

DOING WELL IN SCHOOL:  
REPERTOIRES OF SUCCESS AT THE END OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **DOING WELL IN SCHOOL: REPERTOIRES OF SUCCESS AT THE END OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

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In spite of over a decade of U.S. school reform emphasizing test preparation and performance, students from minoritized backgrounds continue to underachieve on standardized testing. With an abundance of research on the achievement gap, we are now more than ever aware of this problem. But to avoid reproducing longstanding school inequities, testing practices and achievement measures need rethinking. This dissertation does this by investigating how, in a recently established Mexican immigrant community in Pennsylvania, children from Mexican immigrant and African American backgrounds negotiated the heavy emphasis on high-stakes testing in their final year of elementary school. Based on long-term, collaborative ethnographic research, my dissertation builds on scholarship in the linguistic anthropology of education to investigate how children communicated with each other and their teachers about doing well in school where what counted as success were scores of “advanced” or “proficient” on the annual State Standardized Assessment. The data in my dissertation revealed a number of negative consequences of the use of scripted, test-oriented curricula. For example, children who

were consistently positioned as low performers began to develop oppositional stances towards schooling and to position themselves as choosing not to be smart. In addition, many children came equate doing well in school with simply passing the test, expressed increasing dislike of school-based reading and writing, and did what they had to do to “get by.” However, when given the opportunity to engage in collaborative sense- and self-making, they were able to challenge the ways they were positioned according to their test performance and showed deep engagement in learning. I argue for closer attention to the effects of school based reform efforts and accountability measures at the elementary school level by drawing on children’s underrepresented perspectives. Doing so will point the way to utilizing their communicative practices for increased school engagement and performance, as well as more equitable assessments of achievement. Without better understanding of these phenomena as children approach middle school, schools risks further reifying the schooling inequities reform efforts seek to remedy.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

We – the third graders and I – were well prepared for the arrival of the school evaluation team with their clipboards and checklists. Lesson objectives and standards lined the bulletin board and children, if asked by evaluators, were ready to explain the reading comprehension strategy of the week. When I heard the evaluators had arrived in the building, I tried to remain calm and reminded the children to do so as I started my mini-lesson. When the classroom door finally opened, it did so as if in slow motion, the creaking sound of the door matched by the collective gasp of the class acknowledging the arrival of the team. I don't remember exactly what happened that day back in 2004 except that the group with clipboards didn't stay for more than a few minutes and everything went fine. What I do remember was the feeling of being under a microscope, the sense of dread that this provoked, and how I passed this feeling along to my students. I also remember how, several years later as testing coordinator at this same school, a two-way (90-10) immersion program in California with many Spanish-dominant students: an increasing pressure to teach to the test, the push for packaged, scripted curricula, the increased surveillance and regulation of teachers, and in turn, the increased surveillance and regulation of children.

Four years later I found myself across the country back in the classroom, this time as an ethnographer-in-training in a kindergarten classroom at an English-only school with a population of students similar to those of the schools where I had taught in California. For the next four years as I followed a group of children, initially a group from Mexican

immigrant backgrounds and then a mixed group of students from mostly Mexican immigrant and African American backgrounds, I was reminded of my own teaching experiences and the challenges I had faced after the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2002. Much like in the schools where I had taught, in the early years at this school I refer to as Grant Elementary, teachers had some degree of freedom in planning and implementing much of the curricula. However by the time children reached third grade, testing preparation took precedence as a new district administration provided mandated, scripted curricula that teachers were required to use. These changes were linked to school reform efforts designed to close the “achievement gap” between white, middle-class children and their peers from minoritized backgrounds who attended Title I schools like Grant and the schools where I had taught with high percentages of low-income students.

During my time in Grant’s third grade classrooms, I saw less of the peer collaboration I had documented in earlier grades as teachers attempted to foster students’ development of what they referred to as “more independent work habits” (e.g. doing one’s own work in class without conferring with or talking to classmates, being responsible for turning in one’s homework, keeping track of one’s assignment and progress in different subject areas) in order to prepare for testing, which began in third grade. In keeping with the emphasis on independent work, children began to hide their work from tablemates, often refusing to help each other on academic tasks. Those who always knew the “correct” answers came to be referred to as “the smart kids.” In contrast, students who were labeled at school as “low performing” in reading and/or math began to describe themselves as “not smart anymore,” “different”, and deciding “not to get straight As.” I became interested in examining more deeply how these children were responding

to schooling practices around being a good/successful/“normal” student and how, in light of these practices and through these responses, they were developing accounts about what it meant to do well in school, and positioning themselves and others as certain kinds of students.

My interest in examining these issues stemmed from my own experience as a third grade teacher, and how, in spite of wanting to better understand how the heavy emphasis on testing and test preparation informed children’s school engagement, I had not found the time or space in which to do so. My interest also was rooted in the relationships I’d developed with children at Grant and their families over the course of their participation in the research projects. Through time spent in homes and classrooms, acting not just as researcher, but as school liaison, interpreter and advocate for a number of the families who participated in my research, I had grown close to some of the focal students’ older siblings. I saw how once they entered middle school, children who had been model students in elementary school, either or both academically and behaviorally, began to disengage from many aspects of school, often reporting how much they hated many of their classes and refusing to comply with school requirements such as daily homework.

My concerns about these older students’ educational trajectories became concerns for their younger siblings who were on the verge of entering middle school and how their classification based on test performance led them to position themselves and be positioned as being successful in school (or not). Moreover, I wanted to better understand how, in a context of high-stakes testing, children developed accounts of what it meant to do well in school or to be a successful student. These concerns motivated a year of pilot

research when children were in third grade, and then a year of dissertation research once they had reached fourth grade, their final year of elementary school.

### **Chapter Outlines**

In Chapter 2, I discuss how my dissertation builds on scholarship in the following areas of research: school performance and the re-invigoration of deficit perspectives on difference, the communicative practices of young people, and constructions of school success and failure in the anthropology of education. I then describe how I draw specifically from the linguistic anthropology of education, using a *repertoire approach* (Rymes, 2011) to investigate how children responded to the heavy emphasis on testing and communicated with each other and their teachers about doing well in school in a context of high-stakes testing where what counted as success were scores of “advanced” or “proficient” on the annual State Standardized Assessment. I discuss how teachers and children used these markers in routine classroom interactions and how they formed what I refer to as *repertoires of success*, or the collection of signs teachers used to signal to students what it meant to do well in school and those the children used to index successful school performance. I situate and examine teachers’ and children’s repertoires of success within and through a Foucauldian lens, looking at 1) how the system of education at Grant operated through managerialism, a mechanism of power underlying the teaching and learning practices in fourth grade, and 2) the consequences of power relations that guided and were shaped by talk about testing. I then lay out my specific research questions.

In the third chapter I present the setting(s) and methods for this ethnographic study. In describing the community where I conducted my research, I touch upon how I

navigated and troubled my role as a white, middle-class researcher conducting research in the schools and homes of children who were minoritized based on their racial, ethnic, immigrant, and/or socio-economic status. I present in detail the town I refer to as Marshall, the school and classrooms where I visited teachers and students, and finally the focal students and teachers who participated in my research. I then discuss the ethnographic, discourse analytic, and collaborative methods I employed to investigate my research questions, and to collect and make sense of the large body of data I amassed during children's final two years of elementary school.

In the fourth chapter I focus on fourth grade teachers' repertoires of success, situating them within the managerialist system of teaching and learning at Grant and examining how teachers deployed these repertoires in routine interactions with children. I look closely at test scores, and other markers teachers used, to signal and interpreted as signaling doing well in school, as well as at the practices that accompanied their communication with students about being successful students. I examine discrete events, patterns of interaction both moment-by-moment and over time, and teachers' comments about the kinds of students Grant fourth graders were and could be. In this way, I illustrate how, through teachers' deployment of their repertoires of success, children were positioned as certain kinds of students in their final year of elementary school. I emphasize how regardless of their concerns about the heavy emphasis on standardized testing teachers, too, were caught up in a managerialist system in which they were under constant surveillance and were severely limited in what and how they could teach.

In Chapter 5, I focus on how children responded to teachers' repertoires of success and developed their own accounts of doing well in school that overlapped to

varying degrees with those of their teachers. In particular I investigate how children took up and deployed different markers of success like test scores in their interactions with teachers and each other. I look closely at how, in the process of taking up and deploying these markers in different participation frameworks, children positioned themselves and others as doing well in school (or not). I examine the creative and sometimes unexpected ways children deployed markers of success, and how power relations and technologies, or techniques, of power were both shaped and enacted through this deployment in daily classroom interactions between teachers and students, and among students. In addition I show how children whose repertoires overlapped with those of their teachers were positioned and able to position themselves as embodying or approaching what I refer to as an ideal schooled subject, an autonomous rational individual responsible for regulating oneself. I end this chapter by discussing how children's deployment of their repertoires of success and their resulting positioning and regulation resulted in dismaying consequences linked to the managerialist system of schooling at Grant.

In the sixth chapter I describe how the fact that I rarely saw children engage in sustained talk with each other outside of lunch and recess due to the fact that they had to sit and work silently for most of the school day, I decided to seek out an alternative space where I could observe children interacting and interact with them more freely. I did this at the local public library, meeting with children each Friday after school over the course of their fourth grade school year. I discuss these meetings and how what took place each week provided methodological rich points (Hornberger, 2013) that pushed me to modify my methods as well as the meetings over the course of the school year based on



children's interests and feedback. In this chapter I explore how and when I elicited children's talk about school and about doing well in school, and how and when children approached this topic. I also examine how children came to tell, craft and dramatize personal narratives and other stories, as well as the role-play and dramatizations they chose to develop and perform. Throughout this chapter, I look carefully at when and how children deployed signs indexing success and how these signs overlapped, not just with teachers' repertoires of success, but from the ways that children themselves signaled success in the classroom. I look closely at how through the deployment of these signs, children positioned themselves and others as certain kinds of students, and more generally as certain kinds of people. I argue that better recognition and understanding of, and explicit attention to these phenomena are critical for finding ways to keep children engaged and interested in school as they prepare to enter middle school.

In the final chapter I discuss how I have used a repertoire approach to address my concerns about school performance and engagement for children from minoritized backgrounds in a context of high stakes testing, focusing on the signs children drew on in their interactions with their teachers, each other, and me to position themselves as doing well (or not) in school. I also discuss how I have used a Foucauldian lens to make visible the power relations shaping and shaped by these interactions. After highlighting several key themes that have emerged in my study, I then discuss theoretical and practical implications of my research. I conclude by discussing how these themes and implications have motivated the development of an agenda for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Conceptual Frameworks**

### **Background Literature**

My dissertation builds on scholarship in the following areas of research: school performance and the re-invigoration of deficit perspectives on difference, the communicative practices of young people, and constructions of school success and failure in the anthropology of education. In what follows I discuss how much of the research on school performance, and in particular, on disparities in testing performance and the achievement gap, tends to either re-invigorate deficit understandings of difference or promote the idea that disparities in school performance is due to cultural mismatch or difference between the dominant (white, middle class) norms and those of minoritized groups. As research in this vein often focuses on differences (or deficits) between home and school language practices, I also build on research exploring the communicative practices of young people, practices that often go unnoticed by educators, and practices not only through which young people are socialized into the dominant norms of school and society, but also through which they resist, appropriate and transform these norms. And finally, many anthropologists of education critique schooling practices that emphasize individualized performance on standardized tests and that sort and classify students based on this performance. They argue that such notions of school success and failure are cultural constructions that offer little about students' capabilities and potential. I explore how these critiques might be applicable in my own research.

## **School Performance and the Re-invigoration of Deficit Perspectives on Difference**

Since the passage of NCLB in 2001 the “achievement gap” has become a key term in discourse surrounding education policy and in defining the landscape of public school education in the United States. The use of this term, however, can be traced back almost 50 years to the publication of the Coleman Report (1966), a study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education that documented disparities in performance on educational measures such as standardized tests between groups of students based on race/ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status. While this report supported arguments for school desegregation, it also bolstered cultural deficit discourses that portrayed “low-achieving” children of low socio-economic status and minority backgrounds as lacking in the cognitive, motivational and linguistic skills necessary for academic success (Foley, Levinson & Hurtig, 2000-2001).

Research conducted from this deficit approach promoted theories of cultural deprivation, disadvantage, and deficit (e.g., Deutsch, 1967; Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966) and claimed that non-mainstream students (often low-income African-Americans) were socialized in home environments that failed to stimulate intellectual development. Since the publication of the Coleman Report, much educational research on disparities in testing performance has focused on countering deficit models of understanding differential school performance based on assumptions that children from minoritized backgrounds have little or no useful home resources or skills from which to draw on for success in schools. Flores (2012) argues, however, that research on bilingual education conducted from this perspective oftentimes reproduces the same deficit discourse through constructs that universalize language practices of the white mainstream norm.

In the 1970s educational researchers drew on Marxist perspectives, emphasizing how schools in capitalist societies reproduce structures of inequality (e.g., Young, 1971; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Apple, 1979; see also, Foley, Levinson & Hurtig, 2000-2001). Ensuing scholarship pointed out the overly deterministic nature of this Marxist critique and expanded on notions of social reproduction by addressing issues of culture and ethnicity inherent in deficit theory. For example, Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) and Willis (1981) demonstrated "that the academic failure of poor students has more to do with institutional bias or a mismatch between the culture of the school and the class culture of the students than inherent cultural and linguistic deficiencies" (Foley, Levinson & Hurtig, 2000-2001, p. 45). Ogbu (1981) focused more directly on issues of race and ethnicity (rather than social class) in school performance in his distinction between "voluntary" and "involuntary" immigrant minorities of color, arguing that minorities of color forcibly brought to the US or colonized by the US ("caste-like minorities") often develop collective oppositional stances toward schooling and lack motivation to achieve in school. While both Ogbu (1981) and Willis (1981) have been critiqued as being overly deterministic, their work is useful for my research as they emphasize how young people actively interpret and respond to schooling practices and thus, the part they play in constructing their own "success" or "failure".

A substantial body of work by sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists conducted from this mismatch or difference approach beginning in the late 1960s examined the language and literacy practices of minoritized students to better understand (and counter deficit explanations of) differential school performance. For example, Labov (1969) found that working-class African American English (AAE) speakers have an

elaborate language code,<sup>2</sup> but one with different rules than Standard Academic English (SAE) and realized in different social contexts (typically not in schools). Heath (1983) illustrated how nonmainstream students' underperformance was related to the lack of acknowledgement and undervaluation of their home language and literacy practices. The 1996 Ebonics controversy in Oakland (discussed by Perry & Delpit, 1998) showed how public opinion and mainstream views frame African American students' home languages and literacy practices as deficient and incompatible with school curricula. More recently, Perry, Still and Hilliard (2003) describe how African American children continue to be positioned by their teachers as lacking in vocabulary development and in need of remediation (see also Murrell, 2007). While such scholarship informs my work, I attempt to move beyond mismatch and deficit theories of education by searching for overlap in how children and teachers talk about and interact around doing well in school and how to build on it for more successful school experiences.

While the above research focuses on African American students, there are a number of studies highlighting how Latino students' language and literacy practices tend to be positioned in relation to the mainstream. In a case study on social exchange and cultural emergence for U.S.-Mexicans, Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992), found that in contrast to assumptions that this population lacks literacy resources in the home, children's literacy development in school was "fractured" due to the forced shift from

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<sup>2</sup> In a study on parent-child interactions in the UK, Bernstein (1971) concluded that [White] middle-class families used an *elaborate code* and families of lower socioeconomic status, a *restricted code*. This study highlighted language as a key factor in socialization and language differences as correlated with social class. While Bernstein's work showed that language differences, rather than inherent deficiencies, could account for differential school performance, many used this study to support deficit understandings of cultural diversity. Still others have argued that because of methodological, terminological and theoretical issues, his work fits into the deficit paradigm.

Spanish (in the home) to English (in school) reading and. Valdés (1996) and Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) show how underachievement in school for Latinos is often equated with shortcomings in their home culture. Research in this vein has also highlighted how prevailing attitudes in the current context of U.S. immigration play into understanding language diversity and difference for all Latino students, regardless of whether they were born in or immigrated to the US, and especially when they use Spanish at home. Rather than viewed as asset to be drawn upon in the classroom, students' home language practices are constructed as problems to be fixed by replacing them with SAE (Hurtado, Cervantez & Eccleston, 2010). Arzubiaga and Adair (2010) point out that although deficit assumptions have been disproven, they continue to inform how educational research frames studies of Latinos and education (see also, Arzubiaga, Artiles, King & Murri, 2008; Murillo, Jr., Villenas, Galván, Sánchez Muñoz, Martinez & Machado-Casas, 2010).

In spite of the large body of scholarship countering claims about home language and literacy practices different from those of White, middle class students as inadequate or impoverished, many argue that accountability measures such as high-stakes testing under NCLB have reinvigorated deficit-oriented ways of understanding differential school performance (e.g., Contreras, 2010; Gibson, Gándara, & Peterson Koyama, 2004; McDermott, Raley & Seyer-Ochi, 2009). Moreover, Murell (2007) points out that much research on underachievement assumes minoritized students "fail" because they reject or devalue education. I work against these tendencies and recognize that while students may disengage from different schooling practices, they value school and have strong educational aspirations (ibid; cf. Carter, 2005). My dissertation is informed by the above

and, more specifically, ethnographic research on connections between schooling practices, social identification, and achievement for African American and Latino students (e.g., Carter, 2005; Flores-González, 2002; Wortham, 2006). Such research shows that underperformance is often a response to racially stigmatizing practices and discourses students encounter at school and suggests that one-dimensional assumptions about minoritized students' abilities and aptitudes are embedded in accounts of success (or failure). Research in this vein also highlights how peer interactions shape school engagement and achievement. However, there is little intergroup research on these issues at the elementary level for African American and Latino students.<sup>3</sup>

### **Communicative Practices of Young People**

My research also builds on ethnographies of schooling from sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological perspectives on, for example, U.S. high school students' social identification in terms of social categories (Eckert, 1989) and on the language practices of multiracial urban high-schoolers in the UK (Rampton, 1995). This pivotal research on how the communicative practices of youth inform processes of social identification has been followed by a growing body of research in the areas of socio- and applied linguistics, linguistic ethnography, and linguistic anthropology investigating young peoples' rich and complex communicative practices and educational trajectories, especially those of students who are minoritized based on their racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and/or class backgrounds, and exploring how to build on these practices for more successful school experiences (Alim, 2004; Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Hill, 2009;

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<sup>3</sup> For an exception, see Rymes and Anderson (2004) on the interactional dynamics of classrooms in which Spanish and AAE are spoken.

Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Orellana, Martinez, Lee & Montaña, 2012; Paris, 2011; Rymes, 2001). For example, Blackledge and Creese (2010) document how multilingual children carve out space in the classroom for their voices to be heard and challenge “the notion that monolingualism in English is a desired or natural state” (p. 7).

Paris (2011), follows Rampton (1995) in highlighting young people’s linguistic dexterity as seen, for example, in their language sharing (or in Rampton’s terms, *crossing*), showing how this dexterity might be used to expand visions of language, literacy and difference in educational contexts. And by documenting a curricular program designed to expand students’ repertoires of linguistic practice, Orellana et al. (2012) challenge simplistic understandings of the relationship between “home” and “school” languages. This body of research highlights the communicative practices of young people that often go unnoticed by educators, showing how they contribute to students’ socialization into institutional discourses and practices, and thus, into the values of the dominant linguistic, cultural and social norms. Importantly, these scholars document the resistance, appropriation and transformation of these norms and how these responses and dynamic practices contribute to identity-formation and available educational pathways. Less is known, however, about these processes at the primary school level.<sup>4</sup>

### **Constructions of School Success and Failure in the Anthropology of Education**

Situated within the anthropology of education, my dissertation follows ethnographic research on the processes through which people are “formed in practice, within and against larger societal forces and structures which instantiate themselves in

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<sup>4</sup> For an exception, see Maybin (2006) who conducted a linguistic ethnography in the UK on White, working class 10-12 year olds' talk and literacy practices as they transitioned into adolescence.



schools and other institutions” (Levinson & Holland 1996, p. 14). From this vantage point, I work to understand how young people from minoritized backgrounds respond to public school practices in the US that emphasize individual performance on standardized tests and related assessments, and sort and classify students based on this performance. Many ethnographers of education critique these schooling practices, maintaining that notions of school success and failure linked to individual student performance are cultural constructions that offer little about students’ capabilities and potential, and focus attention away from the socio-historical, -political and material conditions that contribute to how students engage with schooling, as well as to how they are labeled and positioned (e.g., Erickson, 1987; Foley, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2006; McDermott & Varenne, 1995; McDermott, Goldman & Varenne, 2006; Pollock, 2008; Varenne & McDermott, 1998). They argue that schooling practices must be examined in light of the above-mentioned conditions and discuss how, over time and through daily interactions and routines, together they lead to myriad diagnoses of individual student (dis)ability and (in)competence (e.g., gifted and talented, learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, “low” or “high” in literacy or math skills, etc.), particularly for children from minoritized backgrounds.

Anthropologists of education also point out how processes of labeling and classification focus attention on the individual, which tends to result in holding students “individually responsible for their success in school” and blaming students for their supposed cultural inadequacies (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 106; see also, Varenne & McDermott, 1999; McDermott, Goldman & Varenne, 2006). Pollock (2008) discusses how this kind of response to student engagement and performance fails to account for

inequities in educational opportunities and outcomes, which are, in turn, connected to the culture of competition and hierarchy in U.S. schooling and more generally in the national economy (see also Erickson, 1987; Ferguson, 2001; Henry, 1963). The above scholarship is critical to my own research in the call to move beyond not just school-based notions of success and failure and the labels that accompany them, but also beyond the idea that individual students are solely responsible for how they fare in school. I do this by attending not just to how children talk about and orient to doing well in school, but also to the socio-historical, -political and material conditions of their lives.

One of the arguments I make throughout this dissertation is that while all public school students are subject to standardized testing and evaluated on their individual performance on standardized tests, in Title I schools like Grant Elementary where the majority of students are of color and from low-income backgrounds, they are subject to scripted, skills-based curricula geared towards testing, and constant surveillance and regulation. Thus the materials conditions of their school lives are markedly different than their counterparts in wealthier school districts whose schools are not beholden to the same kind of scrutiny and do not have to implement scripted curricula in order to secure funding. In the following section I begin with an illustration of what the implementation of a scripted curriculum looked like in Grant's fourth grade classrooms, and how it was tied to notions of success based on test scores. I then use this example to outline the conceptual framing of my dissertation.

### **Think Central is Down...**

#### **Excerpt 1**

One afternoon in November, Mrs. Learner had her fourth graders take out their *Go Math* workbooks, telling them she had something special planned but that first they

needed to do some math. After several attempts to open Go Math on the Smart Board, she announced, “Think Central [Houghton Mifflin Harcourt’s “integrated digital website”] is down, so let’s do the mid-chapter check point. Turn to page 39.” As she went over the instructions for the assessment, which entailed a fill-in-the-blank vocabulary section and a set of eight word problems involving long-division and -multiplication, children began to call out that it looked “too hard.” She replied that if they knew their multiplication tables, it wouldn’t be. She also reminded them, “this is not group work. You need to show what you know.” In response, Zac covered his worksheet with his hand and Edgar moved back his desk and put up a folder around his workbook. As children began the assessment, some continued to comment on how hard it was:

(A=Alejandro, Ch=Chantel, L=Mrs. Learner, J=Jewel, JO=Johnson, R=Roque, P=Princess, M=Melvin)<sup>5</sup>

1. **A:** I need H-E-L-P, **help**
2. **CH:** I don’t get this
3. **L:** This is harder than the SSA [State Standardized Assessment], so if you get
4. this you should fly on the SSA
5. **Ch:** (Singing under her breath) my mommy passed the SSAs, my
6. mommy passed the SSAs but I don’t get this
7. **J:** My eyes are burning...can someone read this for me
8. **JO:** This makes no sense
9. **R:** Is this subtraction
10. **P:** I don’t know...you can’t talk this is a test
11. **M:** This is hard
12. **CH:** I can’t do this

(videolog, 11/30/12)

The excerpt above illustrates a typical math class in Grant’s fourth grade, which followed Houghton Mifflin Harcourt’s Go Math program. Go Math was a mandated,

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<sup>5</sup> For transcription conventions, see Appendix A.

scripted curriculum, with a tightly scheduled sequence that prevented extra time on skills or concepts that were challenging for students. On some days, the math lessons were so scripted that teachers did not need to fully engage in teaching, instead setting up Think Central to run lessons in which a recorded voice replaced that of the teacher. In the example above when Think Central was “down,” Mrs. Learner opted for an assessment rather than to teach the lesson. Mrs. Learner and her colleagues had little choice about what and how they could teach as they were beholden to scripted, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt programs not just for math, but for literacy and social studies, and were continually monitored by the school principal, Ms. Chavez. The assessment in this instance, the mid-chapter checkpoint, like much of what went on in the fourth grade classrooms, was linked to performance on the SSA (State Standardized Assessment). In these classrooms, teachers’ communication about doing well in school revolved around the SSA, and being successful had come to mean “flying on the SSA.”

This focus on individual achievement was linked to the notion of an *ideal schooled subject*, an autonomous, rational thinker based on an Enlightenment model of the individual, a model I argue is linked to racializing ideologies about children of color. In this dissertation I examine not just how teachers communicated with students about doing well in school, but also how children responded to these messages and developed their own ways of communicating about school success with each other and with their teachers. Following Johnson’s comment that the assessment he and his peers were subject to made “no sense,” I argue that the systems and structures in place in Grant’s fourth grade classrooms were part of federal-level school reform efforts based on managerialist system of education that, while designed to better the school performance of students

from minoritized backgrounds, made little sense in practice.

To investigate teachers' and students' communicative practices around school success I draw from sociolinguistics and the linguistic anthropology of education. More specifically I track how students, in single interactions and over time, responded to teachers and developed their own ways of communicating about what it meant to do well in school that overlapped to varying degrees with the more normative or dominant account of success they were exposed to in their classrooms. I situate and examine these practices through a Foucauldian lens, exploring the power relations that both shaped and played out in how teachers and children communicated about success and in how children were continually positioned, and positioned themselves and others, as doing well (or not) in school.

Through this lens I also explore the different technologies, or techniques, of power, that guided and were enacted in routine teaching and learning practices and interwoven into communication around school success. In particular I examine how these technologies were part of a managerialist system of education that has guided U.S. education policy since the Progressive Era during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Mehta, 2013; see also, Hall, 2015). I argue that managerialism, akin to Foucault's (1979) notion of *management*, was in and of itself both an ideology and a technology of power that motivated and was motivated by related ideologies of school achievement and performance based on individual performance on standardized tests. I also posit that understanding how such Foucauldian power relations shaped and were shaped by classroom communication about doing well in school will add a critical lens to research on reform efforts that seek to boost the performance of students from minoritized

backgrounds.

### **Repertoires of Success**

To conceptualize teachers' and children's communicative practices around school success or doing well in school, I draw on scholarship in the linguistic anthropology of education and sociolinguistics. A key concept in these fields is Gumperz's notion of *verbal repertoire*, "the totality of linguistic forms regularly employed in the course of socially significant interaction" (1964, p. 137), which he conceptualized to address the many language varieties used in multilingual communities of India. As Rymes discusses, "this conceptualization makes it clear that all communities have a range of varieties that are functionally distinct and appropriate in different kinds of social events" (2010, p. 529). A recent elaboration of Gumperz's verbal repertoires is Rymes' notion of *communicative repertoires*, or "the collection of ways individuals use language and literacy and other means of communication (gesture, dress, posture, or accessories) to function effectively in the multiple communities in which they participate" (2010, p. 528). The concept of communicative repertoires is an extension of Gumperz's work in its emphasis on the range of communicative (linguistic, paralinguistic and non-linguistic) resources deployed by individuals rather than those of a particular community of speakers (cf. Hymes, 1980).

In Excerpt 1, although Mrs. Learner's comment that the mid-chapter checkpoint was not group work sent the message that success on the checkpoint (and other assessments such as the SSA) had to do with individual performance, students responded to this situation in various ways. While some students showed conformance to this notion (e.g., putting up a folder around one's work), others continued to verbally seek help from

their peers or teacher throughout the assessment. Thus while students likely desired to answer the checkpoint questions correctly, which, in Mrs. Learner's words, would lead them to "fly on the SSAs," they used different communicative strategies in their attempts to do so. In my dissertation I track the diversity of strategies children used not just to show teachers that they could perform at expected levels on tests, but also to position themselves as successful in the classroom.

The concept of communicative repertoires is part of Rymes' (2011) *repertoire approach*, which helps move research on issues of language use in education beyond the container metaphor of language to one of language and other semiotic resources as tools for acting and communicating in diverse contexts (cf. Orellana, Martínez, Lee & Montaña, 2012). In this way analytical focus is on work done through interaction rather than on static skills or abilities within the individual. Rymes discusses how these signs are only meaningful when embedded in social practices and points out that, "these practices are complex, highly localized, and unexamined even (perhaps especially) by those who participate in them" (2011, p. 210). Moreover, critical to Rymes' work is that one's communicative repertoires emerge, evolve and recede according to use and context (2010; see also Blommaert, 2010). In my dissertation I use a repertoire approach to show how, while teachers' ways of communicating with their students about what it meant to do well in school varied across classrooms, their communicative practices tended to converge around a singular notion of success as measured by standardized tests. I discuss how advanced or proficient test scores, as the primary element of teachers' communication around success, became the central focus of teaching and learning practices in fourth grade and thus the rationale for dull, scripted, teacher-fronted

curricula.

In my dissertation, I also show how, regardless of the dynamism of children's and teachers' repertoires and the range of contexts in which they evolved, only certain ways of speaking were deemed correct or appropriate at school. For example, Latino children's use of Spanish and black children's use of African American English were seen as incorrect and teachers' concerns around how children talked were linked to their concerns for children's performance on tests. They argued that "correct" English was what was needed for the SSA and worried that if students were allowed to speak "incorrectly" or speak Spanish, it would negatively affect their performance on tests. I argue that teachers' language policing and their failure to explicitly recognize the range of ways of speaking and communicating racialized certain students. More specifically, I follow Flores and Rosa in pointing out that those who were racialized were overdetermined to speak in deficient ways regardless of their actual language practices (2015). Moreover, language policing silenced students and inadvertently closed down meaningful classroom discussion, which was, ironically, something teachers said they struggled to foster.

Using the repertoire approach I investigate how moment to moment, during daily teaching and learning routines, and over the course of the final year of elementary school, children drew on their existing repertoires and made use of the semiotic resources at hand as they responded to teaching and learning practices around testing and communicated with each other about doing well or being successful in school. I show how, as they responded to these practices, children developed their own ways of communicating about being successful (or not) in school, which paralleled and varied to different degrees from those of their teachers. In this way I use the repertoire approach to complicate educational



research positing that students fail (or succeed) simply because they reject (or conform to) school. Instead, I focus on the idea that “educators’ and youths’ ideals and practices are heterogeneous sets of partly overlapping signs, ideas, and activities” (Wortham, 2011, *xi*). I argue that careful attention to both points of convergence and divergence in how teachers and students communicate about success will foster better understanding of school performance.

I use the repertoire approach to investigate how teachers and children communicated about what it meant to do well in school in a context of high-stakes testing where what counted as success were scores of “advanced” or “proficient” on the annual State Standardized Assessment. More specifically I look at how teachers and children used these markers in routine classroom interactions and how they formed what I refer to as *repertoires of success*. Teachers’ repertoires of success were the collection of signs – test scores and other markers – they used to signal to students what it meant to do well in school and thus used to interpret as successful school performance. Children’s repertoires of success were the collection of signs – test scores and other markers – *they* used to signal doing well in school.

While individuals’ repertoires varied to different degrees, test scores were the primary elements teachers drew on in their communication with children and that children used to signal doing well in school. Repertoire elements had predictable, presupposed meanings linked to ideologies about school success and achievement that were embedded in U.S. education policy discourse. For example, test scores as markers of success were linked to national discourse about academic achievement in which students are measured by individual performance on a yearly, standardized test. In

Grant's fourth grade classrooms, test scores became labels for individuals and groups of students and were frequently deployed by teachers to signal *who* was doing well in school and *who* was not.

I use repertoires of success as a way to conceptualize, identify and analyze how children responded to the ways teachers drew on test scores and other signs in their talk with children about doing well in school and to investigate how, as they approached the end of elementary school, children were developing and deploying their own repertoires of success. To do so I examine not only the signs teachers and children used to index success, but also the teaching and learning practices accompanying talk about doing well in school as well as the ideologies embedded and evidenced in these signs and practices. Thus, my analyses include three levels of focus: 1) signs and their presupposed meanings about success, 2) practices accompanying talk about doing well in school and/or that children could use to position themselves as successful, and 3) ideologies evidenced in these signs and practices. In my analyses I look for moments of improvisation when signs were deployed in disparate, hybrid combinations, and thus recontextualized and embedded with new and unexpected meanings (c.f. Rymes, 2014).

In my analyses I also look how, teachers used signs indexing success to position children as doing well (or not) in school and how children used them to position themselves and each other as certain kinds of students. I draw from Davies and Harré's notion of positioning:

An individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate. Accordingly, who one is is always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the positions made available within one's own and others' discursive practices (1990, p. 46).

Palmer and Martinez point out that positioning “is ongoing and powerful in terms of the way it can shape [our] lives and choices” (2013, p. 286). I argue that the ways in which children were positioned based on their test performance had several unintended and dismaying consequences. While I show how children’s positioning of themselves and others was creative and at times, unexpected (Wortham & Reyes, 2011), I also discuss how, for some, these positionings became more sedimented and fixed as children approached the end of elementary school (Wortham, 2006). In addition I show how, in some cases, through this positioning children took active roles in reinforcing and further developing more collective positionings of certain types of students.

To illustrate my conceptualization of repertoires of success, the ways in which their deployment resulted in the positioning of children, and the ways in which power relations were shaping and shaped by interactions around doing well in school, I use the field note excerpt below.

### **Excerpt 2**

After a week of standards-based benchmark assessments in preparation for annual spring testing, Mrs. Cole, the math specialist, presented the results to Mrs. Learner’s class [of fourth graders], showing them a pie chart and telling them that 63% of them were “proficient” or “advanced”.<sup>6</sup> When she named the “advanced” students, many children, including those whose names were not called, cheered, “ooh, ooh!” and clapped loudly. Mrs. Cole then named the “proficient” students. Most of the “proficient” (about 10) and “advanced” (4) students whispered, “yes!” enunciating forcefully the “s” sound while pumping their arms up and down. Mrs. Cole told the class, “we have four months left to prepare for the SSAs, so those below proficient are going to have to work hard...in order to do better for SSAs.” Roque, sitting at a desk near the window away from the rest of the students, yelled, “I’m advanced, too!” Mrs. Cole replying that she didn’t see his name on the advanced or proficient lists. He

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<sup>6</sup> The majority of fourth grade students in this particular classroom, one of four in the school, were seen as the “highest” students in the grade. In contrast to the 63% of students in Mrs. Learner’s class with advanced or proficient scores on this assessment, in an adjacent classroom, only 23% of the class scored at proficient or above.

glared at her, pushed back from his desk, and leaned backward in his chair, choosing not to re-calculate questions from the assessment Mrs. Cole was reviewing with the class. At one point he called out, "I guessed and I got it right!" Mrs. Cole replied, "that's great but you actually need to do the problem." Roque commented, "I always got the smart brains!" (fieldnote, 12/12/12)

In fourth grade, public labeling and grouping of children using test score labels based on individual performance was the main way teachers communicated with children about who was successful (or not) in school. While study sessions like this did not take place every day, nor did all fourth grade teachers communicate about success in exactly the same way, daily teacher-led classroom talk about doing well in school tended to reference children's performance on tests, and in particular, about what counted as a successful score on the SSA. In this example, Mrs. Cole communicated with students that those who scored at advanced or proficient on the assessment were successful, and many students ratified this version of success through their applause, cheers and arm pumping. Because test scores were what "counted" at the grade, school, district, state, and federal levels, by the time children were in fourth grade, test scores were the most readily available markers teachers could use to position children, and children could use to position themselves and others, as certain kinds of students.

In this example, the primary elements, or signs, in Mrs. Cole's repertoire of success were test scores of advanced or proficient. These signs had predictable and presupposed meanings linked to national discourse about academic achievement in which students are measured by individual performance on standardized tests and teachers (and schools) are measured by their students' performance. At the same time Mrs. Cole's comment, "those of you below proficient are going to have to work hard to do better," illustrates a practice teachers frequently requested of students who were

“underperforming.” Children could show they were “working hard/er” in very concrete ways such as sitting up straight, facing the teacher, completing one’s homework, or working quietly and independently on assignments. In this way, certain signs were embodied in the practice of working hard, and the practice itself became an icon of being a successful student. Children who did these things were often praised by teachers and held up as models for their peers. “Working hard/er” and related phrases (“focusing,” “trying your best”) were part of teachers’ repertoires of success and provided a way for underperformers to be positioned by their teachers and peers, and to position themselves, as successful, regardless of their actual test performance.

At times, certain students did not engage in this kind of performance. In the example above, Roque shows improvisational usage of the “advanced” score, making claim to it even though, according to Mrs. Cole, he had not performed at this level. After his unsuccessful deployment of this test score sign, he chose to forego direct participation in the review activity as seen in his facial expression and bodily comportment. However, he continued to assert his success on the assessment by calling out during the activity, arguing that he didn’t need to “do the work” because he “always” had “the smart brains.” In this moment, while the primary element of his repertoire of success was the “advanced” score, he rejected practices like doing the work, focusing, and/or trying hard.

Roque’s case helps illustrate how children are deeply embroiled in power relations at school, relations that don’t conform to normative ideas about power in which teachers simply wield it over students. Although Roque’s case could be interpreted as a “clash” between the teacher and a student who responded contrarily to his positioning, a repertoire approach helps reveal subtleties in this interaction that complicate the idea that

students simply accept or reject school-based notions of success. On one hand, he responded negatively to being told he was neither advanced nor proficient as he pushed away from the table and chose not to participate in the way his teacher expected him to, taking on what could be considered an oppositional stance. However, his calling out during the review activity, while it might have been a strategy to “save face” (Goffman, 1955), suggests that he was deferring to some degree to the idea that success was measured by testing performance. At the same time, his comments – “I’m advanced, too,” “I guessed and got it right,” and “I always got the smart brains” – show that he was positioning himself as not buying into the idea that he needed to work harder since he already was “smart”. Here, his changes in what Goffman (1979) refers to as *footing*, or interactional alignment, reveal the complexity in how children respond to being publicly classified or labeled in certain ways. These changes were connected to the different layers or levels of communication and participation that existed simultaneously in routine classroom interaction.

I view these different layers of classroom communication as *participation frameworks*, or participant structures which guide who is involved in a particular interaction, the roles they play in it, and the status they have relative to it (Goffman, 1979). In the example above there were at least two participation frameworks – the teacher-fronted participation framework and the peer participation framework. Participating simultaneously in these frameworks Roque toggled back and forth between saving face among his peers and opposing his teacher, all the while showing both deference to and rejection of the primary signs and practices teachers used to index success. Here he simultaneously deployed one widely accepted marker of success (an

advanced test score) while rejecting another (actually doing the problem [i.e. needing to work through the problem thoroughly vs. guessing]). In this way his repertoire of success was a set of heterogeneous signs that emerged and receded based on different participant frameworks such as his peer group and his classroom interactions with teachers.

In my dissertation I look at the ways in which children deploy different markers to position themselves as successful (or not) both at the level of discrete sign usage (e.g., “I’m advanced, too!”) and through their engagement or disengagement in routine teaching and learning practices (e.g. choosing not to participate in reviewing answers to a test). I show how children deployed different and sometimes conflicting markers of, and practices embedding presuppositions about, success based on the participation frameworks of the interactional context. Moreover, I discuss how children’s deployment of markers indexing success involved complex self- and other-positioning, which included constant shifts in footing across and within participation frameworks. As I examine children’s repertoires of success, I look closely at how moment-by-moment, and over the course of the school year, these repertoires evolved and became more static as their positioning by others, and their self- and other-positioning became more sedimented.

I also pay close attention to power relations in how children positioned themselves and were positioned in the classroom, tracking how technologies of power were interwoven into daily interactions between teachers and students, and among students. I show how through these technologies that were part of the managerialist system guiding teaching and learning in fourth grade, teachers and children were

regulated and disciplined. I also discuss how these technologies of power were linked to the notion of the ideal schooled subject, an autonomous, rational individual responsible for governing oneself (cf. Fitzsimmons, 2011), arguing that children whose repertoires of success overlapped most precisely with those of their teachers were positioned and able to position themselves as embodying or approaching this ideal schooled subject.

