

Standing with Students: An Exploration of Educational Inequality

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Research Proposal

My observations of the treatment of youth in educational settings have been dramatically different and appear to be related to the race and socio-economic status of the students. To what extent do race and class influence student-teacher interactions? How does differential treatment of students influence educational outcomes? In what ways does the United States system of education serve to sustain inequality across racial lines? As a participant observer at First Baptist Church and Pacheco Elementary School, I will address these questions accompanied by research of educational dilemmas. Throughout this time, I will take notes about my experiences and incorporate them into the research paper. My hypothesis is that race and socio-economic status are significant in the treatment and success of students.

Annotated Bibliography

Ayers, William. *Teaching Toward Freedom: Moral Commitment and Ethical Action in the Classroom*. Beacon Press, 2004. Print.

William Ayers focuses on education as a humanizing force. He recognizes the tension between the politics of education, but maintains that the role of education is to improve our capacities as human beings. Education can steer is in the role of oppression or liberation, but through efforts to stand by students, teachers can help maintain the basic role of education. Education's goal is to open doors to many more possibilities and help improve the world around us. Ayers work is uplifting and hopefully amidst research of failing schools and increasing drop out rates for minorities.

Bettie, Julie. *Women without Class: Girls, Race, and Identity*. University of California Press, 2003. Print.

The simplest things, like what someone wears can shape class identity. In *Women without Class*, Julie Bettie focuses mainly on how gender influences the class construct, but also includes factors of race and sexuality. Most important to my observations of youth is Bettie's discussion of the lack of cultural capital of certain students and how it affects their opportunity for success.

Bowles and Gintis. *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life*. 1976.

As Marxist economists, Bowles and Gintis contend that the organization of schools is strikingly similar to the structure of capitalism with its hierarchical roles. Students are trained for entering the workforce and how to interact with authorities. Bowles and Gintis argue this model of education reinforces inequality, rejecting the American dream of equal opportunities. The myth of meritocracy is prevalent in today's society and begins at the smallest level of education. Certain students are given more privileges based on their race and class. This can be seen in the types of schools they attend, the amount of student-teacher interaction, and the ability of parental help. This is not to say that low- income parents are incapable of serving their children; but rather, the opportunities of a white, middle-class stay-at-home mom's involvement may be drastically different than a foreign speaking, working single mom. These images look significantly different and are common occurrences. The educational system does not cater to the immigrant mother. The knowledge and skills of each class are prejudicially reproduced in the school system. However, Bowles and Gintis fail to realize that education is not the only factor in determining social mobility.

Chambliss, William. *The Saints and the Roughnecks*. Web. Accessed 4 April 2011.

William Chambliss writes about two distinct groups of students; one comes from a middle class background, which he labels the Saints, the other group, a working class background, the Roughnecks. The article details how each group engages in deviant behavior, such as truancy, fighting, and vandalizing, but lead to discordant results. School officials, law enforcement and the greater community make excuses for the Saint's, but fault the Roughnecks for the same behavior. Chambliss uncovers how the labeling of social class affects the perception of each group. This deviant label of always being "bad" and going nowhere can become a self-fulfilling prophecy by internalizing expectations. In this way, teacher's can greatly shape the path of student's success simply by encouraging or discouraging their students.

This article inspired me to look at the students at Pacheco Elementary School and First Baptist Church in a new light. Chambliss helps put into words the labeling of students I observe each time I work inside the school system. It is a common occurrence to be told as a volunteer that the supervisor or teacher will intervene when a particular student gets out of hand, as they usually do. This thinking sets the student up for failure by treating them differently than the other students. Instead of encouraging a student to stay on task, that same behavior is suddenly unacceptable. I have suffered from this detrimental thinking before and have to force myself to reconsider the student in a new lens.

Chapman, C. and Kaufman, P. *Dropout Rates in the United States: October Current Population Surveys 1972-2000*. 2000. Web. Accessed 18 April 2011.

This data was used in my paper to show the disproportionate rates of Hispanic versus white, non-Hispanic high school dropouts. By looking at a larger range of data, it is apparent that dropout rates have steadily decreased from the 1970's, but Hispanics have maintained the highest dropout rates in the nation. This serves as a jumping point to ask why. Why do Hispanics dropout of high school more than any other ethnic group? One factor behind this is a lower economic status and how this background affects their treatment in schools.

Class Discussion. Education system and racism.

Many sociology courses have challenged my thinking about the United State's complex social institutions. However, what inspires me most are discussions surrounding racism inside the education system. This affects my work with youth; especially at-risk youth because I better understand the issues weighing on them and can be a resource. Class discussions spurred me to find my own research and better comprehend educational shortcomings. This was the preliminary stage in my paper.

Delpit, Lisa. *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. New York: The New York Press, 1995. Print.

Found later in my research, Delpit's *Other People's Children* ties many loose ends with regards to the diversity of teachers and the different assumptions they make. Delpit's background in teaching and research provides the information for much of her work. She writes about the largely avoided discussion of how educator's assumptions of low income and minority student's capabilities interfere with success in the classroom. She divides her book into three parts: Controversies Revisited, Lessons from Home and Abroad, and Looking into the Future. The first part focuses on the debate between teaching skills and grammar or by learning by "writing in meaningful contexts" (12). Delpit argues skills must be taught for minority and low-income students to succeed in the dominant society, or another way to say this is for students to acquire cultural capital. The meaningful context has already been achieved, but many educators fail to realize the fluency of the words many minority students express in rap songs or colloquial speech. The skills still need to be taught as "useful and usable knowledge, which contributes to a student's ability to communicate effectively in standard, generally acceptable literary forms," (19).

Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education*. The Free Press, 1916. Print

John Dewey's work was controversial in its time and remains so today. He emphasizes a hands-on learn by doing approach to learning, rather than the traditional basic reading, writing, arithmetic model of education. Criticizing traditional curriculum for a lack of incorporating the ways students learn, Dewey advised a "child centered" approach. Throughout his work, he focuses on the subjective experience of students to improve their learning.

