Move to the Head of the Class: Teacher Agency in Constructing Student Roles in a Rural Elementary School

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Molly B. Bukky

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MOLLY B. BUKKY

has been approved for
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and the College of Arts and Sciences by

Edward W. Morris
Assistant Professor of Sociology

Benjamin M. Ogles
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
ABSTRACT

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This ethnographic research studies the ways that teachers in a rural elementary school use social class indicators to understand the social class of their students. It focuses upon the importance of face-to-face interaction, and teacher perception, in this process. This research indicates that the teachers in this rural elementary school use their understanding of student social class to categorize students into either “quality student” roles or “deficient student” roles. Once categorized into these roles, students receive differential socialization patterns, and therefore differential advantages, based upon those roles, which ultimately reproduces existing social inequalities.

Approved: ________________________________________________________

Edward W. Morris

Assistant Professor of Sociology
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND INSPIRATION FOR RESEARCH

Introduction

The notion that inequality exists within the United States public education system is not a radical new theory. Sociologists have been seriously examining the inequalities of our nation’s schools for at least the last half-century. Yet, even after fifty years of research, sociologists still do not have a clear and detailed understanding of how the U.S. public education system serves as an instrument of oppression, reproducing and perpetuating the existing inequalities within our society.

Existing sociological research has focused upon the different family processes, which serve as devices that perpetuate social inequalities. Differences in parental values based upon the social class of the parent, parental occupation, and the influence of these on the parent-child relationships, is one aspect of this research. Another component of these processes is the different child-rearing styles that parents adopt based upon their cultural repertoire, which is highly correlated to their social class. This path of research indicates that people in different social classes have different cultural styles and sensibilities based upon the ways that they were raised and their lived experiences. These cultural styles and experiences translate into either advantages or disadvantages, what Pierre Bourdieu referred to as “cultural capital”. This line of research is referred to as one version of reproduction theory, and according to
this model, the processes by which social inequalities are reproduced is seen as a covert or hidden process.

Related sociological research has focused on the different processes of the education system that serve as vehicles to perpetuate social inequalities. The “hidden curriculum” of the education system, tracking, and labeling, which often results in a self-fulfilling prophecy, are just a few of the processes that have been studied. From these perspectives, teachers are seen as unknowing instruments of the reproduction process.

Both of these lines of research can be seen as “reproduction theories”, the difference is that one line of research focuses upon the family processes and the other focuses upon the school processes. Each has historically focused upon the large-scale, the structural or institutional, forms of oppression that can perpetuate social inequalities. In other words, most of the existing research has focused upon the macro-level of sociology. Contemporary research indicates that the existing social structure is designed to either intentionally or unintentionally perpetuate social inequalities. I began to wonder how face-to-face interactions at the micro-level might either support or attempt to foil this reproduction process.

Inspiration for Research

In the late spring of 2005, my family and I were happily living in Breckenridge, Colorado. I was working for the Summit County Government in the office of the County Manager, and preparing to register for my senior year as
an undergraduate student at the University of Colorado at Denver. I was planning to graduate with a BA in Sociology the following summer and then attend law school at either the University of Denver or the University of Colorado, where I planned to focus upon environmental law or government law. Then unexpectedly, my father suffered a massive stroke during May of that year and our world turned upside down. During the summer of 2005, we decided to move back to Ohio. Both my family and my husband’s family were from here, and it seemed like the time had come to move closer to our families. Within one year of our return to Ohio, my mother had major back surgery, my father was diagnosed with prostate cancer, and my father-in-law passed away. During this year of turmoil, I took the LSAT, finished my undergraduate coursework, completed an honors thesis, and applied to several law schools in Columbus, Ohio. After my father-in-law passed away, I began to re-evaluate my goals, and decided that I was only continuing to pursue law school because it had been my goal for so long, not because it was still what I wanted to do. My past work history, and volunteer work with a child advocacy program, had increased my interest in family issues, and I had enjoyed my undergraduate education in sociology, so I decided to pursue a graduate degree in sociology rather than attend law school.

I enrolled in the Master’s program at Ohio University during the winter quarter of 2007. The very first graduate level seminar I took during my first quarter as a graduate student was a course on the sociology of education. My
entire undergraduate degree focused upon my intentions to become an attorney, and so I studied organization and inequality in courses that would support that goal. I spared little focus on issues of the family or issues within education. During that first seminar however, I found myself increasingly fascinated by the sociology of education. Every book I read opened new doors, piqued new interests, and pulled me into the subject area. As a final project for that course, we were required to write a research proposal and I decided to propose a study on the distrust and skepticism of the education system in Appalachian regions. I was interested in the region because I am a native of Appalachian Ohio, and both my maternal and paternal sides of the family have lived in the Appalachian region for many generations. I was interested in understanding the differences between families that embraced education as a way out of poverty and the families who distrusted the education system. Ultimately, that proposal was not particularly good, nor was it exactly what I wanted to research, but it did lead me to search for further literature, which paved my way into this project.

During my second quarter as a graduate student, I was introduced to Pierre Bourdieu and Annette Lareau when I took a seminar on social inequality. Reproduction theory really struck my interest, and I began to read more about the theory. As a result of my personal interest in reproduction theory, rural poverty, education and the Appalachian area, I began to imagine a project that intersected all of those areas of interest. Bourdieu’s research focused upon the French school system and Lareau focused upon comparing one poor urban
school with another middle-class suburban school, and I wondered if and how this reproduction theory might work in a rural school setting.

The Appalachian county where I grew up was a traditionally rural community with an expanding group of people moving into the area from a nearby large city. The county displays some traits of an exurban county (one within 60 to 70 miles of a central city) with an increasing diversity of social classes within the student body. The original scope of this research project was based upon my interest in studying how the teachers in such a school managed to maneuver through this diversity, and how their perceptions of the students influenced their teaching methods.

I originally planned to collect data only through face-to-face interviews. When I went into the interviews, I had a specific series of questions to ask and I had a specific notion of social class in my own mind. Over a period of six weeks, I interviewed six teachers and the school counselor and transcribed the interviews. At no time during those interviews did any teacher ever ask me for a definition of social class, nor did they ever provide a definition of their own. I was curious about that. By the beginning of January 2008, I had finished the initial interviews and the transcription process and I had decided to include another facet to the research by adding a participant observation component. In the middle of January 2008, I began volunteering in the classroom. After six weeks of volunteer work, I had gained an entirely different understanding of the teachers, and had very different ideas about what questions I would like
answered. By the time I finished the fieldwork component of the research, I had more questions that I wanted to ask. Therefore, I conducted follow-up interviews with two of the teachers I had worked with in the classroom.

By late February 2008, when I had collected most of my data, my understanding of the research scope, and even the essential research questions, had changed based upon the data collected. Therefore, at the end of data collection, and the beginning of data analysis, my basic research questions were: (1) Is this rural school reproducing social class inequalities? (2) If so, how? and (3) If so, what role do the teachers play in the process?
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review

From the time that sociologists first began to study human societies, attempting to understand social stratification based upon social class has been an important aspect of the discipline. In this chapter, I will examine the various ways that classical sociologists understood social class, which will provide a foundation for understanding the ways that contemporary sociologists understand social class, particularly the ways that social class is viewed by symbolic interactionists as a performative display and a representation of social class.

Next, I will discuss issues of social class in education. First, I will focus upon the family processes that influence the educational experiences of the student. The different ways that parents raise their children based upon their social class and their occupation, and the different parenting approaches used by working class and middle class families will be specific areas of focus. Then, I will focus upon the school processes that influence the educational experiences of the student. The “hidden curriculum” of the public education system will be of particular interest in this section. I will first define the hidden curriculum and discuss the foundational literature that links the hidden curriculum to the perpetuation, and reproduction, of social inequalities. I will discuss the social construction of reality, and the ways that a teacher’s perception of a student can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Finally, I will argue that the contemporary public
education system has placed an increasing focus upon the importance of parental involvement in a student’s education. Due to this increased focus, teachers often use the perceived level of parental involvement as one way of categorizing students into either the “quality student” role or the “deficient student” role.

Social Class

Theoretical Foundations

Amid the social upheaval of the early nineteenth century, early social observers began to study sociology, which is the systematic and scientific study of human societies. One of the fundamental areas of study that nearly all sociologists have tried to understand is social stratification based upon social class. In 1848, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels stated in The Communist Manifesto that, “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle” (Marx and Engels 1967: 6). Therefore, I think it is appropriate to begin the exploration of social class through the theory of Karl Marx.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) conceived of a very conflicting relationship between the social classes. Although Marx did not consider himself a sociologist, his basic ideas eventually gave rise to the conflict perspective in sociology. Marx believed that there is an eternal struggle between the two classes in a capitalist society: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. According to Marx, the bourgeoisie is the capitalist class, the owners of the land, factories, and

\footnote{Although these terms are not completely original, I use them uniquely herein to differentiate between two categories of students.}
machines, which he referred to as the “means of production”, which are capable of producing wealth. The proletariat is the working-class, “a class of labourer, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital” (Tucker 1972: 479). Marx believed that these two classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, were locked in a continuous struggle over scarce resources. He suggested that in every capitalist society, a small, elite group—the bourgeoisie—controls the means of production and is therefore able to exploit those who do not control the means of production—the proletariat. Marx believed that the only way to end this cycle of exploitation and subservience was for the proletariat to rise up against the bourgeoisie and create a classless society.

From these principles of Marxist theory, the idea that is critical to my argument is that Marx conceived of social class as primarily a two-class system. In Marx’s system, the bourgeoisie owned the means of production, and therefore controlled the means of producing wealth. The proletariat is the working class, and exists only as long as they can find work, and they can earn money only as long as their labor creates a profit for the bourgeoisie. In this way, Marx’s system can be seen as a system based solely upon economic capital, or property.

Max Weber (1864-1920) agreed with Marx that property, or economic capital was an important component of stratification, but he also believed that to truly understand the complexities of social class, one must look a little deeper. Weber believed that there were more sources of capital than just property; he
believed that class, status, and party were all important components of social stratification. From Weber’s point of view, Marx’s two-class system was too restrictive—it massed too many people together into a group. Weber explained that stratification is comprised of “[‘classes’, ‘status groups,’ and ‘parties’ [which] are phenomena of the distribution of power within a community” (Weber 1946: 181). He goes on to explain that a “class situation” exists when three conditions are met:

(1) A number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, insofar as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interest in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under conditions of the commodity or labor markets. [These points refer to ‘class situation,’ which we may express more briefly as the typical chance for a supply of goods, external living conditions, and personal life experiences, in so far as this chance is determined by the amount and kind of power, or lack of such, to dispose of goods or skills for the sake of income in a given economic order. The term ‘class’ refers to any group of people that is found in the same class situation.] (Weber 1946: 181)

Here we can see that Weber does not view a class as a community, or a group of people who have a “class consciousness”, but rather as a group of people who are simply in the same class situation. This demonstrates Weber’s agreement with Marx that economic property, or what Weber referred to as “class” is a primary component of stratification, however Weber would not accept this as the only explanation, instead he viewed stratification as multidimensional.

Next Weber explored status, which is now referred to as the prestige component of social class. Weber explained that status groups, in contrast to classes, are normally communities (1946:186). Here, Weber was acknowledging
that prestige (or status in Weber’s terms) and power may not be entirely the
consequence of property relations, but that they could also be a source of
property relations. In other words, a person with prestige might exchange their
social honor for economic advantage. An example might be a well-known athlete
who endorses a product for economic gain—here, the prestige or social status of
the athlete is the source of the economic or property relations rather than a result
of the property relations. This, I think is one of Weber’s unique contributions to
the contemporary understanding of social class.

Finally, Weber explored party, which is contemporarily considered the
power component of social class—as Weber stated, “‘parties’ live in a house of
‘power’” (1946: 194). Here, Weber viewed power as being independent of
economic property. Weber believed that one could have power, or the ability to
influence “a communal action no matter what its content might be” (1946: 194)
without actually having economic property. An example would be the president
of a large corporation who has the power to hire and fire employees, influence
business decisions, and affect stockholders decisions, but who does not own any
portion of the corporation itself. The power this corporation president wields
would be in the ability to get his/her own way despite the resistance of others,
rather than through the ownership of economic property.

Marx and Weber are considered two of the “fathers” of sociology, and are
certainly two of the most influential classical theorists in our contemporary
understanding of social class. By comparing the two, we can see how their
understanding of social class was, in some ways similar, and in some ways
different. Marx first conceived of social class as a primarily two-class system
locked in eternal conflict, strictly divided by the relationship to the means of
production—that is economic capital, or property. Weber argued that economic
property was one component of social class, but that prestige and power were
also important dependent components of social class. Therefore, by examining
social class through the lens of both of these foundational perspectives, we can
conceive of a more nuanced analysis than with any single theory alone.
Ultimately, contemporary sociologists build upon Weber’s basic conception of
social class stratification and herein when I refer to a social class, I am referring
to a large group of people who rank closely to one another in their amount of
relative property, prestige, and power. One of the most influential contemporary
theories on social class is Pierre Bourdieu’s (1930-2002) version of social
reproduction theory.

Pierre Bourdieu studied the ways that people in different social locations
are socialized in different manners. Bourdieu (1977; 1984) believed that our
social location provides us with distinct cultural preferences, styles, sensibilities,
and language patterns. He believed that these unique preferences are tied to
our habitus—which is the perceptions, thoughts, and actions that a person
acquires which are durable enough to last through any alterations—and
ultimately create a type of capital Bourdieu referred to as cultural capital.
Bourdieu (1973; 1985) believed that there were four fundamental types of
capital—economic, social, symbolic and cultural. We have herein gained an understanding of economic capital as a command over economic resources through our review of Karl Marx and Max Weber. According to Bourdieu, social capital is a command over relationships—the networks of influence and support people can tap into by virtue of their social position (1990:119). Symbolic capital is essentially the resources available to an individual based on their social prestige or honor. Finally, cultural capital is the cultural experiences of an individual that can translate into advantages. The concept of cultural capital helped Bourdieu explain the inequality between social classes because cultural capital is socially reproduced—if parents do not have cultural capital, they will not be able to transfer it to their children without help from another institution. What makes Bourdieu’s argument especially compelling is that he shows how cultural and social capital—which are essentially an expansion of Weber’s party (power) and status (prestige)—can be converted back into economic capital by exchanging this power or prestige back into economic capital. Symbolic capital is nothing more than the acknowledgement or recognition of economic or cultural capital, and the legitimization of its prestige, which tends to reinforce or reproduce the existing power structure. Bourdieu demonstrates this by showing how education is one of the fundamental ways this transfer of power is accomplished.

In Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture (1977) Bourdieu and Passeron argued that social structure, power relations and social classes are
reproduced through the education system. Bourdieu and Passeron studied the French school system and showed how social class is reproduced in that society by turning habitus into cultural capital. Bourdieu viewed habitus as fundamental to the reproduction process because it is what actually generates the normal, repetitive practices of which a social life is comprised. In *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1977) Bourdieu and Passeron argue that habitus can be turned into cultural capital, and that habitus can activate cultural capital. They explain that these distinct habitus are either selected by the school system or not selected by the school system. This is accomplished in several ways. First, Bourdieu and Passeron differentiated between two types of linguistic capital. The first are the language skills that children come into school with. This reference to linguistic capital is the language portion that is transmitted by the family. According to Bourdieu and Passeron, families from different social classes speak differently, and then transmit those speech patterns to their children. This first type of linguistic capital is readily apparent to teachers when a child begins school, and the child is assessed accordingly. The second reference to linguistic capital referred to the classical languages that French children are taught in school—specifically Greek and Latin. Bourdieu and Passeron argued that children are differentially selected to learn these classic languages, which has repercussions on their long-term education. They argued that the institutions, and especially the teachers within the institutions, reward the linguistic and cultural capital of those with more status authority (1977: 108)—
those who speak the *bourgeois parlance* find more favor in these institutions and those who speak the *common parlance* finding less favor (1977: 115). Bourdieu and Passeron note, “the unequal social-class distribution of educationally profitable linguistic capital constitutes one of the best hidden mediations through which the relationship (grasped by our tests) between social origin and scholastic achievement is set up” (1977: 115-116). This is the way that the literate tradition maintained the social order. In other words, the education system unconsciously rewards those who speak the *bourgeois parlance* and disregards those who speak the *common parlance*, thereby reproducing the social classes by ensuring that those on top receive the better education and those on bottom receive the poorer education. What is especially interesting to note is that Bourdieu and Passeron believed that this practice takes place through the disguise of meritocracy.

Bourdieu and Passeron explained the way that students are excluded and selected based upon their linguistic and cultural capital. The examination purports to be a meritocratic method of assessing student’s abilities, but in actuality, it helps to reproduce the social classes. The text of an examination favors those who have the *bourgeois parlance* as a part of their habitus—those who easily function using this type of language. In other words, examinations are disguised as meritocratic—as fair to everyone—when in reality, inequalities are built into them through the very language style used in the test thereby ensuring
that society is reproduced into the next generation. This is one of the more sociologically popular versions of what is often referred to as reproduction theory.

As we can see, different sociologists, using different perspectives, have taken many different approaches to understanding social class. Some sociologists have understood social class as a strictly quantitative classification. This method is objective, and for those who utilize this method, social class is understood categorically in a way that socio-economic status, occupation, family income, and educational attainment are all represented in the understanding. Even within these guidelines, there is still disagreement over what quantitative number marks the dividing line between the social classes. Still other sociologists have adopted an interactional understanding of social class. Those who utilize this approach conceive of social class as a social category that individuals interpret as they engage in face-to-face interaction. As social interaction develops between individuals, they use social class indicators to help them categorize others into a social class category.

In this section, I have explored the theoretical foundations for our contemporary definitions, and elemental understandings, of social class. Here, we have analyzed the different types of capital as explained by Karl Marx and Max Weber, as well as the contemporary social reproduction theory presented by Pierre Bourdieu, and we have defined social class and its components. Next, I will examine in more depth contemporary sociological research that focuses upon social class as a social construct.
Constructing Social Class

The theory of Karl Marx laid the foundation for contemporary conflict theory, which views society as groups who are always competing for scarce resources. Conflict theory gives us a commanding understanding of social class and the conflict that can arise between those who have power, property, and prestige and those who do not. Conflict theory focuses upon the large-scale patterns of social life, in other words, conflict theory focuses upon the macro-level of social analysis. Max Weber’s theory is so varied and influential that it has influenced not only sociologists of the conflict perspective and the functionalist perspective—which views society as a great machine that is composed of interrelated parts that all work together to keep society functioning—both of which focus upon the macro-level of analysis, but he has also influenced symbolic interactionists. Symbolic interactionists focus upon the small-scale patterns of social life, and face-to-face social interaction—they look at the micro-level of analysis.

Symbolic interactionist Erving Goffman studied the ways that face-to-face interactions are, in many ways, like a stage performance in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Here, Goffman analyzed social interaction by comparing it to a stage performance in what he referred to as "dramaturgical analysis" or simply dramaturgy. According to Goffman, there are numerous components of everyday life performances. A “role” is simply the normative expectations attached to a certain character or position, while a "role
performance” is “the actual conduct of a particular individual while on duty in [a] position” (1961: 85). Goffman also explained that roles are performed either on the “frontstage” or on the “backstage”. Frontstage performances are more formal, with the actor remaining very conscious of his role. Backstage performances are much more relaxed, with the actor letting down her guard and acting with a lack of self-consciousness. Goffman also explained that presenting ourselves in roles involves “impression management”, which is basically the idea that, “when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey” (1959: 4).

Goffman helps us understand how actors understand their roles and how actors perform their roles in everyday life. This is a critical component to understanding social interaction. Our socialization, or the ongoing manner in which we learn the ways of our society, is accomplished through our social location and through our agents of socialization. In other words, we learn about our lives from those who we are in close contact with, and we learn to perform our roles based upon the norms we learn from those who we are in close contact with. In this way, we learn to perform the role that is compatible with our status. As we identified earlier, status or prestige is a component of social class. By applying Goffman’s theory of dramaturgical analysis to our overarching interest in social class, we can understand that actors perform the role that is compatible
with their social class and their social status, or we could just say that playing out the role of our social class is performative.

Other sociologists have focused upon specific role performances, such as how we perform our gender roles. In “Doing Gender”, West and Zimmerman (1987) provide “an ethnomethodologically informed, and therefore distinctively sociological, understanding of gender as a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment” (1987: 126). Here, West and Zimmerman describe gender as a symbolic “role enactment in the conventional sense and as a “display” in Goffman’s (1976) terminology” (1987: 126). “Doing Gender” frames gender as an “emergent property of social situations: both an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and a means of justifying one of the most fundamental divisions in society” (1995: 9). In other words, West and Zimmerman explain how gender is performative, and we perform the role we are socialized to play based upon our gender. West and Fenstermaker (1995) take this very general notion a step further by looking at how additional social roles are also performative.

In “Doing Difference”, West and Fenstermaker (1995) counter the mathematical formulations of either additive social categories (think gender, plus race, plus social class equals greater or lesser levels of oppression) or the geometric categories that some multicultural and multiracial feminists have employed, which view gender, race, and class as intersecting planes of oppression. The premise of “Doing Difference” relies upon the argument that
race, class and gender are all things that we do or accomplish. In other words, we enact and display our roles in life, and so the lived experience of our gender, race, and social class become performative.

In *Women Without Class: Girls, Race and Identity*, Julie Bettie (2003) explained the ways that working-class and middle-class Mexican-American and white girls in California’s Central Valley socially interpret social class. Many sociologists have argued in the past that social class is a perplexing concept in the United States because of its relative fluidity. Recent debates have included the argument that our social institutions, the public school system being especially relevant to Bettie’s work, have enacted a “color blind” and more importantly a “class blind” social environment. In other words, school personnel and parents insist that labeling peers according to social class is nothing more than stereotyping and so they try to ignore its existence—this happens in schools just as it happens in the larger society. Bettie argued that the students in her ethnographic study react to this phenomenon by categorizing themselves in other ways that are related to typical social class aspirations, but that they do not specifically refer to social class. Bettie found that the girls in her ethnographic study perform their roles, based upon the status of their race, their gender, and their social class. At the same time, these girls and their peers were able to identify and categorize one another based upon their perception of the others role performance. In other words, Bettie found that race, class and gender were
all performative, and that the participants in her study were able to categorize one another based upon their perception of those performances.

In this section, I have reviewed contemporary sociological research that understands social class as a social construct. According to this line of theory, social class is something that we may “do” differently based upon our own experiences—in other words, social class is performative—it is a role that we play based upon our lived experience. In this way, we can see social class as a social category that, while not often discussed in face-to-face conversation because it is viewed as stereotyping, is easily identifiable all the same.

**Issues of Social Class in Education**

**Family Processes**

Sociological research from the past fifty years has demonstrated that differential access to resources, and differential advantages in life, are often based upon family processes. Research focused upon the differences in childrearing practices based upon the social class of the family, social location, and differences in the level of parental involvement in education based upon the social class of the family, has demonstrated differential advantages and differential outcomes in the children. This line of research has also focused upon the **dominant set of cultural repertoires**. Lareau (2003) explains that the dominant set of cultural repertoires² privilege one type of parenting style above

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² Lareau refers to Eliot Freidson’s *Professional Powers*; Magali Sarfatti Larson’s *The Rise of Professionalism*, and Amitai Etzioni’s *The Semi-Professionals and Their Organizations* to discuss the influence of professional opinion in childrearing
another, and these differences are at the heart of the differential advantages in child outcomes. This section will explore these lines of research.

During the late 1950s and 1960s, sociologist Melvin Kohn (1959; 1963; 1969) wrote several articles addressing social class and parental values. Kohn conceived of the socialization process as highly correlated to the parental values, and he believed that these values were dependent upon the parent’s social class. Kohn found that working-class parents are primarily concerned with keeping their children out of trouble, and they often use physical punishment to reprimand their children. Middle-class parents are more concerned with the development of their children—they encourage curiosity, self-expression, and self-control, and they are more likely to try to reason with their children than to use physical punishment.

Kohn asserted that these differences in values and child-rearing practices were a result of the occupational conditions of the parents. Kohn found that working-class occupations were more likely to require the employee to follow explicit rules set down by a person in authority while middle-class occupations were more likely to have a greater degree of self-direction and autonomous decision-making. Kohn concluded that parental values and child-rearing practices therefore, reflected the parent’s social class and working conditions and the environment that will likely confront the child in his or her future occupation, considering that the child is most likely to fulfill a position in the same social class as the parents.
During the 1990s and early 2000s, sociologist Annette Lareau performed several major studies on social class, parental involvement, and the education system within the United States. Lareau studied how parenting styles differ by social class, and how these differences translate into either advantages or disadvantages for the children. In *Home Advantage: Social Class and Parental Intervention in Elementary Education*, Lareau (2000) found that most parents want their children to do well in school, but they use different approaches. These parents employ different approaches because they have different cultural experiences, in other words, they have differential cultural capital. Lareau found that middle-class parents have more cultural capital, and could therefore customize their children’s educational career. The relationship between the parents and the school in a middle-class neighborhood was characterized by inter-connectedness. In these middle-class schools, there was pointed continuity between what the teachers perceived to be the parents proper role in the students education and what the parents perceived to be their role in their children’s education. Lareau found that working-class and poor parents had less cultural capital, and could therefore only offer their children a generic education. In working-class and poor schools, the relationship between the parents and the school was characterized by separateness. In working-class and poor schools, there was a pointed difference between what the teachers perceived to be the parents proper role in the students education and what the parents perceived to be their role in their children’s education. Parents believed their role was to keep
the child healthy, clean, and able to attend school while the school should be in charge of education. This difference created a gap in between the expectations of the teacher and the expectations of the family.

In Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life, Lareau (2003) continued the same basic concepts outlined in Home Advantage, but included the component of differences in family life between the social classes. In Unequal Childhoods, Lareau took a more in-depth look at family life, how it differs based upon social class, and how these differences equate to cultural advantages or cultural disadvantages or what Lareau referred to as the transmission of differential advantages (2003: 5).

In both Home Advantage (2000) and Unequal Childhoods (2003), Lareau compared middle-class suburban families with working-class urban families. She found that working-class parents use a parenting approach she described as the accomplishment of natural growth. In this approach, there is a clear boundary between adults and children. These working-class parents use directives to tell their children what to do, and the children are allowed considerable freedom in their playtime. Middle-class parents, on the other hand, employ a parenting approach Lareau described as concerted cultivation. These middle-class parents discuss things with their children. Rather than issuing directives, they use persuasion or encourage the use of reasoning skills to help their children arrive at a good decision. These children are enrolled in numerous organized activities, including sports and music (2003: 1-3).
Lareau discussed “cultural repertoires” as a key argument in her understanding of differences between the social classes, their ability to gain cultural capital, and the “transmission of differential advantages” (2003: 5) based upon the parent’s cultural repertoire. Lareau asserted that most of the professionals who work with children, like teachers, doctors, and counselors have a very specific idea about how to raise a child. These professionals believe that the best way to raise a child, specific to education, is to talk to their children about the importance of school, develop their educational interests, and remain involved in their schooling. The ideas expressed by these professionals become guidelines of childrearing because they are viewed as the experts on childrearing. Therefore, these guidelines become the **dominant set of cultural repertoires** (2003: 4). The education system embraces this dominant set of cultural repertoires, thereby favoring the concerted cultivation approach to childrearing above the accomplishment of natural growth approach, and this translates into advantages for middle-class children and disadvantages for working-class or poor children. In this manner, social class is reproduced throughout the generations by providing unequal education to children based upon their social class and the cultural capital associated with their social class.