### **Power Relations Shaping and Shaped by Repertoires of Success**

In my exploration of how repertoires of success in fourth grade emerged over time and through moment-to-moment interactions I pay close attention to how power relations played out in the ways teachers and children communicated about doing well in school. To do so, I draw on Foucault's work on discourse and power. First I consider how the institution of schooling as a space of disciplinary power served as a backdrop upon which communication about success took place. In addition I follow Foucault in discussing how schooling involves processes of subject formation through which, over time at Grant, students came to be positioned and position themselves as certain kinds of students, and as successful (or not), based on how well they conformed (or could conform) to the notion of the ideal schooled subject. I argue that the power relations playing out in this kind of subject formation as well as communication around success were enacted through different configurations of technologies of power, or disciplinary and regulatory techniques, that permeated teaching and learning in fourth grade at Grant. I frame these technologies within Foucault's conception of power, arguing that as tentacles of disciplinary and regulatory power they stretched and seeped into the very fabric of school life, taking myriad forms across the school year and on a daily basis that at times were surprising, and as Roque's case shows, ruptured the dominant ways of



communicating about success in the classroom. I argue that together, these technologies were part of managerialism, or market-based, technical models of public management, which was the primary mechanism or apparatus of power driving teaching and learning at Grant. As both an ideology (Klikauer, 2013) and a technology of power (cf. Ball, 1990), this mechanism fueled the development and deployment of repertoires of success in Grant's fourth grade classrooms.

### **Power and the Institution of Schooling**

To better understand how repertoires of success emerged and evolved in the final year of elementary school at Grant, I draw on Foucault's concept of disciplinary power (1977). This concept frames discipline as a mechanism of power that regulates bodies and behaviors of individuals through systems of hierarchical observation or surveillance, normalizing judgments, and examination, which are part of the modern paradigm, or *episteme*, of Western knowledge structures and the discourses that have constructed and accompany this episteme (ibid; Foucault, 1970). More specifically, I use the notion of disciplinary power to illuminate how, along with the use of labels like those affiliated with standardized testing, schools employ a variety of techniques for classifying, monitoring, and controlling students such as: classroom design allowing for individuals to be seen at all times by the teacher (see Foucault on panopticism and gaze, 1977, 1980); examinations or testing; the use of norms against which students are continually measured; and systems of ranking, reward and punishment (Foucault, 1977; see also, Jardine, 2005).

I argue that in fourth grade at Grant, standardized testing, as a normalizing technique, was the primary instrument of disciplinary power around which all teaching

and learning practices revolved (Foucault, 1977, 1979; see also Jones, 1990).

According to Foucault:

The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgment. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify, and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates and judges them. (1979, p. 175)

Under this gaze, fourth graders were continually and publicly labeled according to their performance on assessments in preparation for the SSA. I argue that while standardized testing on a national scale has existed since the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, its current iteration is shaped by national discourse on testing and accountability in which students are measured by individual performance on annual standardized testing, and in which teachers (and schools) are measured by their students' performance. While these ideas about individual, teacher and school performance are couched in an ideology of neutrality, Ball (1990) discusses how they are linked to *regimes of truth* (Foucault, 1977), or discourses with scientific status.<sup>7</sup> In my dissertation I show how although these regimes of truth in which achievement or success is measured by standardized tests dominate education policy and claim and/or seek to provide solutions to schooling inequities they instead reinforce them through dull, scripted, test-oriented curricula for minoritized children which, in their final years of elementary school, turn them off from learning.

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<sup>7</sup> Foucault defines discourse as a “group of statements that belong to a single system of formation” (1972, p. 121). Linville discusses how discourses have “created the categories in which human activity has come to be known and understood” (2009, p. 157).

## **The Ideal Schooled Subject**

In my dissertation I examine how the emphasis on testing performance informed how Grant's fourth grade teachers and students communicated about what it meant to do well in school, and how, in turn, the teaching and learning practices associated with repertoires of success in fourth grade continually offered up models of an ideal schooled subject against which teachers could measure students, and students could measure themselves and others. For Foucault, the institution of schooling was a primary site for the construction of the modern subject. He argued that this modern subject was a Kantian, Enlightenment subject, a rational, autonomous individual characterized by transcendental reason and radical self-determination (Foucault, 2002, 2004; Packer, 2011). Foucault historicized this Kantian model of the ideal schooled subject and its related truths about the autonomous, rational individual, illustrating its formation within the modern episteme.

In my dissertation, I show how teaching and learning practices continually structured children's subjectivities around the ideals of independence, competition, and regulation. Children whose repertoires of success matched or showed a great deal of overlap with those of their teachers could more readily position themselves and others as "good" or "successful" students through adhering to these ideals. As I discuss later in this chapter, the kind of regulation of self and other that children engaged in to position themselves in this way relates to Foucault's notion of governmentality, "a set of practices and strategies that individuals in their freedom use in controlling or governing themselves and others" (Besley & Peters, 2007, p. 139).

In describing how teachers' repertoires of success offered up this model of the

ideal schooled subject, I follow Leonardo and Zemblyas (2013) as well as Flores (2013) in arguing that the ideal schooled subject is akin to what these scholars refer to as the “idealized white subject,” who sits in contrast to the racialized other, a subject constantly positioned in opposition to this “ideal.” Flores discusses how, historically, language has been integral to the production of the idealized white subject (ibid, p. 4). For example, at Grant, in spite of the fact that the teachers themselves did not conform to using \*Standard American English (\*SAE)<sup>8</sup>, the ideal schooled subject was a white subject who spoke this idealized, abstracted, homogenized form of language “imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions” (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 67). Thus, hegemonic whiteness permeated normative expectations for how students should speak.

Students of color fell not only under the white gaze of teachers, but also were monitored through the ears of the white listening subject (cf. Flores & Rosa, 2015). In this way, hegemonic whiteness held sway over whether one was perceived as speaking \*SAE or not, and ultimately, who could potentially fit the model of the ideal schooled subject. I argue that the power relations that played out in this kind of subject formation (and its related notion of success based on individual performance on standardized tests), were enacted through different configurations of technologies of power, or disciplinary and regulatory techniques, that permeated teaching and learning in fourth grade.

### **Technologies of Power**

Central to my discussion of the technologies of power evident in the repertoires of success and related teaching and learning practices in fourth grade is a Foucauldian

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<sup>8</sup> In my dissertation, I follow Lippi-Green in using the term *\*Standard American English* as the “idea of a homogenous, standard American English” (2012, p. 62). Lippi-Green adapts syntacticians’ use of the asterisk to mark utterances judged to be grammatically inauthentic.

notion of power 1) as an action, 2) as relational, and 3) as “distributed throughout society rather than, as is often supposed, concentrated in some central body, such as the state” (Gallagher, 2008, p. 399; Foucault, 1978). In this way power is “an action upon an action” (Foucault, 1983, p. 220) and is exercised rather than possessed. In other words, power is not simply something policymakers, administrators, teachers, or students have more or less of, but rather is employed through multiple interactions, diverse and diffuse. Thus, in tracking and analyzing technologies of power evident in the interactions between and among teachers and students, I focus on how power is exercised by different teachers and students, the different contexts and forms in which technologies are evident, and the effects these power relations have on how children come to see themselves as doing well (or not) in school. As the notion of power as relational suggests that power varies according to the nature of the relationships through which it is exercised (Gallagher, 2008, p. 403), I look specifically at the relationships between teachers and students, and among students, to track the complex ways that power is manifested through and shapes everyday classroom interactions.

In addition I pay attention to how cycles of power circulated through teaching and learning in fourth grade: As the overriding mandate to prepare students for standardized tests resulted in an endless loop of public labeling of students with test scores and grades, leading to pep talks about working harder and doing better, leading to more test preparation, leading back to more public labeling *ad infinitum*. As the discursive thread running through this loop, teachers’ repertoires of success converging around test scores continually reanimated and were reanimated by the testing regime with its corresponding grid of technologies of pedagogic discipline and regulation. It was within the context of

this seemingly interminable cycle of testing and test preparation over the course of fourth grade that students' repertoires of success emerged and evolved. I show how while children were caught up in this testing loop, through face-to-face interactions and the shifts in footing in the moment and over time, children did not simply docilely accept their positioning based on test scores, but continually and actively positioned themselves and others in heterogeneous and dynamic ways.

In the Excerpt 2 above, in talking about testing and labeling students with test scores, Mrs. Cole was employing what Foucault (1988) refers to as various *technologies of power*, or disciplinary and regulatory techniques (see also Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998). Through these technologies, children were held to the norms of standardized tests and classified as individuals and in groups based on their performance on such examinations. I follow Gore (1998) in highlighting different, intersecting *technologies of power* that teachers drew on in their daily instruction and that were interwoven into their repertoires of success (Foucault, 1988b; see Figure 1).

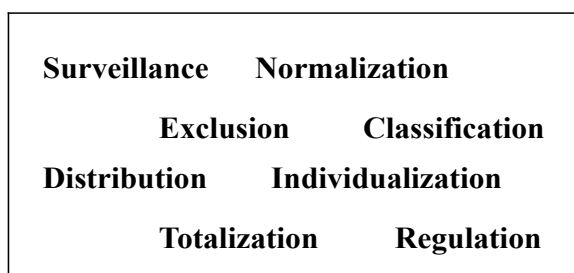


Figure 1. Foucauldian technologies of power.

For example, in the fieldnote above, Mrs. Cole publicly identified students who had performed at the advanced or proficient level, effectively separating the high performers (four students) from the rest of the class without having to name those who fell into the latter category. Here, certain technologies of power such as classification,

individualization and exclusion are evident. Mrs. Cole's public classification of those who had performed well ended up excluding those who did not meet the desired norm. Moreover, at the same time children were classified into groups based on performance level, they were also individualized as each was deemed responsible for her or his test performance.

I argue that these technologies formed a particular grid of pedagogic discipline that not only regulated children's bodies and behaviors, but also taught them to monitor and regulate themselves. I show how these technologies also constructed a disciplinary and regulatory gaze under which fourth graders were constantly scrutinized and learned to scrutinize themselves. At the same time I highlight how what teachers were expected to do and say in the classroom was highly constrained by the disciplinary gaze under which they themselves were continually monitored and appraised. I discuss how these levels of discipline were necessary to ensure compliance with the current system and latest iteration of standardization and accountability measures in U.S. education policy.

While the notion of disciplinary power is useful for illuminating how schools employ a variety of strategies, or technologies, for classifying, monitoring, and controlling students, I follow Gallagher (2008) and other neo-Foucauldians (e.g., Simons, 1995; Rose, 1999) in rejecting a solely or wholly deterministic reading of power relationships in schooling. Thus I explore technologies of power through Foucault's (1992; 2007) work on *governmentality*, a concept of power which as Flores discusses, is conceived of "not in a top-down centralized approach, but in a much broader sense in which knowledge produced through a variety of institutions coalesces in the creation of governable subjects and governable populations" (2013, p. 3). Thus in addition to the

idea that, through disciplinary power, people learn to discipline themselves and others, governmentality cultivates self- and other-regulation in those who are governed. In my dissertation I pay close attention to how children came to regulate themselves and others, showing how they did so in heterogenous and dynamic ways.

At the same time I show how although teachers had to regulate themselves, especially in terms of what they had to do to prepare children for testing, as white, English speakers they did not have to monitor their speech regardless of the particularities of the English they used or how far they veered from what could be considered \*SAE. In this way, their whiteness privileged them as \*SAE speakers and they were exempt from this kind of self-governance. In contrast, their students from Latino and African American households, however, had to be hyper-vigilant about speaking “correctly” (cf., Flores & Rosa, 2015, Lippi-Green, 2012).

According to Foucault, governmentality centers around the reason of the state, which “is governed according to rational principles which are intrinsic to it and which cannot be derived solely from natural or divine laws or the principles of wisdom and prudence” (1991a, p. 97). In addition, the art of government “includes a focus on the techniques of the self as well as the institutional technologies that perpetuate the art of government in ways that make it acceptable to the populace” (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998, p. 21). In this sense, individuals are “free to make choices and are responsible for their own governance” (Flores, 2012, p. 15). Flores points out that through the concept of governmentality, Foucault envisions power as much broader than a top-down centralized approach (ibid., p. 16). Flores further explains that power, rather than being an issue of “brute force,” is “instead an issue of using expert knowledge in the human sciences to



maximize the productivity of citizens and populations” (ibid.)

Hoskin discusses the use of expert knowledge in the human sciences centered around reason, or rationalization, and techniques of the self in a description of how governmentality involves the construction of subjectivities as technical-scientific and rational-economic (1993, p. 280). In this way, the construction of the ideal schooled subject is not just as an autonomous, rational, white, SAE\*-speaking individual, but also as a subject who is linked to technical-scientific and rational-economic principles guiding the modern state. Thus at schools like Grant, governmental power relations, or “the set of practices and strategies that individuals [e.g., teacher *and* students] in their freedom use in controlling or governing themselves and others,” (Besley & Peters, 2007, p. 139) were informed by a larger technology of power, that of management, or managerialism, a technical form of management, control, and rationalization.

Mehta (2013) writes about how three reform movements based on this managerial technology of power – the rationalization of schooling during the Progressive Era (1890-1920), the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, and the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001 – have guided education policy and school reform efforts since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. First, he describes how education policy in the Progressive Era was led, at the school district level, by scientific and business techniques that would make schooling “more efficient and effective” (p. 39). These techniques stemmed from Taylorism and the factory model of management in which “expertise and hence power reside at the top rather than at the front line, work is prescribed from above, and teachers are motivated by external incentives set by their superiors rather than by internal motivations to do quality work” (p. 39).

Second, he argues that in the years surrounding the passage of the ESEA, the combination of the Coleman Report, the failings of the Great Society efforts to fully eradicate poverty and social inequities, and “the explosion of social and behavioral science engendered by the social reforms of Kennedy and Johnson created a definition of schooling as a black box sitting between programmatic inputs on the one hand and test score outputs on the other” (p. 68). During this period, standardized testing became the measure for program evaluation to assess if schools were effectively using federal monies such as Title I funding.

Mehta also discusses how, through the passage of NCLB precipitated by the standards-based reform movement, *lay accountability*, or the idea that humans [ie. teachers and administrators] were motivated by external incentives and in this way could be held accountable based on their students’ test performance for teachers and schools, became the primary model for school reform (Mehta, 2013). Kathleen Hall builds on Mehta’s (2013) argument, describing how, since the authorization of ESEA, efforts to increase equal educational opportunity “have come to focus increasingly narrowly on aspects of schooling that are assumed to be quantifiable and measureable” such as performance on standardized tests (Hall, 2015, p. 7). She goes on to argue:

Scientific techniques for measuring and “auditing” performance have particular salience and value within public sector governance systems that have come to emphasize performance accountability for achieving “results”—or holding the public sector accountable to its citizen consumers. These forms of public sector management embed business management concepts, principles, and measurement techniques—such as an emphasis on quantitative indicators to assess quality in programs and performance—within the mechanisms of government decision-making and processes of service delivery. They aim to improve public sector performance (in the name of effectiveness and cost efficiency) through an emphasis on “results-based accountability.” (ibid., p. 9; see also, Hall, 2005)

Important to note are the connections between current forms of scientific measurement

and management, which since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century have been used a tool for sorting and tracking minoritized students (e.g., Tyack, 1974), and the roots of standardized testing, which lie in the eugenics movement (cf. Au, 2007; Selden, 1999). These links between the history of testing and its nefarious associations, standardized testing in its current form, and managerialism are crucial to understanding the deficit perspectives on difference entrenched in the U.S. education system.

In my dissertation I argue that the emphasis on testing and test preparation was guided by managerialism based on results-based (ie. lay) accountability that informed how teachers communicated with children about doing well in school and permeated teaching and learning practices in fourth grade. Au (2011) further links this kind of accountability to Taylor's (1919) principles of scientific management and how they were applied to the U.S. educational system through the influence of John Franklin Bobbit. A professor at the University of Chicago (1909-1941) and proponent of eugenics (cf. Bobbit, 1909), Bobbit designed a theory of curriculum development based on the principles of scientific management. His work had great influence on U.S. curriculum studies, which supported a factory model of education in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Moe, 2003) and was linked to New Taylorism, or new forms of scientific management. Moe writes:

The movement for school accountability is essentially a movement for more effective top-down control of the schools. The idea is that, if public authorities want to promote student achievement, they need to adopt organizational control mechanisms—tests, school report cards, rewards and sanctions, and the like—designed to get district officials, principals, teachers, and students to change their behaviour in productive ways... Virtually all organizations need to engage in top-down control, because the people at the top have goals they want the people at the bottom to pursue, and something has to be done to bring about the desired behaviours. ... The public school system is just like other organizations in this respect. (ibid., p. 81)

At Grant, these organizational control mechanisms, all part of managerialism as ideology behind and the mechanism of power fueling and fueled by how teachers and children communicated about success and informing teaching and learning practices, hinged on the technologies of power discussed above. Wrapped up in these control mechanisms were related ideologies of individual achievement and meritocracy, as well as an ideology of difference as deficit for those who did not approach the norms of the ideal schooled subject. Managing how individuals performed and separating out those who were unable to conform to such norms became a major aspect of classroom instruction.

Stephen J. Ball discusses how Foucault's notion of *management*, which is akin to my use of the term managerialism, requires "subjected and practiced bodies" to increase "the forces of the body in economic terms of utility" while simultaneously diminishing "these forces in political terms of obedience" (Foucault, 1979, p. 130, as cited in Ball, 1990). In this way technical forms of management and control that used a single performance outcome to measure the progress of individual students, teachers, and schools led to administrator and teacher deployment of technologies of power that were associated with ideologies of individual achievement, meritocracy and standardization. For example, in Grant's fourth grade classrooms, managerialism required passivity and obedience, attitudes or behaviors that were usually lauded or rewarded by teachers, but at other times were seen as impediments to students' successful participation in class.

The fact that such docility was both required and seen as problematic was one of the many contradictions evident in the ways teachers communicated with students about doing well in school. Moreover it links to a larger paradox around test preparation and

performance: regardless of whether students embodied the outward signs of the ideal, schooled subject through bodily comportment and classroom behavior, for those who struggled in math and reading and whose scores were “basic” or “below basic” on routine assessments, it was highly unlikely that they would perform at proficient or advanced levels on the actual SSA. For example, their performance on the SSA had already been predicted through the 4Sight Assessment.

By using a Foucauldian lens to examine how Grant’s fourth graders experienced and responded to teaching and learning centered around high-stakes testing, my dissertation offers a critical account of structural forces underlying U.S. schooling and current school reform efforts. Moreover it helps illuminate the power relations circulating inside what Mehta refers to as the black box of schooling “sitting between programmatic inputs on the one hand and test score outputs on the other” (2013, p. 68). In the fourth grade classrooms, the notion of success was based on a managerialist system and upheld through disciplinary technologies of power, as well as constant the regulation of self and others.

At the same time, my use of the repertoire approach reveals a less totalizing or deterministic account of what took place in Grant’s fourth grade classrooms. Key to this account were the nine- and ten-year old participants in this research – young people who were not automatons programmed to take tests, but rather active self-and sense-makers who continually shifted footing to position themselves and their peers in certain ways and who employed a variety of communicative strategies and ways of speaking in their interactions with each other and teachers around school success. By using the repertoire approach and focusing my attention on students, their communicative practices and their

self- and sense-making, I aim to re-focus the research lens in the broader education community on students as resources and producers of knowledge.

### **Research Questions**

In this study I explore the following questions: How do children respond to the heavy emphasis on testing in the final years of elementary school? More specifically, I investigate:

1. How do teachers draw on test scores and other markers in their communication with children about what it means to do well in school?
  - a. What are teachers' repertoires of success and how are they deployed in fourth grade classrooms?
  - b. Through the deployment of their repertoires of success, how do teachers position children as certain kinds of students?
2. How do children draw on test scores and other markers in their communication with their teachers and each other about what it means to do well in school?
  - a. What are children's repertoires of success, how are they deployed in the fourth grade classrooms?
  - b. How do they overlap with those of their teachers?
  - c. How do children position themselves and other as they deploy their repertoires of success?

The following chapter details the ethnographic methods I used to investigate these questions. I begin by presenting my research context, the fourth graders at Grant who

participated as focal students, as well as those teachers and fourth graders who agreed to let me observe and videotape them during their final year of elementary.

### **Chapter 3: Setting and Methods**

Like many PhD students, when I arrived at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education in 2008, although I had many ideas questions and issues I wanted to explore based on my experience teaching and working with students and families from minoritized backgrounds, I had little idea of how profoundly my first graduate assistantship would shape my dissertation research. During my first semester, I joined the data collection team for an ethnography of Mexican, immigrant kindergartners' communicative practices in what many referred to as a new Latino diaspora location, a community like many others across the US in both rural and suburban areas in the Midwest, the South and the Northeast where large numbers of Latino, primarily Mexican, immigrants had been settling for the first time in recent years (Wortham, Murillo & Hamann, 2002).

While as a teacher I had worked in cities with large longstanding populations of Latino students, I had had interest in but never fully developed ways to connect with families of the students I taught beyond school events and occasional invitations to baptisms or first communions. This changed through my participation in the ethnography I joined, and very quickly I found myself spending several hours a week in children's homes. The relationships I developed with families from that moment on, combined with my years of teaching experience and the concerns I had about schooling for children from minoritized backgrounds, were pivotal in shaping my dissertation research – the kinds of questions I asked and the methods I used to investigate them. At the same time, the



research context itself – a town I refer to as Marshall where large numbers of Mexicans had begun to arrive in the late 1990s and where local schools had few systems in place to meet the needs of its changing population – stood in sharp contrast to New York City and San Francisco where I had previously taught, and where bilingual, bicultural programs and services were more available.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Marshall became a puzzle I wanted to better understand as well as a place of personal growth and development as an educator and researcher. In the years that ensued, my time spent in Marshall, in children’s homes, in the hallways and classrooms of one its schools, Grant Elementary, and in the local public library helped me see the complexity of the many factors at play in how, well before they enter middle school, children come to see themselves as certain kinds of students.

### **Marshall, PA**

To get to Grant, I would take the commuter rail to the last stop in Marshall, hike east up a hill past the town’s library and then walk a few blocks south. Grant was located at an intersection across the street from a non-denominational protestant chapel and blocks full of row houses that had been divided in apartments. In the blocks south of Grant were small businesses like Mexican delis and restaurants, lunch counters, along with several other churches. Four blocks south sat the county courthouse. Continuing south down the hill upon which the county courthouse sat, was Marshall Transportation Center, the transportation hub of the county with numerous buses, as well as the regional rail and high-speed train, running from early in the morning until late in the evening.

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<sup>9</sup> In my dissertation I use pseudonyms for the names of my different research settings as well as for research participants.

Marshall, referred to as a New Latino Diaspora location, was a Pennsylvania town of about 35,000 where, between 2000-2010, the Latino, mainly Mexican, population had grown from 1,500 to almost 10,000. It had a shrinking White population (32%), and growing African American (38%) and Latino (28%) populations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The arrival of Mexicans was initially mostly Mexican men who came to work as laborers in the surrounding suburbs in the 1990s. Over the next two decades, more and more women and children arrived from Mexico. As families were reunited and new families grew, an increasing number of children from Mexican households were born in Marshall. These demographic changes presented both potential benefits and challenges. On the one hand, newcomers contributed to Marshall's revitalization by, for example, opening businesses and becoming active members of church congregations across town. On the other hand, some saw the arrival of Mexican immigrants as straining dwindling social services and underfunded schools.

With knowledge of this context and based on my experience as a bilingual elementary school teacher, I was interested in how schools were working with and meeting the needs of families and children from Spanish-speaking households. Thus when the opportunity arose to take part in the ethnography I joined in 2008, I was eager to participate. Having taught in low-income neighborhoods in urban areas on both the east and west coasts of the US, I was familiar with the run-down feel to the blocks surrounding Grant. However as I got to know the greater Marshall area, I was surprised to find that much of the town had this feel. Marshall was the county seat of Jackson County. As the director of the local community center I refer to as *Revolución Arte* has pointed out, Marshall sat in great contrast to its surrounding suburbs. In 2008, Jackson

County was chosen by a major business magazine as one of the top 10 best counties in the US to raise a family. In addition, the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) placed Jackson County as in the top 55 wealthiest counties in the US. In Marshall, however, close to 20% of its population lived below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Many of its residents were working class and immigrant families who rented rooms or apartments in row houses that had been divided into cheaply modeled, under kempt rental units where residents could not drink the water running from its faucets due to its high lead count. Several of the homes of research participants I regularly visited over a period of five years fit the above description well. These families' living spaces tended to have frequent leaks and basement flooding, faulty or non-functioning heating and cooling systems, peeling lead paint, torn flooring and carpeting well-overdue for replacement, and rusty taps hooked up to water purifiers. A toddler in one of these families had developed lead poisoning from crawling and playing on floors and carpets where lead-based paint chips constantly accumulated in spite of how often her family vacuumed and cleaned the floors. As I got to know families through spending time in their homes, I became a resource for communicating with landlords, helping translate documents like utility bills and medical information, and making and accompanying families on appointments for social services or matters related to immigration.

Most parents in the families I knew left their homes each day to work in landscaping or construction in the wealthy suburbs surrounding Marshall. Others worked in the service industry centered around two nearby malls, one of which was the second largest mall in the US. Their routes to the surrounding suburbs and towns took them down two of the main thoroughfares of Marshall, Madison and Danforth Streets, both

part of the same highway that led to the PA turnpike as well as a major U.S. interstate.

Busy streets intersecting Madison included Marshall Street, a central business area known as “Mexican Main Street” that had been revitalized in recent years by Mexican restaurants, delis, apparel shops, and bakeries. Marshall Street also included some longstanding non-Mexican business such as Crown Fried Chicken, the Dominican barbershops, a laundry shop, and an antiques store. In addition this street was home to a Latino family center, APLAUSO, which had been located in Marshall for over 35 years and had originally provided services to Puerto Rican and Dominican families that had settled in Marshall in the late 1960s-1970s. By the time I began coming to Marshall in 2008 APLAUSO was serving mostly Mexican immigrant families who had been arriving since the 1990s.

Over the years several families I spent time with took advantage of APLAUSO’s services and afterschool homework program, and from time to time I would accompany family members to the building. I also frequently walked up and down Marshall Street with focal families and children as they ran errands, did laundry and visited with friends and extended family. When, while out with parents of focal children, we ran into their friends or acquaintances I was introduced as the children’s maestra. In the early years of my time in Marshall, I tended to feel uncomfortable in these moments and would sometimes try to explain that I wasn’t actually their children’s teacher, but *una estudiante de una universidad en Filadelfia*.<sup>10</sup> However, I understood that because the families

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<sup>10</sup> I follow Sandín and others in choosing not to use italics as it “disrupts the constantly changing, performative, relationship between English and Spanish” that was the case in my communication with families and children and our use of translanguaging, and in what I observed of their communication with each other (2004, p. 5). I do provide glosses for Spanish words and phrases that may be difficult for readers to understand.

participating in my research were likely unfamiliar with the nature of social research (cf. Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), this may have been the best way to gloss my relationship to their children in explanations to their extended family and friends. At the same time, as Mexican friends pointed out to me, the term was more than an easily understood way of explaining who I was and what I was doing with their children. It was also one of respect and appreciation for the time I spent with their children as well as a term for teacher that had a broader meaning than I initially took it to mean. Thus, by the time I began my dissertation research in 2012, I was used to the greeting, “hola maestra,” when I ran into families and friends of Mexican families while walking on Marshall Street, an area where most of the families I knew lived.

Parallel to Marshall Street and intersecting both Madison and Danforth Streets was Maple Street, the street on which the county courthouse was located. At certain periods this building held great significance for some of the families I knew who were dealing with immigration cases beginning in 2011 when a high number of Mexican immigrants began to be targeted by local police and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for being undocumented. A walk down Maple Street, running east-west, led past fast food restaurants, gas stations, local luncheonettes, a bank, parking lots for the courthouse, law firms, furniture, home supply and hardware stores, a bar where men collected on the sidewalk at night, and more Mexican delis and restaurants. This street also made visible the history of Italian immigration that had taken place in the early to mid 1900s with its restaurants and delis with Italian names, an Italian men’s club with a bocce ball court, and several Catholic churches of Italian origin.

During the five years I spent walking through Marshall, I watched as Mexican businesses continued to appear on these and surrounding streets. As a white, middle-class woman who wore primarily unisex pants and shirts, and no make-up, and who wheeled around a large black backpack, I stood out and felt heads turn as I walked around Maple and other streets in Marshall. In reflecting upon those days in the field I also realize that my high degree of awareness around self-presentation and my desire to manage my impression influenced my decision not to look too feminine for fear of calling undue attention to myself (cf. Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). I was hyperaware of my whiteness and class, and the privilege and meaning they held, as most of the people I passed were black and brown and living in low-income housing. One afternoon while lugging my backpack up a sidewalk past a black family sitting on a stoop, I heard, “we don’t want any,” a comment that popped into my head from time to time as I questioned what my “work” in Norristown meant for me and others and *who was I* to be conducting research there (cf. Lytle, 2000). This question was and still is ever present in my mind, especially as I wrote and continue to write about the children from Latino and African American backgrounds.

The other maestras of Grant Elementary School who lived in Marshall, part of the shrinking white, middle and upper-middle class population of the town, mostly lived several miles west up a series of hills and only crossed through the area that I came to know in their cars on the way to and from work. I rarely saw this “nicer” area of Marshall and spent most of my time traversing Marshall, Danforth, Madison and Maple Streets on foot several times a week, both night and day. Although there were some white, working class families, these areas were populated by mostly African American and Mexican

immigrant families. Walking through this part of Marshall gave me a sense of the inter-ethnic and racial relations among these residents, and in particular the tensions between Mexican immigrant and African American residents. I was frequently accompanied by Mexican heritage children who would sometimes point out young *morenos* [African Americans] sitting on their stoops or walking down the block who they accused of starting fights with their older siblings and calling them names like *wetback*. The families I knew felt that many of Marshall's African Americans did not want them there; some families reported having confrontations with African American families on their blocks who had threatened to report them for being "illegal."

Other families reported stories of Mexican men being mugged by African Americans on payday when they were carrying large amounts of cash (cf. Wortham, Allard, Lee & Mortimer, 2011). These tensions had to do with the claim that Mexicans were taking over the town, unfairly absorbing the scarce resources available through the health and public service system, and were taking their jobs. One location where I often saw a multi-ethnic and -racial group was at the bar on Maple Street where both Latino and African American men hung out in the evenings, spilling out onto the sidewalk. Over the course of my research, I got to know a number of African American families and individuals who recognized and appreciated the contributions Mexicans were making to the town. Moreover, at the elementary level, especially in the lower elementary grades at Grant, I observed close friendships develop across these racial and ethnic borders. The tensions I describe above along with my observations led to my intentional focus on both Latino and African American students in my dissertation.

## Grant Elementary

The school site for my study, Grant Elementary, was one of six elementary schools in Marshall and was located in the downtown area, a neighborhood often referred to as “unsafe” and “run-down” by teachers. About 99% of its approximately 400 kindergarten through fourth grade students qualified for free lunch due to their families’ limited income. At the time of my research, enrollment characteristics showed Grant’s population to be approximately 38% Black, 51% Hispanic, and the rest “Other” (NCES, 2012).<sup>11</sup> However, at the kindergarten level, over 70% of the students came from Spanish-speaking households. Approximately one third of students at Grant were classified as “Limited English Proficient” and qualified for English as a Second Language (ESL) services. While they were integrated with other students for the majority of the school day, they participated in different pull-out programs for 15 to 60 minutes several times per week. At Grant, none of the classes or curricular materials was provided in Spanish, and while many of the students at the school were bilingual, the school itself was not. English was the official language of academics, and students were expected to use it for all academic tasks.

Grant’s teachers were primarily White and from European American, middle-class, English-speaking backgrounds. Of these, two spoke Spanish. In the fall of 2010, Grant had a new principal, Ms. Chavez, a Spanish-speaking, Latina who had immigrated to the US as an adult. Of the additional school staff, there were three Latino, Spanish speakers – an ESL paraprofessional, an administrative assistant and the head of migrant education for the school district whose office was housed at Grant. There were no other

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<sup>11</sup> “Other” consisted of: 4.5% White, 6.5% Mixed Race, and 0.5% Asian or Pacific Islander students.



teachers or staff of color outside of an Indian American paraprofessional and two African American janitors. All but the school's lead teacher [assistant principal], the music teacher, and the special education teacher were female. Most teachers lived in the surrounding suburbs and the few who lived in Marshall, lived in the northwest section of town several miles from the low-income area where the children who attended Grant lived. Teachers, with the exception of a few individuals, had little interaction with students and families outside of the school day or school-related events. As a Spanish speaker I frequently acted as interpreter for teachers, especially for the 12 teachers in whose classrooms I visited regularly over the course of my research. During these years I developed amicable relationships, and in some cases friendships, with these teachers. My own experience teaching served as an entrée into conversations about curricula, pedagogy and education policy, and led to frequent opportunities to work with individual or small groups of children whom teachers had identified as needing extra help or more challenging work.

Grant had a warm and inviting environment, the walls lined with welcome signs, colorful murals, children's school and artwork, and a table in the front hallway with informational pamphlets for families in both English and Spanish. Frequent cross-grade events, celebrations, and collaborations promoted community building and allowed for multi-aged peer interaction. At the same time, performance on standardized tests as the sole measure of school progress had placed administrators and teachers at Grant in a precarious position. Not only were they responsible for meeting the needs of their changing population with an increasing number of students from linguistically, culturally and economically minoritized backgrounds, they also had to ensure that their students

fared well enough on the tests to make “Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP),” a continuously advancing target and school-level designation.

I was very familiar with this pressure, not just as a former third grade teacher but also as a testing coordinator for the school in the Bay Area where I taught between 2002-2008. At Grant such pressure had resulted in a heavy emphasis on standardized test performance and testing readiness, and a school-wide narrowing of literacy and math curricula to focus on discrete reading, writing and computational skills. Teachers were required to administer frequent standardized assessments designed to mirror the format and content of the State Standardized Assessment (SSA). By 2012 even first graders had to take monthly reading assessments comprised of reading selections followed by multiple-choice questions, and second graders were administered practice SSAs. In third and fourth grades, each monthly math and reading assessment lasted for several days, and writing test preparation, modeled after the essay format on the SSAs, took several hours to complete each week.

In addition third and fourth grade students were administered quarterly reading, writing and math benchmark assessments, called 4Sight, designed by Robert Slavin’s Success for All Foundation. These assessments were aligned with state standards and each quarterly assessment package took roughly a week to complete. Not surprisingly, teachers in the upper grades complained about how little time they had to teach what was assessed in these and other evaluations, and while students were compliant, many commented that they disliked reading, writing and/or math time. I often had conversations with third and fourth grade teachers about the effects of testing on them and their students, and commiserated with them as they expressed their frustration. It was

within the atmosphere of testing preparation and individual performance that I aimed to understand how children came to make sense of what it meant to do well in school. As I describe in more detail in the following section such an atmosphere resulted in an environment in which children had little time to interact with each other and in which they were forced to sit quietly and work independently for most of the day. For this reason, I included an additional setting, the local public library, in which to interact with children and observe them interacting with each other.

### **Marshall Public Library**

When I began to observe in Grant's third grade classrooms after previously having spent two years in kindergarten and first grades, I was struck not just by the new emphasis on testing, but also by how this changed routine classroom interaction. Whereas in previous years children had ample opportunity to talk and interact with each other, by third grade they were required to complete most assignments quietly and independently. Much of my time in the classroom was spent watching whole group instruction in the IRE (initiation, response, evaluation) format (cf. Mehan, 1985) and children working silently. Not only did I experience what Maybin refers to as a "strong sense of paralyzing boredom," (2006, p. 11; see also, McLaren, 1986), I rarely saw children engage in sustained talk with each other outside of lunch and recess. Because so much of the day children were under close surveillance by their teachers, it was hard for me to know what they thought about the signs in teachers' repertoires of success, and how they used these and/or other signs to index success in non-teacher-directed interaction with each other. I also wanted to see what *children* were interested in talking about, exploring, and doing

with the hope that this would help me understand whether or how they saw themselves as certain kinds of students in less institutionally defined ways.

All of these factors led me to seek out an alternative space where I could observe children interacting with each other for more sustained periods of time. Thus, I developed an additional component to my pilot study, meeting with focal third graders at the Marshall Public Library eight times between March and June. Once they entered fourth grade, even though I did not start formal classroom observations until November based on the principal's decision, I began meeting with children at the library on a weekly basis in September and continued to do so through June. These meetings took place in the boardroom of the second floor of the library in the administrative wing of the building. The focal students I describe in the following section are those with whom I met at the library and whom I observed at school.

### **Focal Students**

A typical day during my dissertation fieldwork involved observing, chatting and working with any of a group of 11 fourth grade focal students, seven girls and four boys, most of whom I had known since their kindergarten year at Grant and five of whom had been focal participants in my research since 2008 (see Table 1). These five children, plus one more who had begun to participate in my research when he was first grade, had originally been selected as focal students in an earlier study led by Kathryn Howard on the language and literacy practices as Spanish speakers from immigrant backgrounds in their first two years of elementary school. Their selection was based on my research partner and my interactions with their families at Grant's kindergarten orientation where

we had acted as interpreters and looked for families who might be interested in participating in this earlier study (2008-2010).

When these children reached third grade, I began to notice a change in how they talked to me about school. Whereas in previous years, they had enjoyed school and saw themselves as “good” in math or reading or both, they began to describe themselves as “not a good student” or “only a little good” in math and/or reading, and began talk about disliking math and/or reading. These changes motivated questions about how this group of children was responding to the heavy emphasis on test preparation and the ways in which they were being labeled based on their performance on assessments that mirrored the SSA. These questions, in turn, were linked to my own experience as a third grade teacher and testing coordinator, and my longstanding desire to develop a critical understanding of how education policy like No Child Left Behind played out in the classroom especially for students from minoritized backgrounds. At the same time, standardized testing coincided with the final years of elementary school because in the Marshall School District, middle school started in fifth grade. I had a hunch that children’s orientation to and the ways in which they engaged with middle school was connected to how they were coming to understand themselves as certain kinds of students as they approached the end of elementary school. Following this rationale, for my dissertation research I decided to explore how, in a context of high-stakes testing, children in fourth grade were communicating about what it meant to do well in school.

My concerns were not solely centered on the experiences of the students from Spanish-speaking backgrounds. Although it was easy to focus on Grant’s newest and fastest growing population of Mexican and Mexican American students, doing so

obscured over a third of its student body, those who identified as black, African American, white, or mixed, many of whom struggled with similar educational challenges as their Latinos peers. Over the years, I had gotten to know a number of the children from English-speaking households, and from my general observations at the beginning of third grade, many of these children were beginning to explicitly talk about and label themselves and others as certain kinds of students (e.g., not smart, great in math, not good at reading, smart, etc.). At the same time, many began to express dislike for reading and/or math. I was curious about how all of the children in third grade were drawing these conclusions about themselves and the ways in which they communicated about doing well in school. In light of these questions and observations, I decided to widen participation to children from English-speaking backgrounds for a pre-dissertation pilot study when children were in third grade. To select additional focal children from English-speaking backgrounds, the three participating teachers recommended families they felt would be receptive to joining the study. Thus, during this cohort's third grade year, along with the five students from Spanish-speaking backgrounds, I invited five more students from English-speaking backgrounds, all of whom expressed interest in participating and all but one whose parents gave them permission. By fourth grade, all of these 11 children and their families were on board to participate in my dissertation research.

During their fourth grade year six of these focal children described themselves as Mexican, Mexican American, or Mixed (white and brown). Of these six, three were born in the US to Mexican parents, and three arrived in Marshall from Mexico before kindergarten. Of the five remaining participants, one self-identified as black, one as African American, one as Asian African American, one as mixed (black and white), and

one as Irish and German American. All but one of these five were born in Marshall.

Children’s self-descriptions included a number of other markers of social identification including perceived cognitive and physical traits, languages spoken, family histories, and interests. When describing themselves, some referred to other’s self-descriptions.

