move on to the next grade level. The next teacher may not be as accommodating. Teachers who do not include rigor in their methods are one of the causes for students getting into college and then spending time in remedial classes. They not only need to catch up with peers who received instruction that required them to listen, process, and take notes at the level required in college, but they also find themselves second guessing their abilities.

Teachers who develop trusting relationships can help by encouraging and guiding students to take fullest advantage of and participate in the academic preparation for college that is available in their high school. Attitude is of the utmost importance, and the idea that just getting by in high school, just passing classes, and not striving for high scores and high grades is detrimental to succeeding in college. Teachers can help students recognize by not pushing themselves hard in high school they are setting themselves up for greater difficulties in college. Students may be shocked to find themselves in auditorium-sized classes where no one takes roll, no one checks off their homework assignments, and the accountability to do the work falls squarely on their shoulders alone.

The independence that most teenagers look forward to experiencing can ultimately be a drawback in college if they have not developed the ability to be self-motivated and independent learners. As important as it is for teachers to have high expectations for their students it is equally, if not more important, that students learn to have high expectations of themselves and always strive towards excellence.

Recommendations for Counselors

Too often students associate counseling with disciplinary action or paper shuffling; this is unfortunate but may be an occupational hazard. However, if counselors are able to initiate and develop relationships with students' families through frequent positive communication, they can foster a home/school connection that empowers parents to participate in and become an integral part of their children's educational process. This is especially true for parents who did not attend college and/or do not have a good understanding of the college application process. They may not fully appreciate or understand the importance of college preparatory information sent home with their child, or realize the impact of their participation, or lack of it, on college planning and goal setting.

Ideally, a counselor can act as a mentor and confidant, providing the information, guidance, and support students need to recognize the importance of developing a college and career plan as early as possible. Like teachers, the opportunity available to counselors to engage students in conversation puts them in the position for sharing their personal educational experiences. As with teachers, all counselors have successfully navigated the college-going pathways in order to get their jobs. However, counselors have an area of

expertise that teachers in general do not, that is, in the field of financial aid and current college-going requirements.

Since college-going requirements for admissions are specific, time-sensitive, and depend upon the post-secondary institution, as is true for financial aid processes and requirements, it is imperative that school counselors keep up-to-date with this information. Counselors need also to maintain an extensive library of up-to-date information and recent resources relating to college preparation and admissions. This, however, may be largely dependent on school budget and funding. The availability of these resources should be made known to parents as well as students, that is, the school counselor should have a system for disseminating the information to all stakeholders, including faculty and administrators.

School and career counselors should also know the demographics of their student populations so they are able to advise students and parents of scholarships and other college-going opportunities such as mentoring programs, internships, and transition programs that may relate to specific ethnic groups. Different cultures value education in different ways; it is therefore important for counselors to have a general-to-specific knowledge of their students' ethnic backgrounds. Counselors could participate with teachers in professional development that addresses culturally relevant pedagogical practices. It is important that counselors are aware of the educational ideologies of different cultures so that they can be sensitive to students and their families. This is particularly important for students who will be the first in their family to attend college,

and undeniably important to those who will be the first in their family to graduate from high school.

Recommendations for Administrators

The need for academic rigor in all high school courses in order to be sufficiently prepared to succeed in college has been established by numerous studies. Administrators have a responsibility to ensure that students have access to and are encouraged to engage in coursework that provides them with the foundational knowledge to graduate from high school college-ready. Administrators also have the unenviable task of enforcing state and district mandates that may be met with resistance and create tension among faculty and staff (including counselors). It is therefore important to foster collaboration not only among teachers across disciplines, but between teachers and counselors and between the faculty and staff in separate small learning communities that exist in larger schools today. It may be effective to reserve time during professional development that allows teachers, counselors, and other classroom staff to discuss ways to assist students and families in college and career planning. Brainstorming sessions may produce ideas otherwise never voiced because no forum previously existed.

Administrators are also charged with assuring that students and families have access to services that ultimately lead to improved student achievement. With regard to creating a college-going culture, these services must include active outreach to students' families. Providing opportunities to educate parents and families about the importance of encouraging their children to pursue postsecondary education is essential; information given at parent meetings and in all communications with the home from the beginning of

high school is important in establishing a culture in which students feel supported and encouraged by their families to persist in their college preparation.

However, due to the stress imposed on families in almost every community by the economic crisis in this country, administrators must make extra efforts to create multiple opportunities for families to get involved in students' education. This may require the use of technology, seminars, workshops, or open houses that are scheduled on weekends or other non-traditional times that coincide with parents' availability. Here again the hardship of today's economic reality rears its ugly head, as these "extras" all require funding that may or may not be available.

