TEACHER UNDERSTANDING OF STUDENT SUCCESS AND FAILURE

by

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Social reproduction is well established in educational literature. Diminished outcomes for students marked by class and race persist despite analysis and educational policy. Teachers articulate discourse to explain student success and failure and satisfy personal and professional investments (Miles, 1989; Popkewitz, 1998). Interviews with teachers in urban secondary schools point to the operation of discourse in the reproduction of inequality with profound effects on students on the margin. Meritocratic, individualist discourses privilege white, middle-class students, excluding others. Constructing students as Other and beyond reason (Popkewitz, 1998), teachers articulate discourses of motivation as explanatory of student success and failure and posit a neo-liberal normative subjectivity as explanatory of success. Social, historical and economic factors are silenced. The instability and arbitrary closure of discursive articulation offer possibility for a progressive, ethical pedagogy.
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DEDICATION

For Anna and Catherine.

And for Irene. Always.
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FOREWORD

In the course of more thirty years as a teacher and administrator in publically funded Catholic schools in Ontario, the troubling persistence, the relentless predictability of academic outcomes for students on the margin has been a source of dismay, puzzlement and regret. It has, at the same time, been the—happy for me—occasion for the development of a commitment to urban youth and their success. My personal suspicions about the marginalization of students in the school system along lines of race, class and gender called out for probing and investigation. Were my inchoate intuitions correct? What was at play in an apparently inexorable process of exclusion and social reproduction? Could it be disrupted? How?

The story I have read in the interviews and research for this study is one of social reproduction through discourse. It is the story of meritocratic arguments being marshalled in the interest of the protection of professional, indeed class, privilege. It is the story of justification of student success and failure (and of professional and institutional success and failure) through the articulation—the selection and utterance—of available discursive strands. I have read this story in the talk of teachers in urban schools,¹ which they generously offered in a series of interviews. Implicit in this story is the operation of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980) through discourse.

As a teacher and administrator in urban schools, I have been and continue to be subject to (as well as the subject of) the same discourses that first inform teacher articulations of their positions and investments and are then taken up by them to satisfy

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¹ The term “urban,” discussed in greater detail below, is used throughout to name students and schools that are constructed as anomalous in dominant discourse. Popkewitz provides a helpful discussion of the “urban” and “rural” as constructions of difference and marginality (Popkewitz, 1998). See Chapter 2.
those same investments (Brantlinger, 2003; Miles, 1989). I neither claim a separate nor, certainly, a superior discursive position. I do make the claim that discourse can be identified and named (as I do in this study): and that its articulations and effects are amenable to the effects of a limited and contingent agency and to a project of ethical school reform.

I am grateful to the teachers who have contributed to this study as collaborators in the work of inclusion and disruption of social reproduction. The individual subject, my co-worker, who takes up dominant discourse, is never the object of a ‘judgement’ in this study. Rather, I hope that the identification of dominant discourse, as it operates with real effects in the lives of students on the margin, can be one element of a program of disruption of social reproduction and exclusion, based in the possibility of the re-articulation of the same language structures which produce marginalization and exclusion and the formation of new ones in specific social and historical locations.

_A Historical Note_

As I write to bring this long effort to completion, Ontario has a premier who became politically active to counter the measures that the Harris government put in place to “reform” public education and their effects. I began work on this study during the dying days of Ontario’s Harris regime (1995-2002): several political and educational policy cycles ago. The responses of subjects in the interviews I conducted as well as the questions and prods that I used are the product of a past historical and political moment. Much has changed in public education in Ontario since then.

While many of the effects of the Harris government remain (restructured and amalgamated school boards, funding deficiencies, testing and “accountability” regimes, a
dearth of human resources and a scarcity of time in the working lives of educators), there has been a substantive change in the official discourse about public education as evident in policy: some funding has been restored and much good will has been bought by stabilizing teachers’ and educational support workers’ collective agreements and adjusting the most egregious of the former Tory government’s conditions of employment for teachers.²

At the same time, educational policy has taken a turn that would have been hard to predict during the Harris years. The stated focus of provincial initiatives has shifted from an explicitly meritocratic one of excellence, ranking, competition and exclusion to one of “Student Success,” inclusion and diversity. The educational and political phenomena of Student Success and “inclusion” initiatives³ are perhaps the most important changes brought about by successive McGuinty and Wynne cabinets. The goal of Student Success and Success for All is, at least prima facie, in stark contrast to the Harris philosophy of competition and regulation.

Can this study, with data collected in different historical circumstances, still make a contribution in an altered political and historical context? I argue that while the context may have changed, the language structures available to teachers as “practically adequate” (Miles, 1989) to the tasks of explaining student success and failure and of satisfying the demands of personal and professional investments have hardly altered. Particular

² A new round of austerity measures, this time by a Liberal government, has undermined much of this good will.
³ Examples of these initiatives and the policy they promote can be found in a variety of Ontario Ministry of Education documents. See for example Learning for All (2011), Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy: Realizing the Promise of Diversity (2009) and Student Success/Learning to 18 (available: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/studentsuccess/strategy.html) (Ontario, 2009, 2011).
articulations of discourse to discourse continue to be produced in new and altered ways in new and specific political, social and historical circumstances, but teachers’ positions and their (power) relations vis-à-vis students on the margin are of a piece with those of a few short years ago.