Ferguson, Ann Arnett. *Bad Boys*. University of Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2000. Print.

As a participant observer for three years at an elementary school, Ann Ferguson discovers how black males construct their identity after being labeled "unsalvageable". This identity is shaped during the student's day in school, partly by school officials. Ferguson begins her book with a school official stating a ten-year-old boy has a prison cell ready for him. At first shocked to hear this statement from school staff, after spending time with the child and his surroundings she comes to believe it herself. Ferguson's *Bad Boys* is "an account of the power of institutions to create, shape, and regulate social identities" (2). This means it is not something inherently wrong with the child, but greater social forces create a disastrous path. Ferguson finds a much greater proportion of black and male youth headed down this troubled path, which coincides with Foucault's theory of education as a means to control certain groups. The systemic practices of education are actually encouraging roads to trouble for minority youth, instead of preventing them.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. 1975. Web. Accessed 18 April 2011.

Foucault writes to challenge the idea that the prison system was built on the premise of humanitarian concerns. He claims discipline is just a way for the powerful to control certain populations. These methods of control exist not only within the prison system, but also in educational institutions. Foucault's thoughts of controlling large segments of the population can be applied to school officials control over students. One mode of power is seen in the way school officials label students as troubled, which results in a different academic path than the preferred group. Foucault maintains testing also redistributes individuals into a hierarchal system by determining the level of each student's success. Testing results then cause differential funding to schools, which determines the amount of resources available to students at a certain school. This is evident in the fewer resources at Pacheco Elementary School compared to Bishop's Peak.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011. Print.

With a Marxist background, Freire's work exploring the relationship between the "oppressor and the oppressed" remains a foundational piece in critical pedagogy. What Freire sees as the basic model of education is the "banking" approach, which perceives students as an empty piggybank to be deposited with knowledge. He rejects this idea, since it allows the educator to filter what they view as important knowledge and the student appears an empty being. Instead, Freire proposes a mutual approach to education, where all strive to be more complete. Freire coined the term conscientization, which is the attempt to shape each person and society by education.

Frey, Andy and Walker, Hill. *Education Policy for Children, Youth, and Families*. Web. Accessed 8 May, 2011.

Frey and Walker begin their article discussing the failures of the education system- low reading test scores, math scores, and the number of high school dropouts. The disheartening statistics they share, introduces the topic of youth of color falling even farther behind in terms of dropout rates and student success. Frey and Walker discuss risk factors for academic success that can be applied to the students I serve. Much of their work, though, is about the origins of the education system. Frey and Walker trace education back to the 1800's, when it was thought to be the "great equalizer" for people of all different social classes. Many policies have stemmed from this idea, but fail to understand greater social forces that affect each student's success. Frey and Walker advocate for policymakers to include "principles of risk, protection, and resilience" to improve the nation's current struggling system.

Goodreads.com. Good Reads, Inc. 2011. Web. Accessed 5 May 2011.

Though not the most academic source, gooreads.com offers many profound quotes from the world's prominent leaders. The quote I used from Nelson Mandela says, "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it

treats its children". Applying this to the United State's and the prejudices of the education system, I find that this does not reflect well on the nation. Our children are the most vulnerable in society, but many are faced with despairing odds of success based on race and socio-economic status.

Lamont, Michele and Lareau, Annette. *Cultural Capital: Allusions, Gaps and Glissandos in Recent Theoretical Development*. American Sociological Association, 1988: 153-168. Web. Accessed 18 April 2011.

Lamont and Lareau's research on cultural capital proved invaluable to my own research of the education system. Cultural capital is defined as "high status cultural signals used for social and cultural exclusion". Frey and Walker introduced how education arose as an equalizer between the classes, but it is the dominant class that create the rules, both written and unwritten, that perpetuate the values of cultural capital. The working class may eventually acquire this knowledge, but Lamont claims they will never reach the level of familiarity and ease of the dominant class.

Lipsitz. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*. Web. Accessed 16 October 2010.

The Possessive In Whiteness illustrates how racism is still prevalent today. Research of residential areas show that by 1993, eighty-six percent of suburban whites still lived in places with a black population below one percent. This affects what proportion of minorities go to predominantly white schools. There is much greater diversity at Pacheco Elementary School because of its open enrollment system. However, Bishop's Peak is a very wealthy area with mainly white students. As a scholar of critical race theory, Lipsitz argues "whiteness" is more a property than a racial category, since social institutions, such as schools, protect it, thereby preserving privileges for whites.

McIntosh, Peggy. *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*. 1988. Web. Accessed January 2010.

American feminist and anti-racist activist, Peggy McIntosh opened my eyes to a whole new world. McIntosh adds easy to understand, relatable dimensions of privilege to the discussion of gender and race. Racism is not only defined by thinking others inferior based on the color of their skin, but also by not recognizing one's own power and privileges. McIntosh argues whites are not taught to see themselves as an oppressor or racist throughout their schooling, but see racism only in individual hateful acts. Where Lipsitz argues white privileges are sustained through education, McIntosh adds students learn to be blind by these very same privileges.

San Luis Coastal Unified School District: School Accountability Report Card.
Bishop's Peak Elementary School. 2010-2011. Web. Accessed 10 April 2011.

The School Accountability Report Card is publicly available for both Bishop's Peak Elementary School and Pacheco, which reveals differential funding allotted for each school. Bishop's Peak is only 18.15 percent Hispanic, and 69.52 percent white with a correspondence of 20 percent of the students socioeconomically disadvantaged – less than half the amount as at Pacheco. Per student, Bishop's Peak spends 400 dollars more a year than at Pacheco. The teachers at Bishop's Peak are paid more and do not have to possess the same language skills as at Pacheco since less than one percent of Bishop's Peak students are English learners. This is a value flaw in our society that we do not recognize the importance of bilingual teachers and have a corresponding salary.

