DRIVING CURRICULUM IN SCHOOLS: 
THE ROLE OF ADVANCED PLACEMENT TESTING, NEGOTIATION, COMMUNICATION, AND STUDENT INDEPENDENCE

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ABSTRACT

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This paper examines what drives curriculum in schools by looking at several different factors, including student creativity, student independence, teaching strategies and the role of state proficiency and advanced placement testing in schools. I first took a historic perspective on the role of cultural and economic reproduction in school curriculum. In order to find out what currently drives curriculum in schools, I observed a northwest Ohio suburban high school to find out how students are taught through the direct curriculum and the null curriculum. The factors I used to help determine what currently lead curriculum of one suburban high school were student independence, student creativity, teaching strategies, negotiation, and state proficiency and advanced placement testing preparation. I observed how big a role, if any at all, state proficiency and advanced placement testing preparation impacted what teachers taught, and how that affected students’ higher order thinking skills. I made inferences regarding how the curriculum the students at this high school were exposed to impacted their future careers.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The topic of economic and cultural reproduction in schools has been long studied, yet today it is still evident that schools are different in how and what they teach students (Apple, 1982; Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Kanuika, 2009). The belief that schools were meritocratic institutions where students were rewarded based on ability and outcome has been disputed ever since World War II (Coleman, 1966; Jencks, 1972). While the meritocratic institution may still hold merit, how schools determine what they teach students and how “success” is measured varies widely among schools (Zachary, 2010). Schools vary in what they expect from students, and what students are taught differs across the country. The notion that schools are set up equally to teach all students the same knowledge and in the same manner is problematic, because curriculum dictates how and what students learn, and students do not always receive the necessary knowledge they need in order to compete in a global market (Lewis, 2007). The students who attended schools that reward creativity and spontaneity are more likely to grow into adolescents and adulthood with the skills they need to succeed in managerial or traditionally “white collar positions” (Anyon, 1980).

There are a number of reasons why schooling is used as an actor to reproduce the economic and social capital inequality that exists in the United States today. The elite and wealthy capital owners had to have an economic system put into place that ensures them more profit and interest. One method of doing this is to maintain control of symbolic capital, which is essentially intellectual and social capital. In order to maintain the economic and social system, the elite controlled who learned the soft technical skills that were necessary for the current job market. These skills include collaborative and interactive skills through pedagogy that is necessary in competing in the competitive job market (Hayes, 2010). The job market required the
laboring work of the majority to provide the capital profit and interest to the elite (Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

As a result of this structural inequality in U.S., a large number of students are not receiving the technological, communication, and critical thinking skills needed to attain a working knowledge of technology, science, and sociology. This is needed for students to be fully independent adults in a society where interdependent higher order thinking and communication skills are key (Levy & Murnane, 2005). Impoverished students are less likely to have the opportunity to learn, let alone have opportunities to use the skills necessary to compete with their higher income peers; they are also not having their needs met in schools. The needs we are meeting are not the students’, but society’s need for a status quo economic system (Zachary, 2010).

In addition, the labor market and social norms are also shaped by cultural reproduction seen in schools. Cultural values, which are set by the dominant culture, determine what attitudes and social norms should be represented in schools. Students who do not share the dominant culture’s language, traditions, and attitudes often feel isolated and discriminated against, making them resentful and mistrustful of the dominant culture and of individuals in the dominant culture who are supposed to help them perform better in school (Lew, 2006). The resentment of accommodation and assimilation to the dominant culture can lead to resistance and opposition as coping strategies (Ogbu, 2004). This makes cultural reproduction more evident in our school system. Cultural reproduction serves as a mechanism in maintaining class relations that contribute to our unequal economic systems (Apple, 1979).
Standardized Testing

Standardized testing appears to trump the needs of students in today’s schools for many reasons. Standardized testing may have begun with good intentions, as it requires school administration and teachers to be accountable to their students. Now, standardized tests arguably take away valuable class time from teachers and place additional demands on already struggling schools (Cobb & Rallis, 2008). Standardized testing, when referring to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Denning, 1983) does not provide schools with resources to end the true causes of the academic achievement gap among students (Cobb & Rallis, 2008). Furthermore, NCLB does not encourage teachers to teach beyond what is on the test, which often includes the soft skills of communication and analytical skills necessary to compete in the current job market (Kaniuka, 2009). Informal scaffolding helps improve student-teacher relationships. Improved student-teacher relationships help motivates students. The pressure of standardized testing negatively impacts this positive interaction. Furthermore, students may not learn the necessary soft communication, technology, and sociological skills due to the need of teaching to the test. Lower income students are placed at a greater disadvantage than higher income peers whose school districts are teaching students’ specialized skills they need to successfully compete for high skilled managerial jobs (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). There are systematic institutional frameworks in place that help pre-determine a student’s success in the labor market. The institutional frameworks maintaining our economic system will be discussed later.

No Child Left Behind pushes for accountability and ensuring that the U.S. economy remains competitive, (Zachary, 2010). Despite this effort, teaching methods used in schools and standardized testing essentially ensures that students are not being taught the skills they need to succeed in the twenty-first century. Many students are taught a curriculum of basic skills, rule
recognition, and compliance (Luke, 2010). This curriculum can be tightly interwoven with standardized testing because, arguably, standardized testing leads all schools to focus on the basic skills of rule recognition and compliance emphasized on the standardized test (Luke, 2010). Improved test scores sound good on paper, and in the media, but the pressure for students to perform well on standardized tests comes at the expense of students not having the knowledge or experience in learning about social studies, art, or science.

Lower income students spend much more time on standardized tests than their upper income peers (Kaniuka, 2009). Lower income schools spend significantly more time teaching students to pass state proficiency testing. In low income schools, an average of 79 percent of class instructional time is spent on test taking skills, compared to the 25 percent of time that is spent going over test taking strategies in higher income schools (Kaniuka, 2009). Students who spend the most time reviewing for standardized tests also do not receive as much “new knowledge” as schools that do not place as much emphasis on standardized testing. This means that upper income students have the opportunity to spend more time learning and practicing higher order skills, such as negotiation, collaboration, and communication, than lower income students who are stuck learning the test. The learning differences between upper and lower schools are that lower income schools become complacent in their strategies. Few creative ideas are implemented to improve learning, and the primary focus is on standardized test preparation (Luke, 2010). This creates isolation among the teachers, school, and community, because classrooms often independently prepare students for standardized tests. This isolation hinders the variation of information and strategies to facilitate higher-level learning (Sadovnic, 2008). This lack in low-income schools of higher-level learning in areas that are not specifically tested
on the ACT, SAT, or Iowa Test of Basic Skills, that students in higher income schools receive prove to be another advantage higher-income schools have over the low income schools.

Standardized testing has also been proven to be ineffective and grossly inaccurate in determining students’ skills, strengths, and intelligence with their future careers (Sacks, 1997). Sacks (1997) asserts that while standardized testing is factored in the admissions equation, women and minorities are consistently admitted at a lower rate, because women tend to underperform when compared with men, and minorities tend to underperform when compared with Caucasian students on standardized tests. However, it has been shown that high stakes testing can be an accurate indicator of whether students go into traditional lucrative careers, thought of by many as careers in business, accounting, law, etc. High stakes test scores have been proven to be misleading in predicting a person’s skillset or capabilities in the labor market. Yet these tests are a leading factor in determining institutional success (Sacks, 1997).

Traditional tests often encourage teachers to teach passive, rote learning of basic facts and formulas that go against effective teaching strategies. Students who perform the best on standardized test often are performance-based learners who are concerned only with grades and “surface learners”; who learn to retrieve rote learning and required information (Sacks, 1997). Standardized test scores have also been linked strongly to socio-economic status. Felter (1991) stated that students who take the SAT can expect to earn an additional 30 points for every $10,000 in their parents’ yearly income. This shows that standardized testing does not necessarily decrease the achievement gap among students, and ultimately, social mobility is limited among students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Despite resistance to standardized testing among many educators, parents, and administrators, schools continue to prepare their students to learn the rote learned facts that
accompany standardized testing (Luke, 2010). One possible reason for this is because the public likes numbers that are easy to understand. A student’s intelligence, skills, and projected future outlook cannot be simply told in numbers provided through standardized testing. Despite the consistent fact that drilling occurs with standardized testing, it is not an accurate means of measuring students’ intelligence (Luke, 2010). One researcher who studied the factors of student independence, student creativity, and negotiation was Anyon (1980). Anyon’s (1980) research will be detailed later.

**Statement of Research Questions:**

This thesis is guided by the following research questions:

1. Do Anyon’s observations of affluent professional schools hold true today?
2. Are the aspects of negotiation, student independence, and student creativity as seen in lower-income schools similar to upper income schools today?
3. How does the relationship between standardized testing and specifically advanced placement testing impact the factors of critical thinking and communication skills, and what role do these factors play in providing students high skilled positions in the labor market?

**Statement of Purpose**

This research explores how state testing and advanced placement testing influence pedagogy and content and formal knowledge and the null curriculum in teaching students the above noted critical thinking and communication skills. The motivation for teaching students is to teach students the material that will likely be on Ohio Graduation Tests, the Ohio Achievement Test, and advanced placement testing which provides schools with faulty incentives and resource allocation structures (O’Day, 2008). This push for standardized testing
leaves teachers to teach in a clear direct manner while having limited freedom to implement creativity and informal scaffolding in the classroom (O’Day, 2008). I chose this research topic because I am interested in the differences, in “formal knowledge” that schools display, along with the null curriculum in school about what is expected from students and what is necessary to know. I have taken numerous teaching classes at Bowling Green State University and am interested in what impacts student learning and the role standardized testing plays among students of various backgrounds. My subjectivity is inclined to believe standardized testing takes important informal knowledge out of schools and that standardized testing takes away from the critical skills of communication and higher order thinking skills that are critical for educating students.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter Two, addressed how schools used to and currently teach students in an effort to help pre-determine students’ labor paths to sustain our economic system. The second part of this chapter addressed current factors that determine what is taught in schools, with an emphasis on standardized testing, and how those factors impact how and what teachers teach, along with the critical thinking and communication skills of students. Chapter three detailed my methodology and research procedures. Chapter four presented my findings on my research. In chapter five I summarized the research findings and addressed my research questions.

Definition of Terms

**State Proficiency Testing:** State mandated tests that students are required to pass in order to graduate.

**Advanced Placement Testing:** Evaluations of students’ understanding and comprehension of advanced placement classes that students can take for possible college credit.
Case studies: The reconstruction of a single culture that studies” intensive, in-depth examination of one or a few aspects of a given phenomenon” (Lecompte & Preissle, 1994, p.33)

Curriculum: The content and pedagogy that is taught in formal and informal educational settings that is used to pass knowledge to students.

Null Curriculum: Message(s) students receive based on what is not taught in the classroom; specifically, message(s) that what is not taught is not important in educational experience or in society.

Critical Theory: Looking at how economic, social, and political structures impact power and influence in society by maintaining current power structures (Lecompte & Preissle, 1993).

Cultural Reproduction: Repeated attitudes, beliefs, customs, and values that society values.

A Nation at Risk: A government report issued in the 1980’s, which stated the need for greater education standards in public and private schools and colleges, and to compare U.S. student achievement to that of other industrial nation student achievement. This report also made an urgent call for the need of accountability in schools.

No Child Left Behind: An act reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), incorporating the principles of increased accountability for States, school districts, and schools; greater choice for parents and students, particularly those attending low-performing schools; more flexibility for States and local educational agencies (LEAs) in the use of Federal education dollars; and a stronger emphasis on reading, especially for young children (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Race to the Top (RTTT): The most recent education reform bill that reinforces school accountability. This legislation calls for innovative means to improve education outcomes, and takes a supportive stance towards charter schools (McGuinn, 2012). This act seeks to counter the
perceived failings of NCLB, by driving state education reform through incentives as opposed to sanctions (McGuinn, 2012).

**Higher order thinking:** Knowledge that entails analytical, synthesis, and evaluation skills which consist in organizing, inferring, composing, formulating, creating, judging, and critiquing (Avilles, 1999).