Recommendations for Parents/Family Members

Ideally, parents and family members should begin during their children's elementary school years to encourage them to strive toward working at a high level; planting the seed that engenders college planning and preparation cannot begin too soon. This is important because even if children choose not to continue their formal education beyond high school, they will benefit from that preparation throughout their schooling, and will at least have the option to move on to a postsecondary institution. During our country's economic hard times with single-parent families, parents working multiple jobs, or students having to care for younger siblings or older relatives, even though parents may want to help their children realize their educational goals, in reality they have neither the time nor energy to do more than provide the necessities of life. Keeping a roof overhead and food on the table can understandably pre-empt efforts to research college and/or career opportunities that appear to be on the distant horizon.

A common sentiment from working class families is the notion of working hard so their children will have opportunities they never had, and so achieving the short-term goal of having a child go to high school may be all that is possible for struggling families. Often parents and families are completely dependent upon school personnel to provide motivation, guidance, and support for their children. Encouragement to seek opportunities that are either school-based or provided by university or state programs may be beyond the scope of parents' capabilities. It then becomes incumbent upon the schools to implement outreach programs, to initiate communication with parents and families in order to foster an ongoing relationship that can be strengthened over time.

Parents and families should try to be aware of and open-minded to outreach opportunities; they should be encouraged to engage with the school so a process of relationship building can begin. Once a family member makes a connection with a teacher or administrator, they can begin to include that person in conversations with their children. They can encourage their children to ask questions about future educational and/or career opportunities; they can find out whom to contact at school regarding college information, and more importantly, they can learn to ask questions. Parents and family members who have not had college-going experiences may not know about important deadlines in the college and scholarship application process. Another important, indeed, essential area that is difficult to navigate without assistance is the financial aid process. Many parents may not have knowledge of, or even awareness of, the many paths and opportunities that exist as well as those that are being created for the nation's growing number of low-income, minority students.

Just as opportunities for success are hoped for and passed on from generation to generation, the ideologies about the nature of education itself shifts by generation. Whereas one generation worked hard so their children would not have to work so hard, there is also a generation that leads by example, the parents who take community college classes so their children will follow their lead. These parents should be praised, encouraged, and provided greater opportunities to work closely with their children's school. Leading by example, these parents can help their children understand the college-going process and educate themselves at the same time.

Recommendations for Future Research

The primary objective of a high school that wants to create and foster a college-going culture is to shift from a mind-set that believes only certain students are capable of graduating and pursuing a postsecondary education to a mind-set that believes all its students are capable of achieving that goal. Such an objective requires the organized and sustained involvement of all stakeholders in an agenda designed to facilitate that paradigm shift. This transformation includes at least five phases: (a) assessment of the current culture, using data collected from the school site, administrators, faculty, staff, students, and their families; (b) exploration of best practices of high schools with programs and resources designed to create a college-going culture—focused on creating a strategy for all stakeholder outlining and clearly describing the activities and goals suggested; (c) institution of professional development for administrators, teachers, and counselors—to train them as facilitators and culturally responsive resources for students and families; (d) initiation of on-going information sessions and college planning

workshops for students and their families; and (e) continual evaluation and reassessment of goals, programs, and ideas, continuous staff development, and maintenance of a committee that seeks support from and provides information to the school community including students' families. Future research needs to be conducted on each phase in order to provide different school populations with the specific criteria needed to define college-readiness adapted to specific student bodies.

Assessment of the Current Culture

The current culture of a school could be determined by conducting surveys and/or interviews with school personnel, asking for their perceptions of students' likelihood of enrolling and succeeding in postsecondary institutions. Questionnaires and interviews would need to delve into the reasons for their perceptions, that is, whether educational achievement relates to race or ethnicity, family structure, or economic status. Students and their families could be surveyed and/or interviewed about their actual post-high school graduation plans. Follow-up questionnaires and interviews are also needed to gain knowledge of how and why respondents made those plans, when they began their planning, and who assisted them.

Exploration of Best Practices

Determining best practices for creating a college-going culture for specific student populations would require conducting multiple ethnographic studies, similar to this one. It would be essential to include schools in different socioeconomic areas, with different demographics, and even schools with different governance systems in order to provide a broad base of useful data. Smaller private and charter schools could also be studied so

that every avenue leading to college readiness would be explored. It would be important to measure the achievement and graduation rates, along with the proportion of students applying to college, as well as the proportion of students who receive degrees and continue to graduate education and beyond.

Professional Development

Faculty, staff, and administrators could be surveyed and/or interviewed as to the support they get or do not get to keep up-to-date with the requirements of the various postsecondary institutions, including the regularity with which professional development is provided. It would be important to determine what each group (faculty, staff, and administrators) defines as college-readiness and how they perceive the mission of their high schools in addressing the demand for students to look beyond simply graduating from high school.