In this section, we have seen that parenting styles and approaches tend to differ based upon the social class of the parents, and the parents values are often a reflection of their occupation. In the next section, I will explore the ways that we come to understand social class, the ways that we perform our social
class, and how these performances help us construct and understand a person’s social class.

**School Processes**

The sociology of education has long tried to understand if, and/or how, the public education system reinforces and reproduces existing social inequality. This line of research has focused upon the “hidden curriculum”, tracking, and labeling as mechanisms of reproduction within the school system. This section explores the school processes that reinforce and reproduce the existing social inequalities.

The “hidden curriculum” is the transmission of cultural values and attitudes, such as conformity and obedience to authority through implied demands found in the rules, routines and regulations of the school (Snyder 1971). During the early 1970s, psychologists, political economists, and conflict sociologists all posed the argument that the hidden curriculum within the public school system of the United States helped explain the reproduction or the perpetuation of social inequalities. In this section, I will explore the theoretical foundations for the hidden curriculum, as well as the ways that teacher perception shapes the hidden curriculum, and the increasing focus upon parental involvement by the U.S. Department of Education as an indicator of student social status or even social class. I argue that including teacher perception and parental involvement as components of the hidden curriculum gives us a more nuanced understanding of reproduction theory.
According to Benson R. Snyder (1971) in *The Hidden Curriculum*, there are two curricula that students are expected to master as a part of their education: the formal curriculum and the hidden curriculum. The formal curriculum is the official class work, the rules of the classroom, and the rules of the school. Included in the formal curriculum is the actual transfer of knowledge, as well as the learning of overt school rules such as the dress code, however most behavioral lessons such as comportment and social skills are taught through the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum is the “covert, inferred tasks, and the means to their mastery” (1971: 4) which students must learn and adapt to in order to succeed in school. Snyder believed that, in trying to learn both the formal curriculum and the hidden curriculum, students either conform and master these two curricula or they do not master these skills, and instead “turn off from their education” (1971: 4).

Scholars of both sociology and political economy have linked the hidden curriculum to reproduction theory. Bowles and Gintis (1976) argued that the very reason for the hidden curriculum is to extend the “‘social continuity of life,’ by integrating new generations into the social order, [so that] the schools are constrained to justify and reproduce inequality rather than correct it” (Bowles & Gintis 1976: 102). In other words, schools are designed to serve the needs of the society, and in a capitalist society, we need stratification and social inequality, therefore the hidden curriculum is one way to ensure that this inequality is reproduced in the next generation. Bowles and Gintis go on to argue that in a
nation like the United States where one of our values is equality, we must mask the inherent inequality of the education system and the hidden curriculum in some way. They argue that this masking is accomplished through “the ideology of equal educational opportunity and meritocracy” (Bowles & Gintis 1976: 103).

Jean Anyon (1980) argued that the classroom experience of students is different depending upon their social class, which is a component of the hidden curriculum and reproduction theory. Anyon studied five schools ethnographically, and provided “one instance of elementary education in a particular social class context” (1980: 72). Anyon argued that the students who attended the working class schools followed explicit procedures, learned through rote memorization and behaviors, and experienced very little decision making ability or choice (1980: 73). Students who attended the middle-class school worked towards getting the right answer. These students often had to follow written or verbal directions to find the right answer, but within those parameters, experienced some level of autonomy, choice and decision-making (1980: 77). Students who attended the affluent professional school were “continually asked to express ideas and concepts” (1980: 79). For these students, work involved individual thought, expressiveness, and the autonomy to make a choice of an appropriate method for the subject material. Students who attended the executive elite school worked on developing their analytic and intellectual abilities. These students were “continually asked to reason through a problem, to produce intellectual products that are both logically sound and of top academic quality”
Here, Anyon linked the type of work that students do in school to their social class, and ultimately to the hidden curriculum.

The hidden curriculum helps us analyze how social inequalities are reproduced through the education system from one generation to the next, and so is an important component of reproduction theory. It is important to note that the descriptions provided above are very deterministic. Therefore, it is important to use symbolic interactionism as a tool to help us understand the roles of individual actors and to help us understand and to develop the meaning that we attach to those roles.

Symbolic interactionists have long tried to understand the meaning that we attach to one another’s behaviors, and how we interpret one another’s actions. Erving Goffman (1961) explained that social interaction within a given society can have a shared meaning. He used the term “civil inattention” to explain that, when in a ritual public situation such as riding an elevator or passing on the sidewalk, we tend to acknowledge one another’s presence without making one another the object of particular attention. The notion that social interaction does have a pattern is referred to as the “interaction order”, and it is thought to regulate the form and process of social interaction, but not the content of social interaction. Further research has shown however, that not everyone has the same interpretation of social interaction, and therefore not everyone interprets the social interaction rituals the same way. Carol Brooks Gardner (1989) studied the ways that women experience ritual public situations very differently than men.
Gardner found that women fear for their personal safety and so try to minimize these ritual public situations by avoiding comments and sexualized propositions. Others (Anderson 1990; Feagin 1991) have explained the ways that ritual public situations are experienced differently by other racial minorities, specifically African American’s. These researchers show that our interpretation of social interaction and social categories is subjective.

Because we experience social situations differently and because we interpret social interaction subjectively, symbolic interactionists wondered whether it was possible for us to have a shared reality. Some symbolic interaction theorists believe that there is very little shared reality beyond what is socially created. This is referred to as the “social construction of reality—the process by which our perception of reality is largely shaped by the subjective meanings we give to an experience” (Berger & Luckmann 1967). In other words, we act on the reality that we see—sociologists refer to this as the definition of the situation, which means that we analyze a given social context that we find ourselves in, we then determine what is in our best interest, and finally we adjust our attitudes and actions to fit that social context. Acting on the definition of the situation though, can create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In 1949, sociologist Robert K. Merton coined the term “self-fulfilling prophecy” to explain the phenomenon that arises when an outcome transpires just because it was predicted to occur—even if it was predicted to occur based upon false assumptions. In 1970, sociologist Ray Rist published “Student Social
Class and Teacher Expectations: The Self-fulfilling Prophecy in Ghetto Education” in the *Harvard Educational Review*. Rist found that upon entry into elementary school, in this case kindergarten, children are quickly sorted into ability groups. The teacher does this sorting subjectively. Rist found that the sorting was heavily influenced by perceived social class rather than actual ability. Over the course of the two and one-half years that Rist followed these students, he found that this sorting into ability groups tended to stick with the children, and ultimately led to a self-fulfilling prophecy. In other words, those sorted into the “high” ability group became high achievers; those sorted into the “middle” ability group became average achievers; and those sorted into the “low” ability group became low achievers. According to Rist, the entire future achievement of the child was determined by the eighth day of kindergarten, and was based upon teacher perception. Future expectations for the children were based upon the teacher’s perception of the students’ social class. The teachers judged a students social class using social class indicators, and used these indicators to sort children into ability groups, labeling higher-class students as “quality students” and lower-class students as “deficient students”. This is compatible with labeling theory, which focuses on the symbolic labels that people are given in their interactions with others. Here, we can see labeling theory becomes a component of the hidden curriculum when the labels that are applied to students by teachers perpetuate social inequalities through the self-fulfilling prophecy.
In *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality*, Jeannie Oakes (1985) used reproduction theory and labeling theory to analyze how schools structure and reproduce social inequality. Oakes explained that schools use tracking as a sorting device to perpetuate social inequality. Oakes defined tracking as “the process whereby students are divided into categories so that they can be assigned in groups to various kinds of classes” (1985: 3).

Essentially, Oakes builds upon the premise presented by Rist that teachers label students based upon their perception of their ability, which is formed by the teacher’s social construction of reality. In elementary school, teachers perceive that children from the upper-class have high ability, students from the middle-class have average ability, and students from the lower-class have low ability. The teacher’s sort the students into ability group based upon these perceptions, label them as either “quality students” or “deficient students”, and a self-fulfilling prophecy occurs which perpetuates the existing inequality of our social structure. Oakes looked at middle-school and high-school tracking as an extension of this self-fulfilling prophecy.

Here, we have seen how our social interactions are subjective and that depending upon our social location, our social category, and our social expectations, we may experience a social situation very differently—in other words, our social construction of reality can afford us very different social experiences. Sometimes, our perceptions and our expectations can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, where an outcome transpires just because it was
predicted to do so. In terms of education, the perception that a teacher has of his or her students can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy where students are labeled as “quality students” or “deficient students” based upon their social class. This labeling based upon teacher perception can ultimately lead to tracking, which affects the student’s access to the formal curriculum and operates as a part of the hidden curriculum. It influences the student’s access to the formal curriculum because when the students are sorted into ability groups, they receive different academic training based upon that track. It operates as a part of the hidden curriculum in many ways including, as Anyon (1980) argued, teaching the students to work in ways that are perceived as appropriate for their future occupations, based upon their social class.

Parental Involvement and Government Policy

The theory of a “hidden curriculum” within the school system was developed to help explain the perpetuation of inequalities between the social classes in a society in which education has long been heralded as “a great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance wheel of the social machinery” (Mann 1848). Years of sociological research has shown that the education system alone will not end social inequality, and that it even reproduces social inequality. Since the early 1970s when Snyder (1971) first wrote about the hidden curriculum, and later when Anyon (1980) analyzed “Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work”, the involvement of the federal government in public education has steadily increased. I argue that the contemporary public education
system, and the “No Child Left Behind” Act (USDOE 2001b), completely disregard sociology and herald back to Horace Mann (1848) by claiming that education alone will cure the ills of the world without ever addressing any of the social locational structures of inequality. The “No Child Left Behind” Act asserts that education alone can end social inequality, while at the same time, favoring the dominant set of cultural repertoires, especially the importance of parental involvement, and thereby adding new variables to the hidden curriculum. I also argue that, since reality is socially constructed, if a teacher perceives something to be true, it is true in its reality. If a teacher perceives a student as having involved parents, then that perception shapes the teachers labeling of the student as a “quality student”. If a teacher perceives a student as having uninvolved parents, then that perception shapes the teachers labeling a student as a “deficient student”, and ultimately affects the socialization pattern that the student is tracked into within the school system.

The United States Department of Education has shaped the teacher’s focus upon parental involvement, which has resulted in teacher’s increased use of the perceived level of parental involvement as a sorting category. Perceiving a student as having involved parents, or not having involved parents, has become a component of the hidden curriculum, and ultimately another way of labeling students as a “quality student” or as a “deficient student”.

According to the U.S. Department of Education’s Strategic Plan 2001-2005 (2000) and the National Research Council’s Eager to Learn: Educating our
Preschoolers (2001), parental or other family, involvement in education is a very important and beneficial factor in learning for children. Generally, family involvement is defined as “parents’ (or grandparents’ or other adult guardians’) investment of resources in their children’s education” (Carlisle, et. al. 2005; Sheldon 2002). Parental involvement can be beneficial to the educating of a young child in many ways. For example, parental involvement can help ease a young child’s transition into school. Continued cooperation between the parents and teachers can send the message to the child that education is important and valued by the family. These types of involvement help the child view their family and school as seamless, supportive facets of their lives, which can have lifelong educational benefits for the child (Carlisle, et. al. 2005). Here, we can see the focus that the U.S. Department of Education places upon parental involvement as an important component of a child’s education.

The U.S. Department of Education’s report on the “Condition of Education” (2001) discussed the importance of a social support system for public education and for “the value of knowledge and learning” (2001: 131). It further framed a particular model of parental involvement stating, “Family support for learning can be demonstrated not only through their support for schools but also by their involvement in their children’s learning outside of school” (2001: 131). This particular model of parenting is a component of the dominant set of cultural repertoires favored by the U.S. Department of Education, and those within the public education system. Teachers have adopted this philosophy, and
developed a further criterion on which to label students into either the “quality student” role or the “deficient student” role. Again, these labeling categories become a component of the hidden curriculum by providing a way for teachers to sort students into a social class category based upon their perception of the students’ social status.

In this section, I have explained the theoretical foundations for the hidden curriculum, which was first developed to explain the perpetuation and the reproduction of social inequalities by the education system. I have analyzed the symbolic interactionist theory regarding the social construction of reality, and the ways that it can produce a self-fulfilling prophecy. I have discussed the research that implicates the self-fulfilling prophecy in education, and how a teacher’s perception can lead to labeling and tracking, which are components of the hidden curriculum. Finally, I have explored the increasing focus upon parental involvement by the U.S. Department of Education, which I argue influences the teacher’s perception of the student’s social status, and ultimately affects the label the teacher attaches to the student therefore becoming a component of the hidden curriculum. I further argue that including teacher perception and parental involvement as components of the hidden curriculum gives us a more nuanced understanding of reproduction theory, the hidden curriculum, and labeling theory.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Personal Background

I am a white, middle-class female in my mid-thirties and I grew up in the rural county where this research was conducted. I am the youngest of eight children—seven girls and one boy. My parents were born during the Great Depression, and I was the last and somewhat surprising addition to the family. I was born when my mother was 43 and my father was 45. My father was a professor at Ohio State University and my mother was a stay-at-home mom. The fact that my father was a college professor made our family upper middle-class in a community that was, especially in the late 1970s and 1980s when I was growing up, rural working-class and very dependant on farming. When I was growing up, this area was predominantly rural farmland, with a small town in the county seat. I attended a rural elementary school from kindergarten through sixth grade, and the only high school in the county from grade seventh through twelfth. I graduated from the local high school in 1991, and did not begin college until I was almost thirty.