**New knowledge:** Critical communication, collaborative, and technological skills that are necessary for competing in the current labor market.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The first part of this chapter addresses how schools have historically and currently teach students in order to regulate our economic system by students’ pre-determined labor paths. The second part of this chapter addresses current factors that determine what is taught in schools with an emphasis on standardized testing, and how that impacts how and what teachers teach, along with the critical thinking and communication skills of students in one suburban school. The aspects of student creativity, student independence, and negotiation are compared with Anyon’s (1980) observations of an upper income school in the late 1970’s to a present day affluent professional school.

In order to maintain our capitalist economy, workers have had to be integrated into the labor market in a way that maximizes profit for the employers (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Workers today have had to be trained in the necessary skills for the jobs that are available in the 21st Century. As Anyon (1980) demonstrates, not every school is set up to prepare students the same way in learning the communication and negotiation skills necessary for 21st Century jobs. Some students are given specific directives throughout their entire education, and some are given none. Those who are given less direction are expected to make their own decisions, allowing more independence, and thus, giving them the mentality that is expected in their future careers (Zachary, 2010). Schools prepare students for the type of employment they are likely to have in the future through the methods they teach their students (Zachary, 2010). Schools control who learns “official knowledge” as a means of controlling the labor market and economic capital (Apple, 1979).

This educational inequality entails a means of controlling the labor market through who is taught the “official knowledge” to be qualified for traditionally high paying jobs. In their
early research on this issue, Bowles and Gintis (1976) highlight the main reasons for this control: 1) Laborers and middle management jobs were necessary to produce profit for any company, and most of the population must fulfill these positions for this to happen, 2) A surplus of workers with high skilled technological or higher level skills, mentioned previously, are necessary so employers have the power to select the “best” workers at the lowest price: employers have the power to hire and fire. In order for any economic system to flourish, it must reproduce the forces of land, labor, capital, and knowledge that are important to the economic production system (Althusser, 1971). Elite or executive schools become more vied for and they then become more important economically and assert their control of economic sources.

Education plays an important role in determining key indicators for social position and status in society. Schools serve as actors in society, in that they indirectly contribute to economic reproduction through tracking and different pedagogical styles, which maintain the economic status quo. Lewis (2007) states, “inequality in the society means that there is unequal access of children to valued high-status knowledge” (p. 330). When education can systematically control who learns the knowledge necessary to compete for high-skilled jobs and control what knowledge is viewed as important, then social positions and statuses can be, to an extent, controlled. Students can be systematically controlled by how they are treated in school, and what kinds of thinking skills and course material they are directly or indirectly learning.

As seen through Anyon’s (1980) research, schools vary widely in what students learn, how students learn, and what resources students have available to learn. Students who attend upper income schools have had great advantages through higher expectations and practice, and have had more control of their learning, more control of their environment, more resources in school, and more experience in conducting original research. These skills provide an advantage
for upper income students today. As Anyon (1997) argues, communities who share a higher socio-economic status have favorable public school systems (as cited in Laureau, 2012).

These factors give students an edge in competing for high skilled jobs and contribute to the social and economic reproduction seen through schools. This institutional imbalance of schools observed by Anyon (1980) contributes to social and economic reproduction, because parents often raise their children based upon similar means and mentality that they were raised with at home and in school. In upper income schools where students have had greater academic freedom, students are expected to question and explore their course content. These schools would then generally educate children who would likewise likely be raised with that same mentality.

**Looking at Curriculum Historically and Presently**

In looking at Anyon’s (1980) observations, which were conducted between [1978-1979], there were specific factors that distinguished affluent professional and elite schools from working class schools (1980). In examining the factors of communication, collaboration, and negotiation, Anyon studied several different types of elementary schools: working class, middle-class, and affluent-professional. She compared the curriculum, classroom environment, and student and teacher interactions used by each. She looked at how students were taught and what they were taught. Anyon based her work on a model of economic and cultural reproduction to predict what and how students were going to learn. Schools serve as stepping- stones for implementing knowledge and skills that aid in pre-determining occupational attainment. In her observations, Anyon found the affluent-professional school students were able to receive hands on experience in the interactive skills of group work and dependent study, whereas the lower income students were given predominately dependent work with strict teacher directives to guide
them. Conversely, Anyon (1980) found that in working class schools, students were frequently given directives and are told specifically what to do and when. This can be seen today, because students of the same economic background tend to go to school together, which reinforces the dominant culture’s norms and attitudes (Zachary, 2010).

**Anyon’s Affluent Education**

Anyon (1980) noted distinct characteristics that were associated with affluent professional schools. These characteristics enabled students to foster skills that would allow them to think independently and to assert their academic independence. The teachers in Anyon’s (1980) observations helped to facilitate and guide student knowledge, rather than relying on giving direct orders to students. Teachers would encourage students to maximize their learning by asking questions that required analytical, synthesis, and evaluation skills. Many of these qualities described were found at Clever High School, the school where I conducted my research for this thesis. The main difference between Anyon’s affluent professional school and Clever High School was the advanced test preparation I observed at Clever High School.

I associated Clever High School with Anyon’s affluent professional schools because this is a wealthy district that shared many characteristics with the affluent professional schools. These aspects included evidence of analytical skills, negotiation, communication, student creativity, student independence, and student and teacher relationships. In this school, one of the teachers stated nearly 60% of the students participate in advanced placement classes where students are expected to exhibit these qualities. While Clever High School is wealthy, it is not among the most elite public schools in Ohio.

Anyon (1980) used several different categories to describe schools observed in her research. First, were working-class schools comprised of students of semi-skilled workers that
had a higher proportion of students living at or below poverty than higher-income schools. Second, there were middle-class schools, which were predominately students of well-paid skilled laborers to middle-management jobs that included accountants. Third, there were affluent-professional schools made up of students of parents’ wealth exceeded that of most Americans and where parents were overwhelmingly skilled workers such as a cardiologist, or engineer. Finally, there were executive elite schools, where the parents income was in the top 1 percent range in the nation, and where parents were actively involved in town politics and community organizations (Anyon, 1980).

**Anyon’s Observations**

According to Anyon’s (1980) study, students in middle class schools, students had a little bit more freedom than their lower-income peers in what they were able to do (Anyon, 1980). More resources were provided to middle class students, and the students learned with more resources and independence in their curriculum. Productivity was still an important factor in these schools though. Students who attended these schools received the message through the null curriculum that while being creative and thinking critically is important, laboring and hard work is still important. Authority, and, to an extent, questioning is still important. Students who attended these schools had parents who were often middle managers who treated their children in manners in which they act at work, which helped indirectly set children up for their often predetermined jobs (Anyon, 1980).

**Student creativity.** Student creativity was present in affluent professional schools. Anyon (1980) noted, “The products of work should not be like everybody else’s and should show individuality” (p. 80). Student work was supposed to be authentic and an appropriate
demonstration of their activity. Often time’s students own satisfaction with their work was a means for evaluation (Anyon, 1980).

**Negotiation.** Anyon (1980) also noted evidence of negotiation that occurred between the teachers and students in the affluent professional schools. Rather than giving students direct orders, teachers often gave students suggestions with problem solving skills. The teachers at affluent professional schools used a more collaborative approach in working with students on their coursework. Teachers would try to reason and talk to students to make decisions that would maximize their learning within their given instructional time Anyon (1980). For example, the teacher would ask a student what they intend to do, and the student would be expected to respond with what their intentions for the given time would be.

**Critical thinking.** Students were expected to engage in critical thinking throughout their classes in affluent professional schools. Students were expected to engage in active learning which often required them to re-create concepts and ideas (Anyon, 1980). Students, for example, in social studies had to re-create a culture in ancient times by creating a film, essay, or mural depicting the lives of the people (Anyon, 1980). Students were expected to learn beyond rote learning and to apply what they have learned to individual or class projects.

**Communication.** In an affluent professional school more plays and project-based learning occurred which helped give students the linguistic and communication skills necessary to be able to compete at a higher advantage in managing and in specialized skill jobs. The abilities of illustrating ideas, verbalizing, and researching and presenting information by no means guarantees those students higher paying and higher skilled jobs, but those students typically have the advantage in knowledge and resource for college readiness and the labor market (Anyon, 1980). Collins (2009) states that many of these students have parents who bring
work to home, which reinforces a work/home environment setting. This setting creates a home advantage for these students who have had resources at home to help them further in their learning.

**Connecting Anyon’s Research to Current Schools**

Anyon’s work is still significant today because many of the pedagogical and structural differences in schools are still present. Anyon’s observations are still important, because it was clear in her observations that how students were taught, and the skills of critical thinking and independence encouraged among students made an impact on how students perceived learning and the expectations they had of their futures. In today’s economy, where communication and critical thinking skills are valued, Anyon’s work is still relevant in looking at how students who experience more academic independence are advantaged in their careers. There is a rich body of research that has continued to examine schooling and socio-economic reproduction. Lareau (2011) notes the imbalance of negotiation and communication skills still evident in schools, which reinforces pedagogical inequalities.

There is current research suggesting that working class parents often give their children direct orders which emphasize conformity to external control (Lareau & Weininger 2009). These children are then taught to do what they are told, which reinforces social norms. Creativity and displaying interdependence in their coursework are not rewarded, which sends the message to students that being docile and obedient is important. Allan (2011) found that working class schools are set up like most minimum wage jobs in the fact that time is tightly controlled and obedience is rewarded. The belief to not question authority is widespread, and productivity rather than thinking is valued. Allan (2011) indicates that the key policies of scripted, standardized pedagogy risk offering working class, cultural and linguistic minority students
precisely what Anyon (1980) described as “an enacted curriculum of basic skills, rule recognition and compliance” (p. 180). The skills needed to compete for middle- and upper-income jobs are not reinforced through many low-income schools. Low-income parents reinforce attitudes and behaviors that will help their children secure working class jobs (Anisworth-Darnell & Downey 1998). Furthermore, Lewis (2007) states that lower-class children are tracked through watered down general curriculum, while their higher socio-economic peers are tracked on more academically rigorous classes.

According to Collins (2009), the working class expressive culture can conflict with the cultural expectations of an appropriate classroom behavior that is often defined by middle class counterparts. These class expectations include appearing interested in content but to secretly mocking or making fun of the teacher (Collins, 2009). Working class students are generally either passive, isolate themselves from the classroom, or are defiant and rebel against the teacher (Collins, 2009). The students who rebel against the teacher as a result of their perceived inequalities often times may still find themselves in low-income jobs. The possible reason for this is because these low income jobs in some cases represent counter-school cultures that allow the students who rebelled a chance to show off their masculinity, if they are males, and to create a sense of self despite the fact that they are exploited for their labor (Collins, 2009).

Educational systems serve as mediators of economic reproduction (Carnoy, 1975). Schools were supposed to serve as institutions that were to help the lower-income students raise their social mobility, but have instead have served as actors in maintaining economic and class reproduction for our capitalist system to work. In being mediators, schools have become part of the economic and class struggle. Fixing or attempting to make changes to an economic system that gradually increases the standard of living of the majority and provides a participatory feeling
of the majority in our economic and political system, and then getting society to understand the
economic crises that they are contributing to can be difficult (Carnoy, 1975).

In affluent schools students are more likely to attend college where they can learn
specialized skills for the careers that they desire to have. Those students who attend high schools
where there are more available guidance counselors, college prep courses, and help for students
on FAFSA (the Free Application for Federal Student Aid), are more likely to attend college
(Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009). Upper income students also have more knowledge in
applying for college and are more knowledgeable about the college application process. These
students also have the family background that makes college applications and FAFSA easier to
complete (Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009).