College Information and Planning Workshops

Students and their families could be surveyed and/or interviewed as to the availability and usefulness of their schools' college and career centers. Questions pertaining to their knowledge of college entrance requirements, placement tests, and the costs associated with attending college could determine if their school provided sufficient outreach. It would be important to discover whether students and families were provided with organizational support structures that facilitated the development of social networks and instrumental relationships that ensured students would not get lost in the system and had access to necessary college-preparedness information. Conducting studies to determine the availability of access to college knowledge is especially important for low-

income students who face a steeper learning curve since they often come from families with little or no college-going experience.

Evaluation and Reassessment of Goals

The continuous loop of evaluation and reassessment of a school's progress in meeting the goals that lead to improved student achievement, and ultimately increased graduation rates and enrollment in postsecondary institutions, is a crucial area for future research. Determining the success of a school in creating and fostering a college-going culture may require conducting longitudinal studies that follow high school graduates into and throughout their college undergraduate years. It would also be useful to know if students who enroll in postsecondary institutions require remediation, and if so how much and in which subject areas. This input would provide data allowing schools to revise their college preparatory strategies. If completion of high school and admission to a college or university does not indicate college-readiness, then the question that begs to be answered is: What is college proficiency? Studies that measure the number of students who pass their freshman year in college and go on to become sophomores may provide some concrete criteria that define the success of a high school's college-going culture. The assessment and revision of a high school's college preparation program is the most important element of a successful college-going culture.

Ideological Considerations

Despite many recommendations to incorporate parental involvement in the school systems and outreach programs, a gap occurs in the practical application, as well as in the literature, illustrating that programs need comprehensive methods of including parents

and/or family members in students' college planning and preparation. If activating students' and families' social and cultural capital is considered a prerequisite to negotiating the college-going process, but the ideologies of students' families are not being valued and utilized, parents may not realize their own resources. They may not develop the confidence to help their children with the educational process, and may fail to tap into their life experiences and expand their networks of support in order to help their children succeed. Further research to discover practical applications to foster parent and family involvement is indicated.

Numerous studies have pointed to the limiting factors and deficits present in families of low-income students and students of color that act as roadblocks in the pursuit of postsecondary options. However, few studies delve into the ways that various educational organizations, such as college outreach programs, traditional K-12 schools, and university assistance play a role in perpetuating those limitations and deficits. As researchers, we must begin to evaluate the implications of continuing to work from only one perspective. Future research should be conducted by adopting a more critical view of the role that organizations play in their efforts to promote postsecondary education. In addition, discovering the inherent resources and funds of knowledge possessed by traditionally underrepresented students and their families may yield larger gains in the college-going rates of these students.

Concluding Thoughts

This case study sought to identify practices evident in one large, urban high school that contribute to creating and fostering a college-going culture for a student body

in which over 70% of the students come from low-income, minority backgrounds. Creating a college-going culture in schools where the values, norms, and social role models of such a culture are not present is a challenge. The successful implementation of a program designed to work internally to instill the ideology and practices that create and nurture such a culture require full-school participation in college preparatory activities. Along with making the assumption that all underserved students are capable of being prepared to enroll in and succeed in college, college-focused schools include the following activities: enrollment in rigorous college preparatory courses, taking college preparatory examinations, discovering students' talents and interests and identifying the college programs that are consistent with them. A school with a college-going culture embraces social, cultural, and varied learning styles and assists students in acquiring career-specific knowledge, including information about the education required for those careers, and perhaps most importantly, students and their families are helped to create plans to finance immediate as well as future college endeavors.

The maxim: It takes a village to raise a child can be applied to the kind of support needed to successfully navigate college-going pathways. There must be an ongoing process of information dissemination pertaining to a variety of college and career choices beginning early, and continuing throughout students' educational careers. The importance of high expectations has not been overstated. It is a requisite in developing a learning environment that will be the foundation and ultimately create the impetus that launches students towards their future college and career goals.

Through focused collaboration with stakeholders in the community, such a learning environment can extend beyond school and the classroom to include students' homes and community. Parents must have high expectations for their children and the school; the school must have high expectations of students and expect support from their parents; and, students must have high expectations for their school and themselves. This being said, it is not enough for students to merely envision themselves going to college, which is only the beginning; a vision without a plan is rarely realized. Thus, it is important for students to gain access to the people and resources that will assist them in developing a plan aimed at achieving their individual long-term goals. The social networks involving students' families, school personnel, and peers contribute to building the confidence, determination, and resiliency necessary to access the various postsecondary options. While students may consider a particular individual or experience as having the greatest impact on their decision to pursue postsecondary education, the concept of a college-going culture implies that support comes from a number of people and events over an extended period of time and continuously throughout their K-12 educational experience.

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