I went to work in a factory after I graduated from high school, and I met my husband Nick during that time. Nick and I were married in 1994 and my job transferred us to Kansas in 1996. We did not stay long in Kansas but we moved on to Colorado rather than return to Ohio in the summer of 1996. We fell in love with the mountains of Colorado, but not with the cost of living associated with settling in a resort town. We stayed in Colorado for one year, returned to Ohio in
order to save up enough money to buy a house in Breckenridge, Colorado, and then returned to Colorado about three years later. In 1998, during our time back in Ohio, our first son Ezra was born. We returned to Colorado in 2000, and our son Izak was born in 2002. I began working on my bachelor’s degree in sociology from the University of Colorado at Denver in 2003. In 2005, we returned to southeastern Ohio and found that while some things remained the same, there were also many differences.

**Context**

There is still a significant amount of rural farmland in the area, but there have also been numerous families moving into the county from the nearest major city. The commute has been made easier by the construction of an outer-belt and wireless communications have improved to the place where it is possible to work from home and commute to the city several days a week. Continued economic strains have caused families in other parts of southeastern Ohio to move around looking for work, and some of those families have landed in the research area.

According to Nelson Davis (1994), exurban areas are different from urban and suburban areas. An urban area is the central city. A suburban area is the residential area ringing the urban center. Rural areas are low-density, non-metropolitan lands outside of the urban and suburban areas. “Exurban counties surround all metropolitan areas, extending outward about 60 to 70 miles from the circumferential highways…by this definition, between 1960 and 1990 exurban
counties added more population than any other type of county did" (Davis 1994: 3). When I first began to conceive of this project, I thought that this aspect, this new exurban population in a historically rural area, would be a focal point of the story. Although the teachers in this research setting did discuss the new families moving into the area, and the diversity of social classes that this created within the classroom, it did not emerge as a central component of the research. According to the U.S. Census 2000, the county seat is the only portion of the research county classified as “urban”, the rest of the county, including the research site, is classified as “rural”.

It is important within the scope of this research project to keep in mind that what is true in urban or suburban areas may or may not be true in rural or exurban areas. Rural America is unique in many ways, including most aspects of day-to-day life, social status, parental occupational access, and parental income. This gap in knowledge can be closed by gaining a better understanding of how a teacher’s perception of social class and parental involvement are navigated in rural schools and family settings. In order to build upon the current research, I believe it is important to investigate how teachers in a rural school construct the social class of their students through face-to-face interaction, and how this understanding of the student’s social class influences their face-to-face interactions with their students.

In *World’s Apart: Why Poverty Persists in Rural America* (1999), Cynthia Duncan finds that in rural America where there is persistent poverty, there are
usually very rigid divisions between social classes. The poor are categorized into the “bad” role, and in such small communities, their family name is so well known, that no one would hire them for a job, even if a job were available. The rich (which are generally middle-class to upper middle-class) are categorized into the “good” role. Their family names are also well known, and this ensures easy access to the job market, loan availability, and a better education. Through nepotism, and in some cases corrupt politics, rural America sustains its inflexible class system through careful maintenance. There is a large city within the 60-70 mile radius of this rural community but several of the traits of a rural community with persistent poverty that Duncan mentioned exist in this research community, including the communities familiarity with family struggles, and the consequential categorization into either “good” or “bad” roles.

As mentioned earlier, this research site is classified as a rural school district, and I believe that applying reproduction theory to a school district classified as rural may open the door to new understandings of such a school. I find it especially important to do so given that rural America has historically sustained a very inflexible social class system.

Methods

The data come from ethnographic research conducted at Mountain Trails Elementary School\(^3\). Mountain Trails Elementary School is a rural elementary school located in southeastern Ohio. The school is located in the small village of

\(^3\) All proper names throughout this thesis, including town, school, roads, teachers, and staff have been changed to protect identities.
Mountain Trails, Ohio. The Ohio Department of Education (2007c) School Year 2006-2007 Report Card for Mountain Trails Elementary School lists the student population as 99.3% white and 55.5% economically disadvantaged. Mountain Trails Elementary School was designated as an “Excellent” school in 2006-2007, and they met all 10 of the State Indicators. Mountain Trails Elementary School received 105.8 out of 120 possible points on the “Performance Index Score”. Mountain Trails Elementary School has improved each of the last three school years: During the 2005-2006 school year, they received 94.5 out of 120 possible points on the “Performance Index Score” and during the 2004-2005 school year, they received 91 out of 120 possible points on the “Performance Index Score”.

If you approach Mountain Trails Elementary School from the nearest state highway, the school is located on the left of State Route 007, or the eastern side of the road. The old Mountain Trails Elementary School was located on the same grounds in the area where the main parking lot is now located. Until the 1970s, this school was a K-12 school, and then it transitioned into an elementary only school with grades 7-12 bussed into the county seat. In 2004, a new building was completed and the students moved in full-time for the 2004-2005 school year. When the new building was constructed, the district boundaries shifted, and the teachers who taught at Mountain Trails Elementary School for many years all mentioned that the new school boundaries brought in more lower-

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4 State Indicators: A school meets a state indicator by reaching a minimum requirement for the percentage of students at or above the proficient level on 3rd, 4th-, 5th-, 6th-, 7th-, 8th-, 9th, and 10th and Ohio Graduation Tests. The two non-test indicators with minimum requirements are graduation and attendance rate (Ohio Department of Education 2007a).
class children. Mountain Trails Elementary School is a two-story school, and the layout of the building is as follows: the main entrance faces roughly south; the left hand wing runs back towards State Route 007 or roughly, west; the right hand wing runs roughly east, and the back of the school where the gymnasium, cafeteria, art room, music room and playground are located run roughly to the north. As you enter the main entrance, the office is on the left and the library is on the right. Just beyond these two rooms, the wings break off. The right hand wing is very short with only two classrooms on each level to the right of the main entryway. The left hand wing is much longer with six regular classrooms, as well as several resource rooms on each level. There is a stairway to the upstairs in each wing and one elevator just into the left-hand hallway off the main entryway. The kindergarten, first and second grades are on the first floor and the third, fourth and fifth grades are on the second floor.

With the permission of the school principal, Linda Ferris, I visited the school during a staff meeting during September 2007. I introduced myself to the staff, and explained the research that I was hoping to conduct. I invited everyone to participate, and asked if they would please let Ms. Ferris know if they were interested in participating. Ms. Ferris e-mailed me a list of volunteers, and I corresponded with them via e-mail until I was able to conduct interviews.

I conducted interviews with six of the seventeen teachers and the one guidance counselor at Mountain Trails Elementary between November 29, 2007 and January 3, 2008. Each of these interviews lasted approximately one hour. I
interviewed Mrs. Wheeling, a first grade teacher with thirty-three years experience on November 29, 2007. I interviewed Mrs. Green, who was new to the school district this year, but who has been a guidance counselor in the southern United States for twelve years, and a high school teacher for approximately fifteen years before that, on November 30, 2007. I interviewed Mrs. Mangrove, the 'Title One' Math and Reading Specialist on December 3, 2007. Mrs. Mangrove is new to the 'Title One' teaching position this year, but she has been teaching at Mountain Trails Elementary School in one capacity or another for eight years. I interviewed Ms. Moore, a first grade teacher, who taught in a neighboring county for twenty-five years and moved to Mountain Trails Elementary School eight years ago on December 11, 2007. I interviewed Mrs. Culver, a third grade teacher who has been teaching for twenty years, fifteen of which she has taught at Mountain Trails Elementary School, on December 13, 2007. I interviewed Mrs. Laredo, a fifth grade teacher with ten years of teaching experience, on December 18, 2007. I interviewed Mrs. Stanton, a third grade teacher who has been teaching for four years, on January 3, 2008.

I also spent twenty-four hours volunteering in three different classrooms over a six-week period from January 17, 2008 through February 28, 2008. I participated in the classrooms of three of the teachers who volunteered for the project. I spent three days in two-hour blocks in Mrs. Wheeling’s first grade classroom for a total of six hours. I spent five days in Ms. Moore’s first grade
classroom. Three of those days were for a two-hour block and two of those days were for a one-hour block, for a total of eight hours. I spent five days in two-hour blocks in Mrs. Laredo’s fifth grade classroom for a total of ten hours. The disparity in times spent in each classroom is due to weather-related school cancellations and school delays. I initially contacted the teachers in my capacity as a researcher, and was thus identified to them in that role. I was identified as a volunteer to the children in the classroom. Follow-up interviews were also conducted with Ms. Moore and Mrs. Laredo after I had participated in their classrooms. In these follow-up interviews, we discussed the indicators of social class that they used to classify students into social class categories, the strategies they used to socialize children into institutionally appropriate school behaviors, and the student attributes that they would use to describe a “quality student”. Each of these follow-up interviews lasted approximately one-half hour. My analysis consists of data contained in three hundred fifteen single-spaced, typed pages of fieldnotes and interview transcripts.

Once all data were collected, I coded the transcripts and fieldnotes using the focused coding approach, in which I conducted a “line-by-line analysis on the basis of topics that have been identified as of particular interest” (Emerson et. al. 1995: 143), specifically, the social construction of social class. As the focused coding approach took place, this researcher concurrently wrote up integrative memos, which helped tie together critical bits of data. After a thorough read-through using focused coding, I further categorized the data into two sub-
categories of particular interest. I found that the teachers indicated that there are two issues that most influence their understanding of the student’s social class and their subsequent sorting of the students into either the “quality student” role or the “deficient student” role: the family and the school.
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

The original intent of this research project was to try to understand the teacher’s perceptions of their student’s social class, and how they deal with social class diversity in the classroom. This initial curiosity grew into an interest in researching if and/or how these perceptions contribute to the reproduction of social class. I volunteered in the classroom, I interacted with the children, and I observed the interactions between the teachers and the students, but the teachers remained at the center of this research project. As I spent more time in the field, I found myself wondering exactly how the teachers understand the social class of their students. As I began to explore my data, I realized that the full story is a little different than I originally conceived it to be. In this analysis, we will see how the teachers whom I interviewed and volunteered with at Mountain Trails Elementary School use tangible and intangible indicators of social class to understand the social class of their students and how they use these performative symbols of social class to categorize students into either a “quality student” role or a “deficient student” role. This perception of social class guides these teacher’s assumptions about student ability, and therefore influences their implementation of divergent socialization patterns for the “quality student” and the “deficient student”. These divergent socialization patterns ultimately serve to reproduce existing social inequalities.

During the initial interviews, I asked questions about the social class of the students, and the challenges faced by the student’s families. I intentionally did
not define social class hoping that one of the teachers would do so; however, at no time did a teacher define social class or ask me to define social class. I believe this is important, and indicates several possibilities. First, it could mean that the teachers I interviewed believe that everyone uses the same definition for social class. Second, it could mean that the teachers interviewed, like most of the American public, believe that they are middle class, and those who are unlike them are either lower-class or upper-class. Finally, it could indicate that the teachers I interviewed were very uncomfortable talking about social class, and that they prefer to maintain a class-blind social environment within the school. I tend to dismiss the third possibility, because all of the interviewees were very forthcoming in their discussion of social class, and the differences they perceived between the social classes. Therefore, I believe one or both of the first two scenarios must explain this lack of definition. Either of these explanations is very important to this analysis because it indicates that, although the interviewees openly discuss social class, they have not explicitly defined it, and so this analysis must attempt to interpret their understanding of social class. Therefore, this analysis focuses upon the ways that the teachers understand the social class of their students through face-to-face interactions, and the social processes that they use to interpret the social class of their students.

In follow-up interviews, I specifically asked both Ms. Moore and Mrs. Laredo if they had access to any quantitative social class information, such as knowledge of who received free or reduced lunch. They both answered that “no”,

they did not know specifically which students receive free or reduced lunch. Mrs. Laredo said, “Oh, I don’t even know, I couldn’t, I really couldn’t tell you, I could guess, based on what I know about the family, whether parents are working and things like that” (Laredo 02/26/08 Interview: 2). In other words, it would be a guess based upon her interpretation of the student’s social class. Ms. Moore indicated that, even if she did know who received free or reduced lunch, she believed that this information might not be representative of actual socioeconomic standing in this particular community. When asked about student use of the free or reduced lunch program, she said:

That’s very often deceptive. This district has a high percentage of kids on free or reduced lunch, and that is partially because of where we are but that can be deceptive, because some kids that you think aren’t, are and some of the kids that you think really should be are not. And, sometimes it’s because the parents won’t fill out the paperwork (Moore 02/21/08 Interview: 2).

This statement indicates Ms. Moore’s reluctance to use a quantitative understanding of social class. Therefore, Ms. Moore confirms the need to use social processes to interpret the social class of her students because she sees it as a more reliable way of understanding their social class realities.

As I observed the teachers in this research setting, and then spoke with them separately in interviews, I found that these teachers understand the social class of their students through their own perception of the student’s family. This perception is shaped by their own social location and social experience. The teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary School interpret the symbolic performance of their students through the lens of their own social
location and experience. Their social location, and therefore their social and cultural experiences, are in line with the dominant set of cultural repertoires exposed by Lareau (2003), and are also favored by the school. These particular teachers view most of the students who perform social class in a way that is similar to their own as belonging in the higher social class and therefore, they are sorted into the “quality student” role. Many of the students who perform social class in a way that is different from these particular teachers are categorized as being from a lower-class, and are sorted into the “deficient student” role. In assessing the data, I began to distinguish between two categories of indicators that these teachers use to understand the social class of their students. The first category is the **tangible indicators**, specifically the clothing the student wears. The second category is the **intangible indicators**, such as knowledge of the student’s family struggles, student comportment and the level of parental involvement in the student’s education.

**Family Processes**

Student dress is the single most frequently mentioned tangible indicator of social class for the teachers I interviewed. Nearly every teacher mentioned dress in their interview as a way that the students see the differences between one another and the way that the teachers use student dress to differentiate the lower-class students from the higher-class students. The teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary School link student dress, particularly the quality
of the clothes, and the cleanliness of the clothes, to economic capital and therefore to social class.