The meeting of teacher and student is still key. And teacher disposition, shaped by the available and operant discourse has powerful effects on the dynamics of that meeting. The language of teachers taken up to explain student success and failure is still an effect of discursive structures which privilege certain fundamental explanations for success and failure. And, while student pass rates on standardized tests may generally have improved for some, academic, social and economic outcomes for students on the margin have hardly changed. No improvement in student outcomes is likely without a concomitant shift in teacher disposition to their students, through a disruption of the discursive practices that both produce and reproduce that disposition with significant exclusionary effects.
CHAPTER 1

Teacher Understanding of Student Success and Failure

_Students on the Margin_

The problem of diminished outcomes for students on the margin is as well documented as it is persistent. The work of Willis (1977), Bowles and Gintis (1977), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), Fine (1991), Dei (1995), Brantlinger (1993) and Lareau (2003) marks key moments in the analysis of this persistence as well as the apparent intractability of processes of social reproduction. My own experience as an educator, now entering its fourth decade, has been almost entirely in schools which the dominant discourse names as “urban”.

In these schools, it has seemed to me, policy changes and educational reform deployments have done little to change the outcomes of students on the margin: the outcomes of students who find themselves outside the norm of North American society because they are not members of the dominant group.

Among the various factors leading to this inequitable outcome, is a discursive deployment (Popkewitz, 1998; Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998; Shutkin, 1998) in which teachers’ personal and social investments, institutional demands and student subject position come together to (re-)produce marginalization and failure in the body of the student. This study attempts a discursive analysis of the talk produced by nine urban teachers on the subject of student success and failure. Their talk is read as evidence of the

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4 A fuller discussion of this term as it is applied to schools and students not fitting the norm is attempted below. Thomas Popkewitz’s discussion of the term as a tool marginalization is as useful as it is important (Popkewitz, 1998).
5 The qualities that include or exclude a student from this group, as constructed by the teachers who are informants for this study, are discussed in detail in chapters 3, 4 and 5.
same marginalizing discursive deployment. Distinct discursive moves by teachers have a marginalizing effect on certain predictable groups of students. This supports a process of social reproduction that the literature of education has long identified and documented (e.g. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1977; Brantlinger, 2003; Lareau, 2003). An analytical and critical response to this discursive deployment is both possible and desirable and is the focus of the last section of this study.

The apparent intractability of diminished outcomes for students on the margin calls for analysis, intervention and amelioration. Cognizant of the importance of a variety of factors in production of student subject positions—and of the social, historical and economic realities they entail—this study seeks to investigate the language structures which affect the meeting of teacher and student. It is in this meeting that student outcomes are profoundly shaped. It is in this meeting that teachers take up discourses and articulate them as they account for the other they meet in the body of the student. What are these discourses? What ends do teachers have in taking them up? What effect do they have on students? Are these discourses subject to alteration or disruption with possible reformative effects on schooling and an improvement in the lives and outcomes of marginalized students? This study is designed to provide an exploratory answer to these questions.

Diminished outcomes for students on the margin

Diminished academic and social outcomes for students on the margin are well documented. The literature of education of the past forty years outlines this reality.6

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6 Examples of studies and of theorizations supporting this view are numerous and varied. See, for example, Altenbaugh, Engel, and Martin 1995; Anyon, 1997; Biddle, 2001a; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1977; Bowles, Gintis, & Osborne Groves,
Despite an extended project of research and analysis and a variety of policies and initiatives aimed at more equitable outcomes, arguably little has changed for students marginalized by class, race and gender. Subjects of a long and shifting practice of identification as drop-outs, push-outs, fade-outs and at-risk, among other labels (Kelly & Gaskell, 1996; Kumashiro, 2000), these students’ academic, social and economic outcomes continue to be limited and inequitable.

While economic and social conditions external to schooling might justifiably be called upon to explain the persistence of these outcomes, this study focuses on the operation of discourse as a key element in this process of exclusion. As Brantlinger explains, a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches would have been useful, each with strengths and weaknesses, to the task (2003, pp. 6-10). This study focuses on teachers’ disposition (Kumashiro, 2000) to students—itself a product and vehicle of the discourses which teachers take up to satisfy their own personal and professional investments (Miles, 1989)—evident in and shaped by the discourses they take up to explain student failure and success. This disposition has profound effects in the lives of both groups of students as an element in the production of exclusion or possibility through schooling. A disruption of these processes of reproduction is both possible and desirable as an element of an ethical project of school reform.