San Luis Coastal Unified School District: School Accountability Report Card. Pacheco Elementary School. 2010-2011. Web. Accessed 10 April 2011.

Pacheco students look very different than Bishop's Peak. Pacheco Elementary is 54.18 percent Hispanic, 38.29 percent White, no African Americans, 2.44 percent Asian with 44.8 percent of the student body socioeconomically disadvantaged and 43.17 percent are English learners. More than half of the students receive reduced or free lunch, which is highly correlated to a high Hispanic population. Lower spending per student at Pacheco exists greatly due to lower test scores – in science; Pacheco is thirty percent below Bishop's Peak 86 percent at proficient or advanced level score. Foucault writes about how testing can be a form of controlling populations, which can be seen in the populations and funding of each school.

Smith, M. K. *Communities of Practice*. 2003. Web. Accessed 2 April 2011.

Smith's summary of Wenger's work with Communities of Practice (CoPs) unravels the basic theory of how people join and move within CoPs. Smith's insights helped me to look more clearly at Wenger's work without getting caught in the complexities. Smith contends Wenger's theory explains how "initially people have to join communities and learn at the periphery. As they become more competent they move more to the 'centre' of the particular community." Applying this theory to my work at First Baptist Church, I am better able to understand my own process of becoming part of the CoP as well as my students' journeys.

Tapia, Michael. *Untangling Race and Class Effects on Juvenile Arrests*. Department of Criminal Justice, University of Texas, San Antonio, TX. Web. Accessed 5 November 2011.

Michael Tapia's brilliant article tests *race and class effects on juvenile arrests*, controlling for delinquency levels and criminal history. Elite classes have the most influence on society's values and norms, which affect law creation and help define deviant behavior. The study found socioeconomic status and race strong indicators of arrest rates across neighborhoods. Race effects were heightened with less serious forms of delinquency because less serious crimes allow for more police discretion in making an arrest decision. This research highlights the discrepancies

between arrest rates for the powerful and privileged versus the poor. Tapia discusses DMC (disproportionate minority contact) in relation to high-SES neighborhoods. Blacks, the most arrested race group appear “out of place” in privileged areas, leading to elevated arrests. Police have labeled minority youth, before observing actual deviant behavior. This article shows how rules are applied differently across race and socio-economic status, whether that is arrest rates or trouble in the classroom.

Wenger, Etienne. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Print.

Wenger’s research on CoPs generates much of my own research regarding student-teacher interactions. As a participant observer, I myself joined the CoP at the periphery before forming meaningful relationships with my students. Now, as part of the CoP, we all learn from one another and continue to develop and evolve our own self-identity as a member of the group. A CoP puts emphasis on meaningful transmissions of information, while sharing personal experiences and learning from others. In his previous book on CoPs, Wenger developed the phrase, “Communities of Practice: learning, meaning, and identity”. This expression puts a whole book of research into a concise summary. Wenger continues his work by discussing what it means to be a full participant and actively engage with the material and the rest of group. Useful to my role as a teacher and tutor is the term brokering, which discusses traversing across the CoP and remaining mindful of an outsider’s perspective or someone at the periphery. Wenger’s investigation of group dynamics improves my recognition of how students learn to enhance inclusion and engagement.

Nelson Mandela once said, "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."¹ If this is true, the United State's soul must be tremendously tumultuous. It is a gross injustice that race and class play a large part in a student's academic success. In "The Saints and the Roughnecks," Chambliss, a sociology researcher claims that the immense power held by school officials serves to shape the path of students and sustain social inequality through their basic classroom interactions (Chambliss, 2011). This inequality is visible in the differential resources of local San Luis Obispo students at Pacheco Elementary School, Bishop's Peak Elementary School, and the children at First Baptist Church Sunday school. Through both my personal observation and secondary research, I have found radically different models of education used by teachers that reflect the distinctive socio-economic and racial status of students. In becoming a part of these institutions, I have also found the process of joining a staff unique, as I attempt to balance the line between the approval of school officials and the ability to successfully engage with students. As a participant observer at Pacheco Elementary School and First Baptist Church, I have witnessed the consequences of these disparate modes of interaction between students and teachers, within student peer relationships, and embedded within the illusive history of education as an "equalizer". Unfortunately, these interactions coupled with the history of education have reproduced social inequality. The power to continue this cycle of inequality stems from the history of education itself, specific educational interactions between students and staff, and the consequences from

¹ Goodreads.com

these interactions, which often lead to higher drop out rates for minority students. The different models of education employed at each institution greatly affect the overall learning experience. In part these differences arise from the history of education in ideas such as Ellwood Cubberly's "tracking of students" as well as the labeling in Chambliss' article. These models, along with racial and socio-economic status of students lead to a huge difference in student success.

Personal Participation in Educational Institutions

As a Sunday school teacher at First Baptist Church, I cannot help but compare the children in my classroom to the students I tutor at Pacheco Elementary School. Clothing is a visible indicator of access to resources, as brand named clothing cost more money than generic garments. The students at Pacheco wear less extravagant clothes (though part of this may be a cultural tendency to dress nicely for church at First Baptist). The typical attire is a red t-shirt proudly displaying "Pacheco" from some past campus event with inexpensive jeans. At church, many of the girls wear dresses with tights, while other students wear trendy brand name clothing, such as Abercrombie & Fitch. Student's wardrobes act as a proxy for socioeconomic status. The style each student chooses to display is a reflection of his or her social class position (Bettie, 2003).

In addition to social context variance, I also notice racial differences between the two educational contexts. There is only one non-white child at First Baptist Church, an adopted African American boy who is the son of one of the pastors. However, Pacheco is 54.18 percent Hispanic (SLCUSD, 2011). After noting the large differences in racial diversity and socio-economic status, I wonder whether certain

students are more successful in terms of academic performance, which includes the academic and social skills necessary to complete high school and the opportunity to pursue advanced education (Frey & Walker, 2011).