Other Factors Impacting Education

Besides the curriculum itself, financial resources have been cited as a leading cause of
why lower-income students have attended college at lower rates than their wealthier counterparts
(Altavena, 2011). This is because, in addition to (not) completing FAFSA, money has been cited
as the main obstacle to attending college, especially among minority male students (Altavena,
2011). Money, negative social stigma, and lower aspirations have also been noted as major
hindrances to attending college for minority males (Altavena, 2011). This negative social stigma
includes negative stereotypes among minority and lower income students from themselves, other
students, teachers, and from caregivers. These negative social stereotypes serve as emotional and
psychological barriers to performing well in school. The goal to increase college degrees among
lower income students can only be fully achieved when there is an emphasis on how to close the
college completion gap for low income and minority students.
Education institutions are set up to create a subordinate group of adults to work in the labor force. Progressive education reform, while arguably great in the proposed methods of education reforms, lacks the idea and support of making the education system equal. In the current economy, as indicated by Powell and Snellman (2004), jobs are differentiated according to knowledge, creativity, and skill requirements, and only when students have a strong foundation in all three of these areas are they able to fully succeed in the workforce. In order to implement these characteristics in schools, many progressive education methods have been enacted. However, because school systems are still under the tight control and influence of our unequal economic system, the new progressive methods that were brought into schools have not reduced the institutional barriers. These progressive teaching methods include online learning and student centered learning. This progressive education may have helped some students to learn at their own pace and to form collaboration skills among their peers. However, rote learning and learning to perform well on standardized testing with programs such as “Study Island” are still prevalent in education test preparation (Hixson, 2007). Education reforms have focused on accountability and standardized test scores, which have done little to encourage schools to focus on knowledge, creativity, and skill requirements through higher-level learning.

**Tracking.** School tracking occurs when schools place students within discipline differentiation, where unequal alternative versions of academic subjects are offered to students (Lucas, 1999). The school’s tracking system molds students’ expectations for themselves. Schools, which are supposed to be institutions that help students increase social mobility, often reinforce stereotypes and expectations of what students’ careers are supposed to be. Yonezawa, Wills, and Serna (2002) state that after years of signaling by teachers regarding their academic capabilities, students can become convinced of their career trajectory. Coleman (1990) further
suggests that one way of controlling human capital is created by changing people to give them unique skills that enable the most effective use of physical capital. To help maintain our economic system, there has to be a system that helps maintain a balance of high skilled and low skilled employees. This is related to learned helplessness when students do not believe that they are intellectually capable of doing challenging work and develop more of a sense of mistrust.

Tracking serves to segregate students based on race and income because students who have more income statistically perform better in school, and minority students are less likely to participate in advanced courses because they feel isolated socially (Lewis, 2007). Welner and Oakes (1996) point out that this practice is “pedagogically ineffectual,” and disproportionately harmful to non-white students. The means of evaluating students based on the unequal learning mechanisms of material students learn in school means more inequality in the informal knowledge students receive. According to Jacobs (2010), the goal of schools should be to get students to become self-directed learners. In order to do this, schools should include authentic performances, and students should learn how to work through content areas in the curriculum design (Jacobs, 2010).

**Cultural Reproduction in Schools**

Apple (1979) has noted that educational institutions have usually been the main agencies of transmission of the dominant culture. Social norms, attitudes, and organization of work are determined by the dominant culture (Apple, 1979). The norms that the dominant society privileges such as language patterns, social behaviors, and customs are reinforced through schools. These traditions are rooted and seen as true in the dominant culture, making these traditions difficult to break (Apple 1979). Williams (1961) has pointed out that schools act in cultural and ideological hegemonic ways and as agents of selective traditions. Dreeban (1969)
indicates that “students tacitly learn certain identifiable social norms by coping with tasks of classroom life” (p.87). Dreeban (1969) indicates these norms penetrate areas of later life which contribute to students “ongoing social, economic and political order” (p. 87). What is taught in schools helps mold students’ culture experiences throughout their educational career.

Apple (1982) indicated that parents feel that they have little control over what their children learn. With little parental control over what students learn, low-income parents may feel they have little oversight into what their children are learning and if they deem it as appropriate or not. In the past, school boards often made curricular decisions (Apple, 1982). But today public schools have less power in deciding what gets taught, as they must follow state standards. State schools are not able to focus their energies on low-income students, but on those who are able to effectively claim more resources from the school. What the community values and the goals of a particular community may inadvertently exclude low-income family’s needs compared to upper and middle income families, making low income parents feel as though they have a limited ability to question their child’s curriculum due to lack of time and resources (Apple, 1982). These goals and aims may not serve the particular needs of all minority groups. It is often still the dominant culture that has the time and influence to help control the running of their schools that serve their needs. Cultural reproduction reinforces social norms that dictate who maintains control of social capital because cultural reproduction, like social reproduction, is generational. Bourdieu (1974) stated:

Marginalized people, given their perceived inferior cultural capital, will remain decidedly disadvantaged in relation to more dominant groups, reproducing themselves and the same class or social position as the generation before them, thus ignoring
people’s agency in relation to their learning and social mobility strategies. (as cited in Foerer, & Portisch, 2012, p. 336)

Azraelo, (2013) states that practices students learn from their families constitutes the basis of the “reception and assimilation of the classroom message” (as cited in Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000, p. 83). Parents transmit their cultural subordination attitudes to their children, making cultural transmission more evident.

In focusing on the pedagogical aspect of cultural reproduction, Wexler (1980) indicates that knowledge is filled with representation. One idea or concept leads to or ties into another concept in education (Walter, 1969). Wexler (1980) then points out that because knowledge is based on representation of previous learned ideas or concepts. It is stratified by who learns complex ideas, and, therefore “social translations are selectively applied depending upon the knowledge bearers and the closeness of knowledge to the core of the sacred” (Walter, 1969, p. 277). The power of being able to determine what means what and deciding which knowledge should be valued and taught as “sacred” helps to decide the social hierarchy system of maintaining our current economic system.

**Minorities in Education**

Another factor that contributes to cultural reproduction in schools is when peers, teachers, and school administrators do not recognize the unique cultural background that minority students have. Feinberg (1998) pointed out that attempting to generalize the experiences and cultures of minorities results in distortion and false stereotypes of minority cultures. When these stereotypes are pronounced and a group’s culture gets ignored or generalized then the groups’ identity becomes unclear to even the students from the group.
Schools often do not teach cross-cultural norms and values at an in-depth level that allows students the opportunity to see how culture interplays with society and institutional norms and values. Many schools often do not embrace multiculturalism through their curriculums. Many schools talk about pedagogical practices to teach students about cultural diversity, but those teaching practices make the issues of struggle and powers of minorities seem inferior to anything else being taught. Schools display and enforce the wider forms of political, economic, and social practices that society expects. Giroux (1985) argued that understanding and teaching the discourse of lived cultures in schools is important in understanding the social locations, histories, and subjective interests that occurs in schools.

**Immigrant Students**

Minorities are stigmatized by cultural reproduction. The general cultural norms throughout schools are to conform to the majority culture and to be obedient. Often, there is not a lot of resistance among first generation immigrants. This is because many first generation immigrants have positive attitudes concerning their chances in a new country (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998). This can change with second-generation immigrants who do start to rebel against the dominant culture, as they feel left out culturally, economically, and linguistically. They become more pessimistic because they begin to feel that they are at a disadvantage as they belong to a disfavored group (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998). Different levels of education help set up a social hierarchy system that correlates to the different levels reached by laborers. Ream (2005), states that this division of labor is in part determined by different experiences students receive at school. Minority and low-income students are more likely to attend schools that provide fewer chances of career advancement.
There is also a fear among many poor immigrants and many minorities of “acting white” and conforming to the dominant culture. The fear of appearing to do well in school can cause frustration and resentment among many second generation immigrants. The feelings towards cultural domination, unfair economic institutions, and educational systems that reinforce these policies are sources of resentment. Lew (2006) suggests that issues such as: “class, peer relations, and school structure” also play a big part in determining academic achievement among minority students (p. 342). This goes back to the idea that schools are still not equal in how they treat students. The school environment itself contributes to how students act with each other and what their expectations are, and indirectly tells students what society thinks of them.

Stanton-Salazar, Chavez, and Tai (2001) indicate that for minority and low-income students, relations with institutional agents and networks with social hierarchies impede supportive relations. Many low income and minority students do not have as wide of a support system to embed or collaborate with the dominant culture. Many minorities have a negative view of institutions, which means that genuine institutional support must be taken gradually (Stanton-Salazar, Chavez, & Tai, 2010). This genuine institutional support means integrating resources and help to low income and minority students so they are able to receive the same kind of skills that their upper income peers have. This support must be given gradually so students can build trust and rapport with teachers and administration to achieve educational skills of communication and negotiation. Some students need a school system that will work hands-on with students’ needs and gradually implement expectations for students to perform well. Schools do not typically gradually implement their expectations of behavior or take the time to learn about the experiences of their students, which leads to negative experiences in school among some minority students. Negative experiences will often cause students to withdraw from
important sources of institutional support (Wehlage, 1989). Those students who need the support the most from caring adults to help them aid in their life’s dilemmas from negative social sources are least likely to seek out that needed support (Stanton-Salazar, Chavez, & Tai, 2010). This usually stems from many schools lack of support and lack of genuine interest in the students. Many low-income students enter school with negative psychological and emotional issues, which many teachers and schools are unable to appropriately help students with.

**African Americans in Schooling**

Another example of cultural reproduction contributing to our stratified society is seen among African-Americans. Ogbu (2004) argued that the “school performance gap persists because the forces of racial stratification-white treatments and black responses-that created it continue to some degree” (p. 264). He argued that African-American students’ attitudes and actions in school are a result of oppression and institutional racism that exist in the United States (Ogbu, 2004). Lew (2006) also discusses “acting white,” and while Lew is not arguing the full institutional implications of acting white as Ogbu does, that many African-Americans struggle with the dilemma of “fitting in” with the dominant American culture while simultaneously retaining their cultural identity. This oppositional identity is important because it is about perception among students peer groups. African-American students may want to develop an image about themselves where they hide their academic performance to maintain an oppositional counter identity among their peers so they are not viewed as “acting white” which is associated with performing well in school.

Values that are deemed important in the dominant culture that students are perceived to possess have a direct relationship with how students academically perform in school. Ainsworth-Darnell and Douglas-Downey (1998) analyzed a survey conducted with 17,000 sophomores from
the National Education Longitudinal Study. In this study, students were asked about their grades, perceptions of future opportunity, skills, habits and styles, and concrete attitudes (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998). In the study, they found that while African-Americans have high educational expectations, there was still that dilemma seen in this study among African-Americans who feel they must balance doing well in school without feeling they are not keeping with their “oppositional social identity” (Ainsworth & Downey, 1998).

As seen through these examples, cultural reproduction aids in reinforcing social norms and values that contribute to systematic inequality among low-income and minority students. According to Giroux (2004), youth used to be seen as a gauge of social process. Empowering youth used to be seen as the link to strengthen democracy (Giroux, 2004). Youth no longer represent the moral necessity to improve upon society, because now low-income children are often viewed as a nuisance to the larger society. This absence of taking into account children in the larger frame of understanding society and institutions will contribute to generational and class stratification that will be difficult to overcome (Giroux, 2004).

Education Legislation

A Nation At Risk (ANAR) was a government report in 1983, which argued that students’ academic abilities were declining (Denning, 1983). The report mentioned how Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores had decreased over the previous two decades, and ANAR argued for the need to help improve educational opportunities for all students (Ravish, 2010). This report was created to increase teaching standards and to increase teacher salaries, as well as push universities to upgrade their course books and to raise their standards. ANAR stated that skilled intelligence is what students need in schools to compete with other industrial nations in the “information age” (A Nation At Risk, 1983). ANAR went on to state that people who do not
acquire the levels of literacy and training essential to the new era would be left out of the opportunity to participate fully in society (A Nation At Risk, 1983). Despite this report’s plea for excellence in education for all students, the education system still did not become equal for all students.

ANAR was different than No Child Left Behind, because ANAR had a more holistic approach to improving education, by increasing school days, and providing more rigorous training to teachers (A Nation At Risk, 1983). ANAR called for a public commitment to make education a priority for students, and for training, tools, and collaboration among colleges, cultural institutions, and businesses to create opportunities for everyone to learn throughout life. Conversely, NCLB, enacted in 2002, almost exclusively focused on standardized testing as a means for improving education (Ravish, 2010).