Student Outcomes

Social, economic and academic outcomes for marginalized students have not improved significantly in the past several decades. Arguably, they are worsening. The rate of child poverty in Toronto, where all teachers interviewed for this study practice, increased from 12.8% in 1981 to 19.4% in 2001 (United Way of Greater Toronto & The Canadian Council on Social Development, 2001). These data are not disaggregated for ethnicity or race. Abada, Hou and Ram (2009) point to the persistence of diminished academic outcomes across generations along the racial lines. During the latter part of the same period, the neighbourhoods with the highest rates of family and child poverty continued to be in the city’s “inner suburbs.” It is in these “inner suburbs” that intersection of poverty and lower educational attainment for certain ethnic/racial groups is most clearly apparent in census data (City of Toronto, 2003, 2006a, 2006b). Data used to the identify “Priority Neighbourhoods” in the “greater Toronto” area also point to the intersection of membership in a racialized group, lower socio-economic status and marginal academic achievement (United Way of Greater Toronto, 2013). A longitudinal effort by the Toronto District School Board shows the persistence of poorer academic outcomes along the lines of ethnicity and class for the past four decades (Brown, Yau, & Department., 1996; Cheng, Yau, Ziegler, & Toronto Board of Education. Research Services., 1993; Deosaran, 1976; Deosaran, et al., 1975; Deosaran & Toronto Board of Education. Research Dept., 1976; Yau, 2013; Yau, et al., 1993). Despite a general improvement as measured by provincial and international tests of student achievement,

7 Both schools in which the teacher informants for this study practice are in the “inner suburbs” of Toronto.
little change had been achieved for these same marginalized groups and even general levels of achievement have plateaued during the last several years for Ontario and Toronto (Programme for International Student Assessment, 2000). An analysis of student achievement on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test for the Toronto area shows that success across categories has plateaued at the district level for the past five years (Educational Quality and Accountability Office of Ontario, 2008, 2013).

*Teachers and Marginalization*

Teachers exonerate themselves and their schools of responsibility for student failure through a series of discursive moves. Teachers take up a variety of discourses to satisfy the demands of their own personal and professional investments as well as their desires for their students. When these investments meet a challenge or these desires do not find their object and are not met, teachers take up discourses of Othering and of motivation. This dynamic culminates in the production of a “figure in dominance” (Simon, 2004), itself evidence and product of capitalist, individualist, mercantile, agentic discourse, to account for student success and failure. Teachers interviewed for this study read student success and failure as responses to their invitation to accept their offerings and the institution’s offerings. The nature of that response determines the moral qualities teachers assign to the student. These processes have very real effects on the inclusion and exclusion of students as well and on the reproduction of the social on the body of the student. The discursive strategy taken up by teachers has the effect of producing (and reproducing) marginalization in certain predictable groups of students. The disruption of these processes is a key element of an ethical project of school reform.
This study was conceived and carried out with a discursive frame in mind. The term “discourse” has a variety of imprecise and overlapping meanings in common speech as well as in academic usage (Mills, 2004). It is used, here, with a specific meaning that is anchored in the work of Michel Foucault (Dreyfus, Rabinow, & Foucault, 1983; Foucault, 1977, 1980; Mills, 2004; Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998), Robert Miles (Miles, 1989) and Stuart Hall (Hall, Morley, & Chen, 1996). Discourse—and the possibility of counter-discursive positions and practices (Hall, et al., 1996; Terdiman, 1985)—as it relates to power and subjectivity is the vehicle and structure of inclusion and exclusion in schooling.8

As Brantlinger points out (2003, pp. 6-12), several theoretical and analytical frameworks could have been adopted to address the questions raised by this study. I chose a discursive frame for its efficacy in identifying elements of language as expressed by individuals within a broader social, historical and political context. The hope is that a discursive frame can open the field to interruption and amelioration of unbalanced and predictable power relations without falling into the trap of partisanship and polemic: that critical awareness of discursive articulations can yield to a re-articulation and possibility.

Theoretical Frames and Analyses of Student Failure

The role of public education in the marginalization of difference and the reproduction of social inequity has been variously theorized. A brief preliminary presentation of important moments in that theorization follows. The present sketch of theoretical positions follows Popkewitz (1998) in grouping such responses as resistance, correspondence and cultural capital theories together as reliant on a sovereignty model of

8 The important contributions and the differences between Foucault’s and Hall’s theorization of discourse are discussed in detail below.
the operation of power (Foucault, 1977; Popkewitz, 1998). They are contrasted to a theorization for which I use the adjective “discursive” as shorthand for the operation and articulation of power and dominance in the local, historical and embodied. In this section, I outline some key moments in the theorization of social reproduction.\(^9\)

Paul Willis’ account (1977) of “the persistent failure of state education to radically improve the chances in life of working class kids” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 27) is a useful starting point for this part of the discussion, both in terms of its treatment of the institutional effects on classed subjects, and as an example of an analysis based on a theorization of the social which assumes the operation of discrete, identifiable sites and dynamics of power (Willis, 1977, pp. 65-67). This theoretical position allows Willis to posit the possibility of a resistance to dominance, rooted in class culture (52). For Willis, ironically, social reproduction through schooling is a function of the choice made by disadvantaged students—though clearly supported by ideological, structural, material and personal practices (65, 67, 70)—to resist dominant values. His account valorizes class conflict and resistance with the bleak effect of a limitation of agency for working class student subjects, who are understood to be the unwitting architects of their own exclusion. The resistance of classed (and gendered and racialized) students reproduces both the class culture Willis is able to discern and the social arrangements he is at pains to critique (e.g. 146).