Racism is evident in our everyday lives, regardless if you are a minority or not. Racism is not only defined by thinking others inferior based on the color of their skin, but also by not recognizing one's own power and privileges. American feminist and ant-racist activist, Peggy McIntosh argues whites are not taught to see themselves as an oppressor or racist throughout their schooling, but see racism in only individual hateful acts. Where Lipsitz argues white privileges are sustained through education, McIntosh adds students are taught to be blind to these very same privileges. The White, non-Hispanic population has consistently been about 10 percent of 16 to 24 year olds who were high school dropouts from 1972 to 2000 (Chapman and Kaufman, 2000). The number of dropouts has been declining for all ethnicities. However, the Hispanic dropout rate is much higher, it remains the highest drop out rate for any ethnicity and in 2000 was about 29 percent (Chapman and Kaufman). This is roughly a twenty percent higher expected dropout rate for a Hispanic student versus a white student! By looking at a large range of data, it serves as a jumping point to ask why. Why do Hispanics drop out of high school more than any other racial group? There are many factors involved, but one important factor is a lower socio-economic status and the ways this status is interpreted by school personnel. This is frightening for the many Hispanic students at Pacheco who will one day attend high school.

Both Pacheco Elementary school and Bishop's Peak Elementary encourage parent involvement in their mission statements because they recognize the importance, but the resources available to students at their respective schools is far from equal. Pacheco's mission statement also reveals that it has the largest population of English learners (43 percent), as well as more than fifty percent of students receive free or reduced lunch. The attendance of the school is very diverse, in part because it is available to the whole San Luis Coastal Unified School District through open enrollment, as well as its unique dual immersion program. Pacheco is 54.18 percent Hispanic, 38.29 percent White, no African Americans, 2.44 percent Asian with 44.8 percent socioeconomically disadvantaged and 43.17 are English learners (SLCUSD, 2011). The fact that more than half of the students receive reduced or free lunch is highly correlated with a high Hispanic population. While volunteering in a kindergarten classroom at Pacheco, I observed a strong correlation with only Hispanic students receiving the free snack. The line of ten Hispanic students waiting in line for their apple and juice or milk was greatly contrasted with Caucasian students going to their cubby to pull out a Disney-character lunch box with snacks from home, and often a note from their parent.

Bishop's Peak, another school in the district is only 18.15 percent Hispanic, and 69.52 percent white with a correspondence of 20 percent of the students socioeconomically disadvantaged – less than half the amount as at Pacheco (SLCUSD, 2011). Less than one percent at Bishop's Peak are English learners. Both schools have all full credential teachers, but those at Bishop's Peak were paid an average of 11, 939 dollars more for the 2009 - 2010 school year (SLCUSD, 2011). The

teachers at Bishop's Peak are paid more and do not have to possess the same language skills as those at Pacheco who speak both English and Spanish. At Pacheco, they may need more funding because of the difficulty of teaching English language learners. This is a value flaw in our society that we do not recognize the importance of bilingual teachers and have a corresponding salary.

Expenditures per student at Bishop's Peak also receive 400 dollars more than those at Pacheco (SLCUSD, 2011). This lower spending on students at Pacheco may factor in to the lower test scores. For both English-language arts and science, Pacheco students are below the district average for at proficient or advanced levels. In science, Pacheco is thirty percent below Bishop Peak's 86 percent at proficient or advanced level score. Foucault claims testing measures individuals and places them in a hierarchical system (Foucault, 1975). Testing is a way to normalize judgment and analyze the successes and failures of an individual. Testing results then cause differential funding to schools, which determines the amount of resources available to students at a certain school. These schools are less than 10 miles apart, yet the results are astonishing. There are fewer resources available to students at Pacheco than there are at Bishop's Peak or First Baptist Church, as evident by lower spending.

Pacheco Elementary School is the home for a dual immersion language program and has a policy of open enrollment, which means anyone in the district may apply but there are limited spaces available. One year, the teacher tells me, there were 30 spots available for 200 applicants; thus, it is an extremely competitive process and applicants are compelled by disparate goals and face distinctive entry

requirements depending on their language background. For Spanish speakers, each student must take a Spanish test to be admitted based on their need. In contrast, language competency is not assessed for English speakers, who enroll through a lottery system. For the English speakers, parental aspirations for their children to “get ahead” of others and receive a more rounded education motivate participation in the Pacheco lottery whereas for Spanish speakers, the program allows them the chance to catch up to others in English proficiency.

Many of the English speaking students I talked with revealed they did not like going to Pacheco since it is harder than their friend’s non-dual immersion schools and they do not see the importance of being bilingual – their parents simply told them they had to be at Pacheco. The Spanish speakers often still feel far behind in English, and their parents often are unable to assist them with their homework – one of the reasons some end up having to make up their homework during lunch. Inequalities in education are extremely evident in the importance our institutions place on speaking English and the perception of inferiority of ESL students.

History of Segregation

Since its conception, American politicians thought education could minimize the importance of class and wealth in the determination of who will succeed economically (Frey & Walker, 2011). In the nineteenth century, Horace Mann, an education reformer argued that above any other institution, education was the “the great equalizer” of people from all different social classes (Frey & Walker, 2011). Social policies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century stemmed from this liberal idea coupled with the “conservative notion that mass education was

necessary to ensure that the citizenry was able to obey the law, pay taxes, and serve on juries and in the armed forces” (Frey & Walker, 2011). Public school attendance for all children at a certain age was required under the Massachusetts Compulsory School Attendance Act of 1852; unless the parent could show the child was attaining equivalent instruction outside of public schools. By 1918, 48 states adopted similar policies, however segregated education was deemed constitutional at this same time under Plessey v. Ferguson’s “separate but equal” clause (Frey & Walker, 2011). Educational quality may vary greatly, but every child, regardless of social or racial class is able to attend school. Overturning the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson case, the Brown v. Topeka Board of Education 1954 case deemed segregation inherently unconstitutional, in violation of the 14th Amendment (Frey & Walker, 2011). Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court Earl Warren ordered schools throughout the nation to integrate (Frey & Walker, 2011). Integration took time, since public opinion did not immediately change with the court case decision.