**Race to the Top.** Under the current Race to the Top (RTTT) legislation, schools are rewarded for finding innovative strategies for improving students’ academic education (McGuinn, 2012). RTTT was enacted in order to help reward states for meeting the criteria in educating their students. Our national government does not have a clear set of standards in education. Shelley (2008) asserts that education standards are left generally to the states. One way to help create reform in education is by encouraging states to meet criteria through a grant and incentive program. From the perspective of RTTT, this success is measured through graduation rates, and standardized tests scores. RTTT stated goal is to foster creativity and implement accountability in the classroom at the same time.

The criterion of RTTT is still accountability through easily documented factors such as standardized test scores, graduation rates, and adequate yearly progress reports. Two factors that have come with RTTT include student data systems, and the adoption of Common Core
standards and assessments (McGuinn, 2012). McGuinn (2012), notes RTTT has attempted to make a much more tolerant environment for charter schools, by allowing for more school vouchers and encouraging charter schools to integrate more student centered approaches. While RTT wants to reward schools for implementing creativity in their classrooms, the larger structural reproduction mechanisms are still in place. RTTT still places pressure on school districts to improve standardized tests scores, and has the same push for accountability as NCLB did. McGuinn (2012), notes that RTTT provides needed incentives to states that meet the set criteria, while still placing pressure on states to meet the set state standards criteria of education instead of having so many unregulated and unfunded federal mandates. RTTT wants schools to have higher graduation rates, higher grades, more advanced placement classes, and high stakes tests.

**Advanced Placement Testing**

Many students currently take advanced placement classes where each year in May they take a final advanced placement exam. Advanced placement classes allow students to earn college credit in high school. There are 34 possible advanced placement tests for students to take. In 2012, two million students took 3.7 million advanced placement exams at over 18,000 high schools (National College Board, 2012). Students are scored on their exams on a scale from one to five, where five represents the highest possible score. Advanced placement tests have a multiple-choice section, and a free response section. “Equating” is the process for scoring advanced placement tests (National College Board, 2012). This process is figured by creating a composite score for the two sections of an exam, and then looking at how well advanced placement students performed on a set of multiple choice questions ranging in difficulty (National College Board, 2012). This indicates how well advanced placement students perform
and the current exam’s level of difficulty (National College Board, 2012). Colleges vary on what scores they accept for credit. Advanced Placement testing and state standardized proficiency testing differ in the skills, knowledge, and pedagogies used to prepare students.

State standardized testing typically test students over rote memorization of facts. Teachers often use the “banking method” for these tests, which is when teachers regurgitate facts and students are supposed to remember facts and knowledge and remember them for the state proficiency tests (Freire, 2000). Advanced placement testing requires more analytical and synthesis skills to perform well. Students are required to evaluate the information given in the problems to decide which information is valuable to answering questions. Multiple choice questions and extended response questions are asked on advanced placement tests (National College Board 2013). Chajewski and Shaw, (2011) indicate that advanced placement test preparation plays a substantial role in determining four year institution enrollment rates. For students who take advanced placement testing, there is a 171% increase in the odds of attending a four year institution, and the rate increases even more for students who score a three to five on an advanced placement test and for students who participate in taking multiple advanced placement tests (Chajewksi & Shaw, 2011).

Summary

This review of literature examined the factors that have driven curriculum historically through economic and social reproduction, and what drives curriculum today. Through economic and social reproduction, schools have served as agents in helping to pre-determine students’ career trajectories. Standardized testing is currently a leading force in determining how and what teachers teach. Legislation and government reports such as ANAR, NCLB, and RTTT were implemented to make schools accountable for their students’ success in an effort to help close
the academic achievement gap. These legislations and reports effectively ignored the larger societal and economic problems that contribute to the achievement gap.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to examine how standardized tests play a role in determining how teachers present their classroom content and the role of negotiation, student independence, and student creativity. With research indicating that schools play a large factor in pre-determining the jobs students will likely go into, I was interested to investigate to what degree this held true currently for schools. I sought to understand what economic and cultural reproduction factors still occur in school today and what role schools play in the stratification of social and economic hierarchy in regard to the factors of independence, creativity, negotiation, and critical thinking. In order to research these questions I conducted observations at one suburban high school located in Northwestern Ohio, and administered surveys to teachers and the principal asking them about their views on what drives curriculum. My research methodology helped me address my research questions. My research questions are: do Anyon’s observations of affluent professional schools hold true today? Are the aspects of negotiation, student independence, and student creativity similar to upper income schools today as compared to lower-income schools? How does the relationship between standardized testing and specifically advanced placement testing impact the factors of critical thinking and communication skills, and what role do these factors play in providing students high skilled positions in the labor market?

Theoretical Framework

In the review of literature, I critically examined the power relations between students and schools, and schools and the labor market (Bowles & Gintis 1976). Since this issue of social reproduction in schools looks at socio-political power of schools in the social hierarchy, I utilized a critical theory lens in my research (Lecompte & Preissle, 1993). I make the argument
that schools alone do not create social inequality in the labor market and in society, but they do in fact contribute to rigidity in the existing social hierarchy. Schools alone arguably do not have the power to change the social hierarchy system because they alone do not have the social or economic power to do so. Power relations and the social hierarchy system first must be fixed. The focus of this paper is to bring social awareness of economic and political oppression that is present in schools.

**Methodology**

This study is focused on qualitative research (Glesne, 1999). Qualitative research seeks to collect data from observations. This requires the researcher to talk with people, gather and collect documents, and observe behavior. This data can be collected from observations, surveys, and interviews (Glesne, 1999). The specific type of research I have used in determining how to best answer my questions regarding the high schools students’ independence, creativity, higher order thinking skills, school environment, and standardized tests for high school students are observations and surveys used in my case study of Clever High School. Qualitative research in my case study the most appropriate way to inquire into my research questions. It is critical that I emphasize the need to focus on the concepts and processes relevant to the study (Glaser, 1978).

**Case study.** Case studies focus on one environment that is often viewed as the field site (Lecompte & Preissle 1993). Case studies are valuable because they allow a researcher to focus and study in-depth one environment to understand the culture of the given field site. My case study of Clever High School allowed me to get in-depth information of the school. The high school I observed has been assigned the name Cleve High School as a pseudonym. All of the identities of my research subjects have been protected by my approved human subjects review board application (Appendixes A-E). I was able to focus my research on the environment of
Clever High School and certain curriculum aspects that will be later discussed. I chose to do a case study on Clever High School because this is an upper income school in a community with a high socio-economic status that would allow me to more fully observe the aspects of student creativity, independence, negotiation, critical thinking, and collaborative relationships. I observed interactions between students and teachers at Clever High School to Anyon’s (1980) affluent professional school. I chose a school with a high socio-economic status with the expectation that I might see evidence of the above aspects.

Environment of Clever High School

The physical classroom environment was accommodating to learning in every classroom I saw. Each room had evidence of student work or of colorful posters that with content related material on it. Students had access to most of the classroom space that was conducive to learning. The school itself was clean and organized. The high school had plenty of art and science supplies that aided greatly in the classrooms. Classrooms still adhered to bells, but the environment of the high school through decorations and classroom make up was student centered. Teachers appeared to have great working relationships with each other and collaborated with each other on their classroom content. The environment of this high school was friendly, student centered, and collaborative by students and teachers making this an ideal environment for learning. This is supported by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) Website, which showed in the 2011 and 2012 school year that Clever High School received an excellent rating in their state report card with 26 out of 26 state indicators met. Clever High School also made adequate yearly progress the previous year (ODE, 2013). Almost all Clever High School students passed the Ohio Graduation Tests. Clever High School has a 95.9% attendance rate, and 76% of teachers had at least a Master’s degree (ODE, 2013). Students at
this school district were as a whole well equipped to pass the OGTs, which has been the case in this school district for many years (ODE, 2013). Clever High School has an excellent rating and fully met their adequate yearly progress in the 2011 through 2012 school years on their state proficiency testing (ODE, 2013). This is a school where students perform well on state proficiency tests and have well educated teachers.

This school district is wealthy. This is a school district that has a well-educated populace and provides plenty of academic resources to their students. The Ohio Department of Education (2013) indicates that this is a suburban school district with low to very low student poverty. The median household income of Clever High School District is $108,823 (City Data, 2013). The district population age twenty five years and older, 97.8% of the population have a high school diploma, and 68.8% have a bachelor’s degree and 39.6% have a graduate degree.

The demographics of Clever High School show that this is a community that supports and expects student independence and collaboration, and communication amongst their students. The student to teacher ratio at Clever High School is 14 to 1 respectively. Clever High School has 35 full time teachers, and the average pay for a teacher at Clever High School is $50,170 a year (City Data, 2013). The career demographics of this community seem to align with the average income. In this community, 20 percent of the occupations consist of physicians and surgeons while 21 percent of jobs consist of professional, scientific, and technical services (City Data, 2013). The other occupations include lawyers, manufacturing jobs, education services, and other miscellaneous careers (City Data, 2013). This shows that the community has the ability to provide students and teachers the resources of teaching needed critical communication and negotiation skills. These skills are necessary to achieve good grades and score well on advanced
placement and state proficiency testing to get accepted into college, which is often a precursor to achieving a high paying job.

Based on my observations, Clever is a wealthy school district with people who expect their children to maintain their status in the economic and cultural hierarchy by teaching students the necessary “official knowledge”. While it is an assumption that going to college leads to good jobs, it is a saturated job market. Communication and negotiation skills are taught to give students a competitive advantage in the competitive job market. For many reasons, not every student who goes to college graduates. Having familial, academic, and financial support gives students an advantage in completing college, which makes finding a high paying job that requires communication, negotiation, and collaboration skills easier.

**Qualitative data sources**

I chose to administer surveys to collect information. This would give me concrete reliable data from teachers. Based on the review of literature, I compiled a set of open-ended questions for the principal and teachers at Clever High School. Open-ended questions allowed the participants to share their ideas and perceptions as they wished. The interview protocols can be found in Appendices A-B. I administered a survey to the school principal of Clever High School. The survey focused on the basic operating of their particular school, views on the issues of student independence, teacher pedagogy, their school environment, and the role that those factors play in students’ expected career path. These surveys were significant, because I was able to gather categorical qualitative data indicating the total number of individuals, or events as part of my research (Frankel & Wallen, 2000). I was able to make some general inferences about the environment and views of the teachers with certain curriculum aspects with this categorical data.
In addition, I also observed student and teacher lessons and social interactions, participating in their school day as normal. I also needed the cooperation of the teachers in allowing me to observe them in their classroom, and the teachers’ participation in answering my questionnaire. These observations were also important because they allowed me to make personal inferences based upon what I saw and heard during my observations. These observations allowed me to cite specific examples of what I saw and heard with the running of the teachers’ classrooms and the running of the school. I went in observing with the goal of taking a learners stance as stated by Glesne (1999) to take a learner’s stance to develop an understanding of the environment I was studying. These observations were important because my new understandings from my observations through my learner’s stance would help me “provide new vantage points, new ways of thinking about some aspect of social interactions” (Glesne, 1999, p. 46).

**Survey.** The surveys were open and closed-ended questions in order to have a higher response rate among the teachers at the high school (Klein, and Brown, 2006). These questions aided in answering my research questions of the role of analytical thinking, standardized testing strategies, student creativity, and student independence in curriculum. I administered surveys to teachers and the principal at Clever High School to compare the teachers’ and principals’ views with my observations. The survey questions were aligned with my research questions because they ask directly what the teachers’ views are on the above factors and their role on their students’ education.

**Teacher survey.** I administered online surveys to the teachers at the high school to find out directly what the teachers’ perspectives are on the standardized test given to their students. The questionnaire asked what standardized test(s) their students take. Following that, I asked
how much preparation time teachers spend on standardized tests along with how they prepare their students for the standardized test. I inquired as to whether teachers believed that their desired teaching pedagogies are impacted by preparing students for the standardized test. If so, what desired teaching pedagogies would the teacher like to employ in, and how different the teaching pedagogies are between what teacher would like to engage students in, and the pedagogies teachers engage in to prepare students for standardized tests. The survey also asked for teachers’ perception on how their rapport was with students. This survey helped me understand how students are taught, and if testing preparation, including advanced placement testing, makes a difference in the educational quality students receive.