*Table 1. Focal Students*

<b>Name (pseudonyms)</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Self-ascribed racial ethnicity<sup>12</sup></b>	<b>Birthplace</b>	<b>Years participated in research</b>
Abi	Girl	Chicana, Mexican, mixed (white & brown)	Mexico	4
Beatriz	Girl	Mexican American	Mexico	4
Ben	Boy	Mexican American	Mexico	4
Chantel	Girl	Mixed (black & white)	US	2
Gaby	Boy	Mexican American	US	3
James	Boy	African American	US	1
Marisol	Girl	Mexican	US	4
Princess	Girl	Mexican American	US	4
Rebecca	Girl	Irish & German American	US	2
Rubina	Girl	Asian African American	US	2
Zac	Boy	Black	US	2

Chantel pointed out that she was mixed like both of her parents, but that her mother referred to herself as black. She had lived in Maryland “all of her life,” until she turned eight and moved to Marshall. She was the second oldest of four and excited to find out that she was going to have a baby sister in the spring, something she had discovered by listening to her mother’s belly. She was a talented gospel singer whose mother directed her church’s youth choir, and she liked to perform songs she had composed. In a third grade interview, she discussed her struggles in reading and work with a tutor, but emphasized that she was great in math. Abi said she liked to call herself by her name, but

<sup>12</sup> I follow Barrie Thorne in using the term *racial ethnicity* to acknowledge that common use of categories like black and Mexican “tend to mix attribution to physical appearance and culture. The broad term racial ethnicity acknowledges these tangled meanings” (2005, p. 84, see also, Omi & Winant, 2014).

that she was Chicana, a Mexican girl and, “like Chantel,” was mixed (brown and white). Throughout elementary school she preferred to speak Spanish and often mentioned not wanting to lose the language of her nuclear and extended family in Mexico. She also talked about returning to Mexico and living in the house her parents were slowly sending money to build back in their home state on land they had bought. As both of her parents had busy work schedules, her father would drop Abi and her younger brother off at a babysitter’s house after school each day.

Rubina and Rebecca were in the same class and Girl Scout troupe, and considered themselves best friends. Both described themselves as English speakers. Rubina described herself as a smart person who liked ice cream and cake. Rebecca said that she was good at math and reading and like animals, especially dogs. Both girls had been identified as “gifted” and participated in the district “discovery” program. Rubina was the oldest of four girls and Rebecca, the youngest of two. While both of their mothers were active in school, Rebecca’s mother spent several days a week volunteering at Grant. Most days after school their parents took them to extracurricular activities and classes.

Zac and James, whose mothers were sisters from Philadelphia, identified themselves as black, and as African American, respectively. Zac described himself as kind and clever, and said one of his main interests was playing video games. He, like Rebecca and Rubina, participated in the Discovery program for “gifted” students, and was seen by his teachers and peers as one of the smartest students in the grade. He lived with his parents and three siblings, and his mother worked as an assistant in a special education, high school classroom. James lived with his mother, sister, and his cat, a pet that he often spoke and wrote about and which he considered a member of the family. He



struggled to get along with others in school, especially those who tried to “run the classroom,” as well as with schoolwork, and often complained that no one listened to him. He prided himself on making others laugh and showed great affection for his teachers, often hugging them upon arrival to and departure from school.

Gaby called himself Mexican American and compared himself to Rebecca and Rubina, saying he was “only a little smart.” He lived with his parents, younger sister, and uncle in a row house that his family had bought and which his father, who ran a construction business, was remodeling. He played the violin and participated in a dance program afterschool. Marisol, who identified as Mexican, also loved to dance and took violin lessons at school. An only child, she spent her summers with both sets of grandparents in Mexico. At the end of fourth grade her parents strategically bought a house on the outskirts of Marshall that allowed Marisol to attend the middle school with the best reputation in the school district.

Princess, originally from New York City, described herself as Mexican American. After her father’s deportation during her second grade year, she lived with her mother, baby sister, and a friend of her mother’s who watched her in the evenings. During her fourth grade year, as her mother left for work early in the morning and did not return until late at night, Princess got ready for school on her own and took care of her sister after school at her aunt’s house. Most days to complete her homework, she consulted with her mother via phone while her mother cleaned in an office building. Ben, who described himself as Mexican American, came to the US at age two with his mother and older brother to live with his older sister and father who had arrived in Marshall a year earlier. When he wasn’t at one of his cousin’s apartments, he liked to spend his afternoons

playing video games. Beatriz lived in a row house with her three siblings, parents, several cousins, and a rotating group of young Mexicans who worked in landscaping and construction, or as day laborers. She described herself as Mexican American and liked to teach her English-speaking classmates Spanish. The highlight of her fourth grade year was the birth of her niece, whom she played with and cared for when not in school.

By the time I started my dissertation fieldwork when the children were in fourth grade, I had personal relationships and different levels of friendships with all of families of the Spanish-speaking children. I had gotten to know and was developing personal relationships with all of the English-speaking families except James's. As I spent time with him, his mother and his sister, slowly his mother and I developed a bond over our mutual concern for James's well-being and school performance. For the focal children, my role was hybrid – part teacher, part tutor, part friend and confidante, part advocate, and part weird, “rich” white lady – and context-dependent.

In the classroom I was often a tutor, children calling me over to help with an assignment. They would also frequently approach me or call me over to ask about what I was doing and/or to share personal news, and at times they asked me to intercede and advocate for them with their teachers. In their homes I was a combination of friend and advocate, and in the library took on a more authoritative, teacherly role. Children were always interested in going through my backpack. Full of snacks, camera equipment (tripod, video camera, wireless microphone), laptop and/or iPad, and often stickers or small treats to hand out, children saw me as source of wealth. Children often asked me about the prices I had paid for these items, and tended to conclude that I was “rich.” For certain students whose families I had developed close friendships with, focal children

came to expect and request that I take them places like one of the local malls, which I did on occasion when I had access to my boyfriend's car.

For the focal children as well as larger population of fourth graders at Grant, many of whom I'd known since kindergarten, my unisex form of dress and my hair, often pulled back in ponytails, didn't match with the fashion and hairstyle of either the teachers or the adult females in their lives. During the first year of my research at Grant, a six year-old girl asked me whether I was a man or a woman. And in fourth grade, a newly arrived student concluded that I was a "big" fourth grader with special privileges. Throughout the years I was at Grant, children often asked me about my speaking Spanish – where I'd learned it and where I was from. Even in fourth grade students I'd known for several years would ask me about me whether I and how it was that I spoke Spanish. For example, one day in fourth grade Roque said to me, "Let me guess who speaks Spanish in your family. Your dad?" When I explained that no one in my family spoke Spanish, he continued, "Oh, are you white? Are you a lesbian?" (fieldnote, 2/20/13). Here it was interesting that Roque, whose family was Dominican and whose skin was paler than mine, associated my language background with my race. At the same time I was not surprised that I might be seen as a lesbian, not because of my language background but because I didn't conform to the gender stereotypes in the way that most females he likely came into contact with on a daily basis did. It seemed that in this instance, Roque's perception of how I looked and talked came out unfiltered.

Throughout my fieldwork, as I wanted to better understand how children were making sense of who they were and could be based on the ways they were classified and labeled in different contexts, I paid close attention to children's comments about me and

each other, and in particular about my, their own, and others' racial, ethnic, linguistic, class backgrounds. Moreover, comments and questions about who I was like the ones above not only gave me a window into how children saw me, but also showed how they were exploring different categories of social identification and making sense of the intersections of these categories (cf. Ferguson, 2010). I also was aware that how children saw me affected what they shared with me and how they talked to me.

### **Fourth Graders at Grant**

In 2012-2013, Grant had about 75 fourth graders divided among four classrooms, one of which was a combined third-fourth grade class. About 65% of the students were from Latino, primarily Mexican households, 30% from African American households, and the rest were from mixed and Anglo backgrounds. Along with the 11 focal students, Grant fourth graders across the three fourth grade classrooms knew who I was and that I was studying fourth graders ideas about what it meant to do well in school. A number of these children appeared in my fieldnotes and videos as they interacted with focal children, and often asked to be observed or filmed.<sup>13</sup> Most of these children showed great interest in my presence at Grant and many asked to participate as focal children. Throughout my dissertation I refer to several of these students, whose words and/or actions became relevant to or illustrative of how teachers were deploying their repertoires of success and/or how children were responding to this. For example, I refer to moments when highly visible students like Roque talked back to teachers when he was publicly

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<sup>13</sup> Five of the fourth graders had returned the “negative assent” note I sent to all of the fourth graders. These children and/or their parents requested that they not be videotaped.

labeled (by default) as not being “proficient” or when others acted in striking ways that brought children’s developing repertoires of success into relief. Most frequently, however, they appear in my dissertation as part of an interaction with focal students.

### **Participating Teachers**

Being on the third-fourth grade wing of the second floor at Grant during my pilot study when children were in third grade gave me a glimpse into daily life in fourth grade. This glimpse was amplified by conversations with Ms. Constanza, one of the participating third grade teachers who would share with me about what testing and test preparation looked like in fourth grade. Based on our conversations and from what I observed, I got the sense that the urgency and pressure around test performance that students and teachers felt only increased in fourth grade. I also felt that spending a year observing in fourth grade would provide me with the data that would help me address issues around student engagement that are so often investigated at the middle school level (e.g., Hernandez, 2013; Shoshani & Slone, 2013; Wang & Eccles, 2013). Thus during this year, I confirmed my decision to focus on fourth grade for my dissertation research. Ms. Constanza also provided an entrée into the fourth grade classrooms. She introduced me and spoke positively about me to the three fourth grade teachers so that by the end of the 2011-2012 school year all three were on board to participate in my study if it turned out that focal students were in their classroom.

My time in the fourth grade was spent in the classrooms of the three fourth grade teachers Ms. Constanza had introduced me to, Mrs. Learner, Ms. Klein, and Ms. Zawistowski. Housed together at one end of the second floor their classrooms were

similar in layout and in teaching and learning routines. The school principal, Ms. Chavez, spent time each morning in each of these four classrooms monitoring teachers and students. She did not allow me to begin spending time in these classrooms until November because she wanted the teachers to have “their classes and routines up and running” before I observed them. The fourth grade teachers were open, friendly and welcoming, and each Friday from September through October when I came to pick up the focal students to take them to the library, they would comment that it was not *they* who didn’t want me in their classrooms yet, but Ms. Chavez, and that they didn’t understand why she was making me wait so long. Like most of the teachers at Grant, all were white and from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds.

Six of the focal students were in Mrs. Learner’s class. In her late 30s, she was in her 18<sup>th</sup> year of teaching up and down the middle school and upper elementary grades. She had been at Grant for 15 years. She lived in a neighboring town and sent her three children to private school. Although she felt ready to leave the classroom, she and her husband had decided it made sense for her to continue teaching to help pay for their children’s school tuition. She had a relaxed and easy-going attitude and her class had the reputation of having most of the “smart” and high performing fourth graders. Ms. Klein, in her late-20s and from a wealthy town outside of Philadelphia, was in her fourth year as a fourth grade teacher at Grant. Her first experience teaching had been as the building substitute teacher at Grant. With a mother as a teacher, she had planned to teach from a young age and had attended a competitive teacher education program in the Northeast for her undergraduate studies. She maintained a quiet classroom and used a complex

classroom management system to ensure that children followed rules and procedures.

Two of the focal students were in her classroom.

Ms. Zawistowski, referred to as Miss Z by the children, was from a neighboring town. She was in her early 30s and had started teaching in 2007. She said that teaching must be in her blood as her father had taught woodshop and robotics at the high school level for over 25 years. To further her education and to open up new professional possibilities, during the year I spent in her classroom, she started a program to get a certificate in Special Education at a local university. While she had a playful manner with her students, she ran a tightly controlled classroom, often sitting at her desk behind students ensuring that they worked independently and quietly. Three of the focal students were in her classroom.

### **Data Collection**

In this ethnographic, collaborative study I followed the 11 children described above in their last year (fourth grade) at Grant Elementary. The primary research sites were their fourth grade classrooms and the public library, several blocks from Grant, where I met with them each Friday after school. An ethnographic approach was well suited to provide a window into the complexities of school engagement and performance, and to illuminate children's emic perspectives about school success. Data collection included participant observation; semi-structured interviews (Briggs, 1986); select classroom and library meeting videotaping; and students' videotaping and photography. Below I discuss the data collection methods I used to investigate each of my research questions. The different types and amounts of data collected are shown in Table 2.

Throughout my dissertation, I occasionally reference data from my third grade pilot study

as well as from fifth grade when I met monthly with focal students at the public library (see Appendices B & C for more information on the data I collected when students were in third and fifth grades.) In the following paragraphs I described the methods I used to answer my research questions.

*Table 2.* Fourth grade data

Research context	Type of data
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 74 classroom fieldnote entries</li> <li>• 123 hours of classroom videos</li> <li>• 5 teacher interview audio-recordings</li> <li>• 22 student interview audio-recordings</li> <li>• 50+ documents (students' artwork, assignments, tests, homework, report cards, notes sent home, etc.)</li> <li>• 6 parent-teacher conference fieldnote entries</li> <li>• 5 parent-teacher conference videos</li> </ul>
Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approx. 220 photos taken by students</li> <li>• Approx. 5.5 hours of home videos</li> <li>• 5 family interview audio-recordings</li> <li>• 25 household visit fieldnote entries</li> </ul>
Library	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 37 weekly library fieldnote entries</li> <li>• 40 hours of library videos</li> <li>• 10 student group and pair interviews</li> <li>• 20 digital stories</li> </ul>

### **How do teachers draw on test scores and other markers in their communication with children about what it means to do well in school?**

To answer this overarching question I engaged in participant observation and observant participation, documenting daily interactions and instructional routines in fourth (2012-2013) grade, the final year of elementary school and the second year of standardized testing. Based on Ms. Chavez's wishes, I did not begin observing in the fourth grade classrooms until November. From November through the rest of the school year I spent between two to two and a half days each week in the classroom. I rotated between each of the three fourth grade classroom, typically spending between a half and



whole day each week in each classroom and rotating the time and day in each classroom each week as much as possible. For each classroom visit, while I took general field notes on what was taking place in the classroom, I paid special attention to a different focal student. However, on the days I spent a whole day in the same classroom, I often focused on two different focal students. This was to ensure that I was able to closely observe each focal student between 4-5 times over the course of the school year.

To focus on individual students, I would set up my small digital camera on a tripod to record the student in whatever activity or lesson she or he was participating. Students would choose whether or not to wear a small lavalier microphone to better record their voices. I would follow these students to recess, lunch, and any other class or activity the student participated in. While I would film the student at recess or in other classes such as violin or library, I would not bring the camera to the cafeteria as there were many students and staff present who had not given consent to be videotaped.

As much of the day in fourth grade revolved around teacher-fronted lessons and quiet, independent work, the video camera tended to capture the teachers' over the students' voices, which gave me valuable information about the teaching and learning practices surrounding how success and doing well in school was indexed. Another source of data I used to examine the schooling practices surrounding teachers' repertoires of success were documents such as textbooks, report cards, assessments, notes sent home, and homework. These were documents shared with me by both teachers and students.

In addition, I interviewed teachers about curriculum implementation, how they understood success, and how they saw certain students as successful (or not). Their responses contextualized my observations and shed light on how they interpreted, and at

times resisted, administrative mandates about curricula and instruction. During this time spent in the classroom, I paid close attention to moments when teachers and students talked explicitly about success, doing well in school, failure, and when they publicly announced grades and test scores. I also took careful notice of when and how they held up certain students as models of “good” or “bad” students.

**How do children draw on test scores and other markers in their communication with their teachers and each other about what it means to do well in school?**

To answer this question I supplemented classroom observations with select videotaping of focal children at school and of parent-teacher conferences. This allowed me to document more closely how children engaged with class routines, especially in moments when “being successful” became relevant such as when tests were handed back to children and they compared or hid their grades from peers, or when teachers positioned students as models of success. As most class routines were teacher-fronted, videotaping helped me document peer interaction operating simultaneously but removed from sanctioned classroom interactions (cf. Blackledge & Creese 2010). To gain additional insight on these issues, I interviewed teachers and parents. I also interviewed children about their ideas of school success and examined documents – assignments, homework, artwork, tests, notes – they shared with me.

While in my interviews with teachers I had a high degree of what Briggs refers to as “metacommunicative competence” (1986) because of my own experience as a teacher and affiliation with the challenges of public school teaching, with families, and especially with children, I learned over time how to move from more researcher-centered questions that I thought would elicit responses that corresponded directly to my research questions,

to following children's lead in interviews and listening to them share their experiences (see, Westcott & Littleton, 2005). Learning to do so was critical to making sense of how children communicated about doing well in school.

During my time spent conducting research in Marshall, I shifted my orientation from conducting ethnographic research *on* and *for* children, to research *on, for, and with* children (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton & Richardson, 1992). I saw the children participating in my dissertation study as active and creative social agents, a recognition based on my growing awareness of how, through their participation in the research, they re-shaped the research context(s) and directed my relationships and work with them. Thus to investigate how children responded to schooling practices that emphasized testing readiness and performance, I drew on Luttrell's (n.d.) *collaborative seeing and hearing* approach, which, along with ethnographic techniques, included visual and narrative methods to engage children in explicit "readings" or observations of their social worlds. I did this by facilitating meetings with focal students after school each Friday in the boardroom of the Marshall Public Library. Beginning in September, two-hour meetings initially consisted of: community-building activities; student-led discussions (based on topics of students' and my choosing); training in the use of disposable cameras and digital video cameras; individual and pair interviews with children about their video recordings and still photographs; and children's work on digital storytelling projects. Children's video recording of portions of each meeting allowed them practice filming, helped me plan for subsequent meetings, and provided additional data on children's interactions outside of school.

In initial meetings I interviewed children, individually or with peers of their choosing, about their video-recordings from the end of third grade. Following the interviews, they took home disposable cameras to document what they wanted to share about their life outside of school and their families; what success meant to them and their families; how they learned or what it meant to do well in school; and/or places where they felt comfortable and respected.<sup>14</sup> After interviewing children about these photographs (again with peers or individually based on their preference), they developed personal narratives around one or more photos, to be used in digital stories, which they later shared with each other and their families. Students also took home small, digital Flip cameras to use in their stories. The development of these digital stories followed work by Glynda Hull and colleagues (e.g., Hull & Katz, 2006; Hull & Nelson, 2005) and were multimodal compositions made of photographs and video clips children took and then arranged in iMovie with narrated voiceovers. While the weekly meetings provide an interactive space where I could share with students about my research and enlist them in data collection and interpretation through the use of photography and video-recording, meetings also allowed students time outside of school to socialize and to explore issues of their own concern.

My use of visual methodologies, while an extension and modification of my earlier ethnographic research in Grant with many of these same children, was also based on the idea that videos and photographs children made or took would offer a glimpse into relationships, places and activities that mattered most to them, and provide a way for

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<sup>14</sup> These prompts were modifications of Luttrell's (n.d.) "Children Framing Childhoods" study in which she uses collaborative seeing and hearing with a group of fifth grade immigrant students in a "low-achieving" public elementary school in MA.

them to “read” and share interpretations of their social worlds (Luttrell, n.d., 2010). My decision to focus on stories or narratives children tell, also part of Luttrell’s approach to research with young people, was sparked by focal students’ interest and requests for space to tell their own stories (in the third grade pilot research). I also wanted to highlight children’s stories told in informal conversations, in interviews, and through these storytelling projects, as “narrative ways of knowing” that are often depreciated or discounted in academic settings (Hymes, 1980), especially in their fourth grade classrooms where “knowing” often seemed limited to correct answers on multiple choice questions.

Over the year the library meetings in the boardroom evolved based on children’s interests, regular feedback, and progress on their digital storytelling projects. I viewed the library meetings as crucial to learning more about children’s evolving processes of social identification – how they positioned themselves and others as certain kinds of students, and more broadly, what was salient to them in presenting themselves to and interacting with others. This view was based on my broader goal of understanding “the ways in which children’s social worlds are shaped and controlled by them” (Edmond, 2005, p. 124). Thus, while I developed a basic structure to these meetings that would allow me to explore children’s evolving repertoires of success, I followed children’s lead in terms of their interests and ideas for what they could do as a group in addition to creating their own digital stories. I also saw their involvement in the planning of what took place in the boardroom as a way for them to take some degree of control over how I was included in their interactions and to show themselves as experts on their own experiences (ibid, p. 136).

In the boardroom children also interviewed each other based on questions posed by the children and by me. For peer interviews, children brainstormed questions they were interested in asking their peers after which they would work in pairs, taking on the roles of videographer and interviewer, moving from peer to peer and engaging them in responding to their questions. My one-on-one and pair interviews in the boardroom tended to be about the photos and video footage and often resulted in spontaneous narratives on the children's part of important events or issues in their lives (see Greene & Hill, 2005), all of which informed how I understood how they positioned themselves as certain kinds of students.

### **Data Analysis**

In order to keep track of and draw upon the great quantity of data I collected/was collecting during the children's fourth grade year, my analysis took place in different phases and formats. Much of my early analysis took place during children's fourth grade year, which helped me follow leads based on how I was "reading" my data and thus, make decisions about what to look for and focus on each week when observing and talking with children and teachers. Deeper analysis took place that summer and the following year. I followed Emerson, Fretz and Shaw in seeing my analysis as "at once inductive and deductive, like someone who is simultaneously creating and solving a puzzle, or like a carpenter alternately changing the shape of a door and then the shape of the door frame to obtain a better fit" (1995, p. 144).

My data collection tools filled my black backpack. Inside were a video camera, laptop or iPad, a small lined notebook, pens and pencils, and several files and folders in which I kept documents kids and teachers shared with me as well as notes I needed to

send home with focal children for their parents. While in the classroom, often with the video camera set up on a tripod and filming one of the focal children, I usually sat in the back of the room in a location that gave me a good view of the child being filmed. From there I would write fieldnotes in my notebook, kids often asking about or asking to see what I had written and sometimes writing me a note or picture in the margins.

By January while I kept a notebook with me at all times to quickly jot down notes (cf. Emerson et al., 1995), I had begun to write my fieldnotes directly into my laptop or iPad. This was to save time as not only did I have fieldnotes from school write up, but also between one to three hours of classroom video footage to log each week, and sometimes interviews as well. Moreover, I had weekly library meeting fieldnotes to write and videos to log. On the train ride home, I would read over my notes, making edits and additions. As I was following Corsaro's (1981) fieldnote-writing techniques, I would also add in personal, theoretical and methodological notes, which later helped me select themes for more focused coding.

On Fridays when I met with the children at the library, I would jot down notes throughout our time together, and then once on the train would write up fieldnotes on my iPad or laptop. Once home, I would find time each week to log all of the video and audio footage I had collected. Based on this process, each week I would engage in initial memo writing, playing with issues and ideas based on my fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 1995). This helped me to identify certain topics or themes in my fieldnotes that were salient to my research questions, such as how and when certain students were held up as models for their peers, or how what students talked about with each other in their free time on the days they had taken tests.

When I began open coding of fieldnotes during my data collection, I quickly amassed over 100+ codes that included codes like: testing, peer interaction, student-teacher interaction, teacher positioning of students, student positioning of self and others, etc. Once done with my fieldwork, I began to group and collapse these codes into broader categories such as: teaching and learning practices accompanying talk about doing well in school, non-verbal markers that signaled success, and ideologies about success evidence in classroom discourse. These broader categories helped me more clearly define and articulate what I meant by repertoires of success and begin to make analytical distinctions between children's and teachers' repertoires of success and the contexts in which they were deployed. For example, although the great majority of instances when communication between teachers and students took place around doing well or being successful in school had to do with test scores and standardized testing, not all teachers and children defined doing well in school based on test scores when I talked with them one-on-one. And for children, especially, there were many other ways they communicate about doing well in school.

Using classroom and library meeting data, I created different codes that had to do with the ways children indexed doing well in school such as the arts, athletics, game genres, bilingualism, social relations and skills, etc. These became the basis for how I began to understand children's repertoires of success. Once I had done this, I began noting how children often employed their own repertoires of success with respect to their teachers' repertoires (e.g., when, upon receiving a low math test grade, a child commented to her peers about her artistic talent) and was also able to more clearly see the overlap between children's and teachers' repertoires of success. As I continued to code, I



also began to see more clearly not just how disciplinary acts of power around testing constrained everyday schooling practices in myriad, complex ways, but also how power relations among students, and among teachers and students played out at moments when talk about success based on testing came to the foreground.

For the library data (fieldnotes, videologs, and interviews), my analyses followed the above process. The library meeting data helped me further articulate children's repertoires of success based not just on how they interacted with each other in a less constricted space, but also on how they responded to questions I asked them in discussions with the whole group of students as well as with pairs or individuals about doing well in school. The collaborative aspect of the library meetings – engaging children in collecting and creating their own images related to what success meant to them – clearly affected the data itself. However, I saw their participation in data collection and our interactions around this data as enhancing my understandings of what I observed (Cameron et al. 1992). For example, in my analyses I examined how children positioned themselves with respect to me and the kinds of questions I asked and tasks I proposed, and compared this to how they positioned themselves with respect to each other, to their teachers, to their parents, and to other important figures in their lives. This allowed me to see how success repertoires emerged and receded across various interactions, and how these interactions were relevant data for cataloguing these repertoires and how they came into play in children's fluid, multilingual and multimodal lives.

Deeper data analysis took place once the fourth grade school year ended, and I followed Emerson et al. (1995) in a process of focused coding and integrated memo

writing,<sup>15</sup> which allowed me to organize data around emergent themes and concepts and to identify portions of video and audio data for further examination through discourse analysis (Gee, 2011). Along with ethnographic coding, discourse and narrative analysis were helpful in my understanding of both how teachers deployed their repertoires of success and how children negotiated, responded to, and developed their own ideas about success based on this deployment.

This new layer of analysis also allowed me to focus more closely on how teachers positioned children and how children positioned themselves and others as certain kinds of students. At the same time, I kept in mind a discursive approach based on a Foucauldian perspective to understanding children's perspectives on doing well in school helped me understand what children said and did "in relationships to (a) what it was possible for them to say and (b) what it was possible for me, as a white, middle class woman, to hear them saying" (Alldred & Burman, 2005, p. 176). I explore this further in Chapters 5 and 6 when addressing the kinds of questions I asked children and the kind of activities I engaged them in during the library meetings.

### **Consent and Data Sharing**

By the time I began conducting my dissertation research I had gotten to know all but one of the families of the focal students in my research. Five of the families I had known since 2008, one since 2009, and the rest since the 2011-2012 year when I conducted my pilot study. Because of the relationships I had developed over time, the frequent sharing of and conversations around data with families and children for six of

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<sup>15</sup> Supported by HyperRESEARCH software

the families since first grade, and for four of the families since third grade, all 11 eleven children and all but one of their families expressed interested in participating in my research.<sup>16</sup> Over the summer before their fourth grade year, I met with all of the families to talk in detail about my project and to share with them the consent form. Due to issues of documentation status, I had received permission to waive the requirement for all families to sign the consent forms and note verbal consent.

Before starting the research, I also talked individually to each focal child and asked for their verbal consent along with many suggestions as to how I might observe them at school. For children, I had double copies made of each roll of photos they took (two rolls for each student). I did not look at these photos until children had first looked at them, taking out any they preferred I didn't see. I would then keep the edited set of photos and children would take the rest home. I also made DVD copies of all of the videos as well as the digital stories each child made for her/him to keep. Children were able to choose those with whom they wanted to share their photos and digital stories. While not everyone chose to share all of their photos, everyone was excited to share their digital story with each other and with all of their families at the end of the school year.

At the school level, I met with fourth grade and specials teachers who would be working with the fourth grade in late October to talk through my study and share with them the consent forms. As I had done in third grade, I sent the fourth grade teachers copies of my fieldnotes, editing out when necessary personal information that children had shared with me in confidence. Each time I videotaped in their classrooms, I also made copies of the classroom video footage marked with potential moments to watch

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<sup>16</sup> James did not start participating in the research until a month into my fieldwork after I had met with his mother.

based on things teachers had mentioned they were interested in knowing more or were concerned about. I did this for a several reasons.

First, I wanted to be as transparent as possible about what I was seeing in the classroom. My goal was also for this sharing to be a way to foster conversation about what I was seeing and engage teachers in discussing and providing feedback.

Furthermore, I wanted teachers to see me as a resource and someone who was available to talk about teaching dilemmas and ideas. However, I quickly realized that teachers had little time to read or discuss the fieldnotes with me. On occasion, one would mention something I had written and it would foster a short conversation, but this was rare. None ever mentioned having watched the DVDs I made them. I did, however, have frequent and ongoing conversations with teachers when I spent time in their classrooms, which mostly centered on things that were happening in the moment.

In terms of the many non-focal fourth graders in the classrooms I was observing and filming, I gave a short explanation to the whole class of what I was going to be doing and then sent home a form families could use to opt out of appearing in the video footage. I surmise that the small number of children and families who chose to opt out was because most of the children had known me since kindergarten and many wanted to appear on camera. Out of the three focal classrooms, between one and two students per class opted not to be filmed. In the third fourth grade classroom, no students opted out.

### **Summary**

Nancy Hornberger (1988) discusses the importance of the ethnographer's relationships with research participants and how they affect the kinds of questions asked and data collected (see also, Luttrell, 2010). I find this point key to how my dissertation

came about over a long period of time and through years of observing, sharing with and listening to families and teachers. In particular, my relationships with children and their families were critical in how I developed my methods and engaged children in my research. These relationships were also key in how I understood and analyzed what I observed at school and inspired me to find ways to conduct research that would be beneficial to them. At the same time these relationships also taught me much about my own privilege as a white, highly educated, middle class woman. These relationships showed me that I had much to learn, including how much children from minoritized backgrounds have to contribute to conversations on education and teaching. It is within this mind frame and framework that I designed and structured my dissertation. In this chapter I have introduced the children, their families, and their teachers, and how and where I came to know them. In the following chapter I focus on the schooling experience of fourth graders at Grant Elementary and more specifically, how the teachers' repertoires of success were deployed on a daily basis.

#### **Chapter 4: Everything We Do in Here Counts: Teachers' Repertoires of Success**

By the time children at Grant reached fourth grade, they were well-versed in the labels and procedures associated with standardized testing. They were also used to weekly classroom visits by the school math specialist, Mrs. Cole, who led mini-lessons on material the class as a whole was struggling to master as indicated by student performance on the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt *Go Math* curriculum tests and quizzes and the Success for All Foundation's *4Sight State Core Standard Benchmark Assessments*. Starting in December, Mrs. Cole's weekly visits had evolved into "study sessions" based on class performance on the 4Sight assessments. During these sessions, which were co-led by the classroom teacher, Mrs. Cole showed a PowerPoint-style, Smart Board presentation using 4Sight software that included sample test questions<sup>17</sup> based on skills or concepts identified as areas of struggle for the class as a whole. The study session screen displayed a set of colored-coded graphs and charts with statistics on class performance along with a digital timer logging the session's duration.

Sessions tended to take place over the course of several days while Mrs. Cole and the classroom teacher walked children through the assessment results, led them through dozens of sample test questions, and gave them pep talks about the SSAs. What follows in Excerpt 1 is a transcription from a recording of one of these sessions in Ms. Klein's class in mid-December. Previous to this visit from Mrs. Cole, children had spent several hours each morning over the course of two weeks taking the second round of the

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<sup>17</sup>For each page of sample test questions, there was a copyright posted at the bottom of the screen stating that these questions may not be printed out or photocopied.

quarterly 4Sight assessments.

### Excerpt 1

(C=Mrs. Cole, K=Ms. Klein, L=Mrs. Learner)

1. **C:** We have 4 months to learn everything we don't know yet
2. **K:** If they got proficient or basic they have a very good chance of getting proficient
3. on the SSAs...there are 13 students below basic...that's a *lot* of students
4. **C:** Should we see who was proficient?
5. **K:** Yeah they could stand up...Paz, Ashanté, Shanlin, Andrés, Jamie, Franklin...six
6. of you have a chance of getting advanced
7. **C:** Basic?
8. **K:** Basic is still good=
9. **C:** =But they have a little bit more to learn before they get to proficient
10. **K:** Gregorio, Isaac, Monica, Yael, Jorge and Alma
11. **C:** You guys are on your way, you're learning...the rest of you have a lot more to
12. learn so you need to really, *really* focus on our math
13. **K:** So if you didn't hear your name you really, really, *really* need to pay attention. So
14. right now you shouldn't be touching whiteboards or markers, everything we do in
15. here counts, it's to help you for the SSA
16. **C:** So your class was 23% [proficient]...should we check out another class?
17. **K:** Maybe L's? [Class known to have the highest performers in the grade]
18. **C:** (Pulling up pie graph off L's class) This is **not** depressing, this is to motivate you
19. **K:** If you're below basic... here [in L's class] there are barely any basic or below

20. basic

21. C: This is a prettier picture...blue is the best, green is proficient...looks like a lot of

22. the class was proficient (clicks back to pie graph for K's class)...we still have a lot to

23. do in not a lot of time...more than half the class is below basic... green is good, we

24. like green...yellow you're on your way...red you really need to work hard

(videolog, 12/12/12)

This instance, in which teachers publicly identified, compared, and grouped students using color-coded test score labels (e.g. advanced, proficient, basic, below basic) according to individual student performance, illustrates how they deployed their repertoires of success in the classroom. Teachers' repertoires of success (TROS) were the collection of signs – test scores and other markers – they used to signal to students what it meant to do well in school and thus used to interpret as successful school performance. For example, Mrs. Cole and Ms. Klein's talk shows how they deemed students successful based on whether they reached a certain level (a score of advanced or proficient) on this assessment. While study sessions like these did not take place every day, daily teacher-led classroom talk around doing well in school tended to reference children's performance on tests, and in particular what counted as a successful score on the SSA. Moreover, teachers frequently used test scores to label students as doing well (or not) regardless of whether they were reviewing a standardized assessment.

In spite of teachers' frequent talk about testing and the use of test scores as labels for children, TROS varied to different degrees and included other markers like holding one's body in certain ways, working quietly and independently and speaking, or being perceived to speak, in certain ways. Talk about these markers was tightly interwoven into



classroom teaching and learning routines, and permeated interactions between teachers and students. Moreover the deployment of these markers was motivated by and helped shape the managerialist focus on performance outcomes in which everything that took place in the classroom “counted” for the SSA (e.g., line 15).

Study sessions often took on the feel of a pep rally, albeit one in which only certain class members were positioned for “success” on the SSA. This motivational talk, along with the color-coded graphs, and fancy technology, seemed to convert the interaction into a parody of a corporate meeting. However, these bells and whistles masked the reality that two white teachers were addressing a room full of primarily brown and black children, publicly equating who they were with their 4Sight performance. Interactions such as these show evidence of what Leonardo, drawing on Foucault, refers to as “race power” of regulating discourse through which the master race controls how subordinated races become known or are made into objects of knowledge (2013, p. 122). In the fourth grade classrooms there was no forum in which to address the subtle, or not-so-subtle workings of race power and how it was embedded in classroom instruction and routines.

In these situations, the children who did not make the mark were barraged with the message that they needed “to really, *really* focus,” (line 12), “really, really, *really* to pay attention” (line 13), and really “work hard” (line 24). Practices like these that students were told to engage in so as to perform better on testing came together to form icons of doing well in school. In turn different configurations of signs and practices were linked to ideologies of meritocracy – that working hard in this way would lead to success. At the same time teachers drew on different technologies of power, classifying, comparing

and excluding groups of children (lines 16-22), and predicting their performance on the SSA (lines 6, 9, 19), just as the 4Sight purported to do.

In this chapter I look at how these technologies of power were akin to Jaffe-Walter's notion of *technologies of concern*, which positioned certain groups of students as Others and as targets for increased surveillance, regulation and remediation (2013). I show how TROS motivated and were motivated by such technologies of concern linked to prescriptivist models of education that racialize certain students or groups of students. I begin this chapter by framing how TROS were situated within the managerialist system of education and how within such a system in which "everything counted," teachers, under surveillance themselves, looked to corporate models of ordering and regulating how and what they taught, as well as what took place in their classrooms.

I then show how in interviews and one-on-one conversations teachers had moments of breaking out of the managerialist frame when they expressed different ideas about what it meant to do well in school such as meeting one's goals or showing academic progress over time. I contrast these conversations with what I observed in the classroom, laying out the details of how teachers deployed their repertoires of success in daily instructional routines and how this resulted in their positioning children as certain kinds of students. Throughout the chapter I discuss how the white gaze of managerialism served to racialize and otherize children in both subtle and explicit ways.

### **On Time, on Task, on a Mission: Managerialism at Grant Elementary**

In the Fall of 2012, I noticed a new school motto for Grant in the entrance of the building: *On time, on task, on a mission. We're on the move. Where precision is taught*

*and excellence is expected.* Striking about this motto were several things. First, its prominent presence in the entrance to the school meant that all those who entered would see it. While this placement may have been important for those who entered daily – teachers, children, parents – I wondered whether it were also important for visitors, such as those charged with ensuring that schools complied with state- or district-mandated policies around testing. Second, this motto seemed more fitting for a corporate headquarters than a school. For example, I was struck by how explicitly the motto indexed the logics of efficiency tied to principles of scientific management and New Taylorism guiding current educational reform and accountability measures in U.S. public schools (Kliebard, 2004).

Under managerialism, social problems such as disparities in school performance along racial, ethnic, linguistic and economic lines become technical problems needing management through accountability, rationality, efficiency, and improved productivity (ibid.; Fitzsimmons, 2011), all notions underlying Grant's school motto. In this way managerialism is "an all-embracing conception of organizational control" that "subsists both as a body of theory to be learned and internalized by managers, and as a set or practices to be implemented, encompassing managers and managed" (Ball, 1990, p. 156; Foucault, 1979). Kliebard (2013) defines managerialism as not simply a method of modern management, but an ideology whose central doctrine is that all organizations and institutions can be "optimized by the application of generic management skills and knowledge" (p. 4). In this view "social life can be mastered scientifically and can be understood and organized through law-like generalizations" (Ball, 1990, p. 157).

Grant's motto also relayed a sense of urgency in reaching "excellence," which, as

Crawford Garrett (2012) points out, drives the logics of efficiency in many schools under current educational reforms. A search on the school district website led to the district's guiding framework, *PATHS to Excellence [Promoting All to Higher Standards of Excellence]*. Of the ten PATH targets listed on the district webpage, seven focused on elementary and middle school students reaching grade level, or proficient or advanced levels, on literacy and math assessments. Here, the notion of excellence indexed ideologies of academic achievement and success based on individual performance on standardized tests. At Grant, the "path to excellence" was located in the scripted curricula fourth grade teachers were required to use and likely indexed in the frequent meetings they attended to learn procedures and policies for implementing test preparation and administering standardized tests and assessments. Their "effectiveness" as teachers hinged on "definable results" (Marginson, 1993), or student performance on the SSA, the axis around which all teaching and learning revolved.

### **Getting Ready for the SSA**

In fourth grade, each class followed the same schedule with little variation. Upon first glance, this schedule seemed like a typical elementary school schedule albeit one that lacked a science program (see Table 1). However, what quickly became apparent to me as I spent time in fourth grade classrooms was how talk about testing and the use of test score labels permeated classroom discourse and that the curricula, all part of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's (HMH) packaged literacy, math and social studies programs, revolved around preparing students for the SSA. The frequent presence of Ms. Chavez, the school principal, in the fourth grade classrooms ensured that teachers

followed these curricular guides and administered their associated evaluations “properly” and according to schedule. In this way, teachers, too were under constant surveillance and had little opportunity to veer from the HMH curricula.

*Table 3. Fourth Grade Daily Schedule*

9:10-10:00	Independent work (Homework check, math word problems, worksheets)
10:00-10:15	Daily Announcements
10:15-11:45	Literacy ( <i>Storytown*</i> )
11:45-12:15	Literacy or Social Studies ( <i>Education Place*</i> )
12:15-12:30	Recess
12:30-1:00	Lunch
1:00-1:30	Independent Reading
1:30-2:30	Math ( <i>Go Math*</i> )
2:30-2:40	Clean up
2:40-3:25	Special (Art, Library, Gym, Music)
3:25	Dismissal
*Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH)	

As the fourth grade daily schedule shows, all academic subjects were taught through the use of HMH. As one of the four publishing houses producing over 80% of the textbooks used in U.S. schools (Sewall, 2005) and one of three corporations that produce all of the standardized tests in the US, not only does HMH write and grade standardized tests, it also publishes the textbooks used to prepare students for testing (Broussard, 2014). According to its press materials, HMH had a 44% market share and brought in \$1.37 billion in revenue in 2014. In this way, it plays a disproportionately large role in the selection, organization, and distribution of curricular knowledge (cf., Larsen, Allen & Osborn, 2010). The HMH comprehensive curricular packages at Grant, with its scripted textbooks tightly coordinated to the SSA, undermined fourth grade teacher expertise in subject matter and pedagogy and served to “de-skill” them as professionals (ibid.). Here, the publishing industry’s role in curricular design and implementation can be seen as an integral part of how managerialism operates in U.S.

public schooling, with teachers as technicians and micro-managers at the bottom of a hierarchy of managers.