Segregation in schools was not the only debate throughout the history of education, but also what was being taught in schools. During the rise of Progressivism, John Dewey wrote *Democracy and Education*, advocating the role of education in shaping society with a “child centered” approach. Dewey reasoned a “learn by doing” hands-on approach best helped children learn in contrast to a traditional curriculum of basic reading, writing, and arithmetic. Intelligence develops in three ways, according to Dewey (1916): first, through group centered social learning, lending itself to the roots of cooperative learning; second, through the integration of an interdisciplinary approach, with ideas and problem solving

stressed; and third, ideas should be tested in action using the scientific method. From this model, curriculum should be flexible according to the experiences of students. This model is most heavily reflected in my experiences at First Baptist Church with greater academic freedom and creative hands-on activities. The curriculum at Pacheco Elementary School follows more of a "set" standard, possibly due to the stress of meeting test scores. Though Dewey's work appeared in the last century, many of his ideas remain extremely relevant today. Dewey believed in connecting schools to the community at large (1916). This could greatly benefit schools, such as Pacheco Elementary School to have a relationship with the greater community. First Baptist Church does a slightly better job of incorporating community members. However, community members regularly attend First Baptist Church, while Sunday School is occurring.

Educational Context Interactions

Many Cal Poly students, like myself have volunteered at Pacheco Elementary School helping to bridge the gap between the school and larger community. I have also been volunteering as a Sunday school teacher for over a year at First Baptist Church. When I first entered the site, I was perceived as an outsider, and it took some time before I was accepted as a member of the group. Etienne Wenger and Jean Leave's (1988) Community of Practice (CoP) theory explains an outsider's tendency to not fit into the community due to lack of memories with the group or established relationships (Smith, 2003). Their essential theory deals with learning from the group, which helps to develop an identity and become part of a larger

learning community – a community of practice, which is formed because of a group's common interest or a specific goal, such as Children's Ministry. Based on this theory, "Initially people have to join communities and learn at the periphery. As they become more competent they move more to the 'centre' of the particular community" (Smith, 2003).

My authority as a teacher has helped me to gain some respect and become a legitimate part of the CoP to better observe the conversational and institutional interactions. In contrast, many of the students have been part of the program for years, yet they too are part of an ongoing process to sustain legitimacy as part of the group. According to Wenger (1988), in CoP, initially people must learn at the periphery when joining a group and those tasks of the new comers are often less key than others. At the start of my work with First Baptist Church, I simply observed before taking on simple tasks like leading an activity. But as I have been accepted into the group a bit more, I have taken on more responsibility.

When a new student named Daniel arrived at First Baptist Church, his presence accompanied whispers of a difficult home life, which is reflected in his behavior. Scholars Frey and Walker argue that risk factors such as disunity in the family life or poverty in the educational setting are not directly related to academic success, but have the potential to have an "adverse effect" and "create maladaptive emotional and behavioral outcomes" (2011). It seems that the hardships at home as well as lack of biblical knowledge affect Daniel's ability to blend in with the other students. He will get frustrated with the reading and follow-up questions and say,

loudly, “I’m tired”, over and over. He seeks attention from his teachers, rather than his peers with these complaints.

Wenger’s theory provides a context for this separation between Daniel and his peers. Wenger affirms that the subject matter is not static, but is part of a larger process of engaging and participating in the CoP. Since Daniel is less familiar with the lesson, he is less able to establish a relationship with his peers (Wenger, 1988, p. 95). Daniel is an outsider at First Baptist Church because he is both a new student, has less previous knowledge of “curriculum content” and is a member of a lower social class. If he attended Pacheco, I would expect him to be more accepted by other students, who share similar backgrounds. Daniel has slowly begun fitting in better with the other students as he adopts their characteristics. Similarly, in Chambliss’ article, when the “bad students” would take on characteristics of the more saintly and celebrated students they received better treatment (2011). When adopting the teacher-preferred manners, Daniel, too, is being disciplined less by acting more middle class.

Consequences of Interactions

The learning process of a CoP is not simply a teacher dictating to a student what to do, but part of a larger process of social participation, involving active participation in the “practices of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities” (Wenger, 1999, p. 4). Being a full participant in this learning process requires attaching meaning to the knowledge. As evidence of this

theory, Daniel is much more engaged in the group and contributes when he finds meaning in an activity, but when he is unsure of what is going on, he tends to ramble to himself or simply draw on his papers, alone in thought.

My experiences in becoming a key part of the group help me to better understand other students. In the last few months of my involvement, I became the primary teacher for the 4th to 6th graders. This leadership role helped enhance my relationship with the students and increase my confidence to help them learn. At this point, I have the skills necessary to deviate from the assigned lesson plan and develop an activity better suited to help the students. I often followed John Dewey's "learn by doing" approach by beginning the morning with something active to connect to later in the lesson. This hands-on approach greatly enhanced the student's ability to recall what we learned about each week.

Although Daniel arrived as an outsider like I did, his position in the group is very different since he better relates to his peer's identities in that he is the same age and a student in class. They are all on similar levels. In Wenger's exploration of the theory "Communities of Practice" (1999), he coined the term "brokering" as a means to navigate across communities of practice while coordinating and aligning perspectives (p. 109). This means that, in my role as a teacher, I must span across the boundary of students and fellow teachers as well as church directors, which is not always a comfortable position. It requires facilitating transactions, while causing learning in a participative manner. I participate in class conversations about the Bible questions as if I am a fellow student, but can quickly switch to informing

students of what they need to be doing or keeping them on task. This ability to navigate between students and officials helps to enhance student's learning.