Out of the approximately twenty teachers who were asked to complete the online survey, five teachers responded. The teacher survey consisted of thirteen questions that asked how communication, negotiation, collaboration, and advanced placement testing impacted how they taught. My survey also asked teachers views on standardized testing, and how teachers prepare students for advanced placement testing. These questions were significant because with this information, I would be able to infer the relationship between the teachers and student creativity, independence, negotiation, and critical thinking skills into their curriculum and how these factors are impacted by advanced placement testing.

Principal survey. The high school principal survey asked questions such as what standardized test are given to their students, and how does the school support learning for students and teachers. Then I followed the question by asking what the principal thought the overall opinion among teachers was in regard to standardized testing in their school. I asked what policies or programs were in place at their high school to improve standardized testing and if teachers had any practices or instructions. This survey also asked questions regarding any
school policy that prepared students for standardized tests. This survey asked the principal about their view on high stakes testing and what their teachers do to help their students perform well on high stakes testing.

Observations. An observation protocol was used during my observations in the classrooms, in order to learn more about what drives curriculum in this affluent professional school, and what evidence of higher order thinking skills were present in this suburban school. I examined the classroom physical environment to see if there was any student work present that contributes to the classrooms environment. I observed teacher pedagogy, and what teaching strategies were used. I observed Clever High School for one day. I spent one approximate 50-minute class period observing each of the five teachers. I looked at how students and the teacher interacted and communicated with each other. Finally, I observed how much independence students had in the classroom, in the school, and in the course work. This serves as an important data collection piece because my observations allowed me to provide first hand examples of teaching strategies and evidence of standardized test preparation.

Data Analysis

My data was systematically analyzed, allowing me to best make inferences based upon my research (Glesne, 1999). My qualitative research was analyzed through coding. Coding research required me to examine my observations, and to draw conclusions based on common themes I noted during my observations and the teacher and principal surveys. The significance of coding is “looking for key linkages among various items of data” (Erikson, 1996). Coding research notes in qualitative research is critical because notes allow the researcher to draw evidentiary warrants for assertion that a researcher wishes to make (Erikson, 1996). An assertion is what a researcher wants to prove or confirm through their research. A warrant is
evidence that the researcher uses to prove their assertion by looking for confirming and disconfirming evidence. I found warrants by looking for key linkages and common themes through my surveys and observations to find answers through my objective data collections to prove or disconfirm my assertions on what drives curriculum.

Through the warrants I found in interview and survey data, I attempted to understand how this suburban high school and its school curriculum helped students become better prepared in integrating higher order thinking skills. My assertions for my observations and online surveys were that the role of communication, collaboration, negotiation, student independence, and student teacher relationships play a huge role in the skills necessary to compete for college and jobs in the 21st century.

Participants

The participants for this study included teachers of six classrooms, and the principal at a suburban high school in northwest Ohio, Clever High School. I examined various classrooms to observe the running and teaching strategies employed in different classrooms. I observed six classrooms; five of the classrooms were advanced placement classes. Out of the six teachers I observed at least two of the teachers had taught for 21 to 25 years. All of the participants in the study, including the school, were assigned to protect their confidentiality as stated in my human subjects review board application. I observed six classes; an advanced placement chemistry class, an advanced placement European history class, an advanced placement Chemistry class, an advanced placement composition class, an American government class, and an advanced placement French class. The same teachers I observed were the same teachers I asked to complete my survey.

Mr. Smith. Mr Smith was the physics teacher. He knew about advanced placement testing and had taught for a number of years. His classroom had a great deal of supplies and
equipment in it. Mr. Smith had high expectations for his students and treated them as intellectuals. Mr. Smith has taught at Clever High School since 2008, and has a Bachelor’s in Physics and Mathematics.

**Ms. Jones.** Ms. Jones was a younger teacher but demonstrated a great wealth of knowledge in her discipline of American and European history. Her classroom was arranged in rows of desks facing the board. Her classroom had decorations in it. Ms. Jones explained her content well and individually graded students’ practice for their advanced placement tests. Ms. Jones gave students valuable information in preparing for the advanced placement tests. This is Ms. Jones first year teaching at Clever High School. Ms. Jones has a Bachelor’s in Adolescent Young Adult Integrated Social Studies, and a Masters in Political Science.

**Ms. White.** Ms. White was an energetic teacher who clearly loved to teach chemistry. Her classroom had an abundance of posters, and room decorations. She appeared to be a somewhat experienced teacher. She was involved in projects and great professional affiliations in teaching students chemistry. She stated she enjoyed engaging students in active hands on learning with labs and experiments. Ms. White has a Masters of Arts degree in Teaching Physics.

**Mr. Stevenson.** Mr. Stevenson was a teacher who very much enjoyed his content. He had a background in acting and theatre and was not afraid to incorporate that into his lessons. Mr. Green’s classroom was full of decorations, and was dynamic in that it appeared students frequently talked amongst themselves during class activities. One example was students collaborating in determining how to best act out a play or story. Mr. Stevenson has three Master’s degrees in Education, English and Communications, and Directing.
Ms. Miller. Ms. Miller was an involved, well-prepared advanced French teacher. Ms. Miller was knowledgeable on the structure of the advanced placement French tests and how to best prepare students to perform well on it. Ms. Miller had a classroom that was arranged in table groups easily making this a collaborative learning environment. Ms. Miller has a Masters in Social Foundations of Education.

Mr. Duncan. Mr. Duncan was an experienced American Government and advanced placement Government teacher. In Mr. Duncan’s regular American Government class he maintained an orderly environment with discipline. Mr. Duncan frequently asked students to elaborate on their responses suggesting a focus on analytical skills. Mr. Duncan’s classroom was also full of decorations. Mr. Duncan has a Masters of Arts in Political Science.

In this study, I observed high school students in their classrooms. The aspects of education that Anyon looked at; student independence, creativity, negotiation, and teacher relationships are equally relevant for high school aged students. They are universal across the K-12 spectrum. These skills may help predict how well students can analyze, predict, and evaluate data in the future.

Triangulation

I triangulated my finding by collecting and comparing data from three different sources. This made my inferences and data more reliable because I had sources to examine and compare. Triangulation is used to crosscheck the accuracy of data gathered in one way to check the data in another way (LeCompte & Priessle 1993). This is helpful for making more accurate data inferences, and assists in correcting biases when there is only one observer of the phenomenon being researched (LeCompte & Priessle 1993). My observations and teacher and principal surveys allowed me to obtain information in three separate ways to learn how critical and
analytical thinking, standardized testing and advanced placement preparation, communication, and student creativity and independence play a role on curriculum. I knew that I was more likely to get responses from people who were interested in my topic (Ary, Jacobs, Razahieh, Sorensen, 2006). Out of my sampling group the more people who are likely to be at least somewhat interested in my topic, are likely to respond to my survey. In order for my surveys to be clear, respondents needed clear questions that avoided misleading and unstated assumptions (Ary, et al, 2006). This way there is no confusion about how respondents should answer, and the questions only ask one question at a time making the survey easy to read for the respondent.

Subjectivity

Using my critical theory lens, I have a bias that schools serve as agents in aiding economic, cultural, and political inequality (Lecompte & Preissle 1994). My data will likely report analyses that closely supports this lens that focuses on political, economic, and cultural oppression. It is important to recognize my subjectivity. Monitoring my subjectivity allowed me to increase my awareness of how my research may be biased (Glesne, 1999). My subjectivity may interfere with being completely objective, but by having a justice lens with my topic, I am able to express my analysis that is most meaningful (Glesne, 1999).

Limitations

The first limitation to this study is because only one school was examined for my case study, these findings were limited to this one school. I did not have a contrasting school nor a contrasting population or sample to compare my observations. I elected to administer a survey that would provide me with more concrete answers in answering my research question. I was also only able to collect five surveys, and observe one day at Clever High School. A limitation to my teacher and principal surveys was that I might not have received as elaborative enough
answers that will help me answer my questions as in-depth because of some of the closed ended questions. I needed surveys that would require respondents to answer questions that would indicate how the respondent thought about the impact of Ohio Graduation Test, proficiency tests, and advanced placement tests on their classroom with receiving as much input from teachers as I could. Teachers would feel more at ease answering questions that they could easily and quickly answer without feeling like they had to give what they perceived as the “socially right” answer. These questions gave me more data and more information to analyze teachers’ attitudes and teaching methods regarding standardized testing even if the answers were not as in-depth. This was enhanced by my observations and interviews, where I had the opportunity to observe teaching pedagogies, classroom environment, and student independence in the classrooms I observed.

**Summary**

Through interviews, observations, and questionnaires, I sought out information pertaining to the role of standardized test in curriculum, the impact it has on teaching, and how that, combined with classroom environment, student teacher interactions, and student independence has played a role on student projected work paths and college entrance at one suburban high school. I learned through my instrumentations how the attitudes, incomes, and teaching styles students are exposed to impact them after school. My instrumentations sought to find out how standardized tests and advanced placement testing play in determining how teachers teach their curriculum. I was able to observe how negotiation, classroom environment, and advanced test preparation impact curriculum at Clever High School.
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

My research questions were do Anyon’s (1980) observations of affluent professional schools hold true today? Are the aspects of negotiation, student independence, and student creativity similar to upper income schools as compared to lower income schools today? How does the relationship between standardized testing and specifically advanced placement testing impact the factors of critical thinking and communication skills, and what role do these factors play in providing students high skilled positions in the labor market? This chapter will share the results of observations and survey results in one northwest Ohio suburban high school. This chapter addresses the findings of the research questions.

Clever High School Atmosphere

When I first walked into Clever High School, I was greeted in a well-kept school where there was clearly community, student, and staff pride. The environment was welcoming and busy with students and teachers wondering through the halls preparing for the busy day ahead. The hallways were filled with off white walls and large lockers for the students. The school itself is stately, suggestive of “traditions” and longevity that maintains community pride. There were various photographs and evidence of student work on the high school walls. Even though the school building was old, the students were proud of the building where they attended school. Students overall appeared to be content with their educational experience, and displayed a sense of pride and happiness in their school building among their peers and teachers. The school was filled with the most up-to-date resources and opportunities for students despite the building’s age. Items such as art supplies and science equipment were well provided for the students.

Furthermore, the classrooms were welcoming and full of activity on the part of the students and staff. The classrooms were pleasantly decorated, as they were full of posters and classroom materials. The teachers provided challenging activities including analyses, synthesis,
and evaluation skills. Students demonstrated the majority of these skills in the classrooms I observed. Students demonstrated these skills by answering complex questions, and demonstrated their knowledge from a science lab to elaborately acting out a play.

**Evidence of Advanced Placement Tests Preparation**

When examining standardized testing and its impact on curriculum, I found several examples throughout my observations and the survey of exam preparation. Teachers stated that they prepare their students based upon information from previous tests, and the College Board for advanced placement testing (survey results). Mr. Tiller from the survey stated “everything we teach is generally based upon a concept or problem which will likely appear on the advanced placement exam.” Mr. Tiller also stated “the advanced placement designation requires the submission and approval of an aligned curriculum.” Teachers at this high school have stated that preparing students for the advanced placement tests is a difficult task. The teachers I have observed teach their students how to most effectively answer test questions, and to how to analyze tests questions to answer them in their entirely. It is evident in the classes these teachers teach that advanced placement testing heavily determines the course content.

While visiting Clever High School after the state proficiency tests, I noticed nearly every advanced placement classroom I observed was busy with preparation for advanced placement exams. A high score on an advanced placement exam could mean college credits. Students at this school generally perform well on advanced placement tests “scoring typically between a 3 to a 5 on each advanced placement subject test” according to Mr. Smith, the advanced placement physics teacher. The week prior to the physics advanced placement exam students were busy preparing. The students would receive a score after taking this exam from 1 to 5. Depending upon the score on the advanced placement exam, students may receive college credit.
Many students were taking four to five advanced placement classes. There was a varied amount of time spent preparing depending on subject and teacher. Some teachers spent the majority of the academic school year preparing their students for their advanced placement test while some spent a week or two reviewing before the exam. All of the advanced placement teachers stated on the surveys and in person that preparing their students for advanced placement tests was a primary goal for them. Ms. Jones stated in the observations that this school did not seem to prepare their students a great deal for state standardized tests needed for graduation, according to one teacher, because nearly all of the students who attend Clever High School passed the state proficiency test.