As testing and test preparation were integral components of the HMH curricula, each week fourth graders were assessed through quizzes, spelling tests, end-of-unit tests, and/or extensive benchmark assessments such as the 4Sights. After the December break, an even stronger emphasis on testing readiness began, and starting in January “powerpacks,” 20-30 page-long math and literacy test prep packets, took the place of regular homework and were sent home every two weeks until the SSA was administered in April. Students who did not turn the packets in were sent to detention.

Teachers made note of this emphasis on test preparation in their conversations with me. For example, one morning Miss Z told me about the upcoming SSA writing test that would be administered several weeks prior to the math, literacy and science SSA tests (1/30/13). She said that later that day she needed to review the Storytown test children had just completed because they needed to be familiar with the kinds of questions that would be on the SSA. She added that after lunch they would be taking their Go Math end-of-unit test, which was 10 pages long with lots of word problems. And finally, she mentioned that the following week fourth graders would be taking the third round of 4Sight assessments. After going over this long list, she sighed and said she didn’t like that they had so much testing, but that they had to get ready for the SSA. Fourth grade teachers frequently shared with me this kind of resigned but resentful compliance with testing mandates. Not only did they have to regulate and monitor students’ progression through the constant stream of tests, but they also had to regulate their own teaching to comply with these assessments.

One day in February Ms. Klein showed me copies of the third round of 4Sight math and reading assessments (2/8/13). The reading 4Sight was 12 pages long and divided into reading passages and questions for fiction, non-fiction, a poem and instructions. The last section on the assessment was a constructed response essay on one of the reading passages. For the math 4Sight, there were about 17 pages of multiple-choice questions and then three pages of word problems with space for children to write constructed response paragraphs (explaining how they had solved each problem). Ms. Klein said that the 4Sight took between 8-10 days to complete as they were only administered in the morning, and she pointed out that this meant that she lost valuable instructional time.

Although the 4Sight seemed exceptionally long, she pointed out that the Storytown end-of-unit tests were even longer. She said they tended to be between 25-28 pages and consisted of 2-3 reading passages of different genres, with multiple-choice and constructed response sections. These were followed by several pages each of multiple-choice "robust vocabulary," spelling, and grammar sections. Then there was a final, longer, constructed response section in which the children had to write an essay in response to a prompt unconnected to any of the reading passages on the test.

Ms. Klein reiterated that these tests also took away several days worth of literacy instruction. Regardless of their opinions about these assessments that were so directly tied to the SSA in their length, look and content, teachers had no choice about whether to administer them. Thus within this context, student performance on these assessments became the primary way to measure student success and to talk to them about how well they were doing in school. At the same, these measurements were ways for teachers

themselves to be evaluated and managed. As Green points out, such ‘teacher-proof’ forms of curricula are linked to the “heightened emphasis on teacher accountability and the surveillance and control of teachers’ work” (1998, p. 178; see also, Ball, 1990b).

### **In “Big Trouble”: Surveillance and Control of Teachers’ Work**

One day in early February, Miss Z (Ms. Zawistowski), one of the fourth grade teachers, told me she needed to postpone the interview we had scheduled because Ms. Chavez had called a mandatory afterschool meeting for the fourth grade team. Miss Z said that the fourth grade team was in “big trouble” because they had administered the SSA writing test incorrectly. Following what they had thought was the testing protocol for accommodations for those identified as English Language Learners, teachers had “transcribed” rather than “scribed” students’ writing, which meant that they had written what children had dictated to them directly onto the test booklet instead of writing their words on a separate paper and having students copy it. Miss Z said that they had had so many meetings about testing and testing accommodations that she was still trying to process information from the September meetings. She commented that she was “not going to let Ms. Chavez yell at us” and that the message they always got was to “hurry, hurry, hurry.” With a grim, angry look on her face, she told me that she and her colleagues might be fired, and that in any case all she was going to do for the rest of the SSA was just hand out the test and “nothing more” (fieldnote, 2/6/13).

Shortly after this incident, teachers were notified that they would not be allowed to administer the rest of the SSA to their own classes, and instead would have to switch classes with each other on the remaining testing days. Here, rather than recognize the confusion teachers had experienced around administering the writing test and find ways



to support them in this endeavor, teachers were blamed for their misinterpretation of the testing accommodations and positioned as objects in need of discipline, as in-compliant workers who needed to be held accountable for their infraction.

Accountability was an integral part of teaching and learning in fourth grade and as a component of managerialism, structured the possibilities for how teachers could engage with children about doing well in school. Moreover, the kind of compliance with accountability measures teachers were subject to bled over into their instructional discourse.

### **There Are No Excuses: Accountability Discourse in the Classroom**

Grant's school-wide monthly Reading Celebration was one of the most publicized, academics-based rewards systems at Grant. To attend the event students had to read for a certain number of hours each month, recording what they read in a log signed by a parent. The celebration took place during lunch at the end of each month when attendees were offered face painting, a plastic Olympics-style medal, and a spot during lunchtime at cafeteria tables converted to banquet tables covered in tablecloths and platters of popcorn and other treats, and waited on by teachers. Each week Mrs. White, the reading specialist, visited classrooms to remind students about the end-of-the-month Reading Celebration, attempting to motivate them to read at home and bring in their reading logs.

One morning shortly before Thanksgiving, she arrived in Miss Z's room right as school began. Children looked up from their multiplication facts worksheets as she talked about wanting to see *all* students at the Celebration and commented, "There are *no* excuses! There is nothing better than getting into a good book!" (11/20/12). Of note in

this example is the phrase, “there are *no* excuses,” which was, during President Bush’s 2006 campaign to reauthorize No Child Left Behind, and continues to be, a catch-phrase associated with school reform and accountability measures refuting what many refer to as “the soft bigotry of low expectations.”

In this case, the phrase was recontextualized by Mrs. White as she incorporated it into a new context, Grant’s Reading Celebration, linking reading for pleasure to accountability measures and thus, echoing No Child Left Behind in a mandate for students to enjoy reading. Here, much like teachers’ requirement that students show an “interested message” when finished with their work or awaiting directions, Mrs. White’s comment can be read as an attempt to regulate children’s emotions or attitudes towards reading. Such regulation became increasingly necessary as many children began to express dislike of reading once testing began in third grade. While this comment in and of itself likely did not have much impact on how students saw themselves as readers, it illustrates how accountability talk linked to managerialism seeped into everyday classroom discourse.

Not only did children’s behavior and work habits need to be managed by others and by them, their affect and emotion around learning did as well. Fendler argues that in this way, aspects of the private self – pleasure, wishes, feelings, etc. – have become “teachable disciplinary strategies of the self” (1998, p. 55). As a former teacher who also struggled with finding ways to motivate students to engage in and “enjoy” schoolwork, I understood why teachers felt the need to manage students on this level and reward students who did so. However, the intense focus on testing at Grant turned reading into a chore to get through and thus required deeper levels of management of children’s minds

and bodies to motivate them to read. This kind of regulation and management was linked to the behavioral markers and configurations children were taught to display to position themselves as doing well in school.

In the following sections I provide more details about how teachers responded to the emphasis on accountability and testing, first in interviews and conversations with me, and then in their teaching practice. I argue that under a managerialist model of schooling, teachers' expertise in pedagogy and content were less important than the degree to which they showed compliance with school, district, and federal mandates (e.g., following scripted curricula, managing test preparation, administering assessments, and regulating children's movements and talk in the classroom).

### **Grant's Fourth Grade Teachers**

Although the fourth grade teachers whose classrooms I visited each week had little time to engage with me or my research, their welcome and openness made me feel at home in their classrooms. Over the course of the year and in short conversations with them before, during and after the school day, I was able to contextualize the sometimes harsh and often dull, tedious routines around testing and test preparation. Through these conversations and in interviews with them, I learned how the emphasis on testing had increased during the four years I had spent at Grant.

### **Ms. Klein: The SSAs Come First**

Ms. Klein's classroom had an air of quiet and stillness, and upon entry into the

room the only audible voice tended to be hers.<sup>18</sup> She liked “to start each morning quiet,” with students working independently (interview, 2/6/13). This routine carried over into the rest of the day so that for most of the day, after whole group instruction students completed assignments by themselves at desks lined up in three rows facing the Smart Board while Ms. Klein monitored them from her desk. Although only in her fourth year of teaching, she commanded strict compliance from students through a complex system of rewards and sanctions. This need for student compliance was part and parcel of the heavy emphasis on testing and test preparation in fourth grade. As Ms. Klein mentioned, since the principal, Ms. Chavez, had arrived in 2010, the SSA had always come first. For example, she and her colleagues used a “cheat sheet” with everything that would appear on the tests to guide their daily teaching. Because of this emphasis, Ms. Klein pointed out that her students needed and had successfully develop(ed) “stamina” in order to become “good at sitting for three hours at a time” (ibid.). Desk placement was crucial to this process as students needed to be facing the front of the room, not looking at each other, and all needed to be within the teacher’s gaze.

When I asked Ms. Klein what concerns she had about meeting the needs of her students she told me that the majority of her students were “below grade level” but that she needed to use only fourth grade curricular materials because of testing (interview, 2/6/13). During this interview when I asked her how she defined success in school, she said that teachers preparing students and telling them what they needed to do would only take students “so far.” She added that the kids who would succeed were the ones who took “ownership” of their work and were motivated even when they knew there was no

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<sup>18</sup> I struggled to hear children’s voices in this classroom, even with the use of a wireless microphone placed on individual desks or worn by focal students.

reward at the end. However, in an environment in which completion of and adherence to fourth grade tasks and expectations usually led to prizes, there were few students across all of the fourth grade classrooms who seemed motivated by something other than extrinsic rewards. Such contrasts between what Ms. Klein said about doing well in school and the teaching and learning practices in her classroom were apparent in her comments about testing as well. For example, although she commented that test scores painted a good picture of what children could do, shortly after she said that since she wasn't a good test taker, she couldn't judge students by their test scores.

These contradictions in what Ms. Klein told me, as well as between what she said and actually did in the classroom, reflected the fact that the SSA did not just "hang over the kids' heads," as Ms. Klein had stated in this same interview. Students' SSA performance also was constantly hung over teachers' heads and limited how and what they could teach. For instance, even though Ms. Klein had extensive training and interest in implementing writer's workshop, a comprehensive and effective model of process writing, she lamented that since she had arrived at Grant this hadn't been possible. She said that the only form of writing she could do in her classroom was practicing *constructed responses*, short, formulaic essays written in response to reading passages on tests. This form of writing was one that many children came to loathe by the end of elementary school. In this way regardless of what they felt was right or appropriate based on their expertise and experience, teaching to the test seemed to be the only viable option for Ms. Klein and her colleagues. Moreover, to ensure their own "success" as teachers, they needed to communicate with children that doing well meant performance on the SSA.

### **Mrs. Learner: Now It's Testing, Testing, Testing**

Down the hallway sat Mrs. Learner's room. Striking to me was the constant motion in this classroom, especially compared to the stillness of Ms. Klein's room. Students rummaged in their desks, wrote in notepads and diaries, played with items like action figures and key chains they hid in their laps or under their desks, and frequently got up to throw away trash, blow noses, borrow items from each other, sometimes passing notes to each other on the sly. Still, children's constant motion, and clandestine actions and interactions, took place in a class where teaching and learning revolved around testing. When I asked Mrs. Learner, a veteran teacher of 18 years, how she would describe being successful or doing well in school, she said:

For this group being successful means a child who can achieve on their test grade and SSA and not be Below Basic. Our school has pretty much told them they need Proficient or Advanced to be successful. (interview, 1/23/13)

However she expressed different ideas about success:

I'm sorry to say it. What it [success] really means is getting those advanced [scores], getting those on your report card. Now in my heart success means that they accomplish their own goals, or that they understood, like if I have a struggling student that doesn't understand multiplication facts but in the end she understands it. Is it on grade level? No, but to me that's success – that she got it for herself and gained some more knowledge to move on. But the guidelines don't say that. (ibid.)

Here she acknowledged the conflict between what she really thought and what “the guidelines” said about being successful.

Mrs. Learner talked about how this emphasis on testing had evolved over time: “Years ago it got stressful the month of [standardized testing]. Now it's all year” (interview, 1/23/13). Because of this stress, she also said she felt more comfortable following the district-mandated, HMH scripted curricula, *Storytown Reading* and *Go*

*Math* whose end-of-unit tests mirrored the SSA. This sentiment can be summed up by her comments about not liking to teach science, for which the grade had no designated curriculum or learning scope and sequence: “I don’t know what we’re doing [in Science]...I’m too scared about what’s gonna be on the SSAs or not, and to take that risk on the children or the school. I don’t wanna take that risk” (ibid.). Mrs. Learner’s preference for the use of scripted curricula motivated by Grant’s heavy emphasis on test performance was not unlike that of Ms. Klein’s, and provides another illustration of how their instruction was limited by test preparation. The scripted curricula she used and felt most comfortable using provided a ready-made way to communicate with students about doing well in school. I found it ironic that the teacher with the most experience in fourth grade felt the most tied to these curricula. However, I argue that her need to stay true to HMH scripts was linked to the de-professionalization and deskilling she experienced over time.

### **Miss Z: It’s Always So Much Testing and Test Prep**

In contrast to Mrs. Learner (as well as Ms. Klein who also expressed preference for scripted curricula), the third fourth grade teacher, Ms. Zawistowski (referred to as Miss Z by the children), said she was most excited about teaching science because of students’ enthusiasm around the subject. However, she pointed out, “but it’s hard now because it’s always so much testing and test prep.” Indeed, the only science lesson I observed apart from a period of several weeks in the Fall when children worked independently on science fair projects, was a Smart Board test prep session with scientific terms and sample multiple choice questions that might appear on the science portion of

the SSA.<sup>19</sup> Miss Z's enthusiasm for teaching and for interacting with students was evident in her frequent talk and conversations with children about the subject at hand. From wherever she was located in the classroom her strong, animated voice was a constant presence as she spoke to and joked with individual and groups of students.

Like the other fourth grade teachers, Miss Z re-arranged the student desks a number of times during the year. When I first visited her classroom in October, there were clusters of four to five desks each. But by January there were four long rows of seven desks placed so close together that children had to squeeze past chairs to exit and enter each row. Through a behavioral management plan of sanctions and rewards similar to that of Ms. Klein, as well through the placement of her desk behind the students, which allowed her to observe children without them seeing her, Miss Z ran a tight ship. Children responded to her no-nonsense attitude by working quietly and limiting their interactions during academic subjects to whispers, gestures, and occasional note passing.

A teacher with five years of classroom experience, Miss Z said that being successful in school meant doing one's assignments, asking questions, and participating (interview, 2/8/13). She commented that this did not always result in high test scores, pointing out that "some people are just good at taking tests and others aren't." She then gave me the example of the PRAXIS, the standardized exam she had taken for state certification that measured teacher candidate knowledge and skills. She told me that she knew a number of people who would be great teachers but who never would do well on the exam. And when discussing the SSA she said that it gave a good judgment "of how kids are thinking or not thinking," but that to do so, "kids have to be invested in the test"

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<sup>19</sup> Because scores on the 4th grade Science portion of the SSAs weren't counted in the school's Adequate Yearly Progress, there was little need to spend much time actually teaching the subject.



(ibid.).

In this way she touched on Ms. Klein's ideas about how student motivation, regardless of extrinsic rewards, was one of the keys to being successful in school. As I show in this chapter, however, teachers' deployment of their repertoires of success, and the teaching and learning practices that accompanied these repertoires, had the opposite effect. Rather than a space that fostered student motivation and deep engagement, Grant's fourth grade was a space in which many students seemed to be motivated solely by rewards and expressed dislike for school-based reading and writing.

While there were differences in Miss Z's, Mrs. Learner's, and Ms. Klein's classroom layouts and management styles, all three said they felt constrained by the pressure to prepare children for testing. These constraints affected the ways in which they organized the physical space of the classrooms and their classroom management styles. In all three rooms teachers drew on a number of technologies of power to ensure that students complied with instructional routines, which centered on preparing students for the SSA. These technologies were most apparent in Miss Z and Ms. Klein's classrooms; however, the pressure all three teachers felt to teach to the test was evident in their comments about what and how they taught, leading them to regulate what they did and said in the classroom. This was done through the white managerialist gaze filtered down from policy to the classroom. In this sense, managerialism served as a "modern, all-purpose equivalent of Bantham's panopticon" in which teacher, as technicians and managers, through the surveillance they were under, needed to continually self-manage and -regulate, all the while regulating and managing their students (Marshall, 1990, p. 156).

In addition, all three teachers' explicit ideologies about success contrasted with the more tacit ideologies about success evident in their daily communication with children about doing well in school. Although this conflict became increasingly apparent as I observed in fourth grade classrooms over the course of the school year and especially as the SSA approached, there were few moments in which teachers openly deployed elements that sat in contrast to test scores and grades. In the following section I show how the emphasis on complying with testing mandates set boundaries for how teachers communicated with children about doing well in school. I begin by showing how routine teaching and learning practices in fourth grade associated with doing well in school were guided by scripted curricula and learning for performance on tests. I then draw on examples of the ways in which teachers deployed their repertoires of success, highlighting how the primary elements they drew on in their talk with students about school success test scores. At the same time I illustrate how teachers' deployment of their ROS involved the use of technologies of power that disciplined children and regulated what they could do and say in the classroom.

### **Teaching and Learning in Fourth Grade: Teachers' Repertoires of Success and their Deployment**

On the days I was present, Ms. Chavez, the school principal, tended to walk through fourth grade classrooms at least once each morning, which ensured that teachers followed the schedule and more specifically, the sequence of the scripted literacy and math programs. Occasionally I saw classroom teachers work with small groups of students, but during most of the day, teachers engaged in whole group instruction with

the approximately 25 students in each class who showed a range of reading levels and comprehension of math concepts and skills. Whole group instruction consisted of teacher mini-lessons often involving the use of “Think Central,” Houghton Mifflin Harcourt’s “integrated digital curriculum website” on the Smart Board. This was followed by independent skills practice on literacy worksheets or in math workbooks, and then review of answers using an initiation, response, evaluation (IRE) format (cf., Mehan, 1985) in which teachers called on one student at a time to answer a question, then evaluating whether the answer was correct. For reading, teachers often called on students one-by-one to read the selected text and then had them work independently on comprehension questions and/or vocabulary, grammar or spelling worksheets. Math time followed the same format.

On some days, the math lessons were so scripted that teachers did not need to fully engage in teaching, instead setting up Think Central to run lessons in which a recorded voice replaced that of the teacher. For example, one afternoon at the end of January, Mrs. Learner had students turn to a page in their math workbooks. She then pressed play on the Smart Board and a computerized voice read out the series of steps for turning a fraction into a decimal as outlined on the workbook page. At one point, Mrs. Learner paused the recording and announced to the class, “You need to pay attention to this because guess what? This is going to be on the SSAs” (fieldnote, 1/30/13). Moreover, this example illustrates how class instructional talk (automated *or* human) was tightly linked to testing: what was highlighted in the lesson indexed what students needed to know how to do on the SSA. In this way the primary value of knowing the steps to turn a fraction into a decimal was linked to test performance. Such instances sent the message

that learning a mathematical skill or concept was significant solely for one's performance on standardized testing. Messages like these were tightly intertwined with how teachers deployed their repertoires of success.

This message resounded in fourth grade where students were constantly reminded that what was important about learning a skill or understanding a concept was to apply it to answering test questions. One day in November, Ms. Klein handed out the Storytown spelling lists to her class. Students then began gluing their lists into their notebooks while Ms. Klein went over some of the words she thought kids might not know, providing glosses or synonyms. When she got to the word "perhaps," she said she couldn't think of a synonym and that the word was hard to explain, instead using it in a sentence. She told them not to worry, though, because they just needed to know how to spell it. She then said she wanted everyone to get 100% on their tests, mentioning how much progress they had made in recent weeks by referring to a graph in the back of the room that charted children's weekly spelling test scores (fieldnote, 11/12/12). Here again, children were given the message that what was important about learning or knowing something was test performance; and thus knowing how to spell a word took precedence over knowing its meaning.

Even in some of the "Specials" classes like Library and Art, activities were infused with test preparation. Art typically began with power points that laid out the learning goals and objectives for each class; in these presentations, there was often a slide with "SSA words" children practiced and were rewarded for using throughout the period. And before checking out a book each week at the school library, children spent about 30 minutes filling out test preparation worksheets from the Storytown reading program;

these were supplemental, test-prep worksheets that classroom teachers did not have time to use during daily literacy instruction and thus, they were passed on to the school librarian. In both Art and Library, therefore, activities linked to testing were critical parts of the programming for each of these classes and once again, learning was linked to test performance.

Although Social Studies was part of the fourth grade curricula, instructional talk during this class was also linked directly to testing. One morning Mrs. Learner called on different students to read aloud a passage on the state of Pennsylvania in the HMH Education Place textbook (1/16/13). Once students had completed the passage she again called on students one-by-one to answer a set of comprehension questions also in the textbook. When no one was able to answer a question about the interstate system, Mrs. Learner remarked, “Come on boys and girls! For the SSAs you have to go back and look. The answer’s right there!” Here, even though Social Studies content was not tested on the SSA, children were given the message that what they were doing was important because the skill they were practicing was one they had to master for the SSA. A more disturbing manifestation of learning solely for performance on tests was the lack of a science curriculum. Although fourth graders had spent class time developing science projects in the Fall for a school-wide Science Fair, there was no actual science class or curriculum.<sup>20</sup> The only time I observed Science “being taught” was shortly before the SSAs when Miss

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<sup>20</sup> In the Fall of 2012, students were taught the steps in the scientific method in order to develop individual science projects. However, this was not connected to a Science curriculum, nor did students spend class time learning science concepts or ideas. The following year (2013-2014), however, the school district purchased *Science Fusion*, a packaged science program also published by Harcourt Houghton Mifflin. This was likely due to the shift at the state level from Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) to School Performance Profile (SPP), which included scores from the science portion of the SSA.

Z led a Smart Board study session on science terms and concepts that might appear on the Science portion of the SSAs (fieldnote, 4/19/13). Because the SSA science scores did not count towards the school's Adequate Yearly Progress, there was no need to teach it in fourth grade.

The scripted, HMH curriculum geared towards testing was what guided not only teaching and learning in Grant's fourth grade but more specifically, how teachers communicated with students about doing well in school. Moments when teachers most explicitly used test scores as labels tended to be during visits from Grant's math specialist, Mrs. Cole. During her weekly classroom visits, she brought in scored assessments and tests, reviewed them with students, praised those who had done well, and urged those who had not to work harder. For example, one afternoon, shortly before the SSAs, Mrs. Cole visited Ms. Klein's class (fieldnote, 3/13/13).

At about 1:10pm, Mrs. Cole came in with a pile of math tests. She had Jenna, Alexis, Aleysha and Juan pass out the tests, Beto asking who had scored a three (i.e. proficient level). Mrs. Cole named three students, then mentioning that Melani was the only student who had scored a four. She then read aloud Melani's "constructed response," [short answer] to a word problem on the test. Meanwhile, Ms. Klein had students clear their desks while Bree and Taliyah passed out small whiteboards and markers to each student. Mrs. Cole told the class that, based on their latest 4Sight scores, they needed practice on estimating and rounding numbers. She said they didn't have a lot of time before SSAs. Ms. Klein added, "Now we have the countdown. Now we have 13 school days." Mrs. Cole gasped dramatically. Then she began going over sample test questions on the Smart Board students using their whiteboards to solve the problems.

At about 1:50pm, she handed out a worksheet<sup>21</sup> with a math word problem. Students' task was to solve the problem and write a constructed response explaining how they solved it. As Mrs. Cole approached Gregorio's row, she said to Ms. Klein, in a voice audible to the class, that she knew Gregorio was one of the few students who would score a three on the problem. Then she left the room, telling the class that she would be grading their problems and that she wanted to see a lot

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<sup>21</sup> The bottom of the worksheet read, "NOTICE: Duplicating any part of this book is prohibited by law."

of fours (advanced score). Ms. Klein had the students take out their “SSA Constructed Response Math Rubrics,” and reminded them to use the word “because” in their responses. She then said, “you **all** want to get a four.”

(fieldnote, 3/13/13)

In this instance, Mrs. Cole publicly identified students who had performed at the advanced or proficient level, effectively separating the high performers (four students) from the rest of the class without having to name those who fell into the latter category. Important to note is that Mrs. Cole, as a resource teacher who worked closely with Ms. Chavez, was also charged with managing Ms. Klein’s teaching. This hierarchical relationship among teachers limited the potential for deep professional/collegial interaction in which teachers engaged more directly with each other about how to communicate with children about their 4Sight performance (cf., Ball 1990). Instead they co-performed a corporate-style presentation that positioned most of the students as unsuccessful and unlikely to produce the expected or required results.

Here also, certain technologies of power such as normalization, classification, individualization and exclusion are evident. As evidenced in Gregorio’s comment, children wanted to and found ways to know how they compared to their classmates. As Gore (1998) points out, normalization often occurs through comparison, and this instance shows how students had learned to compare themselves to and compete with others. And publicly classifying those who had performed well ended up excluding those who did not meet the desired norm. At the same time children were classified into groups based on performance level, they were also individualized as each was deemed responsible for her or his test performance. Deployment of TROS in this instance gave the message that those who performed at proficient or advanced levels were successful students.

Striking in this example is that while both teachers let students know how

important it was for them to perform well on tests, they also communicated that only certain students could or would. This message is more explicit in online descriptions of the 4Sight Benchmark Assessments, which state the assessments “produce overall scores that predict students’ scores on state assessments.” This being the case, it was highly unlikely that students who had scored below proficient would reach the advanced level, regardless of how much test prep and ‘cheerleading’ they received. As those who scored at advanced and proficient tended to be a select few, the rest of the class was effectively positioned as underperforming and not doing well enough to be considered successful. This instance suggests that teachers felt pressure to engage in such talk about testing regardless of what they imagined was possible in terms of their students’ actual performance. In this way, their exhortations (“you **all** want to get a four”) and attempts to motivate students (“now we have the countdown”; Mrs. Cole’s gasp) to reach certain levels of performance on tests and assessments rang hollow. The use of the plural “you” also served a totalizing effect in which children were given a collective goal in spite of the unlikelihood that all students would meet it. Nevertheless, as part of TROS, such comments echoed throughout the fourth grade classrooms on a daily basis. Moreover, the strategy to get students to work harder and focus better was to have as much practice as possible completing SSA-like assessments and tests.

Ms. Klein also often team taught with Mr. Little, the special education resource teacher. One day in December together they led a mini-lesson, modeling the process of writing a persuasive essay. As they started the lesson, Ms. Klein remarked loudly to Mr. Little that she had just received the scores on the second round of the 4Sights and that in her class, only three students had scored at proficient; she then called out their names



(fieldnote, 12/19/12). As seen in this and earlier instances, publicly identifying students with test score labels based on their performance on tests and assessments often took place at the beginning of a lesson (or study session). Doing so automatically linked what followed to testing and test scores and was likely done to motivate students to ‘work harder’ and ‘do better’ on the upcoming assignment. Comments like these were frequently used when tests were handed back or test scores discussed and were linked to behavioral markers indexing success.

One frequent way in which teachers employed their repertoires of success was to correlate children’s performance on non-SSA tests or evaluations with their potential performance on the SSAs. For example, the fieldnote below describes one such instance when Miss Z handed back students’ scored mid-chapter checkpoints, *Go Math’s* version of a quiz:

Miss Z announced to the class that a lot of kids were going to be disappointed by their mid-chapter checkpoint scores, but that this was not because they didn't know how to do it, but rather because they didn't follow directions. She said she might make it optional to do a re-take as a take-home quiz. As she passed out the checkpoints to each student (holding the front of the paper down so the score was not visible), she named the grades (A, B, C, D) and SSA scores (Advanced, Proficient, Basic, Below Basic) that correlated with the checkpoint scores. She told them to choose one question they had gotten wrong and to try to correct it. Then she went over each answer, calling on one student at a time to talk through how they had solved the problem, while the others corrected their work. When they had finished, Miss Z mentioned that the Chapter 9 test was coming up in a few days, and that once tests were completed and scored, they would be sent home for parents to sign. (fieldnote, 2/27/13)

Miss Z’s correlation of the checkpoint grades with tests scores shows how children were constantly reminded about whether they were meeting the expected norm, measuring up to what was considered a successful score – proficient. These constant reminders were often accompanied by remarks (like those above and by Ms. Klein and Mrs. Cole in the

previous transcript) about how if children were to pay more attention and follow directions better, they would be able to perform at the proficient level. In this way certain behaviors that indexed “paying attention” and “following directions” were additional markers associated with the TROS, markers that were accompanied by a similar set of technologies of power.

In the instance above, before Miss Z handed back the checkpoints to students she told me that the kids were going to be upset about their grades and she wanted to mitigate this with a lesson about reading the directions more carefully. Here, regardless of whether she succeeded in lessening the blow of her students’ underperformance, Miss Z seemed to recognize the potential demoralizing effects that ‘not meeting the benchmark’ could have on students, and perhaps on themselves as well. However, the overriding mandate to prepare students for standardized tests resulted in an endless loop of public labeling of students with test scores and grades, leading to pep talks about working harder and doing better, leading to more test preparation, leading back to public labeling *ad infinitum* and so on.

As the discursive thread running through this loop, the TROS continually reanimated and was reanimated by the testing regime with its corresponding grid of technologies of pedagogic discipline. Caught up in this grid but with little opportunity in school to reflect on their situation, fourth grade teachers and students alike were subject to the seemingly interminable cycle of testing and test preparation. However as I discuss in the following section, regardless of their performance on testing there were other ways students could position themselves as successful in the classroom. In this way I show how TROS included additional elements beyond talk about testing and the use of test

scores as labels. I argue that while these elements – certain ways of holding one’s body, comporting oneself and speaking – allowed students a way to perform being successful, they also provided a false sense of hope about how well they could perform on the SSA. Moreover, they were linked to deficit perspectives on and the racialization of certain individuals and groups of children.

### **Additional Elements of Teachers’ Repertoires of Success**

To ensure children’s compliance with teaching and learning practices based on whole group instruction and quiet, independent work, surveillance was the prominent technology of power for ensuring students completed assignments and participated in the “correct” way. For example, the distribution of bodies in space – the arrangement of individual student desks facing the front of the room and teacher desks with unobstructed views of each desk – facilitated surveillance through panopticism, or “the creation of a conscious and permanent state of visibility” (Pongratz, 2007, p. 37; Foucault, 1977). Such surveillance allowed for constant regulation (and often, restriction) of children’s movement and work in the classroom. Teachers continually reminded students that they must work alone in timely fashion (e.g., “remember, this in an independent, on-your-own activity!”), publicly identifying and often shaming those who were working too slowly or not quietly enough, or in other ways not complying with assignment procedures.

Such strategies were disciplinary techniques teachers used to ensure compliance from students, techniques that became linked to TROS: In order to do well in school, which meant performing at a certain level on the SSAs, children needed to learn to work quietly and independently in a ‘timely’ fashion, and to remain seated throughout most of

the day. While the imperative to act and complete work in this way is likely not very different in many classrooms across the US, in Grant's fourth grade classrooms this took on an exaggerated form (e.g., Ms. Klein's comment about fourth graders needing to develop stamina to sit for three hours at a time), with extreme levels of surveillance and regulation. Such surveillance and regulation were part of the *logics of efficiency* linked to the managerialism that undergirded teaching and learning in fourth grade (cf. Kliebard, 2004). Moreover they indexed the ways in which teachers, through technologies of concern, worked to socialize and assimilate children towards the ideal of the ideal schooled subject.

### **Classroom Management: Regulation through Sanctions, Incentives and Rewards**

Following this need for efficiency, there were a number of strategies in place for regulating student's work and participation, strategies that formed part of a complex behavior management system of regulation based on sanctions and rewards. Sanctions included public scolding or shaming, missing recess, erasing points for individuals or table groups, or charging school dollars for infractions. Teachers rarely sent children out of the classroom or called their parents. Rewards were given to individual students who followed rules for classroom participation and work, completed their homework regularly, received high grades or scores on tests, and to groups of students in the classroom and in the school cafeteria who competed with each other to sit quietly and clean their work or tables quickly and quietly. Rewards included public praise of individual students, handing out school cash to be used at the school store, and weekly prizes for both individual students and teams.

Well-behaved individual or groups of students were sometimes invited to choose dollar store toys from individual teachers' private stashes, could earn points to win a pizza party or special dessert, or earn an opportunity to eat lunch with a teacher. As this management system was an integral part of how teachers led class participation and monitored students' independent work, the doling out of different sanctions and rewards was part of TROS. For example different sanctions and rewards came to index student success (or failure), particularly for those students who were frequent targets of certain types of rewards (or sanctions). And for all, public sanctions and rewards served as reminders of an all-pervasive disciplinary gaze, not just of their own classroom teachers, but by all school faculty.

For example, Mr. Little, the special education resource teacher, often team-taught the whole class with Ms. Klein and participated in regulating student participation.

At about 11am, Mr. Little arrived and Ms. Klein had the kids put their work away (a packet of worksheets on spelling and vocabulary) and get out a test prep packet with reading passages, multiple choice questions, and constructed response essay questions. The teachers took turns calling on students to answer each question. While they did this, Ms. Chavez entered the room and observed for a few minutes. As the same three students – Gregorio, Paz and Adán – kept raising their hands, Mr. Little commented, "more hands better be up" and a few more students began to participate. When the class had completed the multiple choice section, Ms. Klein and Mr. Little took turns reading aloud the reading passage, having the students follow along with their fingers while they pointed out where the answers to the multiple choice questions were. When Ms. Klein noticed Tyron chatting with a classmate, she reminded him, "try to be good this week so you can eat lunch with me on Friday. I have Girl Scout cookies." (fieldnote, 1/23/13)

In spite of the layers of regulation and surveillance with Ms. Chavez's entrance and the two teachers monitoring the class, few students actively participated in this test prep session. Students who did actively participate in this instance were those who usually did; these were children who had been positioned as successful through constant public

recognition of high performance on tests as well as compliance with classroom rules and norms. Those who were less compliant like Tyron needed to be persuaded to do their work through the use of incentives. And those who refused to participate in sanctioned ways or who did so infrequently were excluded from talk about successful students and held up as negative examples for their peers. In this way, teachers' technologies of concern for engaging students in the tasks at hand and in following, resulted in more coercive techniques.

This system of sanctions and rewards, while leading to certain kinds of compliance and insubordination, was infused with governmental power relations in which students learned to "govern" themselves (Foucault, 1992), regulating and monitoring not just their own bodies, but also that of their peers. Through this kind of governance and the self-governance it bred, students learned not only to comply with school norms but also to perform doing well in school. Moreover, when students did regulate themselves and each other, and there was order and quiet in the classroom, it provided the guise that all were doing well.

While sitting quietly and raising one's hand were the most typical elements of doing well in school besides high test scores, there were a number of other perceivable markers that indexed success, many of which children had learned in earlier grades. These markers could be read on children's bodies during moments of explicit surveillance and regulation that involved rewards and/or sanctions. For example, beginning in kindergarten in 2008, children learned to sit up straight at tables with their hands folded on top their desks, and to "catch a bubble" which meant closing one's lips and pretending to hold a giant air bubble in one's mouth so as to keep silent (see Figure

2). Throughout the day there were moments of rapidly choreographed poses and postures similar to that in Figure 2. Even students who typically didn't comply with classroom management routines tended to participate in this act of embodying the ideal schooled subject.

Thus in moments when teachers announced they were looking for individuals or table groups to whom they would dole out prizes or points, a wave of movement into this posture would take place. Although positioning one's body in a certain posture to receive a reward is a conscious act, this set of movements associated with it were so deeply ingrained as markers of good or successful student behavior that it almost seemed to take more effort *not* to "catch a bubble" when it was time to compete for a prize. In this way, children's bodies became "sites of representation and inscription of power" (Besley & Peters, 2007, p. 67) as they made their bodies obedient and pliant. Once again, a room full of mostly brown and black bodies freezing into the correct position in front of the white gaze of their teachers spoke to currents of race power in the classroom.



*Figure 2.* Catching a bubble

There were other ways children could position themselves as good students. As children frequently were subjected to long periods of teacher talk, teachers often needed to re-focus their attention by telling them to "send an instant message," which entailed positioning one's body to face the speaker and looking directly at her/him. For example,

one afternoon as Miss Z was reviewing a test prep packet of math word problems with the whole class, Mrs. Cole entered the room (fieldnote, 11/28/12). As she walked to the front of the room, Miss Z called out, “send an instant message.” Bea turned both her chair and her body to face Mrs. Cole, and Miss Z called out, “Bea’s got it!” A variation of this disciplinary technique was to have children “show an interested message,” which typically was reserved for moments when students had completed an assigned task and were waiting for directions from the teacher on what to do next. An interested message involved sitting quietly, folding one’s hands on her/his desk, and looking at the teacher with an “interested” look on her/his face.

One day after lunch during math, as children were completing a set of math word problems, Ms. Klein announced, “when you’re finished, show me an interested message” (field note, 2/8/13). As several students completed the last word problem, they set down their pencils, folded their hands and stared hard at Ms. Klein. In this variation of embodying the ideal schooled subject, children needed to show not just that they were finished with their work, but that they were “interested” in doing more. Fendler (1998) discusses how current goals of schooling include teaching children the “desire” for education (or in this case, at least show or feign it), and thus teachers must regulate students’ emotions and attitudes along with their actions and behaviors.

In this way, regulating one’s bodies, emotions and attitudes became part of positioning oneself as successful. These additional markers of doing well in school became companion elements to TROS, elements tightly connected to the fourth grade system of sanctions and rewards. For students who did not perform at advanced or proficient levels on tests, looking successful became a key strategy for many and masked



“low” academic performance. In this way they could embody the ideal schooled subject regardless of their grades or test scores. However, this perpetuated a false sense of doing well that paralleled teachers’ exhortations for students to work harder and to focus more in spite of the statistical improbability that low performers would succeed in performing at proficient or advanced levels.

In addition, the surveillance and regulation of students through rewards, sanctions and incentives sent mixed messages to students. For most of the day, they were expected to be passive, docile and compliant; yet, during moments of whole class instruction teachers sought out active participation. While teachers’ frustration that only certain students tended to actively participate in class, most students’ passivity during instruction was in keeping with the kind of interaction that dominated most instructional routines. This passivity was in line with the managerialist teaching and learning context of fourth grade at Grant in which “subjected and practiced bodies” were necessary for increasing “the forces of the body in economic terms of utility” and diminishing “these forces in political terms of obedience” (Foucault, 1979, p. 130). At the same time, however, positioning oneself as doing well by strategically deploying these elements of TROS was not enough for certain Latino and African-American children who tended to use Spanish and Black English in the classroom. These children were seen as and often publicly judged for speaking incorrectly for the ways in which they commented, responded or asked questions when called upon by their teachers. In these instances adherence to an idealized form of English (\*Standard American English or \*SAE) became an additional element of TROS.

### **\*Standard American English and Language Policing in Fourth Grade**

When I began visiting fourth grade classrooms at Grant, I assumed that I would spend my days documenting children's talk. However these expectations quickly changed as I realized that children were expected to be quiet for much of the day; thus, in spite of leaving microphones on focal children's desks or hooked to their shirt collars I rarely heard them speak. Classroom discourse consisted primarily of teachers calling on students to answer questions in an Initiation-Response-Evaluation format or to read a passage from a textbook. There was a limited space in which student talk was sanctioned and in these moments, teachers became evaluators and regulators not just of the content of student talk, but of how they talked. And while many of these evaluations were public and part of everyday classroom discourse, teachers also evaluated children's language in interviews and conversations with me. These evaluations were linked to teachers' concerns about testing performance.

For example, when I asked Ms. Klein about her students' language use at school, she said:

Their talking...that's what scares me about their grammar. It's like, just not correct. So when we're doing grammar it's hard because they're like, "I be going," or "this ain't right." And you can't talk like that because there's questions now on the SSA writing that are, "What's the right way to say this?" So that's an area they need to improve in, their everyday language. And I mean they hear it outside, the incorrect language and they just bring it in the classroom. So I'm constantly correcting them, "No, you don't say this, you say it like this." But I don't know if they're connecting that. (interview, 2/6/13)

Here, Ms. Klein's need for children to speak "correctly" revealed her own prejudice against non-white students who she perceived as not talking right. Her lack of specificity indexed in her use of "they," as in "their talking..." and "their grammar," suggest she was grouping together black and brown bodies, overdetermining them to speak in

deficient ways (cf. Flores & Rosa, 2015). Later in this interview, she referred to

Spanish-speaking children's use of Spanish:

That's not helping their language use, speaking their Spanish at home and then they're coming here. They're struggling for words, you can see it in their writing. And you can hear it in how they talk. They'll like flip words and they do that in their writing, too....They just need to keep practicing. And there's a lot of ELLs in here, and they'd rather speak Spanish even in the classroom. I'm constantly just telling them, "speak English, it's the only way you're gonna get better."