This is true of tutoring at Pacheco Elementary School as well. I have found students to be more receptive when I relate to experiences on their level, rather than exploiting my authority distinguishing myself as someone "other" than them. However, when I do engage fully in treating them as an equal, I feel like I am "breaking the rules" in the eyes of the teacher. Wenger cautions that the role of brokering may be problematic since the broker is "being pulled in to become full members and being rejected as intruders" (Wenger, 1999, p. 110). This has been difficult, at times, to manage both membership and non-membership - it is a very narrow and sometimes indistinguishable line. Sometimes it appears it would be much easier to help students and be accepted into the group if I could simply be their friend, but I have to establish bounds as a mentor in order to be followed and taken seriously. The professional boundaries get in the way of teaching, so I must focus on achieving a balance between friend and mentor, while the institution simultaneously discourages such a connection with students.

Disparate Modes of Education

Balancing relationships with other teachers and students is made even more complicated by the model of education many teachers employ. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* addresses the model of education often used in his idea of "banking". Banking makes the assumption that the student is not a "conscious being", rather "an empty 'mind' passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside", like an empty piggybank is ready for deposits (Freire, 2011,

p. 75). Freire continues this theory, explaining that the educator simply deposits information into the mind of the student, which they believe to be valuable knowledge. This idea proposes that the teacher is the one with power and knowledge, the student without. The “oppressed” are not given opportunities for critical thought but meant to adjust their incompetence’s by reproducing exact knowledge. Freire rejects this idea, proposing a mutual approach to education. Freire coined the term “conscientization” which is the attempt to shape each person and society by education, similar to Wegner’s active learning theory in a community of practice.

At Pacheco, I tutor every Friday at R&R, which means Reinforcement Room and I often see a basic oppressive form of education at work. Simply the title of this program seems to weigh on students as a punishment - reinforcing the need to have homework done in the time the teacher asks for regardless of any extenuating circumstance. This is detention for first through sixth grade students. The majority of students who attend R&R are Hispanic. Instead of joining the other kids on the playground to rid excess energy from sitting in a class all day, those who have not finished their homework are instructed by their teacher to go to R&R after they have finished eating their lunch. However, these children are not given the freedom to enjoy their meal, but eat according to a schedule; they must be at R&R working at exactly 12:40. This elementary school seems more like a prison running it’s children according to punishments and allotted time schedules. If students forget the work they are supposed to be doing, they are instructed to sit at a table explaining in writing why they forgot their work or mindlessly looking up words that the teacher

comes up with in the dictionary. This does not allow for any creative thinking on the part of the students.

The teacher who is always present at R&R has developed a rapport with the students, but she often leverages her position of authority. For example, when two different students asked to leave early, they got very different answers: one was told that because of their honesty and studiousness he could leave in half the time, whereas a routinely disruptive student was told he had to stay for 10 minutes instead of five. This authoritarian style of teaching is much more evident at Pacheco since there is a more structured hierarchy of power. When it does occur at First Baptist, it is only with the “troubled” kids as labeled by the church officials who often step in to discipline the few who get out of control. At First Baptist Church, there is a director of activities, but he serves as a mentor to the teachers, rather than a dictator-like leader. A community style of learning is encouraged much more at First Baptist Church than it is at Pacheco, where students are told to work on their own work quietly by themselves. Many of these students attempt to help one another, but are silenced by the teacher for being disruptive. There is more discipline at Pacheco coming from the authority of a teacher commanding students. First Baptist Church puts emphasis on Dewey’s ideas of cooperative learning, so students helping one another is not silenced, but encouraged.

In addition to student’s silenced opinion at Pacheco, I have also witnessed runaway authority of the teacher. In the kindergarten classroom, to help students learn patterns the teacher has a creative activity to paint a caterpillar certain colors to illustrate the concept of patterns. However, when a student wanted to deviate

from the pattern and create their own, they were told “no.” This shocked me, as the student had successfully grasped the concept and only wanted to demonstrate their unique image. The teacher’s pedantic concern for exactness in art projects illustrates a larger problem of lack of critical thinking from many teachers in an education system of power and control.

At first I thought the lack of critical thinking activities to be a huge disparity in the type of learning that occurs at Pacheco and the lessons at Kid’s Church, but there are some similarities. Though the control of the teacher at Pacheco is more obvious in directing the student to look up a word in the dictionary than parts of the lesson at Church, regurgitation of ideas exists in both. Even the way the *Children’s Curriculum* is written provides little room for innovation or creative expression, though teachers are encouraged to elaborate on these ideas. For example, the instructor’s manual offers question prompts about each passage that are followed by a single three or four word answer that the students should recall and recite. Though this is helpful to provide the teacher with some background, I have found it best to deviate from the structured lessons to allow students to take things in personally meaningful paths. This alteration in the lesson plan is much more accepted, and even encouraged at First Baptist. At church every week, there is always a memory verse. The goal is simply to have the kids memorize the verse and repeat it back to us, whether they learn it by unscrambling flashcards or contriving a competition to encourage speed - there is no interpretation in this part of the lesson or opportunity for developing thought. If a child volunteered their opinion, it would not be silenced, but it is not welcomed or encouraged by conversation or

questions about the verse; the time for reflection occurs in another part of the lesson. The idea of the teacher telling students what to do and having them recite it back follows Paulo Freire's idea of "banking." Freire critiques the banking method as passive on the part of the student and serving to sustain the purposes of the oppressor. This provokes an interesting question -who is the oppressor?

Oppress can be defined as burdening with unjust impositions from an over-exercise of authority and power which denies basic humanity (Freire, 2011). Though many students may argue teachers are "cruel" in the amount of homework or papers assigned, this does not seem to be a fair assessment. However, teachers and school officials do carry a certain amount of unquestioned power. It is extremely difficult to challenge a teacher's authority from the position of an elementary school student.