\(^9\) Collins (2009) names and discusses four approaches to the analysis of social reproduction in classrooms and schools, noting that a recent stress on “agency, identity, the person and voice over structural constraints” have had disappointing results. This study focuses on one aspect of social reproduction through discourse, with the awareness that this is but one aspect of social reproduction through schooling.
There are shades, in Willis, of other theoretical positions. He asserts, for example, a consonance between counter-school culture and shop-floor culture (52) which is not inconsistent with the correspondence work of Bowles and Gintis (1977). His emphasis on the operation of culture in social reproduction and resistance finds support in his use of Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) concept of cultural capital operating in the classification and regulation of social actors (Willis, p. 128). Without forcing these connections, it is possible to note points of confluence in these approaches. Their shared emphasis on the importance of structure is evident. A meta-narrative is at work here, in which power operates ideologically and is identifiable as hegemonic and sovereign.10

Michelle Fine’s study of “dropout” (Fine, 1991) is notable as a departure from the accepted language of dominance and resistance. She treats the silencing of dissent and the analytical categories which support it as an effect of school practices, operating ideologically. These practices have productive effects in the subjectivity and position of students (104). Fine focuses on the conditions, speech and practices of students and contrasts them with the personal investments and working conditions of teachers. This approach, set within a critique of common-sense language and dominant categories about schooling and failure, yields valuable insights about the production of subjectivity in students as the effect of practices and discourses at the institutional level. Fine documents in stark terms both the statistics of the failure of schools to produce equitable outcomes

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10 Henry Giroux helpfully summarizes the contributions of these theorists in the development of resistance to dominance. He laments the absence in Bourdieu of the “structuring and transforming process[es]” of culture and the resulting “one-way process of domination” (Giroux, 2001). Similarly, he argues that Bowles and Gintis, replacing Althusser’s use of ideology, posit a “notion of the correspondence principle” (84) which “says very little about either consciousness or how schools produce subjectivities that are not subsumed within imperatives of reproduction” (85). The result, for school subjects, is a limitation of possibility.
(e.g. 81) and students’ experience of exclusion in education as well as reduced social and economic outcomes for classed, gendered and raced subjects.

George Dei (1997), similarly, presents early school leaving and poor educational outcomes for racialized students as the product of discursive and institutional practices. Dei argues for a critical approach that repositions the critique of exclusion away from “deterministic and causal, as well as classist and structuralist, explanations” (220) in favour of a comprehensive view of schools that includes their operation “as actual sites, and [of] students and teachers as actual subjects” (220). This yields to a challenge of discourses of ability, family background and narrowly defined culture as taken up by teachers and others to explain failure. Dei foregrounds the possibility of “resistance in terms of social difference … as bodied, gendered, raced and classed” (220) and notes the silencing and invisibility of dropout and fade-out in school explanations of student performance and reduced participation (209).

While Fine’s and Dei’s approaches include an understanding of the operation of discursive practices in the production of subjectivity and difference, Thomas Popkewitz makes them central to an understanding of classification and regulation in schooling. “… [T]he very knowledge that organizes teaching, learning classroom management, and curriculum inscribes a certain selectivity in what teachers ‘see’, think, feel, and talk about regarding children and school subjects. The effects of that selectivity … generate principles that disqualify many of the children in [schools]” (Popkewitz, 1998). Popkewitz’s strategy points to problems arising in a “sovereignty view of power” (16 ff.), which fails to move past a view of the social situation of participants (e.g. their class position) that is shared across ideological positions (17) and places the subjects of
exclusion and marginalization beyond possibility; witness the lack of change (indeed deterioration) in the asymmetry of power in society as evident in educational sites throughout the past decades, despite a broad project of educational analysis. It is this lack of change which sums up the necessity of a different theoretical enunciation and the pressing nature of a project of reform. Against the repressive effects of the sovereignty view, Popkewitz proposes the productive effects of discourse (18) in both its naming and silencing modes.

Brantlinger (2003) and Lareau (2003) take on the problem from the complementary perspectives. Brantlinger examines the effect of teachers’ classed position in the reproduction of the social in their students as a function of their classed investments. Lareau probes the lives middle and working-class students, both white and racialized for their effects on schooling and on student success and failure. From different directions, their work illuminates the teacher student relation and points to real effects on racial and class identity in that relation and beyond.

Aware of the variety of approaches available and of the possibility they yield for an examination of the meeting of teacher and student and its effects on student success and failure, I focus on teachers’ articulation of discourse as a key of locus of practices of inclusion and exclusion as well as a promising site for an intervention aimed at the disruption of those same exclusionary practices and the production of possibility for students on the margin in public education.