Here, not only African American English (AAE) was viewed as wrong and especially detrimental to students' testing performance; for Ms. Klein the use of Spanish was also impeding their progress and solidifying Spanish-influenced grammatically incorrect writing in English, writing that would be assessed on the SSA. This racialization was both perpetuated and was masked by the managerialist system's emphasis on testing.

For Miss Z, children's poor writing skills were also due to their under- or undeveloped English language:

I have a lot of concern for all of them [whole class] about language, especially students that aren't really receiving ESL services anymore...that don't have developed writing skills. I personally don't think they're just going to develop over time, especially if they're still speaking Spanish at home. (interview, 2/8/13)

While her concerns were for all of her students, she was particularly worried about those from Spanish-speaking backgrounds (the ELLs or those no longer receiving English as a Second Language [ESL]). In this way utterances in either language or language variety indexed poor (or potentially poor) performance on the SSA and served as negative markers for doing well in school.

Comments like those of Ms. Klein and Miss Z revealed a monoglossic language ideology (one nation-one language) in which "idealized monolingualism in a standardized national language" is "the norm to which all national subjects should aspire"

(Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 5; Flores, 2013). This monoglossic ideology could be found in the school homework policy, which changed upon Ms. Chavez's arrival at Grant in 2010. Whereas in previous years all grades sent home copies of the math homework in Spanish for those who requested it, Ms. Chavez decided to prohibit this practice. When one of the first grade teachers said she felt this change would hinder students' ability to understand and complete their homework, Ms. Chavez replied, "This is America. We speak English here."<sup>22</sup>

Ms. Chavez's statement, along with those of Miss Z and Ms. Klein, also link to broader discourses around immigration, and about Latino immigrants not learning English, as in Miss Z's words, "I personally don't think they are going to develop over time" (e.g., Dick, 2011; Shutika, 2005). However, teachers were not just concerned about the language of Spanish-speakers (e.g., Miss Z's comment, "I have a lot of concern for all of them about language"). This concern was enacted through technologies of concern that Othered and racialized children. Based on this monoglossic language ideology all students, from both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking backgrounds, needed to adhere to a particular variety of English. Using this variety of English was an additional marker of doing well in school.

I follow Lippi-Green (2012) in referring to this variety as \*Standard American English (\*SAE), which as she and many others (e.g., Flores & Rosa, 2015; Silverstein, 1988) discuss is an empirically-impossible-to-locate, idealized form of language. Or as Milroy and Milroy write, it is "an idea in the mind rather than a reality – a set of abstract

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<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, while Ms. Chavez, a Spanish-speaker who had immigrated to the US from Latin America, used Spanish with Grant parents, it seemed she had become complicit in devaluing Spanish for academic purposes.

norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent” (1985, p. 22-23). Moreover, SAE\* is linked to the image of an “Anglo, upper-middle class, and ethnically middle-American” or “privileged class” (Lippi-Green, 2012). As the majority of fourth graders were Latino and African American children from low-income families and all three fourth grade teachers were Anglo and from middle- to upper-middle class backgrounds, these evaluations were made through a white gaze. Under this white gaze, the use of certain varieties of English such as African American English (AAE) was viewed as problematic and detrimental to students’ school performance. However, teachers’ use of Spanish and of non-standardized forms of English were not evaluated in the same way.

Grant faculty took pride in attempting to use Spanish vocabulary and short phrases. For example, the guidance counselor who made the school’s daily announcements over the PA system would often say a phrase in English and then try to translate it into Spanish such as the morning she announced, “remember, no school tomorrow. *En la casa mañana* [at home tomorrow]” (11/20/12). Along with bringing in songs in Spanish to sing with children, the music teacher also liked to practice his Spanish in class such as one afternoon when he received a call from the office that a student’s father was there to pick her up early. He said to her, “*Tu papá abajo* [your father downstairs]” (12/5/12). Fourth grade teachers sometimes asked students how to say certain words or phrases in Spanish and would repeat them back. Moreover, on at least one occasion Mrs. Learner suggested the class sing the “Spanish birthday song” (*Las mañanitas*) for a Latino student’s birthday (11/30/12).

These above examples show that the use or attempted use of Spanish for non-

Latinos was deemed appropriate, especially for non-academic topics. Scholars argue that underlying such practices are racializing or raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Hill, 1998; Zentella, 2003) in which the use of minoritized languages by White speakers is seen as positive while the use of minoritized languages by those for whom the language is part of their heritage is seen as negative or detrimental to their acquisition of English, and in this case for certain fourth graders, detrimental to testing performance. In this way \*SAE was part of teachers' repertoires of success.

Teachers, though, did not hold themselves accountable for using \*SAE while teaching. I found numerous examples of instructional talk that had what some might consider "incorrect" usages such as in the instance below which took place one morning in Ms. Klein's class during literacy time when she had the class take out reading test prep packets. Children followed along as she said:

We are going to do the same thing we did yesterday and today hopefully it will be even easier than yesterday 'cause we practiced labeling our questions. We said *there's* right there questions, we said *there's* author and me, and we said *there's* on my own. Tyrell, *why that face?* You have this packet from yesterday. Get your packet and move up. Now, am I *gonna* read you the story right now or what should we do? What's the first thing we do? I'm *gonna* read the questions and you are *gonna help me today label them... 'K?* I'm *gonna* read to you number 12. And we're *gonna* have to think for ourselves. *Member* the question that said what does the word reread mean? (videolog, 1/23/13)

Here Ms. Klein used a more informal vernacular style of English as she and the other teachers tended to do in their instructional talk. This is evidenced through the many abbreviations ("gonna," "'k," "'member," "why that face") she used along with grammatically "incorrect" constructions ("there's" for there are, "help me today label them"). Whether or not this style could be considered SAE\* is less important than the point that although all classroom members, teachers and students alike, spoke in different

ways and in ways that could be judged grammatically unsound, this mattered more for African American students who used AAE and for Latino students who used Spanish (e.g. Alim, 2010).

Teachers did not as readily correct Latino children's use of AAE (or other varieties) of English, and I have no record of this happening in my field notes. This may have been because teachers assumed Spanish speakers' "incorrect" use of English was part of the process of language learning and thus in less need of correction. Such a discrepancy in classroom language policing implicitly set up what Flores and Rosa (2015) refer to as racial hierarchies in which linguistic markedness depended as much on the speakers' race as it did on her actual language practices.

Throughout both third and fourth grades, I saw many instances of teachers "correcting" African American students' use of AAE. For example one afternoon when Mrs. Cole arrived to do a math lesson with the class, telling students to take out a calculator, Jaleed called out, "I don't got a calculator" (fieldnote, 3/13/13). Ms. Klein quickly responded, "You don't **got** a calculator? Say it again!" Miss Z also frequently called out African American students for using AAE. She tended to repeat back children's utterances in White, standardized English as when, for example one day when Taliyah said, "when we was watching Jack and the Beanstalk," Miss Z, replied, "when we **were** watching," waiting for Taliyah to repeat it back to her (3/22/13). Through a prescriptivist lens these constructions could be considered "incorrect," but this lens was only used for some students.

This way of evaluating the use of AAE was not unlike third grade teacher Ms. Ryan's positioning of this variety when she commented during an interview (2/29/12),

“Sometimes you hear it – the lingo they use. I try to correct them. It's street talk, here I try to use the correct English.” In this way, for African American students like Jaleed and Taliyah, “incorrect” language use, utterances spoken in non-standardized varieties of English became a marker of not meeting the required benchmark, or put more simply, of failure. Over time, this daily language policing had the opposite effect intended for some students like Jaleed. As the year progressed, he spoke less and less in class and when he did, he continued to use AAE.

In fourth grade, the racialization of students resulting from language policing, whether it was the continual correction of African Americans’ use of AAE or the disapproval of Latino children’s use of Spanish, was masked through the focus on preparing students for testing. Miss Z, in her comments about her concerns around students’ oral language practices, referenced testing:

I have a lot of concerns with this group with language development. The way that they write their sentences, especially, not only Spanish speakers... I think it's kind of silly when we have ESL teachers in the district, when all of our kids, even our other minority students don't have well-developed language. I feel like our entire classroom should be more of that, but that would be changing an entire model of everything that we do, like testing. Where would the time come from? Would we get trained?  
(interview, 2/8/13)

Here, once again, Miss Z’s failure to recognize varieties of language other than SAE\* as anything other than undeveloped or incorrect is evident. And while earlier in this interview, she, like Ms. Klein, linked her concerns around students’ language to their “incorrect” writing, in this excerpt she frames testing as an impediment to any substantial instructional focus on language. As she said, such a focus would entail “changing an entire modeling of everything we do, like testing.” Moreover, she recognized that she would need training to focus more effectively on language development in the classroom.



Within the context of high-stakes testing this seemed an impossible feat and thus, regulating students language practices seemed to make the most sense. In moments of language policing, or regulation, the power relations between white, middle-class teachers and their black and brown students from low-income families were particularly salient in spite of the lack of teacher recognition of the norms of whiteness invoked through TROS that were so directly linked to performance on standardized testing (cf. Leonardo, 2013). By correcting primarily African American students they sent what were likely unintentional, racialized messages that only certain groups of students needed to be policed in this way. At the same time, Spanish speakers were racialized through the message that the use of Spanish was detrimental to their success in school. Such language policing, as teachers recognized in interview commentary, made little difference in children's speaking or writing as teachers had hoped.

Instead it resulted in silencing them. Moreover it sent a message to certain students about their positioning in school spaces. As Corson (1990, pp. 140-141, cited in Alim, 2010, p. 208) writes:

If schools uncritically present the standard variety of English as more appropriate and correct than other varieties of English, and better than other languages, then this devalues the other languages and varieties because inevitably students begin to see them as having a lesser role in places like schools where prestige really matters.

Alim (2010) points out that this devaluation is also linked to the roles students see *themselves* as having in school settings. Children of color like Jaleed who used AAE in their classrooms may come to see themselves as “bad” or “not good enough” students. Moreover, they may become increasingly racialized either by choosing not to conform to the linguistic norms of whiteness associated with TROS, or on the other hand, by doing so or attempting to do so but still being seen as linguistically deficient. For these students,

performing “doing well in school” was not as simple as following classroom rules and procedures.

\*SAE, as an element of teachers’ repertoires of success, set up an ideal schooled subject, not only one who adhered to classroom rules and regulations, but one who was judged to speak correctly through the white gaze and white listening ears of fourth grade teachers. In this way the ideal schooled subject was akin to an “idealized white subject” who sat in contrast to the racialized Other who spoke “incorrectly” and thus was likely to perform poorly on the SSA. In such a context of language policing, for children of color who spoke AAE or Spanish it may have been easier or advantageous to speak or participate less while within earshot of their teachers and to position themselves as successful using other elements of TROS such as holding one’s body in certain ways, and working quietly and independently. In this way they could still embody the ideal school subject.

### **Discussion**

In this chapter I have shown how managerialism was the primary technology of power underlying what counted as doing well in school and guided teaching and learning in fourth grade. As the dominant framework underlying U.S. public schooling since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, managerialism seeped into more localized district, school, and classroom practices and served to “control, classify and contain teachers’ work towards the end of governmentality,” cultivating self-regulation around how and what they could teach (Ball, 1990, p. 6; Foucault, 1992). Within such a context, teachers, regardless of their expertise in pedagogy or pedagogical content knowledge, needed to look beyond

these aspects of teaching to more corporate models of ordering and controlling both how and what they taught as well as what took place in their classrooms.

Moreover I have shown regardless of the different ways they talked to me about what it meant to do well in school and in spite of their expertise in pedagogy and pedagogical context knowledge, in the classroom they relied around corporate models of teaching and regulation through different configurations of technologies of power. These technologies, or disciplinary and regulatory techniques interwoven into TROS, were part of daily classroom interactions and served to continually and publicly position children as certain kinds of students (e.g., successful, failing, etc.). I have also illustrated how children could deploy additional elements of TROS to position themselves as successful, embodying the ideal schooled subject regardless of their performance on tests. This subject is linked to notions of the modern managerial self, an individual who is responsible for regulating or governing oneself (cf. Fitzsimmons, 2011).

At the same time, however, embodying the ideal school subject was more complicated for African American and Latino children, even if or when they regulated themselves according to the behavioral management system. Their ways of speaking were continually evaluated by the white listening ears and white gaze of teachers. For these children, the microtechnologies of power involved in teacher evaluations of how they spoke were akin to Jaffe-Walter's (2013) notion of technologies of concern that positioned them as Others and as targets for increased surveillance, regulation, and remediation. While for Jaffe-Walter technologies of concern involved practices of coercive assimilation for high school immigrant students, I build on this notion to include not just children from immigrant backgrounds but also African American students whose

ways of speaking were viewed as “lingo” inappropriate for classroom usage.

In this way teachers’ concerns’ about Latino and African American children’s “language,” as expressed in interviews, resulted in policing how and what they spoke. In these examples, TROS motivated and were motivated by technologies of concern linked to a prescriptivist model of care and concern that inadvertently racialized those who spoke incorrectly or who used Spanish. Such racialization was tied to the intense focus on testing at Grant and more broadly, the system of managerialism guiding teaching and learning in its fourth grade classrooms. Managerialism as such reinvigorated deficit models of understanding difference linked to racializing discourses and raciolinguistic ideologies.

Finally, I have illustrated how emphasis on performance outcomes on a single, standardized measurement had particularly nefarious effects on what counted as teaching and learning in schools like Grant that were mandated to use packaged, scripted curricula and that had, in effect, become “test-prep factories” (Hall, 2015). I argue that this factory model of education is anti-intellectual: Rather than foster orientations to learning revolving around deep content knowledge, critical thinking, problem-solving, curiosity and creativity, this form of managerialism instead fostered what Suarez-Orozco (2014) refers to as an empire of boredom and mediocrity in which everything teachers and students did “counted” for the SSA.

For students who did not score at “successful” levels on tests, no matter how hard they tried to “pay attention,” “work harder,” and/or “focus,” it was implausible that they would do well on the SSA. In this way the teachers’ deployment of their repertoires of success revealed a great paradox around test preparation and performance: regardless of

whether “low performing” students embodied the ideal schooled subject by displayed additional, behavioral elements or markers of success, they were continually given the message that it was unlikely they would actually reach the threshold for what counted as success in fourth grade – a score of proficient or above on the SSA. In the following chapter I focus on children’s responses to this factory model of education, investigating how they took up TROS and in turn, how they developed and deployed their own repertoires of success in the classroom.

### **Chapter 5: Children's Repertoires of Success in the Classroom**

When Ben was in third grade, I interviewed him in early March shortly before he took the SSA for the first time. He told me he was doing “great” in school, and that his favorite things about third grade were reading and math stations. He also told me that the main difference between second and third grade was that third graders had to take the SSA and 4Sight tests. When I asked him how he felt about these tests he replied, “[for] the 4Sights you have to learn too much, but they’re just practice for the SSAs. But I think the SSA is gonna be easy...some questions, not all the questions” (interview, 3/7/12). Shortly into his fourth grade year, he told me, “I don’t really like being a normal kid that have straight As, I don’t like that much straight As” (interview, 10/16/12). By February when I asked Ben what he thought about school he told me, “I don’t like it. Kids get too much work – too much reading, too much writing, too much math” (interview, 2/8/13).

The contrast in these comments about school and about how Ben saw himself between his third and fourth grade years were consistent with many of the comments I heard in conversations and interviews with children, and overheard in their conversations with each other during these two years. By fourth grade, many children had come to express dislike for most of what they had to do during the school day and specifically, what they had to do during reading, writing and to some extent, math time. I saw how this growing dislike of school had to do with the heavy emphasis on test preparation in fourth grade but I wanted to better understand how this emphasis influenced children’s communication about doing well in school, and how in the process, they positioned

themselves as certain kinds of students. Ben's comments above became guideposts on my road map for exploring how children responded to the testing environment and formed their own repertoires of success as the school year progressed.

In this chapter I look at how children responded to teachers' deployment of their repertoires of success, or their use of markers signaling success, in daily teaching and learning routines. More specifically, I investigate how children negotiated, drew on, and/or recontextualized these markers as they developed and deployed their own repertoires of success that overlapped and intersected with teachers' repertoires to different degrees. Moreover I focus on how, through the above processes, children positioned themselves and others, and were positioned by their teachers, as certain kinds of students. I show how children's deployment of their repertoires of success and their positioning of self and others, were creative, at times unexpected, and overall, had unfortunate consequences. I pay close attention to power relations in the classroom, tracking how technologies of power shaped and were enacted in daily interactions between teachers and students, and among students. In particular I look at how children whose repertoires overlapped with those of their teachers were positioned and able to position themselves as embodying or approaching the ideal schooled subject. They did this by regulating themselves and each other through their deployment of primarily behavioral and when possible, academic signs, that signaled doing well in school. I show how such deployment and its accompanying positioning and regulation resulted in dismaying consequences linked to the managerialist system of schooling at Grant.

### **Interviews and Conversations with Children about Doing Well in School**

Between March of children's third grade year and June of their fourth grade year, I interviewed each of the 10 focal students between two to six times. In these interviews I was primarily interested in which signs, for them indexed doing well in school. However, getting at this explicitly through interviews was difficult as I illustrate in the following interview excerpt with Bea.

**Excerpt 1:**

(B=Bea, H=Holly)

1. **H:** What do you think it means to be successful in school?
2. **B:** Uh...
3. **H:** Or another way to say this is tell about a time in school when you felt successful
4. **B:** Um...can you repeat success? I keep forgetting it ((laughing))
5. **H:** Like when you work at something and do well on it, or you learn how to do
6. something you've always wanted to do, or you meet a challenge
7. **B:** Um...something I've had success about is when I pay attention more to the
8. teacher I get to do the work real well and get like high scores and sometimes when I
9. don't pay attention I get low scores and I get sad cause I feel like I'm not bein' like,
10. not payin' attention no more
11. **H:** So you feel successful when you're paying attention?
12. **B:** Like sometimes doin' tests that some things like we don't know about it and
13. sometimes we need to try hard but we don't get it...so we need to do it, they're
14. forcin' us to do it cause they want to see what we can do or what we cannot do
15. **H:** Is that like the 4Sight that you are taking right now?
16. **B:** Yeah



17. **H:** How's that going?

18. **B:** That's going a little bit easy...some are easy and some are hard

19. **H:** Yeah? How do you feel about having to do the 4Sights tests and=

20. **B:** =Well, I feel it's good for kids. It...we having to do 4Sights then we won't...like

21. they won't know what we know and what they will know and some...if kids don't

22. know what it's about so they'll just don't pay attention...and when they get

23. something that they don't know they'll just do it all wrong and then the teacher will

24. get upset

(interview, 12/5/12)

This interview with Bea is salient for several reasons. Explicit conversation with children around success or doing well in school took place not only within a context of high-stakes testing but one in which teacher and teacherly (e.g. mine) expectations guided interaction. Thus what children shared with me about success or doing well in school was to some degree presupposed and reinforced by the kinds of questions I asked (lines 1, 3) and responses I gave (lines 5-6). My defining “success” (lines 5-6) for Bea may seem like an awkward moment for me as a researcher since giving a certain gloss for this term provided cues for how Bea assumed I was expecting her to respond. However, across interviews, regardless of the terms I used or how I phrased questions, children mentioned certain academic and behavioral markers consistently; these markers were those I observed them deploy regularly in the classroom to position themselves as doing well.

While this excerpt shows that Bea, like many of her peers, was well aware of the significance of test performance, what stands out in Bea’s comments and in other children’s comments, was that the key to doing well in school (i.e. getting high scores on tests) was a matter of effort and attention. Teachers continually emphasized these

behavioral markers, telling children on a daily basis that if they tried harder or paid more attention, they would perform better on tests. In this way Bea was voicing her teacher, evaluating herself through this lens. There were many ways that children could show they were paying attention and trying hard, and deploying these behavioral markers were part of how children learned to regulate themselves in the classroom to embody the ideal schooled subject.

In this excerpt, Bea also toggled between voicing her teacher and her fellow peers with her use of “they” and “we/us.” This toggling complicates Bea’s voicing of her teachers in her initial response to my question (lines 7-10) that simply trying hard or paying attention would lead to high test scores. For example she pointed out that “sometimes we need to try hard but we don’t get it” (line 14), showing an element of resistance to this idea. This element of resistance was then heightened when she continued, “they’re forcin’ us to do it” (lines 14-15). Her point that she and her peers were being forced to do it [i.e. all of the reading, writing and math test prep, or the tests themselves], even when they “don’t get it” illustrates her negative evaluation of this learning context. Such negative evaluations of school were often more explicit such as Ben’s comments that he didn’t like school.

In Bea’s final comments, she returned to voicing her teacher by saying, “well, I feel it’s good for kids,” confirming that this [testing and all it entailed] was necessary so that teachers could “know what we know” (lines 21-22). However this voicing was complicated by the caveat she threw in when she said, “if kids don’t know what it’s about so they’ll just don’t pay attention. And when they get something they don’t know they’ll just do it all wrong” (lines 21-23). In this way she also suggested that “knowing” was at

the crux of succeeding or failing and pointed to the bind that some children were in: not knowing something led children to disengage, which in turn, reinforced not knowing, and led to increased disengagement. As I argue in this chapter, for children, showing they “knew” something became part of what Bloome, Puro and Theodoro refer to as *procedural display* in which children participated and “got through” whole group without deep understanding or engagement of the content or topic (1989). Doing so entailed deploying certain markers or signs at the appropriate moments.

What I learned in interviews with Bea and other focal students was that they knew and could deploy these behavioral markers to show that they were, for example, trying hard and paying attention. In this way they wielded the signs and showed that they were engaging or could engage in the practices that were interpreted by teachers as indexing being successful or a “good student.” In other words, they knew what it took to perform being a successful student in fourth grade and over the course of fourth grade became increasingly adept at regulating themselves in order to do so. As I talked to children in their final years of elementary school, many of the markers children used to signal success overlapped with those I observed in teachers’ repertoires. However, this overlap obscured the fact that deploying certain configurations of repertoire elements and/or engaging in practices linked to teacher repertoires of success (e.g., completing one’s homework + trying one’s best + focusing) did not necessarily lead to high test scores. Moreover, children’s low performance on tests not only disappointed teachers, but also resulted in their being stigmatized through public labeling as not doing well (or failing). In turn such labeling fed back into how children communicated about success, how they

positioned themselves and others as certain kinds of students, and how they engaged with instruction and assignments in the classroom.

My interview with Bea suggests she wanted to meet her teachers' expectations and had not developed an oppositional stance towards schooling. However, her comment about being forced to take standardized tests show a seed of resistance and disengagement that, for many children, was beginning to take root by the end of elementary school. As I interviewed children I took note of these seeds of resistance. I also took note of other ways they talked about or indexed doing well in school.

### **Third and Fourth Grade Interviews**

During the children's third grade year, all but one of the focal students agreed to be interviewed between March and May.<sup>23</sup> In fourth grade I interviewed each student between two to four times, at least once during the fall semester and once during the spring semester. Table 4 summarizes how children responded during these two years when I asked them questions about success or doing well in school. While children did not explicitly distinguish between behavioral/affective and academic markers, often mentioning both kinds of markers in succession, I make this distinction in the table for analytic purposes. Evident in children's responses in both grades were a number of behavioral and academic markers prevalent in teacher repertoires of success such as: following directions, paying attention, trying one's best, and getting high scores. These markers were readily available signs children could draw on when I asked them to talk about doing well in school.

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<sup>23</sup> Zac elected not to be interviewed in third grade. In fourth grade, for the first of two interviews, he requested I not record his voice but write down what he said instead.

Table 4. Third and fourth grade interviews on being successful/doing well in school<sup>24</sup>

	Third Grade	Fourth Grade
Primary Behavioral Markers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trying your best</li> <li>• Paying attention / concentrating</li> <li>• Listening to the teacher</li> <li>• Being respectful</li> <li>• <b><i>Being nice/not mean or fighting/Treating others nicely</i></b></li> <li>• Following directions</li> <li>• Raising your hand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Trying your best / trying hard</b></li> <li>• Paying attention / focusing</li> <li>• Listening to the teacher</li> <li>• Being respectful</li> <li>• Behaving well</li> <li>• <b>Not getting upset if you don't get the highest grade</b></li> </ul>
Primary Academic Markers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing the correct answers</li> <li>• Getting high grades or test scores</li> <li>• Completing work fast</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing the correct answers</li> <li>• Getting high grades or test scores</li> <li>• Completing work fast</li> <li>• Being good at math</li> <li>• <b><i>Passing the grade / not failing</i></b></li> </ul>
Other markers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>The teacher telling me</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>The teacher telling my parents</i></b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Being in the Discovery (gifted) program</i></li> </ul>

While in both grades the primary markers children named overlapped with those regularly deployed by their teachers to a great degree, there were some significant differences in what children said in third and fourth grades. For most of the children, teachers' evaluations of them were crucial for knowing whether they were doing well in school. However, these evaluations had more to do with behavior than academic performance. Such dependence on teacher evaluations to know whether one was doing well was part of the behavior management system based on sanctions and rewards and linked to the managerialist orientation to schooling at Grant. Such dependence suggests that in third grade children were still developing ways to self-regulate and self-assess.

In third grade interviews, children also made a number of comments linking doing well in school to social relations that did not overlap with the signs their teachers

<sup>24</sup> Bolded text indicates the most prevalent markers in children's interview responses and text in italics indicates markers that differed across grades. Bolded text in italics indicates the most prevalent markers that differed across grades.

interpreted as indexing being successful. For example, Abi and Marisol talked about not bullying or being rude to, but rather helping, being respectful, and paying attention or listening to each other. Bea and Ben mentioned not fighting with or hitting others. These markers and practices indexed friendship and more generally, social interaction among peers that was rarely addressed in the classroom. Behavioral markers emphasized and evaluated by teachers were those that had to do with how children followed teachers' directions, behaved during instructional time, and completed their assignments.

Other third graders shared similar comments with me about being successful in school. During recess one day, while talking with Manuela, a Mexican American non-focal student, about my research project, I asked her what she thought it meant to do well in school. She said it was like when her father asked her each day after school, “¿te portaste bien [did you behave]?” She told me this meant to respect others, giving me the example of two girls in her class about whom she said, “son [they are] friendly” (fieldnotes, 3/21/12). And one day at lunch, when I asked Yesenia, another Mexican American non-focal student, what it meant to do well in school, she said, “es como Leyla. Ella me ve, me hace preguntas y juega conmigo [it's like Leyla. She sees me, asks me questions and plays with me],” (fieldnotes, 3/23/12). She then named Abi as another example because “se porta bien.” While “portarse bien” can be translated as “to behave,” this is only a rough translation as it fails to encompass this Latino term stemming from the concept of buena educación.

According to Arzubiaga & Adair, “the concept of buena educación represents an important cultural model for immigrants from Mexico” and “centers around respeto (respect), moral values, and loyalty to family” (2010, p. 305; see also, Valdés, 1996;

Villenas, 2002; Villenas & Dehyle, 1999). Arzubiaga & Adair explain that respect in this sense entails politeness and other interpersonal courtesies but also includes understanding one's obligations to others (2010). In this way, to be una persona bien educada [a person with education] requires not just book learning, but "the education of the whole being in relation to family and community" (Valdés, 1996, p. 125). Portarse bien sits in contrast to "behaving" in the context of the U.S. classroom structured on white, middle-class norms where behaving is understood as following teachers' directives and classroom rules. Moreover behaving in this latter sense is linked to incentives and rewards (or sanctions) and promotes competition and individualism rather than obligations to others.

In third grade, both Rebecca and Rubina point to this kind of individualism and competition. Rebecca said she knew she was doing well in school because she knew the answers fast and that like Zac, she had her hand up first [to answer questions]. Rubina, who early on in her interview identified herself as the smartest student in her class, told me that she knew she was doing well when her teacher pointed out to the rest of the class that she has "already finished [her work]." Rubina also stated that good students did their work "as fast as they can" and "didn't talk." Here not only does she point towards performance and competition, but also individualism, as crucial markers of success. Both girls, along with Zac, were positioned by teachers and often positioned themselves as the smartest in their classes and/or grade. None of these three were Latina/o and in their interviews they did not mention social relationships, friendship,<sup>25</sup> or obligations to others

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<sup>25</sup> Non-Latino students showed in many other ways that they were interested in talking about and exploring social relationships, and in particular, friendships.

in their talk about success. This more competitive, individualistic notion of doing well in school linked to the notion of the ideal schooled subject. Children who regularly completed their work independently (i.e. without interacting with other students) and quickly could embody this subject for their teachers and peers. However, by fourth grade this kind of embodiment involved more explicit deployment of high test scores as I describe in the following paragraphs.

While the behavioral and academic markers children referred to as signaling success in school were similar across both grades, by fourth grade fewer children talked about positive social relations or friendships as signaling doing well in school. Moreover, they provided greater detail in their descriptions of academic markers. While in interviews in both grades children emphasized that doing well in school had to do with trying one's best, in fourth grade children mentioned "not getting upset if you don't get the highest grade." The latter comment was reflected in the way fourth grade teachers frequently told children not to worry if they didn't make top scores. At the same time, during this year the practice of "trying one's best" became a refrain before testing or during test prep sessions when teachers promoted effort as one of the most critical elements for success on the SSA. In this case, the practices of "working hard/er," "trying one's best," and "focusing," together with the configuration of signs that constituted these practices (e.g., quiet body during work, hand raised during lessons) were so regimented and regulated that together they formed an icon of the successful student or the ideal schooled subject.

However, by fourth grade students became increasingly aware that deploying behavioral markers without the accompanying academic markers (i.e. high test scores or



grades) did not lead to what really counted as success. Thus, for students like Bea who struggled to meet the required benchmarks for “proficient” performance, not getting high scores resulted in a new kind of self-positioning. For example, in one interview when she referred to the need to do well in school so as to get a good job, she distanced herself from those who achieved this goal by concluding remark that “*they* practice too much...like your time tables.” During this year on numerous occasions I heard children comment that they had to “practice too much,” “learn too much,” “know too much,” and “think too much.” Over time I began to see how the heavy emphasis on testing which led to pushing through concepts and skills without giving children ample time to deeply learn or engage with the material also led children to conflate knowing and thinking with simply completing the seemingly never ending lineup of in-class and homework assignment. Also of note in Bea’s comment that “*they* practice too much,” is that she does not include herself as doing this “practicing,” pointing out that *others* were those who would be able to get any job they wanted.

I noticed this trend among other focal students such as Ben, Princess and Marisol, whose comments in interviews and conversations suggested they were positioning themselves as choosing not to engage in “practicing” or “thinking” or “learning” too much. They began to comment that they did not like being smart or getting good grades, or were choosing not to do so, in spite of their recognition that this is what was needed for doing well in school. In these cases, children would sometimes focus on a skill or talent they had like playing an instrument (e.g., Marisol), which, at Grant, was not a marker that indexed doing well in school. This self-positioning against the norm, or what was expected of them, did not preclude their providing more specific details in fourth

grade about the academic markers that indexed success such as getting a 100 on a test.

In these cases, while children's repertoires of success included the behavioral and academic markers found in teachers' repertoires they included additional markers like, as Marisol said, "being good at the gift God gives you like music" or "not bullying" others.

By fourth grade, children had also begun to link being successful in school to, in the words of Rubina and Zac, "passing the grade" or "going on to the next grade and not failing." As students who were positioned as some of the smartest students in the grade, there was little concern that either would "fail." However, teachers often used the threat of "not passing the grade" to get students to complete class- and homework and "passing" was understood by students to be determined by SSA scores. Because fourth graders would be moving on to middle school, there was additional pressure about passing. During this year I heard a number of students talk about "passing," and for some, this became their primary goal. Simply passing set the bar low for children and reinforced a low level of engagement in their learning, children working as little as possible just to get through what they had to do in order to pass. As I discuss in the pages that follow, this reinforced and resulted in much of the school day involving procedural display, where children went through the motions of doing what they needed to do to get by without full engagement in the concepts of skills they were supposed to be learning. They could easily display a surface level engagement without having to "learn" or "think" too much.

In the next section I highlight the relationship how children signaled doing well in school and the resulting self-positioning. More specifically, I focus on how different children, in developing and deploying their own repertoires of success, made use of the signs used by teachers as well as additional and/or different signs to position themselves

as doing well in school. I show not only how, over time, certain students' positioning became more sedimented, but also how through this positioning children took active roles in reinforcing and further developing more collective positionings of certain types of students.

### Children's Positioning

#### Excerpt 2

During math children took a geometry quiz, the mid-chapter checkpoint in their workbook, which was also labeled "Test Prep." When they finished Mrs. Learner had them trade with each other to grade as she went over the answers. As Marisol and Rubina traded quizzes, Mrs. Learner told the class that the quiz grade wouldn't count and suggested they use it as a study guide. As she went over the answers, she told them that even though *she* wasn't so particular about how they drew arrows and lines, she had to be strict because this would be on the SSA. When the grading was finished, I noticed that more than half of Marisol's answers (8/15) were marked incorrect, and two of Rubina's were. While Rubina reached across her desk to hand Marisol her graded quiz, Marisol repeated under her breath, "please let it be a higher grade." Taking her quiz from Rubina, she exclaimed, "Aaahhh! I studied too hard on it, and I got eight wrong...again!" Rebecca, sitting next to Rubina, announced proudly, "I missed all those days and I still got 100!" Rubina replied, "Yeah, but since you were sick, you just got to learn it today and it's fresh for you." Several minutes later as children got out their social studies textbook and folder, Marisol held up a drawing of Smokey the Bear and announced to Rebecca, Rubina and the others sitting nearby, "this isn't even my best!" (fieldnotes, 3/6/13)

In fourth grade, when test grades or scores weren't publicly announced, children still saw each other's scores, whether it was from peers handing out graded tests or grading each other's tests. As primary markers of success in teachers' repertoires, scores and grades were the most readily available repertoire elements that children had at their disposal for developing and deploying their own repertoires of success. In the above fieldnote, the three girls' comments illustrate how children were making use of these elements in their interactions, often comparing and competing with each other. For many

fourth graders, test scores and grades became the principal signs in their own repertoires of success, and by deploying these elements they positioned themselves and others as certain kinds of students. In this instance, although the grade didn't "count" according to Mrs. Learner, it did among students as they compared and commented on theirs and others' scores. Based on their high test scores and grades, students like Rebecca and Rubina were positioned and positioned themselves as the smartest kids in their class. But students like Marisol, who struggled on tests, had to find other ways to position herself as successful. In this instance she used her drawing as a marker of success.

In this section, I examine in greater detail how children negotiated and drew on the markers teachers used to signal doing well in school as they developed and deployed their own repertoires of success. I focus specifically on how, through the above processes, children were not only positioned by their teachers, but also actively positioned themselves and others as certain kinds of students. I show how these positionings were dynamic and flexible, and based on different participation frameworks invoked in peer and teacher-student interactions. I also discuss how, for some, these positionings became more sedimented and fixed as children approached the end of elementary school and how, in some cases, children took active roles in reinforcing and further developing more collective positionings of certain types of students.

In the two sub-sections that follow, I provide two representative examples of broader social types that were constructed through how children developed and deployed their repertoires of success, and in turn, their self-positioning and positioning by teachers and peers.

### **The Usual Suspects: Sitting There Already Knowing**

Towards the end of third grade, I was sitting near Princess one morning when I heard her respond to her teacher's question about who had understood the math question of the day by saying under her breath, "the smart kids" (fieldnote, 5/3/12). By this point in the school year I had started to hear other children use that label to refer to a certain group of third graders in each class. They were the children like Rebecca, Rubina, and Zac, who always raised their hand when the teacher asked a question and almost always had the answer the teacher was looking for in the teacher-fronted IRE (Initiation-Response-Evaluation) format of classroom discourse (Mehan, 1985). While during third grade most children I interacted with recognized certain of their peers as "smart," it was not until fourth grade that the use of this label became prevalent in children's repertoires of success. During this year the "smart" label became another sign children could deploy to position others or themselves as doing well in school.

In fourth grade, the practice of publicly labeling children with test scores coincided with a greater reliance on "the smart kids" to provide correct answers during classroom instruction. For example one afternoon Mr. Little, the special education resource teacher, was co-teaching a lesson with Ms. Klein on writing introductions to constructed response essays. As he solicited different writing "hooks" for drawing the reader in, Andrés and Paz's hands shot up and they gave examples. When this was followed by silence, Mr. Little commented to Ms. Klein, "Let's see if there are more hands than the usual suspects." On cue, a few other hands began to creep up (videolog, 12/19/12). Here children's hand-raising motivated by Mr. Little's comment was a way for

them to deploy one of the signs recognized by teachers as successful school behavior. However as the SSA drew closer and children were inundated with whole class test prep sessions where individual students were publicly evaluated based on whether they had the correct answer, they had increasing trepidation about deploying this sign. These sessions became platforms for procedural display where teachers read through their scripted test prep lessons and the majority of students followed along in the way they were expected to. Bloome et al. describe classroom interactions like these as:

cultural events that are accomplished through the cooperative display by teachers and students to each other of a set of interactional procedures that can be counted (interpreted) as doing a lesson by teachers, students, and members of the community. (1989, p. 266)

However, going through the motions and showing that one could “pay (more) attention,” and “try hard(er)” wasn’t necessarily connected to actual understanding of concepts or the ability to apply a new problem-solving skill.

In this instance Mr. Little identified Paz and Andrés as the “usual subjects (i.e., smart kids),” positioning them as the students who always knew the answers and were willing to participate. Their teachers frequently held them up as model students, comparing them to the rest of the class. Later, at the end of the same day, Ms. Klein asked who was “stressed.” When almost the entire class raised their hands, she replied, “Well, Paz is the really the only one who might be stressed because of Reading Olympics, but for the rest of you, your homework is pretty light.” The Reading Olympics was a special competitive reading club, like Math 24, both special clubs that the “smart kids” were invited to join and held during lunch. In this comment, Ms. Klein used technologies of comparison and exclusion positioning Paz as the only child who had reason to feel stressed.

Paz and Andrés tended to score high on tests, and when graded tests were handed out they were often asked to stand while others clapped to congratulate them for their advanced scores. In this way their peers confirmed high test scores as the primary markers of success and collaborated in the positioning of these peers as “smart.” For children who were considered “low performers” or “below basic,” the public announcements about who was advanced or proficient were constant reminders of their inadequacy. Joseph, a fourth grader who had been identified as falling on the autism spectrum and was frequently pulled out of the classroom by Mr. Little during reading time, was one of these students. On several occasions I heard other students referring to him as “retarded” or “mentally retarded” and although I never heard others position him this way in front of him, he was rejected socially by most fourth graders.

One afternoon, I came upon Joseph sitting at the end of the hallway and leaning his head against the wall. I asked him if he were okay and he told me that he had missed his snack because when the teacher told everyone to sit down, he couldn’t find his chair. I persuaded him to tell his teacher, accompanying him to the classroom doorway and noticing many children still eating. He entered, walked to where Andrés was sitting, turned around and came back, sobbing. He said that snack was over and when I pointed out that many of his classmates were still eating, he said, “no! Andrés finished his so I can’t have mine!” Tanya, a classmate sitting close to the doorway came over and explained, “it’s just that everyone thinks Andrés is so smart and has to do what he does” (fieldnote, 6/7/13). In this instance, the notion of the smart student as a model for his peers was taken to an extreme, exaggerated level for Joseph, as he had to do what Andrés did regardless of the social situation. This example heightens the effect that such

positioning had on students, especially for students like Joseph. As a child who needed to be explicitly taught to pick up on social cues and use them to monitor his own behavior, he took Andrés' behavior to the extreme, not even allowing himself to eat since Andre had already finished. In addition, Tanya's ratification of Joseph's reaction shows the extent to which power relations were intertwined in children's positioning, and how they shaped and were shaped by processes of self- and other-regulation.

In fourth grade, there was little time to address peer relationships, so instances like Joseph's meltdown tended to be treated as a problem of the individual. There was, however, a designated time each week when children had the opportunity to talk, albeit in limited ways, about social issues. Teachers called this the "Bucket Meeting," and it was a time when each student was asked to share about how they had "filled someone else's bucket" by doing something nice or helpful for them. Meant to promote "character development," this meeting was part of the behavior management system in fourth grade, and linked to the classroom norm of being "caring" towards others. For 15-20 minutes children would sit in a circle on the rug, and the teachers would call on students one-by-one to share something they had done to help or be nice to others. However, in all three classrooms, many children used this as an opportunity to showcase test scores and grades. Below are comments children shared one day during a bucket meeting in Ms. Klein's class.