Foucault recognized the relationship between power and knowledge, which is a means of control and exclusion. Mechanisms of control operate within educational institutions - in Foucault's opinion, in a similar function as prisons (Foucault, 1975). Power affects someone's actions and alters his or her will. Many of the kids plead for me to sign off on their slip before they are allowed to leave R&R at Pacheco, but the authority of the teacher prevents me from doing so. One such student, Isabel, wants to be outside with the rest of her friends, but has to remain seated at a table where she absentmindedly counts down the minutes due to school policy. Discipline is another way of controlling the masses. Foucault claims the modern state would be unthinkable without this idea of discipline, which regulates and divides. Another mode of power is seen in the way school officials label students as troubled, which results in a different academic path than the preferred group. Discipline and labeling

serve to define behaviors in terms of good or bad, so that the students who regularly attend R&R are labeled as “problem kids” by the teachers who see the same kids come each week and continue to have difficulties. This points to a problem of the labeling of youth and the failure of R&R.

The Power of a Label

This idea of labeling is evident in Chambliss’ article “The Saints and the Roughnecks” beginning with the author’s own terminology (2011). Before the reader even begins the article they already have an expectation that the “saints” will be the good kids, while the “roughnecks” are troublemakers. This is clever on the part of the author to show how everyone is subject to expectations and labeled perceptions of value. The true dividing line is that the “Saints” are from wealthier families and the “Roughnecks” lack many resources, such as a car. The article details how each group engages in deviant behavior, such as truancy, fighting, and vandalizing but lead to discordant results. Both groups routinely ditch school, but the Saints make school related excuses which only enhances their image as “good students.” When the Saints are caught, they are apologetic and respectful, understanding of the system of power and use this to manipulate positive opinions. Teachers perceive them as capable of more but not meeting their potential, whereas with the Roughnecks were seen as “incapable of meeting the academic standards of the school” (Chambliss, 2011). Both groups were truant and involved in drinking and theft, yet the Roughnecks were deemed as a “bad crowd” due to their visibility when involved in criminal activity and the perceptions of school and law officials. The upper middle class parents of the Saints insisted their son’s bad behavior was only a

lapse in judgment, but the lower class parents of the Roughnecks agreed to the law's definition of their child's behavior. This is partly due to less involvement as well as lack of information of how to manipulate the educational institution on the part of lower class families.

School officials, law enforcement and the greater community made excuses for the Saint's, but fault the Roughnecks for the same behavior. Chambliss uncovers how the labeling of social class affects the perception of each group. This deviant label of always being "bad" and going nowhere can become a self-fulfilling prophecy by internalizing expectations. Elite classes have the most influence on society's values and norms, which affect law creation and help define deviant behavior (Tapia, 2011). In a poignant article, Michael Tapia tests *race and class effects on juvenile arrests*, controlling for delinquency levels and criminal history. His study found socioeconomic status and race strong indicators of arrest rates across neighborhoods (Tapia, 2011). Race effects were heightened with less serious forms of delinquency because less serious crimes allow for more police discretion in making an arrest decision (Tapia, 2011). This research highlights the discrepancies between arrest rates for the powerful and privileged versus the poor, correlating to the arrests of the Saints and the Roughnecks. Police have labeled minority youth, before observing deviant behavior. Partly due to this labeling, all but one of the Saints were able to go to college and then continue into careers. Conversely, two of the Roughnecks never graduated high school and two others ended up in prison. In this way, teacher's can greatly shape the path of student's success simply by encouraging or discouraging their students.

This article inspired me to look at the students at Pacheco Elementary School and First Baptist Church in a new light. Chambliss helps put into words the labeling of students I observe each time I work inside the school system. It is a common occurrence to be told as a volunteer that the supervisor or teacher will intervene when a particular student gets out of hand, as they usually do. This thinking sets the student up for failure by treating them differently than the other students. Instead of encouraging a student to stay on task, that same behavior is suddenly unacceptable. I have suffered from this detrimental thinking before and have to force myself to reconsider the student in a new lens. Ayers suggests looking beyond deficits to recognize greater assets and capabilities (Ayers, 2004).

At the start of Ann Ferguson's book *Bad Boys*, a school official claims a ten-year-old boy has a prison cell ready for him, which unravels the labeling by school officials and the tracking of certain students. At first shocked to hear such a statement from school staff, after spending time with the child in his surroundings, she came to believe in the possibility of his future in prison herself. Ferguson's book is "an account of the power of institutions to create, shape, and regulate social identities" (Ferguson, 2000, p. 2). This means it is not something inherently wrong with the child, but greater social forces that create a disastrous path. Ferguson finds a much greater proportion of black and male youth headed down this troubled path, which coincides with Foucault's theory of education as means to control certain groups. The systemic practices of education are actually encouraging roads to trouble for minority youth, instead of preventing them.

Cultural Capital Can Contribute to Success

One of the social forces holding students back is a lack of “cultural capital.” Cultural capital is defined as “high status cultural signals used for social and cultural exclusion” (Lamont, 1988). Many students at Pacheco start out disadvantaged because of a lack of cultural capital, which can be reflected in clothing, as well as tastes for certain cultural values. The highly educated do consume mass culture, but retain a wider range, that distinguishes them from the less educated. Schools reflect the experiences of the dominant class as those at the top who create the rules perpetuate the values of cultural capital. The wealthier class enters school with key social and cultural cues, which are rewarded (Lamont, 1988). There is also a “culture of power” replicated in the presentation of each student, such as the way of speaking or dressing (Delpit, 1995). The working class may acquire this knowledge, but Lamont claims they will never reach the level of familiarity and ease of the dominant class. Delpit argues, “children from middle-class homes tend to do better in school...because the culture of the school is based on the culture of the upper and middle classes – of those in power” (Delpit, 1995, p. 25). Education arose as an equalizer between the classes, but it is the dominant class that create the rules, both written and unwritten, that perpetuate the values of cultural capital.