Ms. Moore discussed noticing the differences between students’ manner of dress as a tangible indication of social class. When asked how she differentiates a higher-class student from a lower-class student, Ms. Moore said, “Dress. Yeah, you see it there. There’re kids who will show me a new pair of shoes that are obviously not a new pair of shoes, but they are a new pair of shoes to them. So, I see it that way” (Moore 02/21/08 Interview: 2). Thus, Ms. Moore uses the physical appearance of her students to help her understand the social class of the student and the student’s family.

Mrs. Stanton also discussed noticing the differences between students’ manner of dress as a tangible indicator of social class. For example, she said:

Clothes. Just clothes. They come to school, I have a few that come to school dirty, and I send them down and let them change their clothes, but everybody knows that. I don’t think that, at least in my classroom, that there is anybody making fun of, but it might happen on recess. But, I think they know like, you know, whoever is pretty poor. (Stanton 01/03/08 Interview: 7).

Mrs. Stanton also acknowledged noticing differences between her students’ manner of dress and acknowledges that her students also use these tangible differences as a way to differentiate between one another. She uses the physical appearance of the student, both the quality of the clothing, and the cleanliness of the clothing, as a tangible indication of the student’s social class. In these examples, we can see that student dress is a tangible way that the participating teachers link physical appearance to economic capital and therefore to social
class. By observing the student’s physical appearance, teachers are able to interpret the social class of their students.

Although student dress was the most frequently mentioned tangible indicator of social class, and nearly every teacher I interviewed mentioned this important component, these teachers mentioned intangible indicators of social class much more frequently, and in much more detail, than the tangible indicators of social class. Family struggles, student comportment, and the level of parental involvement that the student receives at home are all seen as significant intangible indicators of social class. Some of these intangible indicators of social class are objective, for example a teacher might link family financial difficulties with a lack of economic capital, and therefore use it as an indication of a lower social class. Some of these intangible indicators however, are considerably more arbitrary, as we shall see.

All of the teachers I interviewed, as well as the school counselor, mentioned some type of family struggle that faces at least some of their students. As a relatively small rural school, the teachers, counselor, and staff at Mountain Trails Elementary School are much more personally familiar with these family struggles and family situations than they might be in a larger suburban or urban school. Therefore, these family struggles are a key source of information for these teachers, and a critical intangible indicator for their interpretation of the social class of their students.
Family struggles are typically attributed to financial difficulties or family problems. The school counselor, Mrs. Green mentioned some of the difficulties faced by the students she works with. She stated:

Just the normal everyday problems of how are you going to pay the rent or how are you going to keep them from turning off the electricity. I mean, I've had any number of kids, you know, just comment about, 'oh yeah I didn't get to do it that day because they turned off the lights and then they were on again and I got it finished', and you know it's just very matter of fact (Green 11/30/07 Interview: 6).

Thus, Mrs. Green links ongoing financial instability to family struggles, and uses that financial instability as an intangible indicator to help her understand the social class of the students she works with in her position as school counselor. Mrs. Green uses the information she hears about family difficulties, develops her own interpretation of the student’s social class by linking financial instability to a lack of economic capital, and therefore, categorizes the students who experience such hardships into a lower-class category.

Ms. Moore also mentioned the family struggles that her students face. For example, she said, “This little guy doesn’t have a stove in their house. He said, “It’s OK Ms. Moore, we’ve got a toaster oven, and I like toast” and I said, “Well, that’s good Billy”” (Moore 12/11/07 Interview: 16). In this example, Ms. Moore notes the financial difficulties Billy’s family faces, which seem obvious to her because Billy mentions that they do not have a stove in their house. Ms. Moore uses the lack of economic capital that Billy’s family faces as an intangible indicator to help her understand Billy’s social class.
Ms. Moore further explains that the parents of her students use different confrontation strategies based upon their social class. When asked how she differentiates a higher social class student from a lower-class student, she said:

I see it in parent letters, notes. [Researcher asks, do you get a lot of notes?] Yeah. And, you tend to, this is just my thought, the people who have less tend to be less likely to want to confront you face-to-face. They are more likely to want to confront you a little bit in a note. I think that just, having a little more self-assurance. But, people who have less tend to be less comfortable in school. You can see it, I can just see it. You know, when there is a meeting. Especially when we have those open houses and all those people walk in, and I just think it’s terrible for them, all those parents, they walk in to the meeting and all those people from the school are just sitting there, and the parents walk in and they’re like “OH, WOW”. And, you know, most of them, well not most of them, but a lot of them have bad memories from school (Moore 02/21/08 Interview: 2).

Here, Ms. Moore makes a social class connection between parent-teacher relationships that is similar to Annette Lareau’s (2000) argument in *Home Advantage: Social Class and Parental Intervention in Elementary Education*. Lareau notes that the relationship between working-class parents and the teacher is characterized by separateness and the relationship between middle-class parents and the teacher is characterized by inter-connectedness. By explaining that lower-class parents prefer to confront a teacher through a note, while a higher-class parent will confront her face-to-face, Ms. Moore is demonstrating a similar perception. Ms. Moore believes a lower-class parent does not feel connected with the school, and will therefore experiences a sense of separateness with the teacher, who represents the school. A higher-class parent does feel comfortable in the school, and will therefore come into the classroom and discuss any problems with the teacher face-to-face. Ms. Moore
uses these differential parent-teacher relationships as an intangible indicator of
social class.

Mrs. Laredo’s fifth grade classroom uses ability grouping to “try to stretch
them a little bit further” (Laredo 12/18/07 Interview: 16). She sees this ability
grouping as being divided predominantly along social class lines. She said:

We’ve done some ability grouping. We’ve taken the fifty two kids and put
them into two groups. And that helps a lot because in that first group, with
the more affluent families, for the most part, and then the, you know, you
hate to say it, but almost the lucky ones that aren’t coming from such an
affluent background, but they’re going to make it anyways, for whatever
reason. We have them all together (Laredo 12/18/07 Interview: 16).

During participant observation, I observed these students in their different ability
groups, and listened to students referring to their life experiences in a way that is
different based upon their social class. On a Thursday morning in January, Mrs.
Laredo was giving a math lesson to the lower ability math group on negative
numbers by using the example of a paycheck. She explained how much the
check would be, and how much money was needed to pay the bills. The
example showed more money going out to pay bills than was received in income.
The excerpt from my fieldnotes states:

Then, she [Mrs. Laredo] used an example of her getting a paycheck
tomorrow. She said if my paycheck is $100 and I owe $100 for rent, $50
for utilities, $50 on groceries, $50 to finish paying off my daughters
wedding dress, what would I have? They figured out that she was -$150
dollars. One kid told her that she needed to go to Cashland Loans. Mrs.
Laredo laughed and said, ‘maybe I should look into that’ (01/31/08
Fieldnotes: 3).

Mrs. Laredo did not react in a way that would insult the child, but her comments
in the interview insinuate that she certainly recognizes the differences in their
frame of reference. This example demonstrates the lack of capital lower-class students, and their families, have available to them. Lower-class families have less access to the four types of capital Bourdieu (1973; 1985; 1990) refers to: economic, social, symbolic and cultural. As we have seen in the previous examples, lower-class families are viewed as having less economic capital. This excerpt shows that families with financial difficulties have less economic capital, and so they may have to rely on high-interest payday loans to make ends meet. Lower-class families also have less access to social capital. A higher-class family is more likely to have a social network with the ability to help them through financial difficulties, for example, a higher-class family may have a parent or a friend who could loan them money until they receive their next paycheck. Lower-class families have less access to the resources of social prestige or honor associated with symbolic capital, and therefore cannot rely upon this resource to help them during times of financial need. Finally, lower-class families have less cultural capital, and because this student has cultural and family experiences that include borrowing money from a high-interest payday loan company, this student is not gaining advantageous cultural capital from his family.

In the previous examples, it is clear that the teachers I interviewed use family struggles as an intangible indicator of social class. They might link these family struggles to a lack of economic capital, a lack of social capital, a lack of symbolic capital, or a lack of cultural capital, but they do link it to a lack of capital. The participating teachers then use this lack of capital as a sorting tool to
categorize some of their students with significant family struggles into the “deficient student” role.

The next category of intangible indicators of social class frequently mentioned by the participating teachers at Mountain Trails Elementary School was student comportment. In this context, I refer to student comportment as the personal bearing, conduct, or behavior of a student.

Mrs. Laredo mentioned behavior as an intangible indicator of social class in the following statement.

Some of the behaviors I see...we battle and I don’t think it’s as bad as it used to be, but generational poverty, where they’ve just been impoverished generation after generation and it becomes a way of life because it’s all they know. Right down to whether or not their shoes are tied, seriously, it can be as basic as that. A kid who does not understand that they need to tie their shoes (Laredo 02/26/08 Interview: 2-3).

In this example, we can see Mrs. Laredo links generational poverty to a “deficient” label, and that comportment or behavioral problems are often a result of this lower-class status. This example demonstrates the differences in cultural preferences, styles and sensibilities that different people have based upon their social location. This is what Pierre Bourdieu (1984) pointed out in Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste. For Mrs. Laredo, a middle-class teacher, it seems obvious that a child should tie his or her shoe, and she believes that anyone who does not recognize that importance lacks essential behaviors and knowledge, and therefore is categorized into the “deficient student” role. Although Mrs. Laredo believes that every child should understand that they need
to tie their shoe, using this lack of understanding as an indication of a lower social class is a somewhat arbitrary categorization.

Similarly, Mrs. Stanton also mentioned student comportment as an intangible indicator of social class. When asked whether a student’s school readiness is related to social skills, she said:

I still see social skill deficiency when they’re in the third grade. They don’t know how to act around their peers. And they don’t know how to act around adults. Even just looking at someone in the face, they don’t understand that, and it’s definitely not a, you know, religious thing here, it’s definitely that they have never had that social component (Stanton 01/03/08 Interview: 8).

Mrs. Stanton demonstrates her belief that students without certain social skills must be categorized as “deficient” in this example. Again, for Mrs. Stanton, a middle-class teacher, it seems obvious that a student should know how to act around adults, and they should know to look someone in the face when they are speaking to them. Mrs. Stanton uses this intangible indicator of social class, displayed through student comportment, to categorize the lower-class student into the “deficient student” role, while the student who does know how to act around their peers, and around adults, is categorized into the “quality student” role. This is also a somewhat arbitrary indicator of social class, but it is definitely in line with the dominant set of cultural repertoires favored by Mrs. Stanton, and the school system. Those who display comportment traits that are aligned with the dominant set of cultural repertoires, such as looking a person in the eyes when speaking to them, are often categorized into the “quality student” role and
those who display comportment traits at odds with the dominant set of cultural repertoires are often categorized into the “deficient student” role.

During our initial interview, Ms. Moore told a story about two students she has this year. She explained that the families of the two students have very different social statuses and therefore, differences in their comportment. She explained how these differences are obvious to her and to the higher-class parents who are involved, and the difficulties that can arise due to these differences. She told the story as follows:

I have a parent this year who is from a family who does have more. And, I taught, I actually taught the dad in [a neighboring community], and he was from a very wealthy family. And mom...I felt sorry for her, because she wanted to say it but she didn’t want to sound like, you know, crummy, but she was concerned about the kids in my class. I can’t think of how she worded it, but she was concerned about their... their social status, really. That, she saw many things with these kids that she would rather her child not [be exposed to], an example is...they decided to have a first grade dance, not a first grade dance, a whole school dance...it was a family dance and everything, but I just, to me, it just seems silly. But, they want to do it, the older kids. But, this little girl had her older sister call, and so at conference, this little boys mom, Walter’s mom, is telling me that um, this little girls older sister had called Walter and invited him to go to the dance on a date. And that both his parents couldn’t believe it. And, this is one of the things that she was saying that, you know, she really wishes that he wasn’t around kids whose families thought that was OK, was really what she was saying. So, I thought, oh, surely that’s not right, so...you know, three parents later, they come in for their parent-teacher conference and so the mom says, “hey tell Ms. Moore your good news” and I thought, oh it’s a new baby, I don’t know, and she said, “she’s got a date for the dance. We’re going to leave here and go get her a new dress.” [laughter]. And, it was like “OH”. I just didn’t even know what to say, you know? (Moore 12/11/07 Interview: 8).

Ms. Moore explains that there is extreme diversity of social classes that can be found in a single classroom at Mountain Trails Elementary School. This example
demonstrates the differences in cultural preferences, styles and sensibilities that different people have based upon their social location, as discussed by Pierre Bourdieu (1984) in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste.* Walter’s mother has very particular cultural preferences about what is an appropriate age to begin dating, based upon her higher-class status. The family of the little girl described by Ms. Moore has a very different idea about what is an appropriate age to begin dating, based upon her family’s lower-class social location. Further, this example shows that Ms. Moore favors the values and cultural preferences of the parent with the higher social status because it is similar to her own social location, and it is in line with the “ideal type” student comportment favored by the dominant set of cultural repertoires, and therefore favored by the school system.

Overwhelmingly, the intangible social class indicator that held the most weight with the teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary School was the level of parental support that the student received at home. All of the teachers I interviewed discussed how important a component an involved family is for student success. Participating teachers also discussed the relationship between involved families and social class, where the students who have more involved families were frequently categorized as higher-class and students without involved families were frequently categorized as lower-class. In this way, we can see that parental involvement is the most influential intangible indicator of social class for the participating teachers at Mountain Trails Elementary School.
In many ways, this can be tied back to Kohn (1959; 1963; 1969) and Lareau (2000; 2003) who link parental involvement to parental values, and parenting approaches, as we shall see.

When asked how she thought social class affects a student’s school readiness, Mrs. Wheeling replied, “You can definitely tell who has been read to. They’re more advanced in their, way more advanced in their reading if they’ve been read to before they come to school, you know if they’ve been exposed to books, and seen their parents read, and see that their parents like books” (Wheeling 11/29/07 Interview: 18). Mrs. Wheeling explains that parents who value education are more concerned with the development of their children, and will therefore put forth more effort into reading to them, and developing their basic knowledge. This explanation is similar to what Kohn (1959; 1963; 1969) found, that the higher-class families concentrate on developing their children rather than focusing primarily on obedience. This example makes it clear that Mrs. Wheeling views parental involvement as highly correlated to a higher social class in her understanding. Therefore, to her, parental involvement is an intangible indicator of social class.