Jorge:	I helped Steven on the bus
Jada:	I helped my little sister
Jaleed:	I brought my book bag and helped Ms. Ray
Kevin:	I helped a friend
Andrés:	I helped Horatio
Ben:	Getting 100 on my spelling test
Tanya:	I cleaned the dishes
Avner:	I cleaned my room



Paz: Studying my spelling words and getting an A  
Ms. Klein: You didn't fill up someone else's bucket? If you're only dipping,  
that's not going to be good for your report card.  
(fieldnote, 3/1/13)

Interesting to note in this example is that Mrs. Klein said nothing to Ben for mentioning his 100% on the spelling test but soon after chastised Paz for doing so. This may have been because Ben rarely scored high on his spelling tests while Paz always did, and thus Ms. Klein was reticent to correct Ben. Over the course of the year, I noticed that teachers were inconsistent in their responses to children mentioning test scores in this context. This inconsistency reinforced the idea that in spite of the prompt (how did you fill someone's bucket?), this meeting time was an ideal context in which to deploy high grades and test scores so as to position oneself as doing well. The Bucket Meeting was the only explicit whole group time when teachers promoted behavioral markers related to social relationships as signaling doing well in school, as is evident in Ms. Klein's comment to Paz that "only dipping" would negatively affect her report card. However, children knew what really counted and many would advertise a high test score when they had the opportunity.

The usual suspects like Paz had myriad other opportunities during the day to position themselves as smart and thus successful students. Both Rebecca and Rubina, who sat together all year in fourth grade and considered themselves best friends, were positioned by their teachers and peers and positioned themselves as some of the smartest kids in their grade. On separate occasions, when I asked each to describe herself, Rebecca said she was "smart" and a "good friend" (3/8/12) and Rubina, that she was "the smartest in her class and always finished before everyone else" (5/9/12). These two girls, like Paz, had been invited to participate in the Reading Olympics, Math 24, and an afterschool

program, which according to Mrs. Learner, was a reading program for kids “who could be counted on to do a good job, come to school everyday, and do extra reading” (fieldnotes, 12/5/12). As seen in the following field note excerpt, both girls liked to compete with each other in class, as well as with the other smart kids in these extracurricular activities.

### **Excerpt 3**

As math was wrapping up, Mrs. Learner gave kids their homework assignment and then had Lorena pass out a packet of graded math tests. She said that since they weren't having conferences with parents for “this quarter,” she wanted their parents to know how they were doing by sending home tests for parents to sign and return. She also said that for all of the students who had gotten 100% on the most recent math test, she had posted their tests on the “proud wall.” As I walked over to see to see these, I heard Rebecca call out, “yeah! I got a 100!,” Rubina echoing, “me, too!” I found their tests on the Proud Wall, along with two others – Jaime's and Flor's. As I walked back to my seat, Rebecca called me over, showing me another of her tests with a score of 105%. She then told me that she got 90% on another. (1/16/13)

In third and fourth grades, both girls' comments about being successful in school signaled their sense of competition. For example, Rebecca talked about how she and her classmate, Zac, were often the first to have their hands raised, pointing out that her third grade teacher always said to the class, “Don't let Zac and Rebecca do all of the work” (interview, 3/8/12). Rubina said successful students “work as fast as they can” (interview, 5/9/12). In fourth grade, when I sent a video camera home with her to record what success meant to her, she chose to record herself doing her division homework telling me this was because, “I was the fastest, I was doing them so fast” (interview, 11/28/12). This kind of competition was not limited to the smart kids and many children often rushed through their work in an attempt to be the first to finish. Finishing first or quickly became a sign of doing well in school and helped children position themselves as smart or

smarter than others who were still working. Doing so, much like scoring at high levels (or higher levels than others) on tests, also enabled children to embody the ideal schooled subject. Such a subject was characterized not just by self-regulation and independence, but also competition. At the same time, however, it resulted in rushing through work to get it done and promoted shallow engagement in the skills and concepts being taught.

An additional way children competed with each other was blocking one's work, or preventing others from viewing one's work. Teachers encouraged children to do so for tests, but children, especially the smart kids, engaged in this practice in non-testing situations. On the Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the English as Second Language teacher had brought in coloring sheets of the virgin for Mrs. Klein's class. As there were a few minutes before recess, Mrs. Klein allowed the class to color the handout while she asked those who had participated in the celebration what it had involved. As Ben and others talked about staying up all night, I noticed that Paz had put up folders around her handout to prevent her seatmates from seeing how she was coloring the handout (fieldnote, 12/12/12). In this instance, one of the few opportunities children had to share about a cultural practice was recontextualized by Paz as moment of competition or at least, individual work.

I observed myriad other instances reinforcing the idea that assignment completion was an individual endeavor such as in the following videolog excerpt:

Mrs. Learner had children pass out measuring packets and rulers for the kids to use on their set of math word problems. As the class began to work, Zac said softly, "I wish I could just fast forward these," quickly working through the three problems and then taking out his book on Nintendo "cheat codes" that he had been reading at recess. A minute later, at a nearby table I heard Eduardo say to Jaime, "Don't tell Manny how to do it! That's why he gets all the answers right!" Zac called out to the boys, "Don't help nobody!" (videolog, 3/15/13)

In fourth grade, teachers often talked about how children needed to gain independence and more specifically, complete assignments on their own. Such talk was sometimes linked to being prepared for middle school, or what children needed to develop for passing the grade. Children took up this talk in different ways, but overall it seemed to engender a competitive spirit among them. Moreover, it sent the message that success was an individual accomplishment. In this instance, Eduardo and Zac both attempted to regulate their peers' behavior. At the same time Zac's comment about wanting to "fast forward" the math problems so he could get back to his Nintendo book shows his lack of interest and engagement in the assignment. On many occasions I observed "smart" students like Zac, Rubina and and Rebecca rushing through their work to get some free time to read, play with small toys tucked away in their desks, or use the computer. The notion of success signaled by these practices was one in which deep, engaged learning was not part of the equation for doing well in school. Working independently and finishing one's work as fast as possible became so routinized as part of performing doing well in school that the practices themselves became icons of success.

A small sub-group of the smart kids, including Zac, Rebecca and Rubina, had been identified as "gifted" and participated in the Discovery program. When I asked Rubina what it meant to be successful in school, she replied, "Discovery shows successfulness cause I had to take a test for Discovery for being gifted" (interview, 11/28/12). Through this program, students were supposed to be pulled out for several hours once a week to engage in what I interpreted as project-based learning, in which science, math, and literacy skills and concepts were integrated and used, for example, to develop spacecrafts. I never met the Discovery teacher nor was present when the

Discovery students were pulled out, but based on what children told me, the program did not always take place weekly. For example, while chatting with Rebecca in February about a 4Sight test the class had just taken, she brought up how much she missed the Discovery program because the teacher hadn't picked them up in a long time.<sup>26</sup>

When I asked Rebecca why she liked Discovery she told me, "it's just that they [teachers] don't want us sitting there [in regular class] already knowing." While as Rubina pointed out, being identified as "gifted" was an additional marker of success, this sub-group of smart kids often had chunks of time – 10, 15, or 20 minutes – when they had nothing in particular to do. Although they could read books of their own choosing during this time (e.g., Zac's Nintendo guide), during class time there were few opportunities to delve more deeply into the topic at hand or extend their understanding of new concepts. While class instruction and assignment completion were times when they could perform the ideal schooled subject in front of their peers, they spent much of their day "sitting there already knowing." I observed smart kids sitting there already knowing frequently while in fourth grade classrooms. However, it seemed so part of the routine that they seemed to expect it as how school worked.

In late January of children's fourth grade year I interviewed Zac and James during lunch. When I asked James how school was going, he and Zac had the following exchange.

#### **Excerpt 4**

J=James, Z=Zac

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<sup>26</sup> When I asked Mrs. Learner about what Rebecca had said, she told me that the Discovery teacher had not been at Grant in over a month, and that she would inquire about it. I never followed through to find out what had actually happened.

1. **J:** School is kind of a prison...everything but the bars...it even has a gate just like a
2. prison
3. **Z:** Yeah really bad food
4. **J:** School is just so workaholic boring
5. **Z:** *Yes* (in a whisper cheer to show he likes school)
6. **J:** Z he like boring...Z you like smart work...I'm more like muscle work...I need
7. to work out...I can't even do *gym* anymore so school is pointless to me now
8. (referring to getting suspended from gym class because of losing his temper with the
9. gym teacher)...
10. **Z:** You don't have to like school...you gotta be in the school with it though...do
11. what you gotta do

(interview, 1/25/13)

While Zac tended to say he liked school and never complained, in this excerpt he also suggests that school is not about having fun or liking it but rather something everyone must do. Comments like this tended to come out when he was interacting with others who were complaining about school. They served to reinforce his positioning as a smart kid and to distance him from those, like his cousin, who did not embody the ideal schooled subject.

In many ways the usual suspects were likely no different than the “smart kids” from other schools, grades, classrooms, or even decades or eras. What was different about the usual suspects at Grant was that, as students in a Title I school where funding was contingent on adherence to dull, scripted curricula revolving around test preparation,

learning was equated with completing one's work correctly, quickly, and independently. Such "learning" was constructed through procedural displays in which both teachers and students performed their roles as designated under a managerialist system regardless of whether they engaged in deeper learning of concepts or skills.

The repetition over time of completing one's work in this way, and being recognized for doing so, led to their more stable positioning as the smart kids. However doing so also involved great self-regulation as they performed and embodied the ideal schooled subject. All eyes were on them as was evident in the example of Andrés' peers "having to do what he does." In this sense they had little opportunity to go off script or deploy different or additional markers that signaled success. Instead their repertoires of success overlapped neatly with those of their teachers. While the system did not work for them in that they had little access to challenging and engaging instruction outside of the Discovery program and the few other extracurricular activities or clubs they were invited to join, it did provide them prestige and power over their peers. Moreover, their positioning as exceptional students sat in tension with current national, district-level, school and classroom discourse around school performance that *all* students can and should perform equally well on standardized tests. While their teachers often expressed frustration that the usual suspects were the few who participated regularly in classroom instruction, their reliance on them to embody the ideal schooled subject reinforced the idea that they were the select few who were truly successful. In such a context, it is not surprising that children who were not part of this group not only developed and deployed other markers to signal doing well in school, but also began to develop negative attitudes towards schooling.

**My Normal: I Make My Own Self, That's All**

In the fall of Ben's fourth grade year, he brought in video clips he had taken of himself playing video games based on my prompt to film something that had to do with being successful or doing well in school. We ate lunch together upstairs in his classroom and he invited Beto and Andrés to join us. The following excerpt is from our recorded conversation about what Ben had filmed (H=Holly, B=Ben).

**Excerpt 5**

1. **H:** What do these games have to do with success?
2. **B:** I thought I wasn't gonna make a high score...my goal was to do my highest score
3. but then I beat it
4. **H:** How do these games tell a story about you?
5. **B:** Cause I like really much video games and I don't really like being that really
6. normal kid
7. **H:** What's a normal kid?
8. **B:** Cause how a normal kid is that you have you know straight As...I don't like that
9. much straight As
10. **H:** Why not?
11. **B:** Cause I like being *my* normal
12. **H:** Why do you think you like being different?
13. **B:** It's how I make my own self that's all...like some people like black
14. **H:** Like wearing the color black?



15. **B:** I have my whole uniform black but I'm supposed to wear red

(interview, 10/16/12)

As I discuss at the beginning of this chapter, by his final year of elementary school, in interviews with me and in some conversations I heard him have with peers, Ben had begun to express dislike for school and position himself as choosing not to get good grades. Important to note was the presence of two of his friends, Beto (a focal student) and Andrés (one of the smart kids). It is uncertain whether Ben's self-positioning in contrast to the smart kids (like Andrés) were directed at me (in the child-researcher participation framework), or at one or both of the other boys (in the peer-peer framework), or at all of us. Here he positioned himself in contrast to smart kids (like Andrés). At the same time he indicated that it was his choice to be different, to be "my normal," and to make his own self. Positioning oneself as choosing to be different and not liking to get too many As may have allowed him to save face in front of his peers and me, as he typically did not make top grades or high scores on tests.

While this somewhat oppositional positioning suggested that Ben's repertoire of success did not include high grades or test scores but rather things like high scores on video games, what I observed of him in the classroom suggested otherwise. Although he did not make top grades and struggled in particular with reading and writing, he tended to deploy many behavioral markers indexing doing well in school, such as sitting up straight, not talking when his teacher did, and following classroom rules and procedures, often being chosen to help Ms. Klein pass out materials or complete other tasks. At the same time he struggled to complete his homework and expressed to me his frustration with literacy-related assignments. For example, one day when Ben had to stay in the

classroom for recess because he hadn't brought in his homework I asked him what had happened. He replied, "I did it but I forgot it at home." After a pause he continued, "but it's too hard doing the sentences – you have to think and I never get As" (fieldnote, 2/6/13). Here he argued that the homework was too difficult and suggested that even when he did it, he didn't perform well on the spelling tests.

Striking in our conversation was Ben's comment that to do the homework one had "to think." While teachers continually referred to practices like trying one's best and working hard to be successful, I never heard them mention the importance of "thinking" or deep engagement in the content or skills at hand. Thinking was not even something that the smart kids had to do much of to be successful in fourth grade. Much of what children had to do was memorize - memorize reading comprehension techniques, lists of words, as well as formulas for answering multiple-choice questions, writing paragraphs, or solving math problems. In this way, Grant's fourth grade version of the ideal schooled subject sat in contrast to Kant's rational, autonomous thinker of the Enlightenment. This distorted version of the ideal schooled subject was thus more readily embodied by performing doing well in school through deploying behavioral markers associated with success.

Several days after my conversation with Ben while I ate lunch with him and Beto, they began to talk about their upcoming spelling test. Beto said the words were too hard and both said that even when they studied and did their spelling homework, they didn't get a good grade (fieldnote, 2/8/13). On the test that day, Ben scored 45%, and Beto, 70%. Whether or not they had studied for this particular spelling test, their comments suggest they had resigned themselves to not scoring well on these tests. However, this did

not mean that they did not care about their spelling test grades. About a month later, when I entered the cafeteria during lunch time, Ben ran up to me, pulling his spelling test out of his pocket and showing me that he had gotten 100% (fieldnote, 3/1/13). That afternoon, Ms. Klein chose him to pass out math tests to be corrected, telling him in front of the whole class that this was because he had done so well on the test. Ben's performance on spelling and other tests fluctuated during the rest of the school year. When he made good grades he used them in front of his peers as markers of success, and when he didn't, he rarely commented about it, except to me.

For Ben's final spelling test of the year, he asked me to help him study by moderating a spelling bee for him and a small group of his peers (videolog, 6/7/13). He told me that the day before the whole class had had a spelling bee, and that Paz had won – twice. I agreed to moderate the bee, Beto filming us as Ben competed against Paz and two other students. Paz won again, and a few minutes later the class took the test. Since she and Taniyah finished first, Ms. Klein had them grade the rest of the tests. Ben's score was 70%. Here, in spite of his engagement in practicing his spelling words, he lost once again to Paz and performed poorly on the test. With many moments like these during literacy time, over time his self-positioning as choosing not to get As and his comments about disliking school are understandable. However, he found other ways to position himself as doing well in school.

As soon as the SSA had finished, fourth graders began a swimming class at the local high school. The second week of swimming, when I arrived in his classroom, I noticed a packet of tests he had been handed back with mostly low scores. He quickly closed the folder they were in and began to tell me about how he had been put in the

advanced swimming group and got to swim in the deep end of the pool (fieldnote, 5/8/13). Here he effectively directed my attention away from his low test scores to a school-related activity for which he had been identified as advanced.

Ben was like many of his peers who struggled to perform at high levels on tests, who used other markers to signal success, who at times positioned themselves as choosing not to be “smart” and, as the following example shows, at other times positioned themselves as successful on tests and assignments.

### **Excerpt 6**

Shortly before the SSA, Mrs. Cole, the math specialist, visited Ben’s class for a math “study session,” which consisted of the class working through multiple choice questions on mini-whiteboards to solve different problems having to do with money and decimals, fractions, and comparing numbers. The session was part of the 4Sight program and catered to the kinds of problems the group as a whole had gotten wrong on previous assessments. As review problems flashed on the SmartBoard, a small digital stopwatch kept time on a corner of the screen. Ben and Beto leaned forward in their desks, exclaiming “yes” and pumping their arms when they got an answer right and holding their heads in their hands when they got answers wrong. After about four problems, Ms. Klein said, “Ben knows what he’s doing. I don’t know about his score on this last [4Sight] test, but I know he knows what he’s doing.”

About 10 minutes into the study session, I noticed that Nayra, a student who had arrived to Marshall from Mexico several months before, was slumped over in her seat, body shaking as she sobbed. I went over and asked her what was wrong and she told me she couldn’t do what the teachers kept telling her to do [the math problems. Mrs. Cole and Ms. Klein came over, Mrs. Cole telling Nayra that she at least needed to try and Ms. Klein telling me that she didn’t know what to do since Nayra was “only at first grade level in math.” With the teachers standing there, Ben leaned across his desk and spoke to her in Spanish, telling her not to worry, that he would help her. Then he said to his teachers, “I can help her!” He pulled his chair over to her desk, and for the rest of the period he worked through each problem with her. (fieldnote, 4/3/13)

For the rest of the school year, Ben helped Nayra with her math as well as other subjects.

While at times competitive with his peers as seen in the examples above, he did not block his work from others but rather sought out moments to work collaboratively. For him,

social relationships were an integral part of his repertoire of success as seen when I first asked him how he could tell if he were doing well in school in third grade and he laid out a handful of behavioral markers about *not* doing certain things (not hitting people, not pushing them, etc.).

Like Ben, Marisol was a student who performed unevenly on tests. However she had struggled with both math and reading since first grade, and unlike Ben, was continually positioned by her teachers as “low.” In the winter of her fourth grade year her parents requested an evaluation to screen for learning difficulties. When I talked with her about doing well and being successful in school, like Ben, she also tended to refer to social relationships and more specifically, classrooms norms around “getting along” (e.g., “Be respectful, responsible, caring, and treat others the way you want to be treated and never bully somebody,” interview 4/25/12).

The first day I visited her fourth grade classroom she asked me if I would be filming kids. When I said I was going to be observing for the first few weeks, reminding her that I was learning about how kids thought about what it meant to well in school, she replied, “Hey, you copied me. That’s like my project!” When I asked her to explain, she said she was doing a project to see how kids treated each other at recess (fieldnote, 11/9/12). Although this was my first day in fourth grade, I had been meeting with children each week at the library since September. In the meetings I had talked to them about what I was studying, interviewed them about videos they had taken in third grade about success and doing well in school, and had begun to discuss with them what they wanted to film in fourth grade that had to do with this topic.

In an interview with Marisol a month before I started observing her at school, we had had the following conversation (H=Holly, M=Marisol):

**Excerpt 7:**

1. **H:** What would you like to film that has to do with success in school?
2. **M:** I can take what is like doing well in school and what to do. I can walk around
3. showing the people this is how they work, this is how they do, this is how they sit
4. down and be quiet
5. **H:** Tell me more about what this has to do with success.
6. **M:** Success means that you do the things that you wanna be like...there's some kids
7. who bully you who just want to be successful...they wanna be popular and they're
8. never gonna be nice people all the time...I wanna know if everyone is gonna be safe
9. or that everybody's playing nicely with their friends and if some people don't have
10. friends they can meet other friends

(interview, 10/12/12)

Here, for Marisol, success was deeply intertwined in social relationships. Her interest in making sure fourth graders had friends and weren't bullied likely speaks to how she saw herself in the social order in fourth grade. In this interview, success took on a somewhat negative connotation as she assigned desire for success to bullies who sought popularity. Earlier in this interview she had showed me some video clips she had taken at her godparents' house of her godmother doing her godsister's hair. When I asked her what these videos had to do with success she told me, "My godsister always cares about me and helps me and brings me a little bit of coolness. She teaches me certain things that I don't know so if they curse me I don't care." In this way, Marisol indexed a kind of

social success connected to coolness, much like her comments about bullies and popularity. For her this emphasis on social positioning seemed to take precedence over academic markers of success.

At the beginning of this same interview, when I had asked Marisol about videos she had made in third grade of herself demonstrating dance steps and playing the violin we had the following conversation (H=Holly, M=Marisol):

**Excerpt 8:**

1. **H:** Tell me about these videos
2. **M:** It feels like I'm doing dance lessons so I really like the violin because I'm like a
3. different girl that likes instruments and fun and not smart anymore
4. **H:** What? What about smart?
5. **M:** I don't like to be smart, it's just that smart...it's like every day when I come to
6. school...I don't like to be smart. It's just that it's more difficult than doing something
7. different...on the first day of school in first grade it's just that it was difficult and I
8. looked at Mr. R's (music teacher) cart and it looked good. I like music. I would like
9. to be that (music teacher)
10. **H:** Tell me more about not liking to be smart
11. **M:** My mom and dad are smart...I don't wanna be smart like them, I like to do
12. different things...they always tell me why don't you wanna be smart and I tell them
13. it's just too much smartness...my only gifts are music and art
14. **H:** So some kids choose to not to be smart?
15. **M:** I can videotape them and I can ask them, "Do you like to be smart or just to be
16. different?"

(interview, 10/12/12)

Striking in this excerpt is Marisol's idea, one she wanted to explore with her classmates, that being smart was a choice, and that the opposite of smart was not lack of intelligence but difference, which for her had to do with her interest in art and music. Much like Ben, Marisol positioned herself as "choosing" not to be smart and instead choosing to do "different" things like play the violin and dance, both endeavors that didn't officially count in how children were evaluated as being successful (or not) in school. However, Marisol often used these non-academic markers to position herself as successful in the classroom.

For example, on the first day I visited Marisol's classroom, they had a visitor, Mr. Brown (fieldnote, 11/9/12). He was from a local bank and volunteered for a program called Junior Achievement that focused on helping children develop "work-readiness, entrepreneurship and financial literacy skills." At the end of his visit, to review traits of a good entrepreneur, Mr. Brown handed out photocopies of a "business" game that children could cut out and fold, origami-style. Marisol finished cutting and folding hers before her desk mates, holding it up for them to see. Several children commented on how nice hers looked and how fast she had finished. She then said, "yeah, I'm so good at origami," and then went around the table helping others. In many other instances I saw Marisol position herself as successful on what were seen as "non-academic" assignments or projects (e.g. her Smokey the Bear drawing for social studies). However, like Ben, in spite of her comments to me about being different and choosing not to be smart, she looked for moments to position herself as smart or good at some kinds of schoolwork.



In third and fourth grade Marisol rarely raised her hand to provide the correct answer to a math or literacy question, and when she did she tended to speak softly and tentatively. In third grade when I asked her how she could tell if she were doing well in school, she replied, "I can be really good. I don't raise my hand very much because I'm so shy but I know the answers, but I don't raise my hand" (interview, 4/25/12). For Marisol, knowing the answers was a marker of success, and to explain why she didn't display her knowledge she positioned herself as shy. In fourth grade, in spite of her comment that she didn't like to be smart, as the following example shows, correct answers and high test scores were still part of her repertoire of success.

One day after lunch while Mrs. Cole reviewed the 4Sight test results with the class, Marisol paid close attention, re-doing problems on a small whiteboard and looking at the work her desk mates were doing (videolog, 12/14/12). For each problem she solved correctly, she would call out, "yes!" along with other children who had done so. At one point, as Mrs. Cole talked through a problem on multiples of the number eight, she shouted out, "yes!," jumping up and down in her chair and saying to Mrs. Cole, "I had the same thing as you!" For the problems she did not solve correctly, she looked down and did not say anything. Towards the end of the review, she raised her hand, was called on, and gave the correct answer. Mario called out, "yo, she's smarter than me!" and Marisol yelled out, "I'm the only one who got it!" While these moments were few and far between, she still found ways to deploy correct answers and high test scores when she had them.

However, Marisol became increasingly discouraged with her test performance. In spite of the support from her parents who helped with homework and studying, she

continued to struggle on tests and quizzes as seen in the example when Marisol expressed frustration about getting over half of the answers on her math quiz wrong. Moments like this were likely especially frustrating for Marisol as for much of the year she sat with Rebecca and Rubina, two of the “smartest” girls in the grade who frequently announced their high grade and scores to the class. As the spring semester progressed I noticed that Marisol participated less and began to disengage during whole group instruction, independent work time, and even small group activities.

On rare occasions, Mrs. Learner allowed children to work in pairs or small groups. One morning when I arrived in her classroom, Marisol had joined three other girls – Antoine, Princess and Yesenia – to read a Storytown selection on Paul Bunyan (fieldnote, 3/20/13). I observed the group as they took turns reading. There were many multisyllabic words in the text as well as unfamiliar names of geographic locations in the western US. Marisol and Princess struggled to read these words, as did Yesenia, while Antoine helped them decode many of them. When Marisol wasn’t reading, she did not follow along; instead she looked around the room, applied chapstick, at one point got up and went to the water fountain. The following month, during the first week of the SSA, when I checked in with her about how it was going, she told me, “not good” and that she didn’t want to talk about it (fieldnote, 4/12/13).

In May, during a whole class math homework review of four double-digit division problems, I noticed that Marisol had most of the answers wrong on her page and had not shown her work as required (fieldnote, 5/10/13). As Mrs. Learner called on the usual suspects – Rubina, then Rebecca, and Zac – to solve the problems on the SmartBoard, Marisol did not correct her work. What had been atypical behavior up through early

spring had become the norm for her. However she had also become adept at managing her low performance. For example, in the final weeks of school I observed her chatting with Chantel as they organized a packet of tests in their folders to bring to their parents (videolog, 6/5/13). When Marisol showed Chantel one of her math tests with a score of 33%, Chantel suggested she put this and her other tests with low scores at the back of the folder so her parents wouldn't notice. Marisol followed Chantel's advice and then called me over and showed me two spelling tests on which she had scored higher grades, 80% and 85% (fieldnote, 6/5/13).

Over the course of fourth grade, there were other students like Ben and Marisol, whose repertoires of success shared overlapping markers with those of their teachers such as correct answers, high test scores, and other behavioral markers. While they strategically deployed these markers in more "public" conversations with peers and in whole group settings where teachers were present, in one-on-one or small group interactions with me and in some cases, with close friends, they also began to position themselves in contrast to the "smart kids." As they toggled back and forth in this positioning, they began to express increased dislike of and different degrees of disengagement from school. While fourth graders at Grant fell along the spectrum in terms of how they developed and deployed markers of success, the primary sign most used to position themselves as doing well in school remained high test scores. In the following section I discuss some of the unexpected ways children deployed these markers, or responded to their peers' deployment of them.

### **Superkids, Antiheroes, and the Unexceptional Superheroes**

Leaving Mrs. Learner's classroom, it was hard not to miss a poster covering most of the inside of the door titled: Superkid of the Week. Each week the chosen "Superkid" would fill out the poster with her or his interests, likes, etc. Of note was a section in which Superkids wrote out their "proudest accomplishment." In early 2013, I began to notice a trend among students. From January through April, approximately two-thirds of the Superkids' proudest accomplishments referenced their performance on the SSA.<sup>27</sup> Some of these read, for example, My Proudest Accomplishment is "to get an A+ on SSAs," "getting advanced on the SSA," and "getting proficient on the SSAs." In some of these cases, it was unclear whether children were referring to their test performance the previous year or the upcoming SSA. Moreover, what some children wrote suggested confusion about SSA scores' correspondence to grades.

These responses seemed to become the default, an easy way to answer the prompt and perhaps more significantly, a way to publicly position oneself as a good or smart [enough] student. For some, doing so likely provided a silent refutation of how children were being positioned in study sessions and served as a proof of their ability to do well, or well enough, on the SSA. Deployment of high test scores also mirrored teachers' expectations for their performance on what really counted for doing well in school. Doing them during the Superkid of the Week activity shows how children recontextualized high test scores as a marker of success, bringing them into a non-academic space or context of sharing about one's preferences and interests. In this way, while this example shows the overlap in teachers' and children's repertoires of success it shows how children's deployment of these signs varied from their teachers. High test scores were so highly

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<sup>27</sup> Once the SSA was finished in April, most superkids responded differently to this section of the poster, and I have no record of SSA-oriented responses in May or June.

counted and so integrated into teachers' repertoires of success, that no matter the ostensible topic, children deployed these markers every chance they could. As in the Bucket Meeting example, children took advantage of this moment when they had the attention of the whole class.

I was curious, how, after the SSA had ended, children might reflect on this superkid practice and asked a small group of girls to do so one day during lunch.

**Excerpt 9:**

(H=Holly, M=Marisol, L=Lorena, RE=Rebecca, P=Princess)

1. **H:** What was your proudest accomplishment as Superkid?
2. **M:** I don't remember
3. **L:** Getting advanced on SSAs
4. **RE:** Oh yeah, me too, I wonder what I got on the SSAs *this* year
5. **L:** Me, too
6. **P:** I bet I got below basic
7. **RE:** What'd you get last year?
8. **P:** My reading score was basic and then my math was ... proficient

(interview, 5/10/13)

While Rebecca and Lorena's positioning was straightforward – they scored high and let others know about it, just as their teachers did, how Marisol and Princess responded to this deployment was more complicated. Notable was Marisol's silence. Her lack of commentary during this interaction suggests that she was less willing to talk about her test scores which may have been a way to save face. I was initially surprised that Princess admitted she thought she had performed at the lowest level on the SSA as she could have

saved face like Marisol.

But Princess' admission supported my observations of her across fourth grade and the comments she made to her peers and to me as the year progressed. She had become less engaged in schoolwork and more vocal about this as the year progressed. For example, in late winter and into the spring when children had independent reading assignments, she often lay her head down on her desk, jumped back and forth from page to page, or looked around the room. During whole class instruction she tended not to follow along or correct her work when it was reviewed. Instead she passed notes to friends or played with items in her desk. In February when I asked her how fourth grade was going, she told me, "I don't think it's fun, you have to learn a lot but we have to do a lot of writing and we're not really learning" (2/6/13). On several occasions, she told classmates that she never studied for tests "because I'm too lazy and it's boring (3/8/13)," and "I do not like my teacher, and I do not like my classroom (3/15/13)." It seemed that by this point in her schooling, she had started to develop an oppositional stance towards school. This was in contrast to her comment in the fall semester: "I think I'm doing good at school because my teacher said" (11/30/12).

Experiencing less success on tests, students Princess and Marisol, and Ben, reacted in different ways, positioning themselves as being good at other things, or as being bored by or disliking school and thus less invested in doing well. They became adept at knowing when to deploy test scores and when to deploy other markers of success such as those that allowed them to bodily or behaviorally embody the ideal schooled subject. Doing so involved a high-level of self-regulation and management.

In contrast, Roque and other students who were seen as troublemakers by their

teachers, developed repertoires of success that included markers like high test scores, but excluded many of behavioral signs found in the repertoires of students like Marisol and Ben, as well as the smart kids. Troublemakers often deployed high scores as a marker of success regardless of how they had performed on tests, and these were not accompanied by the requisite behavioral markers. They tended to explicitly refute how their teachers positioned them and showed themselves to be “smart” in myriad other ways.

For example Roque’s proudest accomplishment, which he wrote the week SSA testing began, was his talent in drawing. He was known for his ability to make quick math calculations and on numerous occasions he pulled me aside during class to teach me math games for multiplying and dividing. He often attempted to help others with their schoolwork and proclaimed himself a champion car builder at recess. During whole group instruction he challenged his teachers, sometimes in subtle ways. One afternoon Mrs. Learner had the class work through a set of multiple choice math problems on the SmartBoard, emphasizing the importance of eliminating improbable answers as each student went up to the board. She called on Roque, who had been waving his hand wildly (not in the sanctioned way) for several minutes, to solve the last problem. He walked up to the board, circled the correct answer immediately, spun around on his heels, and walked back to his seat as Mrs. Learner reminded him about the process of elimination and of showing one’s work (fieldnotes, 3/15/13).

Roque was the superkids’ foil. His power lay in his creative deployment of and adding to the markers both his teachers and peers used to signal doing well in school. He didn’t play by the rules and was a constant reminder to his teachers and peers of other

ways of being and of being successful in school, regardless how this resulted in being positioned as the bad guy or the villain. For much of the school year, Roque's desk was placed across the room from his peers. I frequently found him standing against the wall during recess as punishment for a classroom infraction, and many students kept their distance in the classroom and in more open, unsupervised spaces. At the same time his exceptional behavior made him a magnet for attention and a frequent topic of conversation among teachers. In this way he disrupted the managerialist power relations that circulated in fourth grade classrooms.

One of the few popular writing assignments fourth graders completed over the course of the school year took place shortly after the SSA, an essay in which they had to write about a superpower they would like to have. All three classes worked on this assignment, and children spent several days researching different powers such as telepathy, invisibility, speed, mimicry, and mind control (the most popular power). Children worked on this assignment during literacy time for two weeks. One morning while children were outlining why they wanted the superpowers they had chosen, I came upon Kiara whose chosen power was omniscience, which she had defined as knowing everything. When I asked about this choice, she replied that this would help her "get everything right on the SSAs" and thus she would "pass to fifth grade and be a champion" (5/3/13). Echoed in Kiara's essay focus on passing to fifth grade were other children's comments about being a success or doing well in school as "passing the grade," "going on to middle school," and "not failing."

While omniscience was, of course, a fantasy, Kiara knew plenty about the high stakes of the SSA. Her essay offers a subtle critique about the classroom learning



environment: For many children, even those who diligently studied and completed their class and homework, getting a perfect score on the SSA was truly a fantasy in spite of all the test prep and teachers' talk about "trying one's best" and "working harder." In light of this reality, just reaching a proficient level on the test or passing the grade became the primary goal for many fourth graders. For these students self-regulation was critical to doing well in school. At the same time, with the goal of just passing, children came to see "learning" as "too much," "too hard," or "too much thinking," and as something boring to get through. "Fast forwarding," or finishing one's work quickly, at least allowed children a moment of free time to do something of their own choosing. Along with the attainment of a perfect SSA score, deep, engaged learning was also a fantasy.

### **Discussion**

In this chapter I have shown how children responded to teachers' deployment of their repertoires of success, or their use of markers signaling success, in daily teaching and learning routines. In other words, I have illustrated how children negotiated, drew on, and/or recontextualized these markers as they developed and deployed their own repertoires of success that overlapped and intersected with teachers' repertoires to different degrees. High test scores, the most readily available sign with the most stable, predictable index were the primary elements in most teachers' and children's repertoires of success.

Teacher's and children's repertoires of success shared a number of behavioral signs and practices that also held more fixed, shared meanings around doing well in

school. Moreover certain practices or configurations of signs and practices, when deployed routinely and consistently, became iconic of being a successful student. However, I have also shown how children strategically deployed these signs and practices in unexpected ways. This depended on the interactional context and more specifically, the different participation frameworks embedded in interactions. Moreover children signaled doing well in school through their deployment of other less academic markers and markers related to friendships, and more generally social relationships among peers. I argue that critical to understanding how children negotiate and make meaning around what it means to be successful in school is looking not just at points of overlap between their repertoires and those of their teachers, but looking carefully at areas where their ideas about doing well in school diverged from those that teachers tended to interpret as signaling success.

In this chapter I have also shown how through children's deployment of success markers, they were positioned by their teachers, and positioned themselves and others, as certain types of students. Over time these positionings became more static for certain students as well as for certain groups of students, positionings that motivated and were motivated by children's engagement in daily teaching and learning routines, their school performance and their attitudes towards school (cf. Wortham, 2006). At the same time, interactions between teachers and students during daily teaching and learning routines also resulted in more collective positionings of children that both mirrored and reified the ways they were classified and categorized based on processes of normalization (i.e. standardized testing). This process points to "the fundamental relation between learning and social interaction" (Eckert, 1989, p. 183) illustrated by Eckert (*ibid.*) and Wortham

(2006) in their monographs on processes of social identification for high school students. While at the elementary level these positionings were not entirely static, as they prepared to move to middle school children like Ben, Marisol and Princess began to develop oppositional stances towards reading, writing, and math, and more generally towards schooling.

Children like Roque who deployed signs of success like correct answers and high scores but refused to deploy many of the behavioral markers associated with doing well in school, provided alternative models to the ideal schooled subject and disrupted the mechanistic managerialist teaching and learning routines sustained through procedural display. At the same time his consistent positioning as not doing well based on behavioral signs led to a more sedimented positioning as bad student. Smart kids, too, over time came to have more sedimented positionings. But like their peers they had little opportunity to engage in meaningful learning and tended to rush through their work to get to something more interesting or they had to sit there, “already knowing.” What all students did learn was how to regulate and manage themselves and others.

Yet self-regulation without high test scores provided only the guise of doing well in school. While this may have initially provided a false sense of doing well, children who didn’t make high test scores began to realize the futility of their deployment of solely behavior markers signaling success and in turn, became less engaged in the teaching and learning routines. Within this context, just passing became the bar for many students even in their fantasies. Such a view of success not only led to disengagement but also a push towards mediocrity, or doing the minimum in order to get by. This view also has ties to the factory model of education in a Taylorist, managerialist system (cf. Au,

2011). Under this system, students, like teachers, were like factory workers who had little reason or motivation to fully engage in what was required of them.

As I sought to engage what did motivate and engage children, I turned my attention to what they did and said outside of the classroom. In the following chapter I examine how, when taken up in a less restricted but nevertheless school-like space, my concept of repertoires of success was challenged and opened up by children once I began to follow their goals, ideas and interests in our weekly library meetings.

## Chapter 6: Live from the Public Library, It's Friday Afternoon!

### Excerpt 1:

(M=Marisol, H=Holly, RU=Rubina, B=Beto, RE=Rebecca)

1. **M:** Do you think your project is fun?
2. **H:** I think it's really fun cause one of the things I like to do most is hang out with kids
3. and that was one of the reasons I was a teacher...but because I'm a student now and
4. not a teacher anymore this is a good opportunity for me to spend time with kids
5. **M:** Do you think kids would understand the project and like it?
6. **H:** Sometimes I think because I'm a grown-up and how the way that I think about
7. things is very different from the ways kids think I worry they don't quite understand
8. what I'm doing...but I think that's okay if they're having a good time and getting
9. something out of it
10. **RU:** What if the kids don't like the project...like the program?
11. **H:** If they don't like it they could let me know and we could figure out a way to make
12. it better or, if they decide they don't want to participate that's okay
13. **B:** Why do you like...do you like coming here on Fridays?
14. **H:** I do, it's one of my favorite times of the week...but I also get stressed out cause I
15. have to plan everything that we do and I worry about kids getting bored...but when I
16. get here I usually have a great time
17. **B:** Why do you have to plan everything?
18. **H:** Because I wanna make sure we're moving forward in planning these projects that

19. everyone is gonna do and I wanna make sure that we have enough stuff to do=  
 20. **RU:** =but you were a teacher  
 21. **H:** I know but I don't want it to be like a classroom, I want it to me more like=  
 22. **RE:** =yeah cause then the kids would be like, "it feels like we're going *back* to school  
 23. like we go from school to school"  
 24. **RU:** Wait...if you don't like to plan we could just have like fun day or something

(audiolog, 12/7/12)

During the children's third and fourth grade years, I spent great time and effort trying to explain to them what I was studying and to explicitly engage them in talk about what it meant to do well in school. The boardroom of the public library where we met each Friday for two hours was the primary space in which I did so, and where the above conversation took place as children interviewed me about my project. Whereas in the fourth grade classrooms I often experienced what Maybin refers to as a "strong sense of paralyzing boredom," (2006, p. 11; see also, McLaren, 1986) as children had to sit and work quietly for most of the day, the library meetings brought both excitement and new challenges. On the one hand I was thrilled to have a space in which to observe children interact with each other more freely than they could at school and to engage with them about my research. On the other I was confronted with the fact that children didn't necessarily understand my research or want to engage with it (lines 5-8, 10) but rather had their own ideas about what we should do in the boardroom (lines 1, 24).

Over time I came to see moments of dissonance like the one above as *methodological rich points* which pushed me to acknowledge that my assumptions about how the research project should or would work and the methods I had developed were

insufficient to understand what I had set out to investigate (Hornberger, 2013, p. 102).

As I began to pay more attention to instances when children questioned me or challenged me to do something different (i.e., “fun”), I found ways to adjust my methods and follow more directly the children’s leads. While doing so led me away from explicit talk with children about what it meant to be successful in school, it also gave me a richer understanding of how, in this alternative space, children were further developing and deploying their repertoires of success. Attending to the methodological rich points that emerged in the library meetings and adjusting my practices accordingly were critical to reframing the kinds of questions I asked and the ways in which I looked for answers (cf. *ibid*). At the same time acknowledging these methodological rich points helped me notice more clearly how as both researcher and teacher I tended to operate within a managerialist framework that limited my perspective on what I planned for and observed of children.