*Structure of the Study*

This first chapter outlines the structure and content of the study and reviews approaches to the problem of social reproduction through schooling as they apply to the
study. Chapter 2 discusses data collection and analysis both in terms of methodology and of the theoretical lens of discourse used in the study. Chapter 3 looks at one effect of these discourses, the production of an Other, beyond reason and redemption. Teachers’ creation of an Other voids the claims and demands of dialogue and precludes inclusion. This enables teachers to limit the call of their own professional investments and their pastoral desires (Dreyfus, et al., 1983) to change the student. It allows them to account for their own success or failure in the production of a desirable performance and subjectivity in the student. Chapter 4 examines the deployment of a discourse of motivation, articulated to discourses of class, race and gender in an asset/deficit binary to satisfy teacher investments with exclusionary effects on students already on the margin. Chapter 5 argues that this articulation of discourses produces a “figure in dominance” (R. Simon, 2004), a figure which has specific effects in the production of student subjects as languaged by teachers. Each analysis chapter outlines a discrete step in a discursive deployment that is really of a piece. Each is an articulation of an individualist, agentic, meritocratic, mercantile, late capitalist discourse (Blackmore, 1999) which teachers link to other discourses useful and available to them to satisfy personal professional investments (Miles, 1989). This discursive deployment participates in the reproduction of social inequities. Particularly clear in this process is the reproduction of inequity on the basis of class and race. Chapter 6 lists the key findings of the study and focuses on the effects of the operative discursive deployment on student subjects, the implications for a project of school reform and possible points of disruption for a pedagogy of possibility.
CHAPTER 2

Data collection (Interviews)

The data for this qualitative study of teacher understanding of student success and failure was collected in a series of nine interviews with secondary school teacher informants. Teacher talk about student success and failure is theorized as the product and vehicle of discourse through which power/knowledge operates with real effects on the meeting of teacher and student, and on the lived lives of students as evident in their academic, social and economic outcomes and, indeed, in the production of their subject positions. Foucault’s conception of power/knowledge, operating through discourse and productive of subjectivity offers rich analytical tools, but it limits possibility in the form of resistance and alteration as it effectively eliminates agency. Stuart Hall’s critique of Foucault restores possibility and a qualified agency by locating discursive articulations in a social and historical location. The work of other theorists offers additional insights into the uses of discursive analysis in an ethical project of school reform.

A variety of possible approaches and theorizations are available for both the collection of data and its analysis (Brantlinger, 2003; Lareau, 2003) A discursive analysis of teacher talk about student success and failure, collected through structured but open-ended interviews, was chosen for its usefulness in identifying the effects of discourse (and ideology as it reveals itself in discourse), social position, and personal and professional investments in the (re-)production (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 2001) of social structures, evident here in the form of the success and failure of student subjects. In the meeting of the teacher and the student—in an institutional context in which structures and practices operate discursively and in which
teachers’ personal and professional investments come into play—student outcomes are powerfully affected. This meeting is a key moment in the production of student outcomes: and in the production of the their subject positions. If this is true, this is also the key moment of a desirable disruption (Katz & Dack, 2013) of those discursive structures of the reproduction of the social.

The Interviews

Interview materials are narrative accounts: representations of the social which yield to analysis as “social facts [which] are produced, shared and used in socially organized ways” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 418). A variety of analytical methods are open to the researcher of interview texts (Peräkyla & Ruusuvuori, 2011, p. 530) informed by the two principal social science traditions of conversation analysis and discourse analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 418).

Discourse analysis finds its inspiration in the work of Michel Foucault. “Foucault did not propose a definite set of methods for the analysis of text; hence, the ways of analysing and interpreting texts” in this tradition vary (Peräkyla & Ruusuvuori, p. 531). The focus of critical discourse analysis, as developed by Norman Fairclough and others, is on “the ways texts … reproduce power and inequalities in society (p. 531). A theorization of discourse and, as importantly, of discursive articulation, informing the analysis of the interviews for this study is discussed in detail below.
The Structure and Content of the Interviews

An interview script was developed as a guide for the conversation\textsuperscript{11} with the intent of eliciting teacher talk about their “explanations” for student success and failure. In conducting the interviews, teacher responses were probed and promising turns in the conversation pursued. Where the script was unproductive, questions and prompts were abandoned and new prompts introduced. Informants were given the opportunities to add to the conversation after completion of the interview as they wished.

Study informants each agreed to a sixty-to-ninety minute interview. Some interviews exceeded the agreed time by mutual consent. Interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. The researcher transcribed five of the interviews. The balance of the nine interviews was transcribed by a freelance transcriber. This writer checked transcribed text against recorded audio for accuracy and tone. Transcripts comprise 475 pages of single-spaced text.

The Informants

Nine teachers in two “urban”\textsuperscript{12} secondary schools were interviewed. Informants were selected from a group of teachers of the researcher’s acquaintance. The ages, histories and experiences of teacher informants as reported throughout are those at the time of the interviews. Participants were selected with a view to achieving a balanced sample in terms of gender, subject taught, teaching experience and age. An attempt at balance in the categories of gender, experience, age and teaching subject among the informants was made in an effort to address the possibility of a set of utterances being

\textsuperscript{11} A script for the interviews is appended as Appendix B.

\textsuperscript{12} The term “urban”, used interchangeably with “inner-city” is discussed in detail below. Thomas Popkewitz discusses it in detail as the vehicle of an Othering discourse (1991).
particular to a specific social position. The small size of the sample limits the effort’s success in this regard, and limits claims about the scope of the study to exploratory ones. Each participant is deemed capable of multiple and contradictory utterances and positions.