Similarly, Mrs. Stanton linked parental involvement to social class. Mrs. Stanton explained that students from a higher social class have parents who help them with their homework, and who value education. She explained that students who are from a lower social class have parents who do not value education, and who believe that teaching is the responsibility of the teacher.
During our interview, when discussing parent roles in education, we had this conversation:

**Mrs. Stanton:** “That’s not my job”. We hear that a lot. “That’s not my job, you’re the teacher that’s not my job”. I totally, I can think of kids in my classroom where I hear that from their parents. “Why aren’t you teaching my kid?” Well, I do, but you need to go on and extend that at home.

**Researcher:** Right.

**Mrs. Stanton:** But, they don’t, that’s not their job.

**Researcher:** And, maybe that’s the way they were raised.

**Mrs. Stanton:** Oh, yeah. Even, if I think of the kids in my classroom, I can think of the lower economic kids, and their parents don’t work, and they still aren’t getting help at home (Stanton 01/03/07 Interview: 4).

Mrs. Stanton believes, much like Lareau (2000; 2003) demonstrates, that higher-class families value education and help their children with their homework, while lower-class families do not value education, and believe that the school is solely responsible for the education of the student.

When asked how she differentiates a higher-class student from a lower-class student, Ms. Moore said, “I see it in ways, in social class generally, I would say like 90-95% of the time; those are the kids that get homework done. Usually, those are the parent volunteers” (02/21/08 Interview: 2). Again, the link is made between the intangible indicators of social class and parental involvement, with higher-class families more involved in the education of their children and lower-class families uninvolved in the education of their children. As Lareau (2000) discusses in *Home Advantage: Social Class and Parental Intervention in Elementary Education*, there is an interconnectedness between the higher-class
families and the school. Lareau found that the parents at the higher-class research site had substantially more parent classroom volunteers, more parents involved in various school-related committees, and parents who ensured that homework was completed each night. Similarly, Ms. Moore sees her higher-class parents as more connected with the school than her lower-class parents. The main difference between this research site and Lareau’s research sites is that Lareau collected data from two different schools: one was a relatively affluent middle-class school and the other was a relatively economically disadvantaged working class school. This research site is a single multi-class rural school.

All of the teachers I interviewed mentioned the level of parental involvement as an intangible indicator of social class, but some of these teachers and the school counselor discussed parental involvement and parenting styles in a way that favored the dominant set of cultural repertoires that Lareau (2000; 2003) argued provide a transmission of differential advantages. Lareau used a relatively direct approach to understanding social class because her research sites were easily split into social class categories based upon the economic demographics of the school districts and the families within them. The approach used at this research site is a more symbolic approach, likely because of the multi-class status of the student body. In the following examples, we can see how using the level of parental involvement as an intangible indicator of social class can lead to the transmission of differential advantages because they
directly lead participating teachers to categorize students into either a “quality student” role or a “deficient student” role.

Mrs. Green, the school counselor, talked about the difficulties that she has getting parents involved in the YESS (Youth Experiencing Success in Schools) Program, over which she is the facilitator at Mountain Trails Elementary School. The YESS program is aimed at promoting behavioral change in students who have already been labeled as having a behavior problem. Mrs. Green explained these difficulties like this:

With the YESS program, it takes a lot of parent involvement and I can’t even get the parents to come in to sign the papers so we can move forward with it, because they don’t have transportation to get here. So, I have to get the papers ready and leave them with the secretary, so that once they do have the opportunity to run by here it will be waiting for them and they can sign it. Then, I have to conduct the interviews on the telephone and if I’m lucky, the cell phone has been paid for that period of time, and we can do it. But, then that becomes a problem, because interviews take time, as you well know. And there’s a time issues, and they can’t pay the cell phone, and it’s just these few minutes of time that they can pay for, for emergencies, so it is a very difficult situation (Green 11/30/07 interview: 6).

Here, Mrs. Green explained how difficult it is to attain parental involvement with the parents of children participating in the YESS program. In this example, lack of parental involvement is seen as an intangible indicator of lower-class status, as these parents do not have transportation or access to a cell phone. In order to be referred to the YESS program, these students have already been labeled as “deficient students” but this explanation of the difficulties entailed in achieving parental involvement confirms that these students are truly “deficient students” according to the dominant set of cultural repertoires of the school.
Mrs. Culver, when asked what the biggest challenges her students face, said:

Having the parental support. We ask our students to have the parent or an adult sign their reading log at night that they’ve read. There are some who sometimes will comment that mom didn’t have time to do that or said she couldn’t do it at that time, and I feel that gives the child a negative influence of what the, what the parent feels is important or not important (Culver 12/13/07 Interview:7)

Here, we can see that Mrs. Culver considers a lack of parental involvement a challenge for her students. Mrs. Culver sees distinct differences in the importance parents place on education based upon the social class of the student. As Bourdieu (1984) pointed out, families from different social class backgrounds have distinct cultural preferences, different values, and different life expectations. Mrs. Culver recognizes these differences, notably the value the parents place on education, and uses those differences to categorize students with uninvolved parents into the “deficient student” role, and students with involved parents into the “quality student” role.

Ms. Moore also mentioned parental involvement as an intangible indicator of social class. When discussing aspects of a rural school that she thought were striking, we had the following discussion:

**Ms. Moore:** And, I know, another big difference between, and this just popped into my head, another big difference between these kids and more suburban kids, is the support, homework support. I mean they don’t get it. I mean, some of these kids do, but I have one little girl whose mother very clearly does her homework every night, it’s her handwriting. I have some who just never have it, and some who, and I just can’t decide how I feel about this one, in the before and after care program where they do the homework there.
Researcher: Um-hmm

Ms. Moore: I’ve noticed on a couple of my kids who go to after care, that that’s who signs their reading log every night. So, parents never hear them read, and I think they need that component. So, you don’t have the involvement from parents. Now, I have several this year who are very involved.

Researcher: Do you notice, the ones that are involved, is there something in particular about them that is different? Are they ones that came from someplace else? Are they…

Ms. Moore: Both, both of them that are involved both came from someplace else

Researcher: That’s what I was wondering.

Ms. Moore: They’re a little more affluent. And, they’re reliable, they’ll do absolutely anything, especially the one lady. She can almost predict what I’m going to need, and it’s great. And, then I have another lady who comes, and she only stays an hour, which is fine, but she frequently doesn’t come, and she just wants to talk about her health problems when she does come. And, yes she grew up here (Moore 12/11/07 Interview: 14).

Ms. Moore drew a decisive link between those who are more affluent as being the more involved parents. Ms. Moore links the level of connection between the school and the family to social class (Lareau 2000), whereby most higher-class families have an interconnected relationship with the school while most lower-class families have a much more separate relationship with the school. This clearly indicates that, according to Ms. Moore, parental involvement is an intangible indicator of a higher-social class, and a lack of parental involvement is an intangible indicator of a lower-social class.

In this section, we have seen how the teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary School interpret the way students “do” social class. West and
Fenstermaker (1995) explain that we all enact and display our role in life, and so the lived experience of our social class becomes performative—in other words, we ‘do difference’ based upon our social experiences. The participating teachers at Mountain Trails Elementary School use the performative symbols of social class displayed by their students, such as clothing, family values and struggles, student behaviors, and level of parental involvement, as tangible and intangible indicators of social class status. These teachers then interpret the ways that each student symbolically displays the distinct characteristics of their social class and use these tangible and intangible indicators to categorize them into the “quality student” role or the “deficient student” role. In the next section, we will explore the different socialization patterns that meet the “quality student” and the “deficient student”, how these patterns are developed, and the resulting differential advantages for the “quality student” and the resulting disadvantages for the “deficient student”.

**School Processes**

Several of the teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary School mentioned feeling increasingly constricted by the education system. Several of the participating teachers mentioned feeling constricted by the state standards and indicators and the increasing focus upon standardized testing. For example, Mrs. Wheeling stated:

Now we have the state standards and the indicators that we have to teach...And there were things that, there were units that I would make up myself. We had no manuals for anything and my sister had a neighbor that had been involved in the whole language training, which is what they
called it at that time, and she came to my school, and she went through and looked at all the books in the library, and we worked together, we even had to order whatever books the kids were going to use that next year. I added more to it and added more to it and had these wonderful units and now there’s a lot of that that I can’t do because of the indicators (Wheeling 11/29/07 Interview: 10).

Mrs. Wheeling explained that she feels that the increasing restrictions on education hurt the children by removing some of the fun learning experiences that she once used.

Similarly, Ms. Moore explained that she feels as though the curriculum has become increasingly prescribed during the last three to four years. She especially dislikes the way she must now teach reading. In an interview, she said:

Kids rotate through every grading period and I don’t think it’s developmentally appropriate. I don’t think it’s, and this year, they just told me, actually she said, “I want to have you do it half a year”, and then she said, “the point is to give you time to learn to give up control” and you know, that just went through me like…”I said, I don’t need time, I’ll give it up right now”, [laughter] so, it’s not about control, that’s really not, I just don’t think that every nine weeks you change a kids reading teacher when they’re learning how to read, I don’t think you do that (Ms. Moore Interview 12/11/07: 11).

Ms. Moore feels that the prescribed teaching method is not what is developmentally best for her students. She feels that the increased pressure from the government is not in the best interest of the students. For example, she said, “It’s just more and more, as the state puts on, as the federal government puts pressure on the state and the state, it trickles down to us. Oh, the pressure now. For the test scores, is just, “oh”. And, yes teachers cheat. I see it” (Ms. Moore Interview 12/11/07: 12).
Mrs. Laredo explicitly mentioned the constraints of the “No Child Left Behind” Act, which she believes constrains the teaching of essential social skills, or the dominant set of cultural repertoires. For example, Mrs. Laredo noted that:

Social skills, which I blame on, well I blame it on “No Child Left Behind” to be perfectly honest. But this whole we have to teach kindergarteners to count and write and read, and all these things, but there’s no time to teach them social skills. They’re still kids, and they’re still, you know, we could be teaching social skills. How about asking, “please pass the glitter” don’t pick it up and throw it at them, or don’t snatch it out of your neighbor’s hands. And, we’re still dealing with that at fifth grade. And I can honestly say that they’re not learning this at home because nobody speaks like this at home, so where are they going to learn these verbal skills if we’re not given the opportunities to teach them at school? And it’s sad, it’s very sad (Laredo 12/18/07 Interview: 15).

These examples show that the teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary School feel increasingly constrained by the restrictions of federal and state regulations, specifically the “No Child Left Behind” Act. They feel that student success is increasingly singular—that a “quality student” is one who can do well on standardized tests. They feel that a “deficient student” lacks the social skills and behaviors needed to become a “quality student” and that their job therefore is to try to help the “deficient student” gain the social skills necessary to become a “quality student”, but they feel the “No Child Left Behind” Act is increasingly restricting their ability to do so.

In the early stages of fieldwork, I began to see different patterns of socialization emerge within the classroom. For example, I saw children reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and the School Pledge\(^5\) every day. I saw children engaged in “show and tell” where they are taught to address a group and listen to

\(^5\) See Appendix ‘B’
a peer who is speaking, and I saw teachers constantly reinforcing the importance of “good” behavior. I continued to collect fieldnotes for data, and when I conducted follow-up interviews, I asked the teachers about this socialization process and what strategies they used to teach students what they consider appropriate school behavior.

As I began coding my fieldnotes, I sorted my data into two separate themes: social class indicators and socialization. As I spent more and more time working through that portion of the data, and thinking about the data, I began to see socialization as a sub-theme of social class indicators, rather than its own separate theme. In other words, I began to see the socialization of the students as a result of the teachers understanding of the social class indicators. I began to realize that the teachers I interviewed use social class indicators as a sorting tool for differentiating between students, categorizing them into either “quality student” roles or “deficient student” roles, and tracking them into different socialization patterns, and that this categorization process is dependent upon the participating teachers understanding of the social class of their students. This entire series of actions is part of the reproduction process, and ultimately a component of the hidden curriculum.

The way the participating teachers interpret the performance of the social class of their students based upon their perception of the family processes discussed in the previous section, results in different school processes for the student. The dominant set of cultural repertoires clearly favors students with
strong parental involvement, appropriate student comportment, and a good academic work ethic. This favoritism is part of the hidden curriculum, and the increasing shift towards a singular model for student success. In this research setting, I found that all of the tangible and intangible indicators discussed in the previous section work together to help the teachers I interviewed understand the social class of their students. Ultimately, the participating teachers use the symbols of the dominant set of repertoires for sorting most higher-class students into a “quality student” role and the symbols that are not in line with the dominant set of cultural repertoires to sort most lower-class students into a “deficient student” role. We have already seen how these roles are linked to social class; now let us look at the differential advantages afforded to these two roles.

If we review the symbols that teachers I interviewed use to categorize students into the “quality student” role, which we compiled in our discussion of social class indicators, we will see that a “quality student” is one who is well groomed, who is well behaved, whose family is very stable, and who has involved parents. Participating teachers at Mountain Trails Elementary School track many “quality students” into socialization pattern number one. Socialization pattern number one is primarily reserved for the student with no academic impediments and is a fast-track to academic success.

Most “quality students” already have in their cultural repertoire the social skills and behavior patterns needed to achieve academic success in the increasingly singular school success model. Many “quality students” are
therefore tracked into socialization pattern number one, which teaches some aspects of the hidden curriculum, such as consumerism, capitalism, and patriotism, which all students in our capitalist society receive, but most of the effort is spent on teaching the “quality student” the formal curriculum, which increasingly focuses upon the standardized test.