This was not the case for a neighboring school district whose students did not pass the state proficiency tests in the same rate. In this school district, many high schools were on academic watch, and 4 out of 26 indicators were met and adequate yearly progress was not met (ODE, 2013). For these students, with the push for accountability in schools as judged by state proficiency testing, students may be learning through rote memorization, and test taking strategies. Ironically, these means of teaching inhibit the teaching of communication, negotiation, and collaboration skills necessary to help prepare students for the competitive job market (Kaniuka, 2009). Preparation for advanced placement testing does not involve rote memorization to the same degree as state proficiency exams.

These state proficiency tests for high school include the Ohio Graduation Tests. The main difference to note between advanced placement testing and state proficiency testing is state standardized testing tests students on content that they are supposed to learn according to state standards. Receiving a passing score on these tests is required to graduate high school.
Advanced placement tests test students beyond state standards and are not required for graduation.

The Clever High School teachers I observed spent most of their instructional time with their students on analytical thinking skills preparing students for their advanced placement tests. For example, in advanced placement physics, students reviewed complex questions. Students spent the class period solving complex equations that required synthesis and analytical skills because students had to infer how the information being asked was relevant and how to solve the problem using the most effective strategy. Students completed the questions at first independently, and then would share answers and problem solving strategies with each other. Students were expected to solve the equations independently and quickly. Then they would have to state how they solved the specific equation. Mr. Smith, in my observations, noted to his students that the test “would be challenging, and that students would really be getting tested.” Mr. Smith explained to his students the importance of knowing what information given is actually necessary in solving a given problem. Sorting through relevant information is a critical skill that students need to learn in order to solve the number of problems in the short period of time students had to answer them. Mr. Smith noted to his students the importance of looking at the first paragraph to organize information.

Another example in my observations could be found in Ms. Jones advanced placement European history class, where students were preparing for the AP exam as well. Students were taking mock advanced placement European history tests so they could prepare for their advanced placement exam. Students were practicing their recall skills for the multiple choice section and their judgment and analytical skills for the free response questions. Students had spent, according to Ms. Jones, a few days prior to my observation preparing individually for their advanced
placement exam. Students would spend the class period answering multiple choice and essay questions so they could determine what content they needed to further review for their exam. Ms. Jones believed that allowing students to prepare individually for their exam would help her students score well on their exam because this would enable students to individually see what content areas students would need to review.

The class went over the test with each other at the end, and students were able to individually see overall areas where they needed improvement. Students in this class became organized in learning what content they needed to review in order to achieve a high score on their advanced placement European history class. Students became more organized because they were able to compare their test answers with their own, which encouraged them to use evaluation skills which require students to “make judgments based on external criteria or internal evidence” (Aviles as cited in Bloom 1999 p. 15). Seeing the correct answers for the multiple choice section of their practice allowed students to compare answers and to look for common errors.

In addition, in my observations of Ms. White’s advanced chemistry class, students were engaged in direct instruction at the beginning of the class, and participated in exploratory learning with a lab exploring heat and energy after the lecture. Students were engaged in this lesson about a thermo reaction. Students were expected to use their prior knowledge to describe how heat and energy were related. While explaining the lab, students were asked what data they would need to collect, and for what reason. Students needed to be able to explain, for example, why the room temperature was needed and why that was necessary to understand how much heat was needed to heat water with molten iron in a soda can (f.n.1).

Students were expected to engage in synthesis where they had to communicate ideas and formulate hypothesis while completing this lab so they could more fully understand heat and

1 Field notes from observations
energy (Aviles, 1999). Similarly, the teacher in that class, Ms. White, stated in her observations, “It is critical students learn by discovery so they will be challenged.” This would lead students to help motivate them for their advanced placement exam. Ms. White modeled practice problems on the board as a class-wide approach to helping her students prepare for advanced placement testing. This appeared to be beneficial for students because it enabled students to see and hear how to solve various energy problems by balancing scientific equations on the board. The teacher also passed materials to students such as molten iron to help students visualize what they were studying.

Parents, teachers, and community members in this school district likely believe that preparing students for advanced placement tests is advantageous in preparing students to attend college, which can be strongly associated with finding a high paying career. Advanced placement tests do in fact help students with evaluation, analysis, and synthesis skills. In terms of allowing for student independence and promoting communication skills, state proficiency testing, rote learning, or perhaps even advanced placement testing preparation are not the best means of promoting these skills that are necessary for competing for jobs in the 21st century.

Teacher’s Views on Standardized Testing

In looking at the teachers’ survey responses, I noted teacher opinions on standardized testing and how they feel it impacted curriculum. In general, teachers at this school believe that standardized tests have value but should not be the only factor. The general opinion on standardized testing was that teachers understand the overall purpose of standardized testing, and teaching to the test becomes common. Mr. Tiller from the survey stated that often in advanced placement tests, “teaching to the test becomes common.” Mrs. Dreeban from the survey stated that they understand the point of standardized test. Mrs. Dreeban stated, “I believe teaching
students beyond what is on standardized tests, such as problem solving skills and critical thinking skills are important.” Mr. Tiller from the survey indicated that standardized tests can be “narrowed down to norm referenced test which include ACT and SAT tests that are valuable in the college admissions progress, and advanced placement testing which helps determine students’ knowledge in a specific content area.” This means that traditional state proficiency testing is one type of standardized testing that does help in determining students’ college admissions status. How well students perform on state proficiency tests serves as a means for tracking students into colleges, which helps determine students’ careers. Clever High School’s students, as was stated by a teacher, perform well on these tests including the Ohio Graduation Tests. This school generally focused on advanced placement tests that focus on higher order thinking skills for specific content.

**Negative aspects of standardized testing.** Teacher two from the survey stated that they believed the content was “too narrowly focused.” In the state proficiency test, the respondent stated these tests are too easy and do a poor job of measuring educational attainment. Another respondent also stated that “standardized testing reduces teachers’ teaching abilities and student learning abilities are forced down to a score.” These results indicate that these teachers believe that the tests they administer are too narrowly focused and are not adequate sole indicators of how much education achievement their students have attained.

However, during my observations, teachers appeared to display a great deal of emphasis on standardized tests. The majority of teachers stated on their surveys that they believe too much emphasis is placed on advanced placement and state standardized testing, and they are not challenging enough. Despite this, in order to help their students perform well, the teachers still stated preparing their students for these same exams are important. The teachers I observed
emphasized through their actions to their students that advanced placement testing was important, and students needed to work hard in order to achieve a high score on the advanced placement test.

**Anyon’s Affluent Education**

In looking to compare Anyon’s (1980) affluent professional schools to an affluent professional school today, I compared the aspects of analytical skills, negotiation, communication, student creativity, student independence, and student teacher relationships.

**Analytical skills.** In examining the characteristics of Anyon’s (1980) affluent professional schools, the presence of higher order thinking skills in the classrooms was noted. In my observations at Clever High School it was evident that students were required to use analytical and higher order thinking skills in the classrooms. For example, in the advanced placement physics class, Mr. Smith had his students complete practice problems together. While students were working, he stated, “These are intense problems that require students to think critically.” In order to help his students succeed on their advanced placement physics test, his students needed to learn how to effectively solve complex problems in a short period of time. This practice encouraged analytical thinking skills because students were required to explain and show in-depth understanding of the practice problems. Mr. Smith explained that his students “needed to analyze practice problems” to help prepare students for their advanced placement exams. I saw that he did in fact push his students to explain how to best solve advanced physics problems on the board.

The focus of this lesson was to help students explore multiple ways to think about a problem using higher order thinking which is defined by analytic, synthesis, and evaluation skills of judgment, comparison, and creativity. When, for example, students were working to complete
an energy problem, they had to use judgment in knowing how to best solve the problem and compare problem solving techniques to other problems. I noticed students were driven in attempting to solve the problems individually so they could know what they needed to further study for the AP tests. Students worked diligently at their desk solving the problems and frequently asked each other questions to solve the problems (f.n.) Mr. Smith reminded the class “to read the first paragraph of a problem so you know right away how to solve it.”

Another example of analytical skills I observed was in Ms. Miller’s advanced placement French class. Her students were also busy preparing for their advanced placement French tests. Her students went to the school’s computer lab where they had to listen to a conversation in French and respond. Ms. Miller implied this test is difficult and requires a great deal of higher order thinking skills among students to comprehend the French conversation and respond quickly. Ms. Miller helped immerse students in hearing and understanding French by speaking only in French to students. This enforced what students knew in French and required students to quickly convert their language and thoughts into French. Students spent the whole period immersed in the French language and knew the tasks they were supposed to do in French. They worked diligently in converting their thoughts and ideas in French (f.n.).

In addition, the teacher survey results indicated that teachers integrate group work in their lessons to allow students to collaborate using higher order thinking skills. This allows students the opportunity to compare responses and data collection with each other. Mr. Keegan from the survey also indicated that they require students to engage in individual research that allow their students to practice how to obtain and analyze reliable research. This suggests students are practicing the evaluation skill of critiquing information Aviles, 1999).
All of the teachers I observed at Clever High School asked their students thought-provoking questions related to the academic content. These skills included organizing and classifying information. I observed these skills when students were taking practice advanced placement tests and were required to organize information to help them know what material to study. Students were able to practice planning skills when they took practice essay questions. Advanced placement testing requires students to answer extended response questions, which require the teacher to ask students original analytical and synthesis questions that require inferring, planning, and making hypotheses (Aviles, 1999).

Negotiation. Negotiation was seen in Anyon’s (1980) observation in the affluent professional schools. Negotiation from the teachers view was to try to help their students predict the consequences of their actions and to help students decide what to do accordingly (Anyon, 1980). The importance of negotiation was to help students “self-police” and predict, which is why it was included in Anyon’s (1980) research as a factor of what impacted schools and curriculum. This negotiation helped students verbalize what they wanted to do and gave them some control over what they learned.

While conducting my observations at Clever High School, I noted one example of student negotiation in Mr. Smith’s advanced placement physics class. Mr. Smith wanted students to perform energy and wave problems individually at first. The students overall wanted to solve the problems as a class. Mr. Smith stated “these are common questions on the advanced placement exam, and would be good to put them on the board for practice.” The students, then realizing the importance of this, agreed to try all of the problems individually, and then as a class, students would compare answers and problem solving strategies. This demonstrated evidence of negotiation because Mr. Smith and the students worked together to decide what course of action
would be most beneficial for the students. Rather than a direct order, the students talked amongst themselves and to Mr. Smith to decide how to best prepare for their advanced placement test.

**Communication.** Anyon (1980) noted that a key aspect in students being able to express their thoughts and to assert their academic and classroom viewpoints was communication between students and teachers. Communication was a critical skill that I observed students having repeated practice in at Clever High School. This was also evident in Anyon’s (1980) observations of affluent professional schools where students and teachers communicated frequently on assignments. This skill is critical because it allows students to effectively engage in sharing ideas and information with each other. Understanding and processing written and verbal information allows students to learn analytical thinking skills of planning and organizing information.

This was seen in Ms. Miller’s advanced placement French class where analytical skills were practiced when students had to respond to an email in French to a friend describing French culture. Students had to plan, formulate, and compose a response in a foreign language that helps effectively communicate with others. Students were required to communicate with each other in French, which helped students process and verbalize thoughts in English and French. Ms. Miller indicated “it takes hard work among students to understand and respond to a French conversation.” These skills help students to learn how to synthesize skills in formulating and creating a conversation. This helped students improve with their communication skills in English and French, giving students an advantage in jobs where being bilingual is helpful. Students communicated with each other in French as well in making small talk and joking with each other (f.n.). This encouraged and incentivized these elaborative communication skills.
Another example was in Mr. Stevenson’s advanced placement English class where students had to effectively communicate with each other in order to successfully reenact *The Crucible*. Students had to communicate and reason their opinions on how to best act out the play and to communicate with each other in how they would say their lines. Students had to communicate with each other in where they should stand, and in what tone they will say their lines that would make the scene most authentic. Students were not shy in interrupting the play and making recommendations to their peers. This is a significant element I observed because communication allows students to collaborate and share knowledge with each other that will allow for better retention and processing of analytical thinking skills. This gives students advantages in communicating valued and specialized knowledge with potential employers, giving them an advantage in the job market. Mr. Stevenson noted “acting out stories helps students understand the scenes of the stories through audio-visual means.” Students spent the class period talking and debating with each other in how the play should be acted out saying comments such as, “I believe this line should be said with a stronger tone.”