I am profoundly indebted to the teachers who offered their observations and reflections about their understanding of the conditions for student success and failure. I am keenly aware that I am subject to (and the subject of) the same discursive structures as my informants. While I write frankly about my observations in the analysis of teacher talk, I seek deliberately and with persistence to report the talk of my generous informants without judgement. Where a teacher’s utterance appears to cast a negative light on her or him or on students, I invite the reader to join me in reading the utterance as evidence of the discourse which informs secondary school educational practices and structures, rather than evidence of some moral or personal virtue or shortcoming. In each case, I stand with the teachers who have contributed to this study as co-workers in the struggle to include all students. Where an utterance may raise concern, I remember the teacher’s commitment to an ethical and inclusive practice.

The questions asked of teachers in this study do not include any examining or probing of their interactions with their students. Neither do they address teachers’ assessment of the effect of those interactions on student success and failure. The scope of the interviews is limited to an identification of the discursive structures they take up and their effect on students’ academic outcomes. This limitation narrows the scope of the study. While the questions and probes are designed to elicit teacher talk without “leading

13 Appendix A includes a chart of the informants’ pseudonyms, gender, age and the date of the interview.
the witness,” it is fair to note that other questions or attention to particular details may have elicited different responses. I rely on the consistency of the data evident in teacher talk as a support for its validity. No claims are made about the operation of a language structure unless it is consistently and persistently evident internally in the talk of each informant as well as broadly across the talk of all the informants.

An introduction to each of the informants for the study follows, in the chronological order according to which the interviews were conducted. Ages, experience and qualifications are reported as at the time of the interviews. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

*Maria*

The first of the teacher informants to be interviewed, Maria is also the longest serving teacher. At age forty-eight, she had been teaching, with some brief breaks, since age nineteen. A native of Northern Ontario, her first teaching experience was in fishing outports in Newfoundland as a member of a Roman Catholic order of nuns. Long since a lay person, Maria taught for ten years in number of elementary schools operated by her current employer, before moving to Site A for her first experience as a secondary school teacher. At Site A, Maria taught English and English as a Second Language. She was the head of the English Department at the school.

Maria takes up the invitation to account for student success and failure with interest. She remarks more than once that she has often pondered the questions raised in the interview. She is quick to mention a student’s social position, when giving an example from her teaching experience, using terms like ‘middle-class,’ ‘working-class,’ ‘immigrant,’ ‘E.S.L.’ and ‘professional’ as closely linked to—and even explanatory of—
student academic outcomes. Maria is passionate about her work. She made the move to secondary education to share her passion for literature with her students.

Anne

Anne had been practicing for twenty years, all at the secondary level. She taught Family Studies and Science. At the time of the interview she was completing her fourth year as a guidance counsellor at Site B. Anne’s practice had taken place in three different urban secondary schools. She introduces her teaching history by reminding the interviewer of earlier days and more challenging working conditions for teachers, clearly proud of her efforts and accomplishments.

Anne explicitly names her personal and professional investment in a relationship with her students. She observes that her current school’s student population faces many challenges—social, economic and academic—and that its needs overwhelm the school’s staff. Against this challenge, she places the efforts of committed teachers and their caring relationships with students. She is open and frank in her observations about family background and cultural characteristics.

Joy

The youngest of the teachers in the study, Joy also had the least teaching experience. A biology specialist, she had been teaching Science at Site A for three years, primarily at the senior level. She names University level Biology and grade eleven and twelve College level Science as courses she has taught, adding that she has also taught an Applied level grade ten Science. She had little experience with other levels of difficulty. Joy volunteers her involvement as swimming coach and moderator of the Student Council as important to her, the students and the school.
The effects of Joy’s recent arrival to a large urban setting from a smaller, less diverse one may be evident in her description of Site A. Asked to describe the school in which she practices, she initially moves quickly to describe the school and its students in terms of socio-economic background, conflating it with ethnicity. Joy often points to benefits of extracurricular and enrichment activities provided by parents as explanatory of student success.

*Alex*

Alex, a teacher of History and English, had taught for sixteen years, all but the first at Site A. In his first year he taught in a secondary school in the east end of the city. He had served as the head of the Social Science department at Site A, when asked by his peers to do so, relinquishing the role when he judged that someone else could fill it and repeating the cycle more than once.

Alex quickly takes up the category of class: first to describe the two schools in which he has taught, then to account for student success and failure. He does so with a full and deliberate appreciation for a variety of social positions, describing both an urban, working-class experience and a suburban, middle-class one as having positive and negative, though different, aspects. Alex is clear about the potential of every student. He holds teachers, schools and schooling responsible for student success and failure, explicitly exonerating the student’s family.

*Pat*

Pat taught Drama and Religion at Site A. In fourteen years at the school he also taught English and points out with pride that he is still often asked to give guest lectures in grade twelve English classes. Before coming to Site A, Pat taught for a year in a
suburban secondary school. He is proud of the school’s Drama program and its productions.

In his account of student success and failure, Pat turns explicitly to motivation, family and ethnicity as related and overlapping factors. In his talk, academic failure appears to be related to deficits in these areas, but he also openly and spontaneously names institutional and professional shortcomings as significant. Pat is distressed by the public’s perception of Site A as a poorly performing school, but shows considerable ambivalence in his own assessment of the students at the site.