An example of an activity that Ms. Moore utilizes to help both “quality students” and “deficient students” become accustomed to being in a “social setting where they are the center of attention…and how to behave when there, and how to listen” (Moore 02/21/08 Interview: 9) is “share time” during group carpet meeting. During share time, the star student of the day gets to share something with the class first. It can be something he or she brought from home or something he or she is wearing, but that student will go to the front of the carpet, sit in the presentation chair, and tell what the item is and why they like it. The students then take turns presenting and listening until time runs out. I noticed specifically that this activity focuses upon the sharing of material goods.

During carpet time, the kids all huddle together on the small carpet area and sit “criss-cross applesauce”. For the most part, the kids are sitting together based on gender (boys together and girls together) although this is not a strict rule...During share time, the star student of the day presented her soccer sweats with her number “27” on the back (this is her birth date), a new sweatshirt, and a new toy with a puppy you can talk to if you have a password. The next little boy had his brothers connector set, another little girl had her friends cap/tooth that had fallen out [gross] and one little girl had some new clothes. (01/22/08 Fieldnotes: 3)

Share time is an excellent way to teach the hidden curriculum. Share time allows Ms. Moore to teach the hidden curriculum to both “quality students” and “deficient
students”. For most “quality students”, share time teaches capitalism and consumerism by focusing on material goods, and for “deficient students” it models appropriate school behaviors and teaches appropriate student comportment. It also teaches values favored by the dominant set of cultural repertoires, such as public speaking, self-presentation, and making eye contact with the audience, which is part of the hidden curriculum.

Students who are categorized as “quality students” also receive differential advantages by being tracked into the advanced ability groups. The teachers I interviewed link this to family processes rather than seeing themselves as agents in the reproduction process. Ms. Moore gave an example of this during our interview when she told me about one of her students. Ms. Moore noted that:

With the one [parent] in particular, with the accelerated reading program. Bless her heart. She was determined that he [student] was going to start, and I don’t think first graders need to start that until like January, but she really wanted him to start, which is fine. And, his grandparents are one of the benefactors for the program. So, I think it was for a lot of reasons. But, he took the first two tests and he couldn’t pass them. So she, at home, would type up on the computer. She asked to come in once and just stand behind him and just watch. Then, she went home and started making up her own tests for him to practice on other books before, and sure enough, that was what it took for him to get back on track. But, yeah she wants him to succeed and she’s willing to do whatever she needs to do to help him. Yeah, that was amazing to me, that she did that (Moore 12/11/07 Interview: 14-15).

In this example, we can see that this student’s mother wanted him to start the accelerated reading program. Only the most advanced readers begin the accelerated reading program during the fall of first grade, so this places him into an advanced ability group. His mother took extreme measures to help her son
achieve success with the accelerated reading program, which shows concerted
cultivation (Lareau 2003) on her part. The important thing to note here is that this
student was labeled as a “quality student” based upon his social class and he
was tracked into an advanced ability group. Finally, and most importantly, Ms.
Moore views this student’s differential advantage as related to his family’s social
status, rather than as a result of school processes such as labeling, tracking, or
the hidden curriculum. In other words, Ms. Moore and other participating
teachers do not believe they are reproducing social inequalities. They believe
that the students enter the school system with differential advantages based
upon their social location, and their family’s social location. The teachers believe
that their role is to try to help close the gap between the pre-existing social
inequalities.

The teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary recognize that
they do not have any control over what type of clothes a student wears or the
struggles their families suffer. They do try to encourage increased parental
involvement, but recognize that they have very little control over this aspect as
well. For example, Mrs. Mangrove said:

I think when we earlier spoke of the Carnival, thinking of the school
Carnival, that’s a big outreach thing and that’s something that we as rural
schools must do. Because schools are often thought of, and even, it’s
becoming better, but school is often thought of as, that place the child
goes, or childcare, or you go there, you do whatever and the teacher takes
care of that then when you come home, you do what you need to do
around here (Mangrove 12/03/07 Interview: 11).
Mrs. Mangrove recognizes the importance of reaching out to the parents to try to get them more involved in the school community, but acknowledges the difficulty in doing so. The one intangible indicator of social class that the teachers I interviewed felt they have some control over, however is student comportment. Therefore, the participating teachers at Mountain Trails Elementary School use a different socialization pattern for students who are categorized as “deficient students”. This socialization pattern focuses upon student comportment.

If we assess the traits of a “deficient student” compiled in our discussion of social class indicators, we will see that a “deficient student” is one who wears hand-me-down, worn out or ill-fitting clothing, one who has behavior problems, one whose family experiences struggles, and one who has parents who are uninvolved in their schooling. Most “deficient students” at Mountain Trails Elementary School experience socialization pattern number two, which is much more intensive than socialization pattern number one. Socialization pattern number two primarily focuses on teaching most “deficient students” the social skills, student comportment, and behavioral patterns that comply with the dominant set of cultural repertoires. The teachers I interviewed believe that these skills are essential for academic success in an education system that increasingly recognizes only one type of academic success—a good test taker. Therefore, they use their agency as teachers to try to improve the student comportment of “deficient students”, who are often perceived as being from the lower-class, through socialization pattern number two.
The teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary spend a great deal of time socializing many “deficient students” into the norms that are privileged by the dominant set of cultural repertoires. In many ways, this socialization becomes a component of the hidden curriculum, because it is not strictly the formal curriculum. Ms. Moore understands this as a part of her job tightly linked to social class. When I asked Ms. Moore about the amount of time she spends trying to socialize students into proper school behavior, she said:

Oh yeah, some of them have no clue… and that is a class thing. And, they’ve just been in situations, you know, I have one little guy who, the family is just, it really is very successful and has been for generations, and one day, he said, “oh yeah, we did that one day when we were at Greenbrier6. Well, you know, Greenbrier is very exclusive, you know, and how many of these kids have been there? And, this kid’s in first grade and he’s been there. It just made me laugh. So, a child that’s been in a place like that where you’ve got to, you know, have some social skills, of course he’s going to be ahead of someone who has never. And if you think about it, that’s a lot of it, just being exposed to it. Then, you know, if they can’t practice it at home… We teach them school behaviors and what’s appropriate, but outside of here, we really don’t have any control over teaching those behaviors (Moore 02/21/08 Interview: 6-8).

This displays the differential advantages of a student with significant cultural capital. It shows how social locations, and social experiences, form a frame of reference for students. In this case, advantageous cultural capital is something limited to this student from a higher-social class, and therefore this student is categorized into the “quality student” role.

When asked what approach she finds most useful in teaching students proper school behavior, Ms. Moore said:

6 Greenbrier is an exclusive five-star resort located in the mountains of West Virginia
I guess mostly it is a modeling thing... When it comes down to it, they just have to see somebody doing it. Doing what you want them to do. And you can call attention to that, well our little bee award program, that addresses that. Because they get an award if they're caught doing something good [like being kind, being a good friend, being respectful, etc.] (Moore 02/21/08 Interview: 8).

In this example, we can see how deficient student comportment, especially behavior, is understood as being shaped by social class and that Ms. Moore attempts to present in her own behaviors a model that will teach children the hidden curriculum, which in this case is appropriate school behavior. This modeling behavior is, for Ms. Moore, a component of socialization pattern number two. Ms. Moore hopes to model comportment that is privileged by the dominant set of cultural repertoires, therefore helping the “deficient student” learn behaviors that are essential for academic success.

In Mrs. Laredo’s classroom, the children are tracked into ability groups for their math and reading lessons. I observed differences in the social class indicators and student comportment of these two ability groups in my observations. I spent Thursday mornings in Mrs. Laredo’s classroom, and on Thursday mornings, Mrs. Laredo teaches the higher ability math group first while the lower ability group takes reading with the other fifth grade teacher. After the lesson, the groups switch and Mrs. Laredo teaches the lower ability math lesson. There were obvious differences between the two groups, but some of the most obvious differences were not the ability of the students but the differences in their behaviors and the references they made to their life experiences.
The lower ability group displayed less cooperative behavior and frequently had to be reminded to stay on task. For example, one day Mrs. Laredo was teaching a lesson on how to use a protractor to measure an angle. I was overseeing one table of six students. This is my description of the last ten minutes of the lesson:

The biggest issue was that Ian was sitting in the middle chair at the table. He paid absolutely no attention to the lesson, he just whacked the girl sitting next to him with a ruler. I told him to stop and as soon as I turned my back, he started whacking her with his ruler again. I was checking the next table back, where Nicholas sits, to make sure they all got the right answer and Karen, who sits across and catty-corner from Ian, began complaining that Ian was bugging her. She told me that he called her a “bloody scab”, he called her a “dork”, he called her a “dumby”, etc. Karen said “she can’t stand him, he’s a bully, he makes her want to pull her hair out”. And so on. It was SO fifth grade! The other girl who sits right next to Ian (Brianna), the one he kept whapping with his ruler, told me that she felt like she had a bug in her ear and that it was driving her nuts (01/24/08 Fieldnotes: 4)

Rather than listening to the lesson, or trying to work through the problems, these “deficient students” were engaged in their own drama that was completely unrelated to the school material. These lower-ability students displayed poor student comportment, bad behavior, and inattention to the lesson, thereby confirming their categorization as “deficient students” and in need of socialization pattern number two. Here, we can see that students who have been labeled as “deficient students” are tracked into the lower ability groups. It could even be argued that these older students (fifth grade), who have been unable to conform to the hidden curriculum favored by the dominant set of cultural repertoires, have “turned off from their education” (Snyder 1971: 4).
While participating in Mrs. Laredo’s classroom on my first day in the field, Mrs. Laredo introduced me to Nicholas. She told me that one of her goals for the year is to get Nicholas through the achievement tests. During the early morning, she:

Asked me if I could spend a little time with him helping him finish up his math homework for the week because he wasn’t getting any help with his homework at home. I spent about five minutes at his desk helping him finish the first of three pages of math homework…. [at the end of my time in the classroom that morning] Mrs. Laredo asked me if I could help Nicholas finish his homework while the other kids worked independently in class…I just encouraged Nicholas to work through the problems reminding him of the particular definitions that applied and using the knowledge that he already had. Nicholas told me that he really appreciated me helping him because his parents don’t understand it, so they won’t help him. I told him that I was glad I could help (01/17/08 Fieldnotes: 3-4).

In this example, Mrs. Laredo has labeled Nicholas as a “deficient student” because of a lack of parental involvement. Nicholas has been tracked into the lower ability group because of this deficiency. Mrs. Laredo has taken a special interest in trying to give Nicholas a little extra support, when it is available, to try to supplement this deficiency. In other words, Mrs. Laredo uses socialization pattern number two, and her agency as a teacher, to try to help supplement Nicholas’s education in hopes of helping him re-categorize as a “quality student”. Nicholas is still engaged in his education, and has not ‘turned off from his education’ (Snyder 1971). Mrs. Laredo, like Ms. Moore, does not believe that she is reproducing social inequalities. She believes that the students enter the school system with differential advantages based upon their social location, and their family’s social location. Mrs. Laredo believes that her role is to try to help
close the gap between the students who are labeled “quality students” and those who have been labeled “deficient students”.

The data in this analysis show that the teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary School actively use tangible and intangible social class indicators such as clothing, student comportment, knowledge of family struggles, and level of parental involvement, to help them understand the social class of their students. The participating teachers use these performative symbols of social class to help them interpret their student’s social class. They use these interpretations to categorize most higher-class students into the “quality student” role and most lower-class students into the “deficient student” role. “Quality students” are typically tracked into socialization pattern number one, which primarily focuses upon learning the formal curriculum. “Deficient students” are typically tracked into socialization pattern number two where they are taught components of the hidden curriculum that focus upon the cultural repertoires favored by the school system, such as having a good academic work ethic, problem solving, and being considerate of others, as well as the formal curriculum. This data demonstrates the role the participating teachers play in the reproduction process. However, the participating teachers themselves believe that the students enter the school system already unequal and that they as teachers are trying to use these different socialization patterns to try to minimize the pre-existing inequalities of the student.
The teachers I interviewed openly discussed with me the differential advantages that students already have when they enter the school system. For example, when discussing the increased focus upon standardized tests, Mrs. Mangrove noted that this approach fails to recognize existing problems and puts all of the ownership onto the teachers. She said, “Instead of really looking at what the issues are, why these children are failing. ‘Cause it doesn’t matter, if the child has the background at home that’s not conducive to learning or college isn’t a good idea or even if school isn’t valued, it’s just not going to, it’s just not going to make a difference” (Mangrove 12/03/07 Interview: 10). Mrs. Mangrove is noting that some students enter the education system already ahead and other students enter the education system already behind. Mrs. Mangrove is addressing the fact that the current regulations, and teacher accountability policy, does not consider the existing inequalities, nor make any effort to address the underlying inequalities, when measuring teacher accountability.

Similarly, Mrs. Culver notes that some students enter the school system already ahead, and some enter the school system already behind. She said:

And, a child who starts in kindergarten, and is two or three behind a child who has had some home, a better home life with more experiences, um, it is very, very difficult for that child ever to catch up. So, basically they’re going to be behind or struggle every year. All the time, because they’ve missed out on so many things before. And then if they’re in that same cycle, same situation, same home life, they’re not going to ever have additional things added to it as they get older, either (Culver 12/13/07 interview: 18).

Mrs. Culver explains that it is very difficult for the school system, or the teachers within the school system, to end inequalities that the student entered the school
system already possessing. In other words, students enter the school system already differentially advantaged. The school system, and the teachers within the school system, will always have to struggle if they hope to minimize those pre-existing inequalities.

In addition, Ms. Moore mentioned differential advantages that students face. Ms. Moore notes that:

It's just that, we would just like for kids to have, all kids to have, this identical childhood, and it's just not, it's not that way. And they're going to continue to have more and more pressure put on them to test and to meet this um, benchmark that some people can't meet. They're just not capable. And so, there's this, there's always going to be this carrot, and they can't get it, and I don't care what they say about "No Child Left Behind", somebody is going to get left behind, it's just not realistic (Moore 12/11/07 Interview: 20).