In this chapter I first describe the library meetings and how what took place each week evolved over the course of the school year based on children’s interests and feedback. I then examine how and when I elicited children’s talk about school and about doing well in school, as well as how and when children approached this topic. In the following sections I discuss how children came to tell, craft and dramatize their stories over the course of the school year. In each of these sections I look carefully at when and how children deployed signs indexing success and how these signs overlapped, not just with teachers’ repertoires of success, but from the ways that children themselves signaled success in the classroom. I look closely at how through the deployment of these signs, children positioned themselves and others as certain kinds of students, and more

generally as certain kinds of people. I argue that better recognition and understanding of, and explicit attention to these phenomena are critical for finding ways to keep children engaged and interested in school as they prepare to enter middle school.

### **Weekly Library Meetings**

Each Friday after school I would walk several blocks with the 10 focal fourth graders to the public library. Leaving Grant, the group would spread out, some running, others pairing up to chat as they walked, and still others walking behind with me. At the library, once past the security gate the group would make a mad dash up the stairs to the second floor, through the children's section of the library, and down the hall of administrative offices to the boardroom. The boardroom consisted of an enormous oval table surrounded by 18 heavy, cushioned chairs and a small open space (approximately 9 x 12 feet) by the entrance where we often sat on the floor. It was in the boardroom that I observed the children interacting with each other for extended periods of time, talked to them about my research project, and came to follow their lead by developing activities and projects based on their interests.

At the beginning of the school year, a typical 2.5 hours meeting included a check-in meeting, snack time, and activities I developed that I thought would allow me to observe their deployment of repertoires of success such as having them document what success or doing well in school meant, interviewing them and having them interview each other, and engaging in role play that touched on the topic of schooling and/or success. I arrived each week with a full agenda for the two hours but early on began to realize that children seemed most interested in eating snack and chatting with each other.



In frustration one afternoon I had a conversation with the children about how long snack was taking and how it meant that we had little time for other activities (fieldnote, 10/5/12). I assumed our conversation would lead to a shorter snack time, but children responded by developing an elaborate list of how to make snack time “better,” which consisted primarily of assigning each other snack jobs each week: the snack carriers (those who would carry the snack from school to the library), snack suppliers (those who would pass out cups and napkins and refill our water bottle), snack passers (those who would pass out snack), cleaners (those who would clean up), and the snack body guards (those who would guard the snack since they were concerned that some were taking extra snack on the sly). While children’s response gave me insight into how they were attempting to order and regulate the space, it also pushed me to acknowledge how important it was for them to have unstructured social time, especially because this was lacking at school.

This instance offered up a methodological rich point in which I was forced to rethink how I was attempting to answer my research questions and thus ended up changing the structure of the meeting format. I did so by setting up centers and small group activities that children could join or participate in whether or not they had finished snack. While children took charge of the roles and responsibilities they associated with snack, I used this time to observe them more closely, chat with individual or small groups of children, conduct interviews, or have them interview each other.

Methodological rich points continued to guide me in planning for the library meetings each week and both the format and the content of meetings evolved over time. In this way our coming together was continually reshaped by our interactions, and

developing the weekly agenda was an iterative process (see Appendix C for details on the different activities we engaged in month by month). As in the third grade pilot study children had expressed great interest in sharing personal stories, I incorporated time in the fourth grade weekly meetings for them to do so. However in September I was unaware of how significant this time would come to be for the children. The stories they told became integral to the development of their digital stories. While I had imagined the project would revolve more explicitly and directly around my prompts about what success meant to them and what it meant to do well in school, what children decided to photograph, film and tell centered on their stories around families and friendships.

In a similar vein, although the role-play activities I brought to the meetings were initially geared towards getting children to dramatize different aspects of schooling, children quickly redirected these activities, and continually acted out short skits based on popular fairy tales, video games, movies and television programs. Their enthusiasm for doing so culminated in their writing and performing a play for their families at the end of the school year. Although over the course of the year, the bulk of activities in our weekly meetings became increasingly child-directed, I found small ways to engage children in talk about school.

### **School Talk**

One of the main ways that I elicited talk about school was through what I referred to as the “question of the day” that we would discuss as a whole group or that children would ask each other in peer interviews. My questions tended to be based on my research questions, what I was observing in the classrooms and library meetings, and more

generally, how children were experiencing fourth grade. By November, however, children had begun posing their own questions so that some weeks we used children's questions, some weeks, mine, and some weeks, both. In the following excerpt the children discussed a question posed by Princess as we sat together on the rug (videolog, 1.18.13). For the purposes of analysis, I break this excerpt into five smaller segments. Across these segments there were nine interlocutors: P=Princess, AB=Abi, Z=Zac, J=James, RU=Rubina, B=Ben, H=Holly, M=Marisol, Ch=Chantel.

In the first segment, Princess posed a question to the whole group, Abi, Zac, James and Rubina responding with a range of opinions about school and what they liked and disliked.

**Excerpt 2.1:**

1. **P:** So you ever get bored at school?
2. **AB:** When we do writing---
3. **Z:** I love school and it's not boring because I like independent reading and writing
4. **J:** I kinda like school and kinda don't...I like recess cause I get to be away from my
5. class...*everyone*...I really dislike it cause I HATE the tests
6. **RU:** only part I don't like it, but not when teacher yells when somebody does
7. something but *we* didn't...my favorite thing is 24 (math competition for high
8. performing students)

In this instance the group readily engaged with Princess' question about being bored at school, a complaint I often observed children making in relation to what they didn't like about school. Of note in Zac's and Rubina's comments was their mention of subjects that weren't part of routine classroom instruction (independent reading and 24). Because for

much of the day the smart kids like these two were, in Rebecca's words, "sitting there already knowing (see Chapter 5)," doing independent reading or leaving the classroom for the 24 math competition were likely some of the few times of the day when they could engage in an activity at their level. In line 3, Zac positioned himself in contrast to almost everyone else, especially with his comment that he loved school and that he liked writing, which most other children did not (e.g., Abi in line 2). Rubina told the group that her favorite thing was 24, the competitive math enrichment program for high performing students (line 7). In this way she indexed her special status as one of the smart kids who had been chosen by teachers to be pulled out of the room several times a week to participate in this competition. Her peers could track her progress in the 24 competition on a poster in the hallway with a tally of participating students' running scores.

In their responses, both Rubina and Zac were able to position themselves as an ideal schooled subject. While the library meetings provided fewer opportunities for Rubina and Zac to do this, in conversations relating to schooling they were always ready with a "correct answer." At the same time, significant in Rubina's comment was her admittance of not liking some aspect of school (lines 6-7), which sat in contrast to Zac's response, "I love school and it's not boring" (line 3). The library meeting provided children with opportunities to step in and out of and to explore different positionings and stances towards schooling. Within this collaboratively constructed context, Rubina didn't have to stay "in character" all of the time as the ideal schooled subject and could express what she didn't like.

As the conversation continued, Ben re-directed the conversation, first by providing a counterpoint to Rubina's love of 24, that there was *too* much math in school.

The conversation then turned based on Ben asking me to share his essay (lines 9-11), a well-written and well-researched essay.

### Excerpt 2.2

9. **B:** It's too much math (pulling a persuasive essay he wrote at school about why
10. children shouldn't have homework and asking me to read it aloud)
11. **H:** (reads essay aloud to group – see Appendix D)
12. **RU:** I disagree about three things ...well I agree that homework is just...frustrating
13. ...but *kids* don't have stress cause they're just *kids*= (Ben's essay had argued that
14. homework caused children stress)
15. **Z:** =we *do*
16. **RU:** Well sometimes...

While Ben purported to dislike writing as many children did, I had watched his classmates and him work enthusiastically on their persuasive essays for several weeks. This expressed dislike of writing was similar to how Ben and many others talked about hating reading although I often found them deeply engrossed in reading books or other texts that they had chosen or were of interest.<sup>28</sup> The topic of homework, and the idea of *not* having to do it was of great interest to them. Thus they had participated fully in writing their essays and then debating the topic at the library meeting.

One of the main arguments in Ben's essay was that homework caused stress, a point Rubina initially countered when she responded, "I disagree about three things---*kids*

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<sup>28</sup> Although research shows that intrinsic reading motivation makes a positive contribution to reading competence and extrinsic reading motivation, a negative one (Schiefele, Schaffner, Möller & Wigfield, 2012), school-based reading at Grant was primarily motivated extrinsically through a system of rewards and sanctions. From my observations children's dislike of reading (and I argue, writing) did not hold up at times and in spaces when they were intrinsically motivated to read or write.

don't have stress cause they're just *kids*" (lines 12-14). Notable here is the school, and more specifically, constructed-response-style statement with the phrase, "I disagree about three things." Children had to write paragraphs that used this kind of introductory summary statement on a regular basis. In this way, she carried the power and weight of official school discourse into her argument. Rubina, and Zac and Rebecca to lesser degrees, tended to draw on school-sanctioned ways of speaking and writing in moments when she spoke in front of the group, which lent her a certain authority. However, her pause and her concession that homework *was* frustrating, suggested an uncertainty in the points she was trying to make. When soon after, Zac immediately challenged her by saying "we *do* (have stress)," she hedged, admitting, "well sometimes..." (line 16).

The notion of stress became a major focus several turns later, but first Marisol returned to the original question.

### **Excerpt 2.3**

17. **M:** Something about school is I don't like nothing...I just wanna like social studies

18. and science and music and art

19. **H:** Why?

20. **M:** Because I don't like any of the other things because I don't like...understand

21. those things...

Of the children who talked about not liking anything or having "too much" of things like tests, writing and math, Marisol, along with Ben and Princess, had begun to position themselves as choosing not to do well or not to be smart. For them the choice not to be smart was critical to saving face in front of their peers, and at times, with me. However, Marisol's comment about not liking "any of the other things because I don't understand

those things” (lines 19-20) revealed her school positioning as a low performer and was a reminder that the fast-paced, test-oriented curriculum was leaving behind those who couldn’t keep up. Moreover the subjects Marisol mentioned didn’t count for doing well in school.<sup>29</sup> Her separation of these from what *did* count – reading, writing and math – showed her implicit understanding of the dichotomy between what counted and what didn’t. Marisol put this dichotomy into relief, which helped highlight the fact that test scores as the most prevalent markers in both teachers and children’s repertoires of success were relegated to a limited set of skills and knowing disassociated from meaningful content.

Moving beyond social studies, science and the arts, there were non-school based themes of great significance to children that linked to their compliance with school norms and their engagement in school.

#### **Excerpt 2.4**

22. **CH:** I think Ben is right that kids *do* have stress...say somebody in their family got

23. hurt...I know a lot of kids do...we *do* have stress=

24. **B:** =Yeah like my uncle got shot in Mexico and he’s dead=

25. **CH:** =My brother got locked up before

26. **H:** Maybe a question of the day could be about the kind of stress in your lives=

27. **CH:** =if you have to do chores and don't do your homework teachers get mad...my

28. mom says homework comes *last*...we need more time to spend with our families=

As Marisol ended her turn, pausing, Chanel directed the conversation back to the notion of stress, reiterating that it was part of children’s lives (lines 22-23). The examples she

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<sup>29</sup> Although as I point out in Chapter 4, these classes were sometimes used as vehicles for test preparation.

and Ben provided spoke to issues they and many of their peers faced, and signaled larger social inequities like neighborhood violence and high rates of incarceration for families like Ben's and Chantel's who were minoritized based on race or ethnicity, social class, and immigration status. These were just a few of the challenges Ben, Chantel and their peers faced that affected their school experiences and school performance. Such challenges were rarely discussed openly or in meaningful ways at Grant and thus compounded the stress linked to school assignments and test preparation (cf. Gallo & Link, 2015, 2016, in press). In contrast, in the classroom context, stress was something that children, according to teachers (e.g., Ms. Klein in Chapter 5), only had the right to feel based on school workload and was associated with the smart kids who had extra work.

However Chantel's point that in her family, homework came last and kids needed to spend more time with their families (lines 27-28) provided a sobering counterpoint to how stress had been delimited to stress about schoolwork. Spending time with family for these children was not about integrating schoolwork into home life as much research in education suggests is critical for student achievement (e.g., Sim, Berthelsen, Walker, Nicholson, & Fielding-Barsley, 2013). Nor was it about sitting together at dinner for conversation or parents reading bedtime stories to or with their children to promote language and literacy development (e.g., Snow & Beals, 2006; for a counterpoint to normative views on parent involvement and family literacy, see Heath, 2011). Instead family time was about supporting each other and dealing with daily challenges linked to inequities they faced as non-white, non-middle class groups and individuals. During this exchange, as children turned the conversation towards challenges that lay far beyond



school workload, my own white, middle-class, teacherly way of interacting came into play in line 26. Here I attempted to manage the conversation by framing their discussion within the teacher-like frame of the question of the day.

Striking was how my attempt to qualify or link family stress to our meeting structure put an end to the sharing about family stress. In this moment I succeeded in regulating the group and herding us back to what was for me, more comfortable territory. In spite of my goal of breaking out of the managerialist way of structuring the library meetings, I found its tentacles constantly creeping into my interactions with the children. Such struggles were linked not just to managerialism as the apparatus or mechanism of power in which we were caught up, regardless of whether we were at school. They also revealed power relations and power struggles in my interactions with children that mirrored, and in some cases refracted, the power relations they experienced at school.

Ben's comments in the final excerpt (Excerpt 2.5) for this interaction speak to such power relations at school.

### **Excerpt 2.5**

29. **B:** =for my essay my teacher said she's gonna think about not giving us homework...

30. **Z:** I *do* believe kids have stress but you have to do homework 'cause if you don't you

31. won't review anything and you'll fail on tests and get stuck on a grade

32. **?:** ((many excitedly talk at once))

33. **B:** I have a WHOLE BUNCH of papers against homework ((passes out multiple, printed copies of his essay to the group))

(videolog, 1/18/13)

As I attempted to manage the conversation, Ben signaled his sense of agency in his comment that due to his essay, his teacher was considering not giving homework (line 28), and in passing out his “whole bunch of papers against homework” (lines 32-33).<sup>30</sup> Children rarely had a say in school matters, but in this instance Ben believed his writing could make a difference. He had written a strong argument with evidence to back it up and it was a logical step to imagine a change in homework policy. However, Zac, while agreeing that kids could experience stress, contended that doing one’s homework was necessary to prevent failing on tests and getting “stuck on a grade” (lines 29-30). Here homework was linked to doing well in school, and the act of doing one’s homework was a marker of success, which was in Zac’s words “passing the grade.” His comment echoed those he had made to James about doing “what you gotta do” in school even if you didn’t like it (see Chapter 5). Thus for him, part of doing well in school was simply doing what one had to do to get by. Homework was part of getting by, and in spite of Ben’s well-written argument against this practice, it was unlikely that it would end. Instead, the amount and difficulty of homework increased over the next month as the SSA approached. While Ben’s essay had planted a seed for the possibility of change, in isolation it had little effect on homework policy.

In the library context, this seed Ben planted led to rich and meaningful conversation among the children as they co-constructed a space in which to engage in debate and collaborative examination of topics of great significance. The exchanges they had depended not on correct answers or appropriate topics, but on how the conversation

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<sup>30</sup> This moment reminded me of observing Ben enthusiastically passing out a “whole bunch” of informational pamphlets on immigrant rights at a local event earlier in the year in which his family shared about his father’s wrongful arrest and potential deportation.

opened up space in which, turn-by-turn, children, to different degrees, could break in and out of their positioning as certain kinds of students and share about their personal lives. In interviews and conversations about school-based topics, some children continued to position themselves in ways consistent with how they positioned themselves in the classroom while others did not. Such positioning was evident when, in early March and approximately one month before the SSA, Beto interviewed his peers based on the question I had posed about studying for tests.

**Excerpt 3:**

(BE=Beto, M=Marisol, Z=Zac, J=James, B=Ben, RU=Rubina, RE=Rebecca, AB= Abi, P=Princess)

1. **BE:** Do you study for the test (SSA) in 4th grade?
2. **M:** No, because I only do eeny, meeny, miney, mo in each question because I wanna
3. just get it over
4. **BE:** (to Z, J, B, RU and RE) Do you study for your spelling tests?
5. **Z:** Yes cause I wanna get good grades...I wanna get 100
6. **J:** Yes because I wanna get a good grade so I can play my video game
7. **B:** No because it's boring and it sucks and I don't like it
8. **BE:** You're trying to act so “emo” and you're not (B sticks fingers in ears)
9. **RU:** Not a lot because I basically know the stuff we just went over with teacher...
10. except for spelling tests I study for them at school but at home I don't waste my time
11. studying...I don't study cause it's just boring...you need a friend to study with=
12. **RE:** =I don't for math tests because I like have a lot of it in my head and I'm used to it
13. **AB:** Yes I do because...if I get um...my test wrong my mom takes my laptop

14. **P:** No because I'm too lazy and it's boring and I hate spelling

(interview, 3/8/13)

In their responses, only three of the eight children said they studied, and two of them (James and Abi) said they did so to avoid losing access to video games and a laptop at home. Sanctions and incentives like these were similar to those children experienced in school and tended to be the primary motivators for children to do what was required of them in fourth grade.

However, Zac suggested that his sole motivation was the high score itself and he once again emphasized doing what one needed to do to perform well (line 5).

Interestingly, when Zac referred to others (e.g., his cousin, James) doing what was required, it was to avoid failing whereas when he referred to himself, it was to make a top score. In this sense he was positioning himself as smarter than most and had the “proof” to back it up in his high grades and scores. Like Zac, Rebecca and Rubina positioned themselves as being smart, smart enough in fact, that they didn’t need to study, at least not at home (lines 9-12).

In contrast, Princess and Ben said they didn’t study, not because they already knew the material but because the work was boring or “sucked” (lines 7 & 14). In Marisol’s case, she admitted that for multiple-choice questions she just guessed the answers to “get it over” (lines 2-3). These responses were not ones that they would have likely given in front of their teachers, and they were careful to perform “doing well in school” in the classroom context as I illustrated in Chapter 5. However, in the library space they were beginning to show disengagement and an oppositional stance towards what they were expected to do in school and how they were expected to do it.

Beto's comment that Ben was trying to be "emo" was a comment I heard frequently about Ben, both by him and his peers. This term, in Ben's words, was "liking black, like your room's all black and purple and red." Young people who dyed their hair black, wore dark makeup, painted their fingernails black and had multiple body piercings were assumed to be emo, and the label was generally associated with kids who were on margins of social circles. In this instance, the children seemed to be experimenting with this label and how it connected to more oppositional stances towards schooling. At the same time because Ben's older sister, Diana, dressed and presented herself in this way, he may have been trying to emulate her. For example in our first library meeting when I asked him why he had sat off to the side of the group and later picked fights with a couple of the other children, he told me he was "catching an attitude just like my sister" (field note, 9/7/12). This "attitude" was evident not just in how Ben talked about school to me and in the library meetings, but also how he tended to participate on the margins of what I had planned often making what seemed like non sequitur comments.

For example, as we were wrapping up our meeting one Friday and we were talking about filming techniques (e.g., holding the camera without shaking, different kinds of shots, etc.), Ben loudly called out.

**Excerpt 4:**

(B=Ben, CH=Chantel, BE=Beto, RE=Rebecca)

1. **B:** What papers do you need to drop out of school?
2. **CH:** BEN (gasping) he wanna drop out of school
3. **B:** It's just that I don't feel like being in school cause it's boring
4. **BE:** He just wants to watch TV about emo

5. **RE:** He's EMO ((laughing))
6. **CH:** Look Ben I understand cause lots of kids don't like school...me I don't like
7. school neither but if I don't go to school I'm not gonna get a education and be able to
8. do things in my life so if you=
9. **B:** =I don't wanna be in school but my mom and dad force me
10. **CH:** But if you don't go you're not gonna be able to do nothin with your life
11. **RE:** That means that you're gonna have to work at McDonald's...

(videolog, 3/15/13)

Ben's question quickly captured everyone's attention, and Chantel immediately took on an adult role, voicing her mother or teachers, who talked to children about the importance of completing school and college in order to get a "good" job or to be able to do something productive with one's life. Her words echoed Zac's refrain of "doing what you gotta do" regardless of whether it was boring or one didn't like it (as she and others admitted). The fact that as early as fourth grade children were resigned to just "getting through school" was linked to the idea many fourth graders had that being successful in school was "not failing" or simply "passing the grade." The fact that once again Ben was labeled emo suggests that children were using the term to index opposition to school.

Although Ben was more vocal about not liking school, as SSA testing began others, too, shared some of his feelings. Regardless, in public most positioned themselves as doing well on the test. The excerpt that follows illustrates these points.

### **Excerpt 5**

On the walk over to the library, James told me that he was worried since he hadn't seen me today, and when I asked him where he had been at lunch, he said he was in the library for SSAs because he took too long. When I asked how the first week of testing had gone, he said, "Today I lost my lunch, I lost my recess and I lost my

dignity." When we got to the meeting kids shared how they were doing. All but

Beto, used words like “bored, annoyed, tired, disappointed, angry, sad, depressed.” Ben gave me our secret hand signal that he didn’t feel like participating and when I checked in with him later, he told me nothing was wrong but began to cry, finally telling me he had to move to a new apartment because his landlord wasn’t fixing things like the water heater. During snack, Beto interviewed the others using the question of the day that I had written – What are the SSAs like this year?

(BE=Beto, AB=Abi, M=Marisol, B=Ben, J=James, RE=Rebecca)

1. **BE:** Tell me about the SSAs
2. **AB:** It's hard, not easy but I think I'm doing good
3. **M:** I expected it (to be) easy and it's not that hard...I'm doing medium
4. **B:** It's boring, it's stupid and it's boring there you go
5. **J:** It sucks, it stinks, it smells like dookie, it's boring and we're missing
6. recess...but I think I'm doing good
7. **RE:** Some things are easy but sometimes for the open-ended (questions) it
8. gets a little tricky...I think I'm doing good
9. **BE:** Yeah I think I'm doing good or normal

(fieldnotes and videolog, 4/12/13)

Beto was the only student who gave a positive response when I asked children how they were doing at the beginning of our meeting, saying he felt “happy” and “joyful,” which were words he had been using to describe the word “success” in the library meeting. All of the others used terms for negative emotions, terms which link to James’ earlier comment about losing his dignity when he had to miss lunch since he hadn’t finished testing. James’ words built on Ben’s as he chose more negative and descriptive terms to describe the SSA. However, no one in the group admitted that they

might not be performing at the level they had been told they needed to perform (proficient or advanced), although through Marisol's comment that she was doing "medium" she positions herself as doing well enough. This was in contrast to earlier in the week when I had run into her in the hallway and had asked her how the tests were going. She had replied, "I don't want to talk about it, but it's bad, really bad" (fieldnotes, 4/10/13). As children had been continually told that scores of basic or below basic were unacceptable, admitting low performance publicly would be positioning oneself as a failure.

At the same time, for children like Ben who were dealing with many stresses at home, the pressure cooker environment of testing seemed unbearable. As testing took place, his family was in the middle of planning a move for the second time that year, his father was at risk of being deported, and his sister had run away with her boyfriend. I often reflected on how the families participating in my research from low-income, non-white, and in many cases, immigrant backgrounds were managed and had to manage in their daily lives in order to access social services and procure needed resources. I saw how while managerialism permeated children's school lives and limited the ways they could engage with learning, it seemed to seep into their home lives as well by the ways in which families were continually labeled and categorized, and the limits this placed on their daily routines. There was no room to address these issues at school although the challenges and barriers children like Ben faced were likely affecting his performance on the SSA. His situation reminded me of the previous spring, when, the day after Ben had witnessed his father's violent arrest on the front porch, one of the school administrators had persuaded his mother to bring him to school so as not to miss a day of the SSA. Thus



while discourse about “trying one’s best” and “working or focusing harder” had become the mantra for doing well in school, and in particular, on the SSA, there were myriad factors in children’s lives that made effort and focus a challenge.

As the SSA was ending I asked the children what they would tell a new student about taking the test. Of the six who responded, all but one said they would tell the student that if they tried their best everything would be okay. Beto added that “they should never *ever* think that they are going to get “below basic (the lowest score)” (videolog, 4/19/13). This example shows how children took up these phrases (e.g., “try your best”), which had become signs of doing well, recontextualized them, and linked them to other signs (e.g. never thinking about getting a low score). As long as you tried your best and had positive thoughts, everything would be okay.

Once the SSA had ended I asked children to talk about what the rest of the year would be like now that the testing was finished (videolog, 4/26/13). While most commented on the new poetry unit the fourth graders were doing, Rebecca reminded the group that the poetry unit would not last very long.

### **Excerpt 6**

(RE=Rebecca, RU=Rubina):

1. **RE:** You guys keep saying poetry but you said it's just till April so I think really all
2. we're gonna do is writing, reading and math=
3. **RU:** =which I hate=
4. **RE:** =and which is gonna be boring, finish the Storytown, probably watch a movie,
5. we're probably gonna have a picnic, I know everything...

The girls' comments about hating writing, reading and math or finding them boring were striking as they very rarely said something negative about school in front of me or their peers. While on the one hand this likely reflected end-of-the-year and post-test fatigue, it also hinted at their opposition to the routine teaching and learning practices that had dominated the school year. The short periods of enrichment curricula to which these two had access were not enough to counter the hours of sitting quietly and working independently on material they easily mastered or already knew.

As the school year came to a close, we began to talk about middle school and what it would be like. Children had taken field trips to their assigned middle schools and had a lot to say about the coming year. On the last day of school, James posed a question to the group during snack time at the library meeting (videolog, 6/14/13). For the purposes of analysis, I break this excerpt into three smaller segments. Across these segments there were six interlocutors: (J=James, AB=Abi, CH=Chantel, P=Princess, M=Marisol, BE=Beto):

**Excerpt 7.1:**

1. **J:** Are you gonna be a detention kid in middle school?
2. **AB:** No because I'm a good student and a lot of teachers tell me that
3. **CH:** No, because I'm too cute, too funny, and too in love with Jessie=
4. **AB:** =A love kid=
5. **CH:** =A girl that's in love with Jessie, a nice, sweet, smart, funny girl
6. **J:** You gonna be sweet when you wanna be?
7. **CH:** Most of the time sweet, kind, funny, but sometimes mean and if somebody touch
8. me it's gonna be a rumble...there might be more people that wanna fight me there

When I had asked children about the differences between elementary and middle school they often talked about how kids often got detentions in middle school, so I was not surprised to hear James pose a question related to the topic. I was, however, struck by how he turned the term “detention” into a label for middle school students. I was also struck by the different labels children used to position themselves and others as certain social types as they responded to James. Abi said that she was a good student and offered up proof – her teachers told her (line 2). She then labeled Chantel a “love kid” based on Chantel’s self-description as a nice, sweet, smart, funny girl (line 6). Through these exchanges, Chantel, James and Abi collaboratively constructed what Bamberg refers to as a *small story* in and through which they playfully experimented with Chantel’s social identification (2004; see also Georgakopoulou, 2006).

However, James reframed this positioning in his follow-up question, “you gonna be sweet when you wanna be?” (line 7) suggesting that she was not always so nice. Her response was to qualify her initial positioning, admitting that she was “sometimes mean” and then adding, “and if somebody touch me it’s gonna be a rumble” (lines 8-9). During third and fourth grades Chantel often talked to me about fights she had witnessed, had been in, or was planning on participating in. While fighting rarely took place at the elementary level, middle schools had the reputation of being places where fights were expected. In her comments, Chantel positioned herself as being knowledgeable about middle school as well as being someone not to mess with, a shrewd positioning to take on as she moved into this new context. Detention also had other meaning for her as her brother had spent time in the local juvenile detention center. This kind of social identification-in-interaction showed children’s positioning to be jointly constructed,

performed and dynamic (Georgakopoulou, 2006; see also, Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), a much more fluid kind of positioning than was available or took place at school. This allowed children to try on new roles in dialogue with others, and as in the following excerpt with Princess.

**Excerpt 7.2:**

9. **P:** ((laughing)) I'm a bad girl and I don't follow directions...sometimes I go crazy

10. and they're gonna take me to detention, goodbye...I'm a good girl and a bad girl

11. **M:** Me, too

12. **J:** You're tellin me you're gonna be half and half, ya'll gonna be two-face people=

Princess and Marisol's positioning as both good and bad girls was surprising as in the classroom they were seen as "good girls," always following directions and adhering to classroom norms. Their "half and half" positioning suggests their co-experimentation with the idea of not being quite so good anymore – going crazy and being taken to detention. As both had struggled for much of the year academically and had over time expressed increased dislike of and disengagement with school (as I discussed in Chapter 5), I wondered if being a "bad girl" was linked to this growing oppositional stance towards schooling. The joking interactions they had with James allowed them to position themselves in this contrary way, even fleetingly, without being taken seriously.

This kind of playful interaction continued as Beto interjected who *he* would be in middle school.

**Excerpt 7.3:**

13. **BE:** =I'm gonna be a smart, handsome kid that has swag (i.e., cool)

14. **J:** You have swag but you not handsome, you butt ugly=

15. **BE:** =I'm smart=

16. **J:** =Not smart but smart-mouthin'

17. **BE:** CUT

(videolog, 6/14/13)

Beto, paying close attention to the Marisol and Princess's interaction with James, found the right moment to jump into the labeling game. James followed his lead with word play (lines 14-16), or interactive insulting, linked to Black American speech styles and ways of interacting like signifying in which interlocutors engage in verbal dueling (cf. Alim, 2004; Alim & Baugh, 2007; Smitherman, 1986). Beto, however, opted to end the "duel" just as it was starting with his command to "cut (the interview)." Beto may have recognized that he was losing this duel and therefore decided to cut the conversation before James cut him down even further, or he may have simply not been interested in engaging. In either case, there were explicit and implicit positionings in the words they exchanged and through James' one-upmanship of Beto.

In the fourth grade classrooms there was less room for this kind of lively, teasing interaction to take place, let alone be recognized. However, space for, recognition of and attention to the ways in which children were positioning themselves through such exchanges would have provided more insight into how children were engaging with school and how they saw themselves as certain kinds of students. Moments like these offered powerful lessons for me as I saw how children used play and humor in their sense- and self-making, not just in brief interactions like these, but also with challenges they and/or their families were facing. In the excerpts above I have shown how children co-construct and experiment with self- and other-making, moment-by-moment, building

on each other's talk in these conversational sequences, and building a context in which they could play and share more deeply than they could at school.

In the following section I examine how, by continuing to delve into methodological rich points and following children's lead, I was able to gain deeper understanding of the connections between their lives out of the school, how they thought about doing well in school, and how they were experimenting with and exploring different ways of being.

### **Are We *All* Gonna Be Able to Tell Our Stories?**

Along with wanting the library to be a space to spend time with and observe children, I also wanted it to be a space in which I could engage them in the research process. I wanted to do this not just by talking to them about what I was studying, but through a collaborative seeing and hearing approach in which they could more explicitly and actively "read" their social worlds (cf. Luttrell, n.d.). Doing so involved different layers of positioning that I wanted to both promote and understand. For example in my use of the collaborative seeing and hearing approach, I was intentionally positioning children as active sense-makers and self-makers (cf. Corsaro, 2005). At the same time I saw the ways in which this approach would help me better understand how they were positioning themselves and developing ideas about what it meant to do well in school.

My first attempt at engaging children in the collaborative seeing and hearing process was during the second library meeting when I had children work with a partner to make human sculptures, or frozen postures, that represented or symbolized what success meant to them (fieldnotes, 9/21/12). After children had finished their sculptures, they took turns showing and sharing them with each other. The sculptures included a smiling face representing "joy, happiness, and being a good mom and daughter;" a girl on her

stomach propped up on her elbows “writing a serious novel;” a boy sitting in a chair looking upwards, “dreaming about success, the end to war;” and a girl sitting at a desk “doing good in school and thinking hard.” While most of the sculptures gave a broader image of success than just doing well in school, Rubina had sculpted Princess into a model of the ideal schooled subject, sitting frozen at a desk. This might have been what Rubina thought I wanted to see or evidence of her adherence to my research questions and to teachers’ exhortations to “work hard” and “focus.”

While Ben had sculpted Marisol, he elected not to share what he had sculpted with the whole group. My initial reaction was to persuade him to share or at least talk about his sculpture, but he was insistent that he did not want others to see or hear about it. A methodological rich point, this instance, along with his comment to me the previous week that he was “catching an attitude like my sister,” pushed me to re-think how I was attempting to engage him. The next week during my time with Ben in his classroom, I paid close attention to what came up in our conversations and what I observed in his interactions with others. In the following section I describe how I began to re-structure the meeting format based on these and other observations of the children.

### **The Arrest**

Two weeks later, when I arrived in Ben’s classroom, he came running up with a copy of the latest issue of a local weekly newspaper in Spanish. The headline story was about police abuse in the Marshall area, and the high rate of arrests of Mexican immigrants and their transfers to Immigration and Customs Enforcements (ICE). Ben’s family’s story was highlighted in the article. The previous spring his father had been mistakenly arrested but nevertheless transferred to ICE. The family had found an attorney

and was fighting against his deportation. Ben proudly showed me the photos of his family in the issue and asked me if we could show it to the others at the library. The following day at Ben's request I shared the article with the group (fieldnote, 9/28/13). Afterwards, Ben warned that if Mitt Romney were elected, the police would go to all of the houses in Marshall and send "back" all of the families who were not born "here."

A lively dialogue ensued in which children asked Ben who exactly would get sent back. When Chantel admitted that she had been born in Maryland, he told her that she, too, would be sent "back." Ben said to make sure this wouldn't happen, he and his family were going to get identification cards so that they could vote for Obama. As the conversation continued, Chantel talked about how women in her church were helping other congregation members to secure photo identification cards and handing out voting rights pamphlets. In this way she made a link between the topic of disenfranchisement for undocumented immigrants and proposed voter identification laws that would likely disproportionately affect people of color in Pennsylvania.

As the conversation winded down, Chantel said, "Are we *all* gonna be able to tell our stories? Cause when my brother got in a gang fight he had to stay in Juvey (Juvenile Detention Center)." This led to more talk about court, violence and jail. Other children brought up personal stories they also wanted to share. This meeting was unlike most of the library meetings that had taken place in previous weeks and when children were in third grade. While the group tended to be distracted by side conversations and fight for the floor, for Ben's story and those that followed all sat quiet, intently listening to each other's stories. This day we had no time for the role-play I had planned around more school-based topics.



I wasn't sure how to connect the stories children were telling and the themes coming up with my research questions on doing well in school, but I decided to follow this thread in the weeks to come. The following week I proposed the role-play activity; however along with prompts related to school, I asked children to brainstorm topics *they* would like to explore in the role-plays (fieldnote, 10/5/12). Their list included: bullying, a new baby, the fairy tale Rapunzel, and how dangerous it was to live in Mexico. No one chose to develop a role-play around the school-based topic I had suggested. Ben, Bea and Princess formed a group around the topic of Mexico being dangerous, Princess and Ben telling Bea the details about his father's wrongful arrest. Princess also shared about her own father's arrest and deportation, and the three grew animated in their discussion. Ben described in great detail the cops pulling up to his house, jumping out of their cars, and running up on the front porch with guns pointed. He included the specifics of how he had fainted when he saw one of the gun's laser beams on his brother's face.

The three decided to act out his father being arrested, Ben choosing to be a policeman. As they acted out the scenario, children left their own groups and came over to watch and ask more questions about what had happened. Ben continued to emphasize how he had fainted when he saw "the laser beams on my brother's face." For the next 20 minutes the whole group took turns acting out this scene, changing roles and growing increasingly animated. As they acted out the scene over and over, they became increasingly exaggerated in their role-play, responding to the audience's enthusiasm and laughter. What took place this day served as a way for the children to collectively explore what had happened to Ben's father. At the same time, it taught them about the realities of immigrant families in Marshall and the daily risks they faced. This kind of knowledge-

making through engaged and lively discussion was something I had rarely witnessed at Grant, let alone in the third or fourth grade.

I wasn't sure how what had just taken place was linked to doing well in school, but because of the interest and enthusiasm they had shown, decided to follow their lead. I dedicated more time for storytelling and role-play in the meetings and worried less about how to guide them in discussions about doing well in school outside of the question of the week.

### **What's Your Story Going to Be About?**

In the coming weeks, I worked with children on developing topics and plans for creating digital stories, stories they would make using iMovie by putting together montages of photos, video clips and voice-over narration. While I framed the project as telling their own stories about being successful in school, children's ideas about what they wanted to focus on did not neatly map onto my framework. For example in an initial discussion children expressed interest in filming their families as well as special events or occasions like holidays, birthdays, and new babies. Bea talked about making a video about "people like us, how we (Mexicans) have different kinds of parties and stuff" (fieldnotes, 10/5/13). Bea's interest also showed her understanding that outside of the home or the Latino community "people like us" were not always understood. This lack of understanding, in turn, was linked to the negative portrayal of Latinos, and more specifically, Mexican immigrants, in local and national media. While children's topics of interest did not line up with "doing well in school" per se, they did speak to a more general notion of success and the idea that it was a collective, familial achievement.

As children continued to brainstorm together, each week they came up with new ideas such as a certain beach that appeared in a popular telenovela, how the world got here, *bachata* (Latin American form of dance), family, Mexico, as well as “people being killed in Mexico.” This last idea was Ben’s and stemmed from his father’s deportation case for which the attorney was building an argument about it being too dangerous to return to their hometown in Mexico because of gang-related violence and drug trafficking.<sup>31</sup> Children were “experts” on many of these topics related to familial and cultural roots, and they had much to say about them.

However, in these conversations and in other discussions about issues in children’s lives, the interactional dynamics were markedly different than in the classroom, particularly in how children positioned themselves. Whereas in the classroom smart kids like Rebecca, Rubina and Zac took front stage, always having a correct answer ready, in the boardroom their peers were more vocal and led conversation. In this alternative space the three smart kids tended to sit back, commenting less frequently and having less to add to the conversation. This was especially the case when the topic was related to Mexico, Mexicans, or immigration. Much like these three, I knew less and often had to defer to children. Moreover, my desire to manage and control the group, and to keep us “on track” and on schedule, was in constant tension with how our meetings played out and the directions in which they children were headed. I often cut conversations short to keep us on schedule (e.g., as in Excerpt 2). For example, when Abi talked about wanting to explore how the world “got here,” and heated debate ensued

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<sup>31</sup> The theme of violence in Mexico was very real for Ben as he had family members and knew others who had been murdered in the neighborhood where he was from. One of the main characters from Ben’s first story, the man with whom his sister had run away, ended up returning to Mexico and being shot to death at a party where Ben’s family and family friends were present.

about who made the world, and if God had, then who had made him, I reminded children of our agenda for the day (fieldnotes, 10/16/12). While doing so did keep us on track, I ended up missing out on opportunities to observe children's collaborative sense- and self-making.

This tension between my need to manage and control and my goal of following children's lead was also connected to wanting children's digital stories to be polished products. I had to let go of this expectation early on, however, as I realized that our limited amount of time and resources were a constraint (2 Flip video cameras, an iPad and a laptop computer), as well as the fact that this was the first time the children and I had attempted to create digital stories. Doing so allowed me to focus more on the process of developing the stories and how the topics they ended up choosing were collaborative achievements. Because children were sharing the two Flip video cameras, some began their projects earlier than others and in this way they could share with each other what they had filmed, their story topics and how they were putting together their montages. I frequently had them work in pairs to discuss their projects with each other. Over time, the family became the primary focus in most stories, providing counter-narratives to deficit models in education of understanding families from minoritized backgrounds (cf. Solórzano and Yosso, 2002).

By mid-March all of the children had completed at least one digital story, and all were about family members or pets (see Table 5). Initially, I was interested in how, if at all, children deployed signs indexing success and if so, how these signs overlapped and/or differed from those that they and their teachers deployed at school. While there was no specific talk in children's stories about doing well in school, a number of children

took up the notion of smartness. For example, both Zac and Rubina, in their stories about their younger siblings, positioned them as smarter than other babies/toddlers. Zac highlighted in his story how his newborn sister was “able to do many things other newborns can’t do.” Rubina began the narration of her story about her one year-old sister with the comment, “My baby sister is the smartest baby I know,” later commenting, “she knows her ABCs and numbers, and can say *all* kind of words, even big ones.” While for Rubina the kind of smart she was referring to were school-recognized ways of being smart, for both there was an element of competition as they positioned their baby sisters as being smarter than other babies their age.