**Student creativity.** Anyon (1980) noted that in affluent professional schools, student creativity was seen which helped students develop original and independent ideas. Student creativity was important because this allowed students to have control of their own learning and to explore their course content. In conducting observations, student creativity, the freedom to uniquely learn and express their knowledge, was seen in many of the classrooms observed. Students were expected to be creative in advanced placement composition when they had to construct various scenes from *The Crucible* in Mr. Stevenson’s room.

In acting out *The Crucible*, students were required to use their own ideas and creative expression while completing this task. I observed his students acting out the play, and they were
able to use their creativity to demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the characters and setting of the play. Students had to understand tone, and the knowledge of the relationships among the characters, so they could act out their assigned parts accordingly. This helped students relate and understand all of the dynamics that are present in *The Crucible*. While students were guided by each other in how to best say their lines, they were able to explore, as a class and individually, what their interpretation of their lines were and to see and hear how they came out. Mr. Stevenson stated; “This is more than simply reading the lines in the play; students get to express their creativity in reading their parts.”

In other areas observed in Clever High School, students were limited to an extent in the creativity they were able to display in the classroom. This was not because of Ohio Graduation Tests, but because of the rigorous advanced placement testing. The advanced placement classes observed spent anywhere from a week to a whole year preparing students for their advanced placement test. It was evident that creativity in the curriculum that these students were exposed to helped foster synthesis and analytical skills that these students already had. Teachers and students were still limited in their creativity because teachers had to practice direct instruction, performance based learning, laboratory experiments, and problem solving to help their students prepare for their advanced placement exam.

In addition, another theme from the survey was that teachers expect their students to engage in creative learning. Most of the teachers surveyed stated they require their students to generate original research ideas. The majority of respondents also stated that their students were expected to create projects displaying their knowledge. The same teachers stated that their students were expected to think of original questions and ideas in their course content. This indicates that these teachers understand the significance of requiring their students to think of
original ideas and to engage in higher order thinking skills of analyzing and synthesizing. Creativity requires students to participate in implementing analytical and synthesizing skills throughout the school day that will prove beneficial to students post high school. Like in Anyon’s (1980) observations, student work seemed to be valued based on originality, and students’ individuality and creativity was valued.

**Student independence.** Anyon (1980) noted that in affluent professional schools, one motivating factor in student learning for students was student independence. This gave students control and accountability for their learning. At Clever High School, students were limited in their independence in some ways and had independence in their studies in other ways. Students were expected to participate in the rigorous class activities that would help them excel in their advanced placement classes. Students had independence in what problems they chose to go over in advanced placement physics, and they had independence in determining how to best act out *The Crucible.* Mr. Smith made students aware of independence in my observations when he told students to “try these problems by yourself first, “and “work on the problems you individually need to work on to prepare for the test.”

Students had independence in how they chose to express their learned analytical and synthesis skills, but were limited in the curriculum because preparing for the advanced placement class dominated the majority of the curriculum throughout the year for most of them. Even though not all students participated in advanced placement classes, there was a general push in this school, according to one teacher, to help expose students to analytical and evaluation skills to help prepare or push students for advanced placement classes. In the one non-advanced placement class I observed, there was still evidence of analytical thinking skills present. Unlike in Anyon’s (1980) observations where the affluent professional school students have some
control over what happens with their learning, my observations indicated that the advanced placement tests kept the agenda narrowly focused during the time I observed. This was true at least for the advanced placement classes.

The teachers I observed in the advanced placement courses had independence on how to prepare their students for their testing. For example, some teachers noted that they spent an extended period of time preparing their students to score well for their advanced placement test. Still others claimed they had spent only a week preparing their students for their advanced placement tests. Besides the length of time teachers chose to spend preparing their students specifically for their advanced placement course, all of the observed teachers chose different methods of how to prepare their students for the advanced placement test as well. Some teachers chose to go over practice advanced placement questions as a class while other teachers chose to have students practice independently for the tests. Mr. Stevenson in my observations stated that he “tapered off” with the intense course work leading to the advanced placement tests so students would be more relaxed when taking the advanced placement test Ms. Jones, also in my observations, stated she “gives students time to individually go over practice tests so students can see what concepts they individually need to study.”

While all of the teachers observed practiced different methods of preparing their students for the advanced placement, it was in fact a leading source in curriculum that I observed. Students were generally able to study independently and learn the material on an individual basis, but were strongly guided in their classroom independence. That was in part because of the advanced placement testing preparation. This led me to infer that state required standardized testing, such as the OGTs, were not a leading factor in inhibiting students independence because there was not generally a need to prepare students for these tests. The push for doing well on
advanced placement testing was a major factor at Clever High School. Another inference is that based upon my observations, the general education courses did not appear to have the push or pressure of advanced placement testing. The general education course appeared to provide the teacher and students with more independence of the curriculum in the classroom because there was little stress in preparing students for advanced placement testing.

In examining the topic of student independence, half of the respondents on my survey stated their students have alternative assignments to choose from. One respondent stated that their students “have a say in what gets taught to some extent.” All of the respondents stated that their students have a choice in what or whom they research to some extent in class projects and assignments. This suggests that students are permitted to choose what they research, allowing them to assert their critical thinking and analytical skills which allows them to assert their academic independence. Physically, students were free to roam the halls for lunch and appeared to have a strong sense of ownership and pride of their school. Students were limited by the bell, as to their length of classes and how long they had to get to their various classes.

**Student Teacher Relationships**

In Anyon’s observations, it was clear that positive relationships between students and teachers were important in allowing the students to feel they shared some power in the classroom. This enabled the students to feel as though they could negotiate and effectively communicate with teachers (Anyon, 1980). In my observations, the teachers and students overall had excellent rapport in the classroom. Students appeared to be confident and assertive in class. Students participated in class activities and in class discussions as well. Students frequently smiled and actively listened to their teachers at Clever High School. Students were genuinely interested in learning and in hearing what their teachers had to say. Teachers provided their
students an atmosphere where students knew they could voice their thoughts and where students were expected to communicate with each other and actively engage in classroom discussion. There were positive friendly relationships among teachers and students. In Ms. White’s classroom, towards the end, students joked, and said, “Only a few more minutes free time.” Ms. White laughed and gave them another translation task.

While at the time I observed classrooms, students did not have many opportunities to engage in small talk in the classes I observed. In between classes and during lunch, I noticed students and teachers working together and even practicing in the school theatre together. The school does not have a cafeteria, so everyday lunch was brought in for the students. Students would wonder the halls and sit and make polite small talk with each other in the hallways. This small school bonding was reinforced at lunch where the community was able to provide lunch and support for the students. Through the mutual trusting relationship between students and teachers, students collaboration, communication, and negotiation skills were reinforced because students had positive relationships with their teachers and the confidence to be able to practice these skills at school.

**Summary**

What I found in my observations and survey results indicated that the school I examined encouraged analytical thinking skills and provided an environment was conducive to learning. This school provided students with opportunities to be creative and to have the academic freedom to select how they learn about their course content to a degree. The teachers I observed expected students to contribute to class discussions, and students were expected to think of problem solving strategies to higher order questions. Students and teachers spent a great deal of time preparing for advanced placement tests. The advanced placement tests were, as the teachers
surveyed stated, a main factor in determining what and how teachers teach. Students were given opportunities to collaborate with each other to gain analytical and synthesis skills. The preparation students were given at this school will help students achieve analytical thinking and communication skills. Most of these students were fortunate enough to have the upbringing of resources and support to promote the “institutional” success of students. My research questions indicated that this suburban high school did provide students with analytical skills and communication knowledge that will help their students attend and complete college, and then attain managerial jobs in the labor market.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

I have sought to understand the role of state proficiency testing and advanced placement testing in curriculum with the aspects of negotiation, student independence, student creativity, and student teacher relationships. The research questions I sought to answer were do Anyon’s observations of affluent professional schools hold true today? Are the aspects of negotiation, student independence, and student creativity similar to affluent professional schools today? I also examined how much creativity and higher order thinking skills students who attend traditional suburban wealthy schools receive and its relationship with the role of college entrance in relationship to future job prospects in the current economic system. While my sample size was too small to make any true accurate inferences comparing the findings of Anyon’s (1980) observations to my observations, my observations generally held true to the affluent professional schools that Anyon (1980) observed. I chose to focus on Anyon (1980) because many characteristics she observed with affluent professional schools in regards to negotiation, communication, and student independence still are relevant today. I wanted to see how much of Anyon’s observations in regards to the above qualities were still present in another professional school today. While this affluent school I observed exhibited similar qualities of student independence and creativity, teachers are now under pressure to help their students perform well on their advanced placement exams. This led many teachers to drill information to their students.

Comparing Anyon’s Affluent Professional Schools to Today

Clever High School exhibited evidence of critical thinking skills because students demonstrated evaluation and synthesis skills in solving complex problems and in creating a complex conversation (as for instance in French). This was similar to Anyon’s affluent
professional school where students created authentic projects that required evaluation skills (Anyon, 1980). Students demonstrated creativity in Clever High School when they had to think best of how to act out *The Crucible* and to create their own conversation in French. This was also similar to Anyon’s affluent professional school where students had to create their own projects of ancient cultures in social studies (Anyon, 1980). Students at Clever High School also demonstrated negotiation when they debated with the teachers about what they wanted to do during the class time, as similar to Anyon’s (1980) professional school. Students still had academic independence in that they were able at times, to independently research or practice for their advanced placement tests. However, students were limited in their academic independence, because in the advanced placement classes I observed, students and teachers were often busy preparing students for the advanced placement tests by either directly studying for it or by teaching by the National College Board standards. This was unlike Anyon’s (1980) affluent professional school where students were generally able to practice a great deal of academic independence in their coursework.

**The Role of Standardized Test and Advanced Placement Tests**

Another main difference between Clever High School and Anyon’s affluent professional school was that it was not noted in Anyon’s affluent professional school that students had to spend much time preparing for state proficiency or advanced placement testing. This is likely because the push for accountability in schools had not yet begun. To find out how much of a role test preparation is in driving curriculum for a suburban school today, I observed how students are taught, the classroom environment, and how much test preparation was given to the students. I also administered a survey to the principal of the school, as well as to the teachers to find out how students learn, what is being taught, and how the teachers feel about the advanced
placement and standardized testing that they administer to their students. This helped address what drives curriculum, and how that impact students career path in society.

In looking at what determines how and what teachers teach based upon student creativity and independence, I found that in Clever High School, students were definitely engaged in their course content using analytical and critical thinking skills. The learning environment and interaction between students and teachers was positive. To find out more information about curriculum, I conducted a survey with the teachers asking them what test(s) they conduct and how they felt about standardized testing. Most of the teachers had a somewhat pessimistic view on state criterion and normative standardized tests. The responses varied from seeing the value of these test, but they should not be the sole indicator of measuring student knowledge, to the state proficiency test being inaccurate in measuring student knowledge. One respondent stated that the advanced placement tests were more accurate in measuring higher order thinking skills, but are a bit narrow in the overall content being tested. All of the respondents agreed that the skills and content students learn will help them succeed in the future because of the higher order skills possessed by most of their students.

The aspects of creativity, independence, and keen communication will help students tremendously with analytical and synthesis skills which will help make them original thinkers that will no doubt help them in the future. The role of advanced placement testing for Clever High School did limit student independence out of Anyon’s (1980) affluent professional school qualities of independence, creativity, critical thinking, negotiation, and collaborative personable student teacher relationships. The preparation and drive of doing well on the advanced placement tests, not so much state proficiency testing, did seem to dominate much of the curriculum. Most of the aspects of Anyons (1980) affluent professional schools still seemed to hold true. The
preparation of advanced placement tests, as times seemed to support the affluent professional school qualities described in Anyon (1980). This would have been different to schools that spent a lot of their instructional time preparing students for state proficiency tests where rote memorization and direct instruction dominate (Kaniuaka, 2009).