Ms. Moore acknowledges that there is no way for the education system, or the teachers within the system, to knock down all barriers that children face.

The teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary School view students as entering the school system differentially advantaged because of their family’s social status, or their family’s social location, rather than as a result of school processes such as labeling, tracking, or the hidden curriculum. In other words, teachers do not believe they are reproducing social inequalities. The teachers believe that their role is to try to help close the gap between the pre-existing social inequalities.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This study was initially designed to try to understand how the teachers in a historically rural, but increasingly exurban, school managed to maneuver through social class diversity within the classroom, and how their perceptions of their students influenced their teaching methods. As the data collection process took place, and especially after I entered the field, the scope of my research changed as my understanding of the situation changed. I began to wonder how the teachers I interviewed understood the social class of their students through face-to-face interaction. I wondered whether this rural school is reproducing social class inequalities. I wondered, if this rural school is producing social inequalities, how the reproduction process takes place. I wondered what role the teachers play in the reproduction process. I asked myself these questions as I transitioned from data collection into data analysis.

I found that the teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary School use tangible and intangible indicators of social class to understand the social class of their students and that they use these performative symbols of social class to categorize their students into either a “quality student” role or a “deficient student” role. Once their students are categorized into the “quality student” role, they typically experience socialization pattern number one, which focuses upon learning the formal curriculum. “Deficient students” are usually tracked into socialization pattern number two where they are taught the hidden curriculum that focuses upon the cultural repertoires favored by the school
system, such as having a good academic work ethic, problem solving, and being considerate of others, as well as the formal curriculum. Participating teachers view socialization pattern number two as a necessary foundation for academic success, even if it means that students in socialization pattern number two do not receive the same level of formal instruction. They believe that socialization pattern number two provides a foundation that can be built upon later with an increased focus upon the formal curriculum at a subsequent time in their academic career.

The teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary School view students as entering the school system differentially advantaged because of their family’s social status, or their family’s social location, rather than as a result of school processes such as labeling, tracking, or the hidden curriculum. In other words, participating teachers do not believe they are reproducing social inequalities. The teachers I interviewed believe that their role is to try to help close the gap between the “quality student” and the “deficient student”, which they view as categories based upon pre-existing social inequalities.

Although the teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary School believe that they are doing their best to close the gap between pre-existing social inequalities, they are reproducing social inequalities by utilizing these two divergent socialization patterns. Participating teachers play an active role in this process by categorizing students into either the “quality student” role or the “deficient student” role. Students who are categorized into the “quality student”
role are primarily perceived as having higher academic ability, are tracked into
the more advanced learning groups, and receive an increased focus upon the
formal curriculum, resulting in advantages for the “quality student”.

Students who are categorized into the “deficient student” role are primarily
perceived as having deficient student comportment, deficient behaviors, and
deficient social skills. Participating teachers believe that the only way these
students will experience academic success is to teach them the dominant set of
cultural repertoires, which will help these “deficient students” learn proper student
comportment, proper school behaviors, and proper social skills. Participating
teachers believe that without these skills, students will not succeed in a school
system where student success is increasingly measured singularly—as a student
who is a good test taker.

I would like to note that there is a level of subjectivity in all social research,
particularly qualitative social research. This subjectivity is due to the nature of
the research: qualitative research relies on volunteers. During my initial contact
with the teachers, I introduced my research to all of the teachers at Mountain
Trails Elementary School, and I had six out of seventeen teachers volunteer to
interview with me, as well as the school counselor. As noted in Chapter Three,
all of these teachers have many years of experience. By the nature of qualitative
research, it is possible that the teachers who volunteered for this project are
special and different in some ways from the other teachers at Mountain Trails
Elementary School. Therefore, it is important to reiterate that these research
findings are specific to the teachers who were involved in the process and it is not an overarching generalization about teachers in general.

Most research on economically disadvantaged schools has focused upon poor, urban school districts. By studying an economically disadvantaged rural school, this research seeks to uncover the reproduction process in such a school. Researching a rural school adds an additional component to our understanding of the reproduction process by focusing on a school with a very different demographic. Additionally, Mountain Trails Elementary School, and other rural schools, provide a unique demographic which may include significant variance between the lower social class and the higher social class that is unlikely to be found in an economically disadvantaged urban school. This variance puts the teachers in an economically disadvantaged rural school in the unique position of having to teach children from different social class backgrounds. Understanding how teachers manage this process at a micro-level, through their interpretation of the performative display of social class symbols of their students, and through face-to-face interaction with their students, brings us a new understanding of how classroom dynamics work in a rural school.

Research on reproduction theory has predominantly focused upon the ways that social inequalities are reproduced in a covert or hidden manner. In understanding reproduction theory, teachers have typically been viewed as unknowing instruments of the reproduction process who blindly serve as
oppressive agents within the process. This research seeks to uncover the active role that teachers play in the reproduction process through face-to-face interaction with students. Although the teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary School believe that they are doing their best to close the gap between pre-existing social inequalities, I find that they are still playing a part in the reproduction process by utilizing two divergent socialization patterns.

Although I conclude that the teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary School are playing an active role in the reproduction process by utilizing two divergent socialization patterns, I am not convinced that this reproduction process is increasing pre-existing social inequalities. There are several possibilities: participating teachers may be increasing the social inequalities that pre-exist the student’s entrance into the school system, participating teachers may be decreasing the social inequalities that pre-exist the student’s entrance into the school system, or participating teachers may be neither increasing nor decreasing the social inequalities that pre-exist the student’s entrance into the school system.

I particularly question whether the teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary School might actually be decreasing the social inequalities that pre-exist the student’s entrance into the school system for several reasons. First, I believe that these teachers truly care about their students and that they try their best to provide them with the best education that they can. As noted in Chapter Three, Mountain Trails Elementary School rated an “Excellent” ranking from the
Ohio Department of Education (2007c) during the 2006-2007 school year, it reached all 10 of the required State Indicators, it received 105.8 out of 120 possible points on the “Performance Index Score”, and it has shown a steady rate of increase during each of the last three school years. The overall percentage of students at and above the proficient level at Mountain Trails Elementary School who are not economically disadvantaged was 99. The overall percentage of students at and above the proficient level at Mountain Trails Elementary School who are economically disadvantaged was 80. The state requires that 75 percent be at or above the proficient level. Looking at these statistics, we can see that the economically advantaged are achieving at a higher rate than the economically disadvantaged, but that Mountain Trails Elementary School is exceeding the state requirements in both categories. Therefore, I speculate that the teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary School are doing something right. This speculation leads to more questions.

This research leads to certain policy implications. The most crucial policy implication that I find from this research is the importance of increasing early childhood education opportunities. Increasing access to school-based pre-school for children three years and older would help close the gap in ability for children entering kindergarten. If economically disadvantaged children could gain access to the things they lack as they enter kindergarten, such as knowing their alphabet, knowing how to count, access to books, and a stable daily routine that includes academic learning, pre-existing inequalities could be reduced. I
believe that all children, particularly economically disadvantaged children, need access to this type of early learning opportunity.

This research, and specifically the questions that it does not address, provide implications for further research. A longitudinal study of an age cohort at Mountain Trails Elementary School, or another rural, or otherwise economically disadvantaged school, is one avenue of further research that might provide additional data. Another avenue of research that is intriguing would be to study whether or not the teachers at Mountain Trails Elementary School are increasing or decreasing the social inequalities that pre-exist the student’s entrance into the school system.

In their article, “Are Schools the Great Equalizer? Cognitive Inequality during the Summer Months and the School Year” Downey, von Hippel, and Broh (2004) used seasonal comparison research to show that non-school factors such as family and neighborhood are the main source of inequality, rather than the school system. They argue that there is some common ground between reproduction theory (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) and the notion that schools are the “great equalizer” (Mann 1848). They argue that, “Even if schools are unfair, they may serve as equalizers if the variation in school environments is smaller than the variation in non-school environments” (Downey, von Hippel, and Broh 2004: 613). They attempt to prove this argument by using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten Cohort of 1988-89 (Rock and Pollack 2002) to consider how socioeconomic and racial/ethnic gaps in skills
change when school is in session versus when it is not" (Downey, von Hippel, and Broh 2004: 613). In other words, they speculate that social location is the main source of social inequality, rather than the school system. I believe it would be interesting to do something similar—to use seasonal comparison research in this, or another rural or otherwise economically disadvantaged school, to determine whether teachers are reproducing social inequalities, exacerbating social inequalities, or decreasing social inequalities. This could be accomplished by collecting data on student cognitive ability in spring, at the end of the school year, and then collecting data again at the beginning of the next school year for (at least) two years in a row. This method would measure cognitive gains during the school year when teachers have the most influence, against cognitive gains during the summer months when teachers have no influence over students, and the student is influenced only by non-school factors such as family or neighborhood.

In conclusion, I found that the teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary School actively use tangible and intangible indicators of social class to categorize their students into either “quality student” roles or “deficient student” roles. The teachers I interviewed at Mountain Trails Elementary School use their human agency to sort most of their “quality students” into socialization pattern number one and most of their “deficient students” into socialization pattern number two. This leads to the conclusion that the participating teachers at Mountain Trails Elementary School are reproducing social inequalities. Yet, this
conclusion leaves me with additional questions, because I do not feel that these data tell the whole story. I agree with the teachers I interviewed that a student’s social location at birth, and upon entrance into the school system, largely shapes his or her potential for academic success. I have difficulty stating that teachers reproduce existing social inequalities when they are consciously trying so hard to minimize the existing inequalities within the constraints of the school systems regulations and the existing social inequalities facing the students. Within the scope of this research, however, that is the conclusion I have reached.
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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Teacher Perception of Social Class and Parental Involvement in Rural, and Increasingly Exurban, Education

Principal Investigator: Molly B. Bukky, Graduate Student, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Ohio University

You have been invited to participate in a study about rural elementary schools. Historically, rural students have achieved at a lower level than their nonrural counterparts, and I believe that there are a number of contributing factors to this phenomenon. Many things about rural life are different from nonrural life, including the family situations, family work options, diverse social classes, and teacher resources. With this research, I hope to be able to begin to understand how teachers in rural elementary schools navigate the intricacies of their job? Specifically, how do they manage the teaching of children from various social classes, family backgrounds, parental educational attainment, and level of parental involvement?

The interviews will last approximately one hour, and will be audio-taped. Most of the questions should be easy to answer, involving topics such as your general background, your perception of students, your experiences teaching, and your perceptions of the school community. Most interviews can be arranged during your break time, or otherwise at your convenience.

All information gathered from you will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will be changed to protect confidentiality after the interviews are transcribed. Information gathered from this study may be used in scholarly publications and presentations. However, such write-ups will not reveal the identities of participants.

Your decision to give permission is entirely voluntary, and will not influence your present or future relationships with this school or Ohio University. You are free to stop participation at any time, and withdrawal would in no way affect your job or relationships at the school. If you have any concerns regarding this project, please contact Molly B. Bukky at 740-597-2759, or mb203595@ohio.edu or Dr. Edward Morris at 740-590-1529 or morrise@ohio.edu. If you have any additional questions, you may contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, 740-593-0664.

I certify that I have read and understand this consent form, and agree to participate as a subject in the research described. I agree that the known risks to me have been explained to my satisfaction. Further, I understand that no compensation is available from Ohio University and its employees for any injury resulting from participation in this research. Finally, I certify that my participation in this research is given voluntarily and I understand that I may discontinue.
participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which I may otherwise be entitled.

My signature below means that I have freely agreed take part in this project.

_____________________________________________  _________________________
Signature                                                        Date
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your race?
2. What is your gender?
3. What did your parents do for a living?
4. What was the highest level of education your parents attained?
5. Did you grow up in the Hocking County area?
6. If not, where did you grow up?
7. Where did you attend college?
8. How long have you been a teacher?
9. Tell me a little bit about Union Furnace.
10. How would you describe this school?
11. Tell me a little bit about your job.
12. How long have you been teaching at this school?
13. What one thing would you change about your job if you could?
14. What is your favorite thing about Hocking County?
15. What would you change about living Hocking County, if you could?
16. What are some of the challenges that your students face?
17. What are some of the challenges faced by your student’s families?
18. Do you perceive any social class differences between your students?
19. Do your students perceive any social class differences among themselves?
20. Do you feel that social class differences between the children affect the child’s school readiness?
21. Do you notice any differences between the children’s parents?

22. Do you believe that these differences are a result of social class or something else?

23. Tell me what you believe is a parents responsibility to their child’s school performance.

24. Do you think that parents would answer this differently?

25. How would you define a “good” parent?

26. Have you found that some parents have different ideas than you about what parental responsibilities should be?

27. What is your favorite thing about teaching at Union Furnace?

28. What is your favorite thing about being a teacher?
APPENDIX C: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Follow-up Interview Questions:

1. Do you have access to quantitative information about a student’s socio-economic status…for example, do you know which kids are on free/reduced lunch?

2. What kind of things do you look for to help you figure out the social class of a student? What are the (what I would call) social class indicators that you use to place a student into a social class?

3. What exactly is proper school behavior?

4. What are some of the strategies that you use to try to get students to comply to this proper school behavior?

5. Do you have more behavioral problems with boys or girls?

6. Do behavioral problems translate into academic problems?

7. How do you deal with behavioral problems?

8. How would you define a “quality student” or “quality student engagement”?
APPENDIX D: CLASSROOM PLEDGE

I pledge today to do my best,
In reading math and all the rest.
I promise to obey the rules,
In my class and in the school.
I will respect myself and others, too.
I will expect the best in all I do.
I am here to learn all I can,
To try my best and be all I am.7

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