Lydia

Lydia taught Religion and Career Studies at Site A. She taught in an elementary school for one year, before making the change to secondary where she was completing her fourth year. Before coming to Site A, she had a placement in a suburban high school. She volunteers that she much prefers secondary to elementary teaching. Lydia coaches volleyball. She points to her work with the school’s literacy committee and her involvement in the school beyond the classroom and wonders that more experienced teachers appear to do little beyond the classroom.

Lydia names a number of differences between Site A and her other schools—and, indeed, the schools she attended—as explanatory of student success and failure. Two factors, commitment and realism, recur in her talk about student success and failure. Students in her other schools were more committed to their studies and more realistic in their expectations. Like some other informants, Lydia points to the importance of family influence and enrichment experiences in the production of commitment, realism and, as a result, success.
Jane

An art teacher at Site A, Jane was also the head of a department that includes visual arts, music, media arts and technological subjects. She had been teaching, always at the secondary level, for seventeen years: the first fourteen in a suburban publically funded Catholic district, the last three at Site A. She volunteers that there are significant funding differences between older school districts and newer, expanding ones.

Jane points out that she is relatively new to Site A. While she has long lived in its neighbourhood, she expresses some surprise at the composition of the school’s student population as unreflective of the local demographic. She names low levels of student effort and achievement as additional sources for her discomfort. Initially reluctant to hypothesize about the genesis of student success and failure, she names a variety of apparent family and student shortcomings as possibilities at her current school, while pointing to individual motivation when speaking about her former school.

Tony

Tony, a teacher of twenty-nine years experience, had been teaching Mathematics and Computer Science at Site B for eleven years. Before, he taught for seventeen years in a boy’s high school in the east end of the city. He began his teaching practice in a public high school, before moving to the publically funded Catholic system. He was the head of the Mathematics department.

Tony frames his talk about students and schools and about student success and failure in terms of difference. He points to the “multicultural” composition of the school in an opening description of the school, moving quickly to describe struggling students from a variety of immigrant groups. Like two other teachers in the study, he welcomes the opportunity to discuss the causes of student success and failure and links both quite
frankly to class and ethnicity. Tony is proud of his own accomplishments as a professional and of his parents’ achievements as immigrants to Canada.

Stephen

Stephen was a science and mathematics teacher with twenty-four years experience. At the time of the interview, he was the head of the Science Department in a high school in the centre north of the city, having recently transferred there from Site A. He began his teaching career in a highly academic high school the east end of the city, transferring for a brief stint to an alternative secondary school before taking up the headship of the science department at Site A. He taught a variety of science courses during his sixteen years there. Stephen’s talk about students at Site A focuses on their performance.

He is careful and deliberate in his remarks, pointedly refusing invitations to explore his understanding for the reasons or the causes of student success and failure. He stresses his role as an observer and a scientist. Prodded, he consistently takes up constructions of potential, choice and drive to account for different academic outcomes in students. Stephen is much liked by his students and reports positive relationships with them, while pleading ignorance about their experiences and histories beyond the classroom throughout the interview.

Interview Analysis

Each of the interviews was read in an effort to identify discursive elements specific to it. The process was repeated with a view to identifying elements and strands common to other interviews. Attention was paid, throughout, both to utterances and silences as providing evidence of teacher adoption of discourse as practically adequate to
satisfy their personal and professional investments (Miles, 1989). Britzman (1991) points to the productive effects of silence as well as utterance in discourse. Attention was given to the prevalence of discursive elements and articulations and their fit with common sense talk about student success and failure, themselves productive of normalization. A schema of the prevalent “clusters” of discourse was produced as a visual representation and in an effort to identify linkage and relationship. It is included as Appendix D.

The Sites

The two schools in which teachers interviewed for the study practice have many similarities. They are similar in size; they are roughly the same distance from the line bisecting the city from North to South and very near the same subway line; their student populations show strong demographic similarities; they have similar institutional histories; and their student populations have undergone similar changes in number and composition. Both schools are housed in large physical plants which were obtained by the school district as part of a transfer of properties between coterminous school districts aimed at rationalizing space use and public funding. In the informants’ views, both schools began their histories as “comprehensive” high schools and became, “urban” or “inner city.”

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14 A ‘comprehensive’ school in Ontario is a school drawing from an area surrounding it and providing general academic education to students studying at all levels of difficulty and post-secondary destination. Its services include Special Needs, Special Education and Gifted as well as the three levels of difficulty in each of the Intermediate and Senior divisions. I use the term to point to teacher constructions of a normative institution within the Ontario context.
Site A

Housed in a large four storey building at a busy intersection in the west end of the city, Site A was one of the largest school facilities in the district. The site was built in the early sixties, during an expansionary period in publically funded education in Ontario. It served as a vocational school until the late nineties. It was then transferred between coterminous school districts\textsuperscript{15} and altered to house a comprehensive secondary school program. The school is administered by a Catholic publically funded school district. After its initial year of operation, the school was merged with another, which was experiencing declining enrolment, but kept in the same location. The merger is often mentioned by teacher informants in their accounts of student success and failure.