I discovered that Clever High School has a strong sense of community and values higher education. This was a small high school that worked hard to develop strong relationships amongst students, teachers, parents, and administrators. Parents and community members expected their children to develop and practice rich negotiation and communication skills. Children are expected to assert themselves and to express their opinions and knowledge. This is a community where parents and community members are able to provide resources and support for the students, which enable the students to assert their independence, negotiation, and communication skills. The teachers I observed had high expectations for their students. Students were expected to immerse themselves in active learning where students had to either verbally or in writing not only explain what they learned, but evaluate and defend their knowledge. These skills enable students to possess the skills necessary to compete for jobs in the twenty first century. This is a community where most adults are college educated and have the knowledge and resources to give these students the advantage of achieving institutional success.

For future action, I recommend reexamining what drives curriculum in schools. I recommend examining how the role of standardized testing impacts lower income schools compared to higher income schools. The differences in what content and how the content is presented between higher income and lower income schools may explain why the achievement gap still exists and how that impacts students and their possible future career path. Besides test preparation, student ownership of learning, informal rapport between students and teachers, and
the advantage of college track classes should be examined in their role in helping students gain academic knowledge as well and what that could mean in bridging the academic achievement gap between lower and higher income schools. I think more research into observing how community and parental involvement plays into the role of passing “official knowledge” to students should be observed. The expectations and support to students to express their independence, negotiation, and communication skills plays a huge role in how students perceive themselves and their relationships with adults and their peers. How students express themselves and their knowledge is impacted greatly by the curriculum students are exposed to in the classroom.

**Recommendations**

This research has led to several recommendations.

**Teachers.** While it is necessary to prepare students for state proficiency tests and advanced placement tests, if applicable, and while there is a time barrier in preparing students for these tests, it is also important to recognize that a well-rounded curriculum that includes creativity, independence, critical thinking, and negotiation is also necessary to give students the resources to help students in practicing these necessary skills. Teachers should recognize their role in the education system and how that impacts societal institutions at large.

**Parents.** For parents, it is necessary to recognize what their children are and are not learning in school. Parents should support their children in their coursework by recognizing that their child’s education should be based on more than simply their child’s test score. Parents should understand the importance of a holistic curriculum that includes independence, creativity, and negotiation. Parents should understand that what and how their children learn at school
impacts their children’s future in the social and economic hierarchy that exists. Parents also need to recognize the role their child’s education plays in their social and economic success.

**Schools.** Not every school is placed under the same stress. Some schools are privileged in the knowledge they are able to teach students. Schools should recognize how education impacts society and institutions at large. Schools need to be as active as possible in giving students the communication, negotiation, and critical thinking skills even though there are barriers in providing equal support to all schools.

**For Future Research**

For future research, I would recommend further studying the impact of state proficiency tests, and its role in giving students creativity, independence, negotiation, and critical thinking skills and how it compares with advanced placement testing. I would further study how these skills are relevant in the current job market and the differentiation of how these skills are taught at low income versus high income schools. Finally, I would research how relevant this divide is, and its role in maintaining our current economic and social hierarchy.
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Azaola, M. 2013. Revisiting Bourdieu; Alternative Educational Systems in the Light of the


Ogbu, J. U. (2004). Collective identity and the burden of “acting white” in black history,


APPENDIX A: TEACHER QUESTIONAIRRE

1. What standardized tests are you responsible for preparing your students for?

2. What grade and subjects do you teach?

**Social Sciences:**
- World History
- American History
- Psychology
- Sociology
- Government
- Contemporary Issues

**Math**
- Pre-Algebra
- Algebra
- Geometry
- Pre-Calculus
- Calculus
- Trigonometry

**Science:**
- Physical Science
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Anatomy
- Earth Science
**Language Arts**

_Freshman English_

_Sophomore English_

_Junior English_

_Literature_

_Composition_

_Newsletter_

_Poetry_

**Foreign Language**

_Spanish_

_German_

_French_

_Latin_

_Gym_

_Art_

_Music_

_Band_

_AP/Honors Courses (please specify)_

_Other (Please Specify)_

3. How long have you taught? Please check

_1-3 years_

_4-9 years_

_10-15 years_

_16-20 years_

_21-25 years_
26–29 years
30 years or more

4. What strategies do you use to develop rapport with your students?

5. What opportunities do students have to establish rapport with each other?

6. How would you describe your current teaching methods?

7. What if anything do you do to prepare your students for standardized tests?

8. How has standardized tests impacted your planning and instruction?

9. How would you describe student creativity in your classroom?

10. How would you describe student independence in your classroom?

11. Do you believe your teaching methods you engage students in help prepare them for their future careers?

12. What are your views on standardized tests, and do they impact the way in which you teach?
APPENDIX B: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the vision or mission of your school? How does standardized tests fit this mission?

2. How long have you been a principal at this high school?
   1-3 year(s)
   4-10 years
   11-15 years
   16-20 years
   21-25 years
   26 or more years

3. How long have you been a principal?
   1-3 year(s)
   4-10 years
   11-15 years
   16-20 years
   21-25 years
   26 or more years

4. How long have you been in the education field? In what capacity?
   1-3 year(s)
   4-10 years
   11-15 years
5. What standardized test(s) are administered to students at your high school, and at what grades?
   - Ohio Graduation Test
   - ACT/SAT
   - PLAN Test

6. What programs or policies are implemented in your school to ensure students success in standardized test?

7. What do you believe helps student excel or succeed in school? On standardized tests?

8. To what degree does student independence play in academic success?

9. To what degree does creativity play a role in academic success?

10. How does academic success impact success on standardized tests?

11. Do you believe standardized testing in your school has impacted student creativity?

12. Do you believe standardized testing in your school has impacted student and teacher rapport?

13. Do you believe standardized testing in your school has impacted student independence?

14. How important is preparing students for standardized test in your school?
Informed Consent for Teacher Observation:

Introduction: My name is Ashley Morey, and I am a graduate student at Bowling Green State University in the Curriculum and Teaching Masters’ degree program. I am looking at the role of student and teacher rapport, student creativity, student independence, and the role of standardized testing. Your school has performed well on standardized testing, and I hope to observe the teaching strategies, and standardized testing preparation at your school. I have obtained permission from your school principal to contact you in regard to my research study.

Purpose: The purpose of my research is to find out what factor(s) impact curriculum in today’s schools, and if there is a correlation between academic success and students projected career trajectory. I will examine teaching strategies, evidence of standardized test preparation, school polices of standardized test preparation, student/ teacher rapport, student creativity in the classroom, and student independence in the classroom. The benefits will be to find out if the role of these factors contributes to educational success and student career trajectory. There are no direct benefits to the participants of this study.

Procedure: If you agree to a classroom observation, I will enter your classroom before the start of class and stay until the end to limit disruption. I will use an observation protocol to collect data about the teaching strategies that you use, in the classroom environment and information about standardized test preparation. I will not interrupt your classroom, nor will I talk to students during your class. I am happy to share the observation protocol with you before or after the observation if you would like further information about my interests.

Voluntary Nature: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your relationship with Bowling Green State University. All participants must be at least 18 years old to participate in the study.

Confidentiality Protection: I will use pseudonyms in describing my observations of your classroom in my thesis research project. The school’s name will not be given in my thesis. All hard copy observation protocols I will use to collect data will be kept in a secure filing cabinet. The secure filing cabinet will be kept in my apartment, which will remain locked. All observation notes will be shredded upon completion of my thesis project.

Risk: The risks for participating in this study are no greater than those experienced in everyday life.

Contact Information: For any questions regarding this study please feel free to contact me at amorey@bgsu.edu, Phone: 419-372-7401. You may also contact my advisor Dr. Tracy Huziak-Clark (Faculty Advisor) at thuziak@bgsu.edu, Phone: 419-372-7363. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu with any questions about your rights as a participant in this research. Thank you for your time and interest in my research.
Informed Consent for Teacher Survey:

Introduction: My name is Ashley Morey, and I am a graduate student at Bowling Green State University in the Teaching and Curriculum Masters’ degree program. I am looking at the role of student and teacher rapport, student creativity, student independence, and the impact of standardized testing on each of these. Your school has performed well on standardized testing, and I hope to observe the teaching strategies and standardized testing preparation at your school. I have obtained permission from your school principal to contact you.

Purpose: The purpose of my research is to find out what factor(s) impact curriculum in today’s schools, and if there is a correlation between academic success and students projected career trajectory. I will examine teaching strategies, evidence of standardized test preparation, school polices of standardized test preparation, student/ teacher rapport, student creativity in the classroom, and student independence in the classroom. The benefits will be to find out if the role of these factors contributes to educational success and student career trajectory. There are no direct benefits to the participants.

Procedure: This survey should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete. You may decide at any point to stop participation by simply ending your survey session, no responses will be collected.

Voluntary Nature: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to skip questions (or not to do a particular task) or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your relationship with Bowling Green State University. Participants must be 18 years old to participate in this study.

Confidentiality Protection: Your identity will be protected because no names will be collected or associated with this survey. All electronic data collected throughout this research project will be stored in my password protected survey monkey account. Things to keep in mind include; 1. Some employers may use tracking software so you may want to complete your survey on a personal computer, 2. Do not leave your survey open if using a public computer or a computer other may have access to, 3. Clear your browser cache and page history after completing the survey. I will delete all results thirty days after my thesis is published.

Risk: The risks for completing this study are no greater than those experienced in everyday life.

Contact Information: For any questions regarding this study please feel free to contact me at amorey@bgsu.edu, Phone: 419-372-4701. You may also contact my advisor Dr. Tracy Huziak-Clark (Faculty Advisor) at thuziak@bgsu.edu, Phone: 419-372-7363. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or hrsb@bgsu.edu with any questions about your rights as a participant in this research. Thank you greatly for your time and your interests in my survey.
If you agree to participate please select the next button below.
Informed Consent for Principal Survey:

Introduction: My name is Ashley Morey, and I am a graduate student at Bowling Green State University in the Curriculum and Teaching Masters’ degree program. I am looking at the role of student and teacher rapport, student creativity, student independence, and the impact of standardized testing on each of these. Your school has performed well on standardized testing, and I hope to observe the teaching strategies and standardized testing preparation at your school.

Purpose: The purpose of my research is to find out what factor(s) impact curriculum in today’s schools, and if there is a correlation between academic success and students projected career trajectory. I will examine teaching strategies, evidence of standardized test preparation, school policies of standardized test preparation, student/teacher rapport, student creativity in the classroom, and student independence in the classroom. The benefits will be to find out if the role of these factors contributes to educational success and student career trajectory. There are no direct benefits to the participants.

Procedure: If you agree to participate, you will be directed to an online survey, the link will be emailed to you if you decide to participate. This survey should take no longer than 30 minutes to complete. You may decide at any point to stop participation by simply ending your survey session, no responses will be collected. There will be no link between your responses and your personal information.

Voluntary Nature: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to skip questions (or not to do a particular task) or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your relationship with Bowling Green State University. Participants must be at least 18 years old to participate in the study.

Confidentiality Protection: Your identity will be protected because no names will be collected or associated with this survey. All electronic data collected throughout this research project will be stored in my password protected survey monkey account. Things to keep in mind include; 1. Some employers may use tracking software so you may want to complete your survey on a personal computer, 2. Do not leave your survey open if using a public computer or a computer other may have access to, 3. Clear your browser cache and page history after completing the survey. I will delete all results thirty days after my thesis is published.

Risk: The risks for participating in this study are no greater than those experienced in everyday life.

Contact Information: For any questions regarding this study please feel free to contact me at amorey@bgsu.edu, Phone: 419-372-4701. You may also contact my advisor Dr. Tracy Huziak-Clark (Faculty Advisor) at thuziak@bgsu.edu, Phone: 419-372-7363. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or hrsb@bgsu.edu with any questions about your rights as a participant in this research. Thank you greatly for your time and your interests in my survey.
If you agree to participate please select the next button below.