In contrast, in Bea’s story about her four month-old niece, she described her as “*traviesa, chistosa y divertida* [naughty, funny and fun],” telling a story that demonstrated her niece’s ability to trick her father that made everyone laugh. Princess, in her story, described how her one year-old sister would perform complex dance moves from popular songs and engage in elaborate dramatizations with multiple props about making phone calls to her father who had been deported and was living back in Mexico. The kind of smart indexed in these stories didn’t neatly map on to school-related skills like knowing one’s numbers or letters. However, they signaled a broader and more interactional kind of smartness interwoven into familial relationships. These alternative positionings of smartness were not recognized in the classroom or part of what counted for doing well in school.

The many stories about children’s families and specific family members touched on themes of love and caretaking (e.g., children taking on parenting roles while their parents worked), celebrations, teen pregnancy, family ties, family emergencies, and

family separation due to deportation, immigration and other factors. The focus in children's stories on the relationships with siblings and other family members, and on the ways in which they negotiated the challenges their families faced, were evident in the montage of images they chose and the narration they developed to accompany it.

*Table 5. Children's digital stories*

	<b>Story Title</b>	<b>Topic</b>
<b>Abi</b>	My Life with Two Dogs	Pets
	My Adventures in the Park	Friends and family in the park
<b>Bea</b>	Luz	Baby niece
<b>Ben</b>	The Thing That Happened with My Sister	Older sister running away
	My Sister's Birthday	Older sister
<b>Beto</b>	Memories of Sofia	Younger sister
	The Living	Family members
<b>Chantel</b>	How the Family Works	Family members
<b>James</b>	Cat Terror!	Pets
	Cats!	Pets
<b>Marisol</b>	Babies!	Baby god-sister
	My Trip to Mexico	Visiting family in Mexico
<b>Princess</b>	I Love Rosy	Younger sister
<b>Rebecca</b>	I Love Dogs	Pets
	Besties	Friends and family
<b>Rubina</b>	My Baby Sister	Baby sister
<b>Zac</b>	The Three Year-Old	Younger brother
	The First One	Baby sister

In some stories children included subtle signs and comments that signaled family stress and challenges. For example, in Chantel's story celebrating her family in "How the Family Works," she inserted a photo of her older brother with a bandage under his eye and narrated, "my brother hurt himself and I was crying because I didn't know what was wrong." Children tended to focus on images like these and the parts of each other's narratives that seemed to disrupt the narrative flow when they viewed and discussed each other's stories. In Chantel's case this led her to provide a detailed explanation of her brother's standing up for himself against a group of boys who had ganged up on him, and she positioned his attempt to defend himself as admirable. In an interview with Chantel at

the end of the school year, she held him up as an example of someone who was successful:

He's only 16 and gets bad grades but we've noticed he's growing more and maturing to where I already know he's gonna get somewhere in his life, and he has a baby and is doin' a really good job of being a father at a young age."  
(interview, 6/14/13)

Chantel's narratives and her comments about her brother suggest her exploration of alternative or counter markers for success, contextualizing her family's decisions and actions, which through a teacherly lens would likely be seen as lamentable. Also of note in this interview is how Chantel's use of the indexical "we" in "we've noticed he's growing more and maturing," suggests an alternative frame of reference for growth and development in which children were active participants in family discussions, decisions, and evaluations around issues that for white, middle-class families might be seen as developmentally inappropriate.

This alternative frame of reference was evident in other digital stories. For example in Ben's story, "The Thing That Happened with My Sister," about his sister running away with her boyfriend, positioned himself as an active participant in dealing with the situation and securing her return. In Princess's story, "I Love Rosy," she proudly positioned herself as the primary caretaker of her younger sister after school as her mother worked late into the night to make up for the loss in family income after her father had been deported. Moreover, for Princess, Ben, Chantel, and others, the self-portraits they constructed offered stark contrasts to the ways in which they were being positioned at school as "low," "basic," or "below basic." At the same time, these and other stories illustrated how children were dealing with family issues that affected their school engagement and performance, issues that did not fit into the packed and tightly-

scheduled scope and sequence of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt curricula. These issues, while often taking precedence over homework completion, were not welcome in the classroom where home-school communication was encouraged only in relation to grades and test scores (cf. Arango, Arreguín, Flores, Gallo, Link, María, Peregrina, under review).

In the “pets” stories, the way that children described their dogs and cats was cheerful and celebratory, and they were positioned as family members. However, for both Abi and James, loss and grief over losing these and other pets were close to the surface. For example, the two dogs in Abi’s stories were pets her family had been unable to keep. And in spite of James’ hilarious stories about his cat, Cheetah, and its mischievousness, his attachment to Cheetah was linked to the death of another cat his mother had mistakenly left at home when his house was sprayed with poison for insects. In April during a fourth grade post-testing unit on poetry he wrote an eloquent, heartfelt poem dedicated to this cat; the poem was hung for display in the fourth grade hallway, one of the few times of the year when writing assignments allowed children to share about and explore family issues. In the library as children worked together on developing their stories and then shared them with each other, they built a space in which these issues took center stage.

### **For Our Greeting, We Could Probably Do a Play:**

#### **The Culmination of Our Work and Play**

Outside of the digital stories, one of the primary ways children explored issues of their own interest and concern was through role-play and dramatization as in the example of children acting out Ben’s father’s arrest. Much of the role-play they engaged in took



place when we were working and playing in small groups, and over time came to be led by the children. At times I would get frustrated by the high noise level and what seemed to be chaos – children crawling under furniture, shouting and laughing – as children acted out and filmed short scenes. Rarely were they developed into a larger skit or narrative, nor were they performed in front of the whole group. They were more in keeping with the kind of small stories that came up in discussions around the question of the day, as children co-constructed stories and experimented with an array of positionings. While these role-plays did not take center stage in the whole group, they were one of the most popular activities in the library meetings.

In watching footage from these moments, I was struck by the myriad roles children took on and how sharply they contrasted with the ways in which they were positioned and positioned themselves at school. I noticed how Rubina, Rebecca and Zac broke out of their school roles as the smart kids, taking on playful, silly roles, and developing what seemed like nonsensical narratives that were a far cry from the constructed response essay writing in the classroom. Others like Abi and Marisol, who rarely spoke up in class, became leaders and directors in these short skits. The significance of role reversals like these was initially masked through my managerial gaze. As I became less concerned with imposing order on chaos, I began to see the positive the productive power of these moments of collaborative self- and sense-making that allowed children to explore alternative ways of positioning. Over the course of the year, they became more vocal about how they wanted to do this, their ideas about doing so seeping into conversations in unexpected and creative ways.

One afternoon in late March I became increasingly frustrated with the fact that certain children seemed to be sabotaging our weekly greeting time, which I had established at the beginning of each meeting for the purpose of community building and so that children would acknowledge each other's presence. Children had taken over leading the greeting and coming up with different greeting activities. However, I had noticed Ben and a few others were starting to refuse to participate, or when they did, often insulted rather than greeted their peers. On this particular day, I stopped the group in the middle of the greeting and asked for suggestions about how to improve the greetings. The following conversation ensued:

**Excerpt 8**

(J=James, Z=Zac, RE=Rebecca)

1. **J:** For our greeting we could probably do a play like what everybody likes...like Z
2. could be the scientist...like you don't have to dress up you just act like the part
3. **Z:** Wouldn't that make the greeting cut into the meeting?
4. **J:** We can do a play of something we like...first we all say "hi...hi, my name is
5. Miss McKay and I work as a blank (e.g. profession or job)..."
6. **ALL:** (children talk excitedly)
7. **RE:** When we do the play we should add something about us...we could like change
8. our names or something to act like someone like a real play---
9. **J:** You don't have to have a job like you can have anything you want...in the play
10. who gonna...we gotta think of a title for the play

This moment provided a critical methodological rich point that would dramatically change the direction of the library meetings for the remainder of the year. Zac's response

to James' proposal echoed my thought that using our greeting time, an activity that lasted 5-10 minutes, to do a play didn't make sense (line 3). His voice of reason was a reminder of how certain children aligned themselves more readily with the ideal school subject in the process engaging in the kind of regulating and managing that teachers tended to do. However, Zac's response didn't dampen James' or the others' enthusiasm about trying on new roles and more broadly, developing a play. James' and Rebecca's ideas of role-playing "something we like" (line 4) and acting "like someone like a real play" (line 8) also spoke to the idea of positioning oneself in the way one wanted to be positioned. Moreover, Rebecca's comment that "we should add something about us," suggested a kind of broad self-acknowledgement that the roles they tended to take on both at school and in the library allowed. In this way their comments contrasted with the static and limited ways in which they were continually positioned at school.

The fact that children's comments about doing a play arose within the context of greeting each other also suggested children's desire to acknowledge each other as something different than how they were typically positioned. Even though the boardroom was an out-of-school space, children arrived directly from and saw each other as they did at school, and it was hard to escape these kinds of positionings. Choosing a role in this sense involved *not* having to have a job, but rather having "anything you want" and was a way to break out of the paths they were assigned or expected to follow (line 9). Through this interaction, turn-by-turn, the children built upon each other's ideas and collaboratively constructed the plan to "do a play."

For the next few months, while children continued to work on and share their digital stories, developing the play took precedence in the library meetings. Their co-

construction was evident throughout the process, from choosing the genre and the characters, to developing the plot and ultimately, writing the script. For example, in April, after brainstorming different genres for the play and deciding to vote, the result was a unanimous vote for a combination of two genres – mystery and musical. In this way “The Case of the Missing Violins” came to life and took shape from April through June. The play, in nine short scenes, told the story of the theft and recovery of the violins of two famous musicians, Alexa and Skyler. It incorporated elements from fairy tales, telenovelas, crime series, and pop music, and included a cast of pairs: two sets of famous musicians/music stars, two sets of detectives, and shady twin sisters (see Table 6).<sup>32</sup>

*Table 6.* Characters in “The Case of the Missing Violin”

	<b>Character (or Role in play)*</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Abi</b>	Bárbara Shadow	Violin thief, Mrs. Dark Shadow’s twin sister
<b>Ben</b>	Detective B	Detective
<b>Beto</b>	Dr. Wolf	Dog detective
<b>Chantel</b>	Mrs. Dark Shadow	Violin thief, Bárbara Shadow’s twin sister
<b>James</b>	Puss in Boots	Cat detective
<b>Marisol</b>	Alexa	Famous violinist
<b>Princess</b>	Skyler	Famous violinist
<b>Rebecca</b>	Aylor Wift	Music star
<b>Rubina</b>	Caylor Wift	Music star
<b>Salvador</b>	Detective S	Detective
<b>Zac</b>	Writer and director*	Lead writer for play, director of play

The roles they chose and how they developed these pairs’ dialogue was a collaborative endeavor, and resulted in a hilarious symmetry in which pairs built on each other’s dialogue, sitcom-style. Some of the children’s characters tapped directly into issues that had become major themes in their personal narratives and digital stories (e.g., Marisol and her violin; James and his cat; Ben and his family’s encounter with the

<sup>32</sup> By this point in the year, Bea, one of the focal students had opted to participate in my research project only at school, choosing to help her mother care for her niece and several other toddlers on Fridays. At the same time, Salvador, Ben’s eight year-old cousin, joined the group in early March. Although his schooling experience as a second-grader was not a focus of my research, his participation in the co-construction of the play cannot be discounted.

police), and their partners developed their own characters in response. For example, Beto's Dr. Wolf became the foil to James' Puss in Boots, mirroring his comments and actions in exaggerated form in different scenes. Through this collaborative process children were able to position themselves in new and creative ways that, as Rebecca had proposed, added something to who they were (excerpt 8, line 7).

One pair of characters – Aylor and Caylor Wift – remained on the sidelines of the plot. As caricatures of the pop star, Taylor Swift, they became commentators, much like Statler and Waldorf from the Muppet Show (the two elderly men who sat in the balcony heckling and jeering the cast). Throughout and at the end of each scene they offered meta-commentary, roasting different characters and making predictions about what would happen next in sing-song voices. Thus, while they retained much of their “smart kid” cachet and power by remaining on the sidelines and evaluating others' actions, they still were able to experiment with and explore with self- and other-positionings in ways they couldn't at school. In a similar vein, Zac's roles as both writer and director provided him with a certain degree of control, in this case over all aspects of the play. His choice not to act allowed him to stay more aligned with the ideal schooled subject. At the same time, the others' involvement in the playwriting pushed him to write in a less-schooled way. In the final moments of preparing the play for performance, I found him being taught by Abi to read the Spanish translation of the play's introduction. Over time he had become more comfortable moving out of the position of sitting there, already knowing.

On the day of the performance, parents, siblings, cousins and grandparents all showed up to the Community Meeting Room at the library, filming and snapping photos of their children. The play culminated in a dance and air guitar mash-up of three popular

songs that children had voted to combine in the final scene where, after being arrested, the “evil” twins apologized for their theft, explaining they had taken the violins out of jealousy, and were set free to join the others on center stage.

### **Discussion**

Just as in the final scenes of the “Case of the Missing Violin,” where the thieves were repositioned and allowed to join in the performance, in this chapter I have shown how the focal children in my research were able to reposition themselves and each other in an alternative space that put them on center stage and allowed for more collaborative sense- and self-making than was possible at school. In this alternative space – weekly meetings at the boardroom of the public library – children developed a *participatory culture*, one within which “knowledge and authority are loosely negotiated” and “what the group is about can change as members themselves assert changing priorities” (Jenkins, 2006, as cited in Rymes, 2014, p. 5). They did this in spite of my attempts to manage and direct them according to my research agenda, as well as when I *did* follow their interests and leads more explicitly. Within this participatory culture, week-by-week and moment-by-moment, as they collaboratively constructed, produced and performed a series of narratives they also co-constructed, explored and tried on new and alternative positionings.

The library meetings sparked numerous methodological rich points that “made salient the differences between the researcher’s perspective and mode of research and the world the researcher sets out to describe” (Hornberger, 2013, p. 102). These differences, in turn, helped me adjust my research practices and better understand how children were

actively engaging, in ways *they* co-developed, with themes and topics of interest to them, topics that on the surface seemed to have little to do with repertoires of success. However, the methodological rich points I encountered also pushed me to think more broadly not just about success but also about the notion of repertoire.

As I listened to children's stories, and logged the videos and interviews they had filmed and taken of each other, I began to see how while doing well in school was, for most, still based on test scores, being successful had much to do with interpersonal relationships and familial achievements. Moreover, a number of children seemed to be exploring different notions of smartness that weren't directly related to "that kind of smart" that was needed at school (for the SSA) and for which, according to Beto, one needed to "go memorize stuff" (interview, 1/23/13). The kind of smartness children like Bea and Princess described in their digital stories signaled an interactional kind of smartness interwoven into familial relationships. This notion of smartness, however, was not recognized at school.

Working and playing together in this participatory culture, more wide-ranging repertoires surfaced, not just for children, but for me as well. For example, my teacherly and researcher repertoires became much less relevant in the library. Thus, in developing new strategies to follow the children's lead, I not only became more aware of my managerial gaze, but I also expanded the ways I communicated with children in order to gain membership, albeit marginal, in the participatory culture they were constantly developing and modifying. Like me, in the library smart kids like Rubina and Zac were revealed to have more limited repertoires as their silence showed in moments when children discussed non-school related issues. Their repertoires of success were less

relevant in the boardroom, although they found ways to deploy markers from these repertoires in conversations about school. Others brought in additional repertoires that allowed them to position themselves as experts and leaders of the group. Some of these were repertoires that would have been seen as inappropriate or irrelevant in the classroom.

This wider set of repertoires in the library context also helped children experiment and play with different, alternative and even oppositional positionings (e.g., emo, detention kid, bad girl). Through their conversations and the small stories they told and constructed together, these positionings were co-constructed, turn-by-turn. At the same time they were fluid and dynamic, and allowed children relief from or alternatives to how they were continually positioned at school based on test scores and grades. While what mattered most as I observed them at Grant was how children were negotiating doing well in school and how they were being positioned and positioning themselves as certain kinds of students in a high-stakes testing environment, in the library meetings I gained access to a much deeper kind of self- and sense-making than I had access to in the classroom. In the participatory culture children were building together, their school-based repertoires of success receded.

In addition, in the library power relationships evolved through children's collaborative work and play. The testing machine, and managerialism as the mechanism that animated and shaped this machine and thus the kinds of interactions possible in the classroom, while still present, were productively clogged by the ways in which children interacted with each other as well as in how they deemed my plans and goals irrelevant. This kind of productive power led to co-construction of knowledge, often sparked by



affect and play, and a way of being and learning that contrasted with the model of the ideal schooled subject that Zac and Rubina worked so hard to embody.

## Chapter 7: Releasing the Imagination<sup>33</sup>

What I am describing here is a mode of utopian thinking: thinking that refuses mere compliance, that looks down roads not yet taken to the shapes of a more fulfilling social order, to more vibrant ways of being in the world. This kind of reshaping imagination may be released through many sorts of dialogue: dialogue among the young who come from different cultures and different modes of life, dialogue among people who have come together to solve problems that seem worth solving to all of them, dialogue among people undertaking shared tasks, protesting injustices, avoiding or overcoming dependencies or illnesses. When such dialogue is activated in classrooms, even the young are stirred to reach out on their own initiatives. Apathy and indifference are likely to give way as images of what might be arise. (Greene, 1995, p. 5)

On the last day of fourth grade I interviewed Chantel and Princess, asking them to reflect on the school year and what they had liked about fourth grade. The girls began to talk about several of the field trips they had taken and how much fun they were. When I directed the conversation to class time, Chantel shared a critique of, and suggestions for, classroom learning.

### Excerpt 1

(H=Holly, CH=Chantel, P=Princess)

1. **H:** What did you like about what you did in the classroom?
2. **CH:** It could be more interesting if we had like fun activities to go with the lesson
3. **H:** Tell me more
4. **CH:** We just read, listen and write most of the time, and it's not even that fun
5. **P:** I wish we had fun activities
6. **CH:** Like for reading...say we were learning about how um...how plants grow...we

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<sup>33</sup> Following Maxine Greene's essays on education, the arts and social change (1995)

7. could do a project with cereal or jelly beans or if we're learning about houses we

8. could build houses out of...gingerbread houses...and nobody would be bored

(interview, 6/14/13)

In this dissertation I have focused on how children responded to the heavy emphasis on testing during their final years at Grant Elementary. To do so I have positioned them as active and critical sense- and self-makers, looking closely at their classroom interactions, highlighting what they shared with me in interviews and conversations, and privileging their perspectives and ideas. Chantel's ideas about making lessons more fun and interesting demonstrate not only her critical stance on schooling, but also her proposal for a different kind of learning than what tended to take place in the fourth grade classrooms. In addition, her ideas provide clues about school engagement and motivation that are of great concern for education researchers and policy makers, a very real concern that, as I explain in Chapter 1, motivated my dissertation research.

To address this concern, and its connection to testing performance for children from minoritized backgrounds, I have taken a repertoire approach, looking carefully at the signs children drew on in their interactions with their teachers, each other, and me to position themselves as certain kinds of students, and more specifically, to index doing well (or not) in school. Moreover I have used a Foucauldian lens to make visible the power relations and mechanisms of power enacted by and shaping these interactions around being successful in school, as well as the positionings that were made available through them. In this final chapter I highlight several key themes that have emerged in my study and discuss their relationship to my concerns with school performance and engagement. I then discuss both theoretical and practical implications of my research. I

end by discussing how these themes and implications have motivated the development of an agenda for future research.

### **Repertoire Flexibility and Expansion**

Through my conceptualization of repertoires of success, I have looked at what happened when a single set of signs – test scores – was the sole index of doing well in school, how these signs were taken up in different participation frameworks, and whether additional or alternative signs became relevant in classroom interactions around doing well in school. At the same time, I have discussed how certain markers, like ways of speaking, or perceived ways of speaking, affected how teachers saw students and positioned them as potentially succeeding or failing on the SSA. I have also shown how teachers' and fourth graders' repertoires of success overlapped to varying degrees, and how children whose repertoires overlapped most closely with those of their teachers were continually and publicly positioned as doing well in school. Along with test scores, this overlap included an array of behavioral markers related to the classroom management system of sanctions and rewards. Over the course of the year as the SSA approached, signs in this overlap became the most prevalent markers in classroom interaction as, for example, children deployed test scores in conversations and activities unrelated to academics such as the weekly Bucket Meeting and as Super Kids of the week.

The markers that overlapped in teachers' and children's ROS were test scores as well as sitting, listening, speaking and working in certain ways, all of which required a disciplined, self-regulated body that was both docile, and in certain moments during Initiation Response Evaluation interactions, active. The deployment and display of these

signs among children, and among teachers and children, also promoted competition, reinforced hierarchical relations of power, making invisible (or less visible) other non-test-related ways of doing well in school and impeding other kinds of interactions in the classroom that would have provided a broader look at achievement and success. In this sense the overlap in repertoires served as a limiting and homogenizing force in the classroom, silencing those whose repertoires shared fewer of the same markers and positioning them in negative ways. Rymes argues for the importance of repertoire flexibility and expansion, pointing out that “the extent to which we can communicate is contingent on the degree to which our repertoires expand, change and overlap with others” (2014, p. 6). In Title I schools like Grant where mostly white, middle-class teachers work with students from primarily minoritized backgrounds who speak multiple varieties of English and Spanish, this kind of flexibility and expansion is critical, not just for communication across difference but for building a supportive classroom community which fosters learning and engagement in schooling. This did not happen at Grant.

Because the repertoires of success I had observed in the classrooms had much less relevance in the library meetings, children developed and brought in other repertoires to this latter context that didn't neatly conform to my researcher/teacherly ideas about how to engage children in talk about being successful in school. Over time, even children like Zac and Rubina whose repertoires of success limited their interactions in the boardroom, began to develop new ways of interacting with their peers that expanded their communicative repertoires. This was also the case for me as I learned to follow children's lead and worry less about how to direct them back to my research questions. This move towards repertoire expansion and flexibility was critical to the participatory culture

children co-constructed and their exploration of different ways to do and be. The contrast between how children talked and what they talked about in the classroom versus the library brought into relief what I was observing at school and the broader ideologies that guided and were reinforced by talk about doing well in school in this managerialist context.

### **Meritocracy, Mediocrity and the Factory Model of Education**

Lipman discusses how the narrative of meritocracy in the school system “is rooted in classical liberalism and the rise of capitalism with its emphasis on competition, individualism, individual virtue, and the possibility of class mobility” (1998, p. 25-26). In Grant’s fourth grade classrooms, doing well in school centered around this narrative and was infused into teachers’ and children’s repertoires of success. This was in spite of the fact that following teachers’ exhortations for children to “focus more,” “pay more attention,” or “work harder,” did not necessarily lead to proficient or advanced scores on tests. However, adhering to these practices gave children a false sense of doing well and allowed them to mask academic needs or struggles, saving face among their peers. This point speaks to the dark side of the narrative of meritocracy, “that schools fairly reward ability and hard work” and in turn, that one’s position in society is a fair expression of what they deserve (Hartlep, 2013). Thus blame is placed on the individual, or on the “deficient” culture of the group(s) to which this individual belongs.

Lipman challenges this notion, pointing out how the narrative of meritocracy intersects with other ideologies about difference and is often used to rationalize low school performance, especially for students from minoritized backgrounds (1998). In the

managerialist system at Grant, such rationalization made sense. For children who fared poorly on tests, there was always the excuse that they were not working hard enough, not paying enough attention, or that they spoke, and thus wrote, the wrong way. For children like Nayra who had recently arrived in the US (Chapter 5, Excerpt 6) and for others who were performing at significantly below grade level, constant public assessment of their performance positioned them as not having what it took to be successful in school. Rationalizing children's performance in this way resulted in further grouping and sorting and ultimately masked the detrimental effects the heavy emphasis on testing had on many children's social identification and engagement in learning (cf. McKenna, 2012).

Over time children came to understand that hard work didn't necessarily pay off (e.g., Bea in Excerpt 1, Chapter 5). I argue that this realization and the continual and public positioning of students had the opposite effect of what it seemingly intended, and some children came to see themselves as not being able to do the work required for successful performance in fourth grade. For many, passing became the primary goal and children did the least they had to do to get by. At the same time few had to fully engage in classroom instruction, and procedural display became the norm in the fourth grade classrooms. Such mediocrity became embedded in the narrative of meritocracy, and children endured their boredom, waiting for the few moments of the day when they had free time or could talk to each other. In this factory model of education, for most children, what was truly a fantasy were opportunities for meaningful and engaged learning.

### **The Ideal Schooled Subject and the Racialized Other(s)**

Zac, Rachel, Rubina and the other “smart” kids were lucky enough to be pulled out of the classroom on a regular basis to experience something other than “sitting there already knowing.” These students were held up as models for their peers and were able to consistently deploy the combination of signs that indexed doing well in school.

Approaching or embodying the ideal schooled subject became automatic for them and part of the way they were positioned by others and positioned themselves as the smartest in the grade. This ideal schooled subject was based on a Kantian Enlightenment subject, a rational, independent thinker, self-regulating and competitive. What was likely masked for the smart kids at this point in their schooling trajectories, was that this ideal schooled subject was a white subject who many would never be able to fully embody, not only because of their skin color, but because of the structural barriers that prevent access to the privileges that white individuals of certain socio-economic status continually benefit from. Children like Zac and Rubina stood out even more than Rebecca as through the white gaze of the managerialist system and of their teachers, and as black individuals, they were exceptions among their peers. While this was not yet the case in elementary school, in the future this may result in being accused of “acting white” or “selling out” (cf. Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

The white gaze was even more penetrating for children who struggled on the endless barrage of tests and assessments. Little by little some children who struggled in school came to decide that they didn’t like learning or making good grades, and began to develop more oppositional stances towards schooling. While the testing regime served to highlight their low performance, it did little to remedy the situation and placed blame on



the children. Because as the Grant school motto read, teachers and students were “on time, on task, and on a mission,” those who weren’t on time or on task, couldn’t join the mission. Leonardo argues that standardized testing masks “the structural obstacles that children of color and their families face,” and locates the cause of low test performance within the individual or minority culture (2007, p. 269). At Grant this was most evident in teacher’s racializing talk about children’s incorrect ways of speaking and the ways in which they connected these ways of speaking to low test performance. This deficit model of understanding difference tapped into raciolinguistic ideologies about who children were and who they could be.

### **The Power of Participatory Culture**

In the library meetings, children had space for active and collaborative sense- and self-making, defining what counted as having “fun,” and developing their own norms and plans. In this way they co-constructed a participatory culture in which multiple repertoires became relevant and guided interaction, and in which students expanded not only the ways in which they communicated with each other but also how and what they could be. Their experimentation with different positionings and social identification was done interactively, meeting-by-meeting, and turn-by-turn, through their conversations as they developed their narratives and engaged in role play. This experimentation provided them some relief from and alternatives to the ways they were being positioned at school, however it also allowed them to try on more explicitly oppositional positionings and stances towards school. As they approached the end of their elementary school experience this experimentation allowed them to imagine what it might be like to be a middle school student.

The kind of play and storytelling they engaged in was a productive form of power that, along with planting seeds of resistance to counter the limited ways in which they were seen at school, served to clog the managerialist apparatus albeit in small ways. Taking on and debating some of the topics that were relevant at school around homework, stress, and testing centered them as doers and knowledge-makers with important themes and topics to explore. These themes and topics tended to be ones that weren't seen as appropriate to discuss in school and often touched upon the challenges they and their families faced as children from minoritized backgrounds. All the same, these topics expanded what counted as learning, as knowledge, and more broadly, as being.

### **On Learning, Being and Becoming: Towards New Subjectivities**

The learning, being and becoming that took place in the library meetings was fleeting and somewhat nebulous, and I make no claims about effects this participation had beyond their enjoyment in the activities they did and the interactional work they accomplished. However, what I observed during the time we spent together there provided a point of contrast to how these phenomena played out in the classroom. Comparing the library and classroom spaces and what took place in each provokes several questions that speak to epistemological and ontological concerns in education research.

The kind of teaching and learning I observed in my last two years at Grant was evidence of a very narrow definition of learning, which consisted of discrete reading, writing, and math skills disconnected from real-world experiences or meaningful content. What counted as knowledge in the fourth grade classrooms revolved around

demonstrating the ability to choose the correct multiple-choice answer on math problems and reading questions, and to correctly use a set of steps to write a formulaic paragraph. This kind of knowledge was what was needed and what counted for doing well in school. While I was initially puzzled by children's comments to me about how in fourth grade there was "too much learning," I began to realize how right they were. Their days in the classroom were spent learning in this way with rare opportunities to connect this to any meaningful content or to discuss this "knowledge" with each other.

In contrast, I had access to a different kind of knowledge-building in the library, knowledge that was heavily content-based and tended to connect deeply to children's home lives and concerns. While this kind of knowledge seemed unrelated to school-based learning I saw children engaged and excited about reading and writing, and involved in debate and inquiry, in ways that I never observed in the classroom. While there are no easy or single answers as to what should count as knowledge in school, my research brought into relief that what currently counts as learning is limited and had detrimental effects on how children see themselves as certain kinds of students and how they engage with school. Moreover, my research suggests that educators and researchers are those who should be "paying more attention," "working harder" to understand and "really, really, *really*" focusing on what children say in order to engage with the question. Critical, also, to engaging with this question is Wortham's point that "apparently non-academic processes cannot easily be separated from the academic activities that go on in the classroom" (2006, p. 1).

Wortham's work on the interrelations between academic learning and processes of social identification also speaks to ontological questions pertinent in my research

(2006). As I have shown, the ways children were positioned based on their test performance limited the possibilities for the kinds of students they were continually told they were and could be. Moreover, I have shown how over time, as some of these more negative positionings become more sedimented, children positioned themselves as choosing not to make straight As or not to be smart. Children's frequent reference to themselves and others as being or choosing not to be smart suggest they were experimenting with what it means to *be* in school. Beto's point that the SSA was important because it was supposed "to keep you smart" and his further explication provide some clues to how children made sense about being smart in school. When I asked Beto for more details, he told me that you don't get "that kind of smart" if the teacher does it for you and that to be "smart" was "when you go memorize them...like spelling words or math" (interview, 1/23/13).

Beto's view of smartness was reflected in what many children said about being smart, or more generally about learning. With such a perspective on this way of being in school, it is no surprise that children might make the choice to be something different. Following Foucault who writes, "One needs to study what kind of body the current society needs" (1977, p. 58), my research begs the related, but more specific question of what kind of student the current school system needs. I argue that under a managerialist system, schools need docile, compliant bodies that are active only in certain participation frames. This managerialist ideology and frame structure what takes place in classrooms with students from minoritized backgrounds who need to be regulated and assimilated into the dominant, white, middle-class way of being. I argue that we need to critique this way of being and the notion of the ideal schooled subject as the model for being and

doing, not just in school, but across life pathways. Doing so will allow educators and researchers to begin to imagine multiple new and different subjectivities that can be cultivated through schooling.

### **From the Theoretical to the Practical**

In an era when high-stakes testing continues to be central to school life, examining how fourth grade children at Grant responded to the heavy emphasis on testing in their final elementary year has helped illuminate their orientations to school success and engagement as they prepared to enter middle school. This work is timely as states like Pennsylvania continue to develop and implement policy around “core” standards and respond to the recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). While policy like ESSA purports to reduce the burden of testing, it remains to be seen how they will play out in PA and other states, and in particular, in schools with high numbers of students from minoritized backgrounds. I argue that, regardless of how the use of standardized tests changes, in order to for meaningful change to occur, the managerialist mechanism fueling how schools like Grant are run and what takes place in their classrooms must be clogged, not just in small ways through, for example, the power of participatory culture, but in ways that will help do away with the mechanism itself.

While this is no easy task nor are there straightforward solutions, I argue that the first step is rejecting the distorted image of schooling and learning that is reflected in the testing regime. In schools and classrooms, administrators and teachers need time to develop or explore what is taking place in their classrooms through more critical lenses. They also need time to observe what children are doing and saying, and how they are communicating with each other. Doing so would lead them to focus not just on changing

children's ways of being, speaking and doing, but on expanding their own repertoires, their repertoires of success and other pertinent repertoires for more engaged teaching and learning. At the same time, training teachers to examine their classroom interactions through a repertoire approach would help them develop deeper awareness of how classroom communicative patterns relate to students' sense- and self-making, as well as their engagement in school. This would also involve helping teachers develop a more critical lens on their own ideologies about achievement and success and those that circulate broadly in education discourse.

As developing these spaces, ways of thinking, and practices takes time, money and political will, teachers need to find ways to respond in their current contexts to the pressures they face to teach to the test and to position students based on test performance. What if, when told by administrators they had to conduct a 4Sight study session with their class, teachers could spend a few minutes looking over the data and thinking about ways to present it without public labeling? What if they were to ask children to read the statistics more critically? What if, in their conversations about doing well in school, they intentionally and explicitly brought in ideas about success that didn't have to do with test scores, such as those they mentioned in interviews with me? And what if they focused more directly on the issues and challenges children are facing outside of school? Engaging with these possibilities requires creative and collaborative thinking and planning.

I currently find myself uniquely positioned to explore some of these ideas and questions as I act as Director of Educational Programming at a community center in Marshall I refer to as *Revolución Arte (RevArte)* dedicated to the empowerment of the

Latino community through the arts. Because of RevArte's success measured by the improvement in grades of the students in elementary, middle and high school who participate in its afterschool program, the Marshall School District has begun partnering with the center and supporting it financially. As this partnership expands and evolves, there will be openings to engage with administrators and teachers about teaching and learning. While these possibilities develop, my work at RevArte is also informing the development of a research agenda based on what I have learned from my dissertation research.

### **An Agenda for Future Research**

My dissertation research has planted a number of seeds for future research that I will continue to explore. My plans include the use of the repertoire approach (cf. Rymes, 2013) to continue to study how young people engage in sense- and self-making through their communicative practices, what this looks like in both classrooms and less schooled spaces like RevArte, and how it relates to their performance and engagement in school. Doing so will also reveal new, more contemporary resources comprising school success that can be built on to foster school engagement, to supplement school-based versions of success, and to develop more equitable measures of achievement. Research on young people's communicative practices through a repertoire approach will also will help me build on scholarship on how students from African American and Latino backgrounds draw from and re-shape each others' communicative practices (cf. Martínez, 2011; Paris, 2011). At the same time, exploring these topics through a repertoire approach will me help better understand the data in my research that spoke to inter-ethnic relations between

African American and Mexican immigrant children and processes of racialization for both groups in the early years of testing (cf. Hamman & Harklau, 2010). This topic is of great concern as at RevArte there are very few African American students, Zac being one of the few, and we are seeking to find ways to encourage their participation in our programming.

At the same time, I am interested in engaging teachers in learning how to use the repertoire approach and more specifically, to use the tools of classroom discourse analysis (cf. Rymes, 2009) to address their interests and concerns about their students' language practices and ultimately, to conduct teacher research (cf. Lytle, 2008). I believe that this kind of research will help motivate positive change at the classroom level and work towards unplugging the managerialism mechanism of power.

Bryan Brayboy (2013) urges ethnographers of education to engage in the process of change, intervention and justice in their research, arguing that our work is deeply rooted in relationships. My long-term work with children and families, as well as my work at RevArte, is a step in this direction and is helping open up what Hornberger (2002) refers to as an *ideological and implementational space* in which those whose lives are most affected by educational policy and practice, students themselves and their families, can collaborate in the research process and offer advice and guidance to researchers, educators and policymakers. My plans in this regard include the development of a participatory research institute at RevArte for young people and adults.

I have begun to do this through several venues at RevArte. For example, with a group of high school students the director of RevArte and I are investigating college access for students from Latino immigrant backgrounds. Our work and conversations



have opened up new ideas about doing well in school, success and what achievement means for students whose parents did not attend college. A second venue is through a writing collective the director of RevArte, my colleague, Sarah Gallo, and I have started with group of women who participate and whose children participate in RevArte's programs. We are currently writing together about the topic of immigration and education and more specifically, the kinds of resources and communication they envision having and having access to as they interact with educators about documentation status. As these seeds take root and develop, I recognize more fully and embrace more readily the kind collaborative and creative imagining this will involve. I end with the words of Maxine Greene:

## Appendix A Transcription Conventions

...	Untimed pause
( )	Description of accompanying actions or clarification of person, place or thing being referenced
CAPS	Spoken loudly
<i>italics</i>	Spoken with emphasis
=	Latching, or when two utterances follow one another without any perceptible pause
[ ]	Uncertainty of wording
---	Omitted portion of transcript

**Appendix B**  
**Third Grade Data, 2011-2012**

<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Data</b>	<b>Amount</b>
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 52 classroom fieldnote entries</li> <li>• 65 hours of classroom videos</li> <li>• 3 teacher interview audio-recordings</li> <li>• 14 student interview audio-recordings</li> <li>• 5 parent-teacher conference fieldnote entries</li> <li>• 5 parent-teacher conference videos</li> </ul>
Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24 household visit fieldnote entries</li> <li>• 9 family interview audio-recordings</li> <li>• Approx. 6 hours of home videos</li> </ul>
Library	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 library fieldnote entries</li> <li>• 20 hours of library videos</li> </ul>

**Appendix C**  
**Fifth Grade Data, 2013-2014**

<b>Research context</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Library	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 13 library fieldnote entries</li><li>• 4 hours of library videos</li><li>• 9 student interview audio-recordings</li><li>• 1 digital story</li></ul>
Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 6 home visit fieldnote entries</li></ul>

**Appendix D**  
**Evolution of Weekly Library Meeting Activities in Fourth Grade, 2012-2013**

	Primary Activities	Who Initiated Activity
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Group meeting</b> (Community building, norm setting, group discussions, sharing)</li> <li>• <b>Sharing about dissertation research</b></li> <li>• <b>Role play</b></li> <li>• Still photography (representing success)</li> <li>• <b>Storytelling</b></li> <li>• <b>Jobs assignment</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holly</li> <li>• Holly</li> <li>• Holly</li> <li>• Holly</li> <li>• Holly &amp; children</li> <li>• Children</li> </ul>
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Menu of activities to choose from</b></li> <li>• <b>One-on-one or pair interviews with children</b></li> <li>• <b>Digital story planning</b></li> <li>• <b>Holly's question of the day</b></li> <li>• <b>Children's question of the day</b></li> <li>• Practice with video camera</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children</li> <li>• Holly</li> <li>• Holly</li> <li>• Holly</li> <li>• Children</li> <li>• Holly</li> </ul>
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Filming of meetings</b></li> <li>• Practicing interviewing techniques</li> <li>• <b>Children interviewing each other</b></li> <li>• <b>Children filming at home</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holly &amp; children</li> <li>• Holly</li> <li>• Holly</li> <li>• Holly</li> </ul>
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Photo museum (children sharing their photos)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holly</li> </ul>
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Putting together digital stories using iMovie</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holly</li> </ul>
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children audio- or video-recording each other telling stories</li> <li>• <b>Sharing digital stories</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children</li> <li>• Holly</li> </ul>
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial brainstorming for group play</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children</li> </ul>
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing group play</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children</li> </ul>
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rehearsing group play</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children</li> </ul>
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performing group play</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children</li> </ul>

\*Bolded script indicates activities that continued throughout the rest of the semester.

## Appendix E

### Ben's Persuasive Essay Against Homework

Too much homework is never a good thing. I believe that teachers should stop giving homework. I think that homework is unnecessary for kids my age. Here are three reasons why. One reason is that homework causes a lot of stress. Next, it takes away from social time when children play with their friends. Last, homework is too much skill and drill.

Homework is proven to cause stress. In an article from a magazine called Teen, Inc., more homework causes more stress. Kids already have enough stress in their lives. They have other things to be worried about than being stressed over all this repetitive homework. This kind of stress can cause sleep fatigue and unhealthy eating habit. I know in my life when I get home and have too much homework I get frustrated and upset. It takes too much time after a long day at school to get all of this homework done. In fact, sometimes I just want to go to sleep.

According to Colombia University, homework is taking away from social skills and playtime for children. In my life I need more time to play outside every day. Kids with a lot of homework often have to choose between play and getting their homework done. When I play outside I get to spend time with my friends. This is good socialization for kids. It makes me feel relaxed after a day of school. Also I learn a lot from playing with my friends.

The last reason I believe teachers should stop giving homework is that homework is too much of the same basic problem, and it does not require any thinking. According to an article written by Colombia University, students are receiving too much skill and drill for homework. In my life doing this type of homework is boring. I believe that teachers should stop giving homework. It is too much of the same repetitive work. I believe that teachers need to stop giving homework now.

There are many reasons why homework is not important. According to my research one reason is that homework causes stress. Another is too much homework is taking away from social skill and play. Play is so important for kids. The last reason for my research is that homework is

very repetitive and is known as drill and skill. This does not help kids like me learn. It is clear that homework is drudgery.

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