Current Inequalities

In schools, however, academic achievement is explained by ability level, not cultural resources of family. This is the myth of meritocracy that Bowles and Gintis discuss denouncing that people are rewarded based on merit and their level of achievement in education. As Marxist economists, Bowles and Gintis contend that

the organization of schools is strikingly similar to the structure of capitalism with its hierarchical roles. Students are trained for entering the workforce and how to interact with authorities. Bowles and Gintis argue this model of education reinforces inequality, rejecting the American dream of equality. The myth of meritocracy is prevalent in today's society and begins at the earliest level of education. After helping and observing in a kindergarten classroom at Pacheco, I have seen inequality sustained. My previous example of the kindergarten class at Pacheco, with solely Hispanic children lining up for snack provided through the free lunch program illustrates the great difference between socio-economic classes.

Certain students are given more privileges based on their race and class. This can be seen in the types of schools they attend, the amount of student-teacher interaction, and the ability of parental help. This is not to say that low-income parents are incapable of serving their children; but rather, the opportunities of a white, middle-class stay-at-home mom's involvement may be drastically different than a foreign speaking, working single mom. These images look significantly different and are common occurrences. The educational system does not cater to the immigrant mother. Pacheco, a dual immersion school, despite its lower spending is tremendously unique that it allows Spanish-speaking children more opportunities to excel. The knowledge and skills of each class are prejudicially reproduced in the school system. However, Bowles and Gintis fail to realize that education is not the only factor in determining social mobility.

Although recognizing education is a factor, it is not the prime indicator in determining upward mobility; schools serve to reproduce social inequality with the

authority and cultural capital of the elite (Bowles and Gintis, 1976). Privileges are legitimized in the education system with social and class reproduction. Those with power are often the most unaware of its existence because fellow white educators validate one another, without awareness of the voice of minorities (Delpit, 1995, p. 26). Class differences are the “key to middle-class practices of exclusion that make school success difficult for working class students across race and ethnicity” (Bettie, 2003). Bettie’s discussion of the lack of cultural capital of certain students is important to how it affects their opportunity for success. Cultural capital seems to point to the idea that there are two classes set against each other. Lipsitz’s article *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* supports this idea in its finding that by 1993, eighty-six percent of suburban whites still lived in places with a black population below one percent. This is strong evidence of the continuation of a racist society, indicating that the classes are so far apart that they can not even live in the same neighborhoods, which makes sense as many white neighborhoods are very wealthy, such as the neighborhood surrounding Bishop’s Peak. As a scholar of critical race theory, Lipsitz argues “whiteness” is more a property than a racial category, since social institutions such as schools protect it, thereby preserving privileges for whites.

Reflecting on the implications of education, I recognize that my own education differed significantly than most as I went to a private all-girls college preparatory school, where there existed an abundance of resources and parental involvement to ensure their child’s success. My high school was almost 80 percent white, which shows how education has continued to reproduce social inequality in

what populations have the ability to buy the best education. The knowledge I have gained from class and readings have encouraged me to reflect on my educational experiences and realize not every child was granted the same opportunities. I have privileges and dominance based on the color of my skin and my social class. My parent's background enabled me to begin college with a private high school education that was college preparatory as opposed to schools struggling to find resources for their programs. Both Pacheco and Bishop's Peak see the importance of parent involvement and welcome it, but the resources of each school and the populations within them are vastly different.

Educational Suggestions

Lisa Delpit's research and observation in her own classroom with students provides a background for how educators can improve every student's learning. She writes about the largely avoided discussion of how educator's assumptions of low income and minority student's capabilities interfere with success in the classroom. One of the debates she encounters is the push for teaching skills and grammar or by learning to write in meaningful contexts (Delpit, 1995, p. 12). Delpit argues skills must be taught for minority and low-income students to succeed in the dominant society, or another way to say this is for students to acquire cultural capital in the proper form of writing and speech. The meaningful context has already been achieved, but many educators fail to realize the fluency of the words many minority students express in rap songs or colloquial speech (Delpit, 1995). Many proponents for learning in personable ways assign creative assignments, which serve a useful purpose, but if they are extensively relied on then students will not perform as well

when it comes to standardized tests. Because of the emphasis on testing, students still need to learn the basic skills as “useful and useable knowledge which contributes to a student’s ability to communicate effectively in standard, generally acceptable literary forms,” (Delpit, 1995, p. 19). After the skills have been acquired, further assignments may build on these skills in ways more accessible to students to explore their cultural backgrounds. Frey and Walker advocate for policymakers to include “principles of risk, protection, and resilience” to improve the nation’s current struggling educational system. Teaching the basic skills is one easy way to provide protection of students when it comes time to take standardized tests. If other students have been learning the skills, while some have explored creative outlooks, the skills prove more successful during testing.

Joining the team at both First Baptist Church and Pacheco Elementary school has been an ongoing process to become a full participant. Though there are stricter rules at Pacheco, the time I spend with individual students is often more personal than at First Baptist because there are fewer people looking over my shoulder (at least in the first few months). There is only one teacher in charge of R&R, whereas the human resources are far greater at First Baptist where two extra people can always help out at any time. As I have become a full participant at First Baptist Church, I am more cherished as a part of the community, since Pacheco always has new volunteers that seem expendable. My relationship with students is invaluable, and as I recognize the many disparities in resources, I am further compelled to volunteer. Now that I am aware of my own many advantages, it is up to me what I choose to do with my power, influence, and education. Herbert Hoover, a United

Sates president claims, "Children are our most valuable natural resource".

Unfortunately, this is not always recognized. William Ayers (2004) argues, "we begin by standing with, not above our students" (p. 35). If at the most grass roots level, teachers change their thinking and on a grander scale, policy makers look at the great disparities in education, then it will better the lives of students everywhere, regardless of race, gender, or social class.

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