The school building rises, with little setback, at the intersection of two major city arteries. Traffic is heavy from early morning to late evening, often peaking in traffic jams at rush hour. The screeching of turning streetcars and the revving of bus and truck engines is audible throughout the school day. Pedestrian traffic is less intense, despite the proximity of a subway station near the opposite corner of the intersection. From the school entrance a broad stairway opens directly to the intersection. It is crowded with students several times a day: at the beginning of the day, at lunch time, at the end of the school day and, later, for night school.

Built in a brutalist mode of modernist architectural style, the school’s red brick flat walls rise four storeys with only one opening to the street at the main entrance. Windows are small clerestories. To the east of the building is a sports field, undersized

\textsuperscript{15} Ontario funds four publically funded systems: an English, an English Catholic, a French and a French Catholic system. Each system is geographically divided into local districts. Systems and districts which overlap are deemed “coterminous.”
and squeezed in between the school and a major rail corridor. To the south is a large commercial lot, which houses an automotive repair shop, a department store and a supermarket in the middle of a large parking area. The school is separated from its field and the commercial lot by a driveway, a full storey below grade. A walkway overlooks the driveway on both sides. Viewed from the east or the south, the driveway and walkway suggest a moat and battlements.

Beyond the school’s immediate environs are three distinct neighbourhoods. The school is roughly on the border between them. To the south-west is an affluent and stable residential neighbourhood. Dwellings are primarily single-family detached houses. Some of the larger houses are subdivided into apartments. This neighbourhood extends west from the school to a large urban park and south to more parkland and the lake. South and east of the school is a mixed residential and industrial area. Industrial buildings are increasingly vacant, here, likely the effect of globalized trade and manufacturing. This area has a larger share of apartment buildings, some subsidized housing and older housing stock originally built for single families, but currently often subdivided into multiple rental units or rented as single rooms. To the north is a large mixed use area, part of an experiment in city planning which mixed residential and manufacturing zoning. Here too, the manufacturing activity is hollow at best. The school draws its students disproportionately from the second and third areas.

Teachers from Site A describe the school’s student population in terms which mark it as marginal.16 Demographic data for the neighbourhoods from which the school draws its student population point to significant divergence from the norm in several key

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16 See chapters 3, 4 and 5 for a full discussion.
demographic markers (C. o. Toronto, 2003). Immigrant, under- and unemployed, low income and socially assisted individuals and families are over-represented in the student population. Educational levels are below the city average and employment is primarily in the less skilled sector of the economy.

The school has a higher proportion of special education students than the district average and significantly lower scores in provincial standardized tests than the median for the district (EQAO, 2003). The school has been the object of critical pieces in the local media. This supports the teachers’ view that it has a negative reputation in the community.

Site B

The building housing Site B was, like the one housing Site A, constructed in the sixties and similarly transferred in the nineties between the same school districts. It is in the east end of the same city. The school operated for two years at a different, temporary location before moving into the renovated building.

Clad in rough, vertically ridged cement tiles, the building housing Site B rises three storeys from ground level. Built on a residential street, it is set back several metres. A green space in the front of the building is sparsely planted and poorly maintained. The building, facing north, blocks the sun from the front yard. Large pine trees thrive, however, branches untrimmed, shielding the school from the street. The street is quiet except at the beginning and end of the school day. Vehicular traffic is blocked at one end of the street, by traffic-calming concrete barriers. The driveway on the west side of the

17 Supporting data is outlined in chart form in Appendix C.
building is steep. It leads to a parking lot and a sports field on the south side of the building. Here, two more storeys, below grade from the front, are revealed and the length and height of the building are evident. To the east of the school is a treed park. To the west four apartment buildings rise ten storeys each.

Two blocks north of the school lie a major street and a subway stop. Like Site A, Site B is located at the intersection of three distinguishable areas. To the north, a large residential area comprising several neighbourhoods extends to a ravine. Almost all the houses are small detached and semi-detached dwellings, built in the aftermath of World War II. Larger apartment buildings rise at the edges of this residential area. Commercial buildings on main thoroughfares appear much as they did thirty years earlier. To the west and across a major street is a large service yard for the city’s transportation authority. The yard is fenced and below grade. It extends south for several city blocks, forcing traffic to circumnavigate it. To the south and east, a mixed use residential, commercial and manufacturing area shows some signs of change. The hollowed manufacturing area is undergoing some renewal as a film production centre. Small pockets of the older residential stock are being gentrified. The majority of the students at Site B come from the less affluent neighbourhoods extending north and away from the school.

Site B is, with significant effects on its enrolment and the make-up of its student population, located in the midst of five other secondary schools. Three are operated by the public district and two by the Catholic district. None applied geographic limits in the their admissions policy.

Teacher informants for this study at Site B assess their students as marginal and exceptional in a variety of categories. Demographic data for catchment area for the
school show significant divergence from the norm for the city (C. o. Toronto, 2003). Immigrant, under- and unemployed, low income and socially assisted individuals and families are over-represented in the student population. Educational levels are below the city average and employment is primarily in the less skilled sector of the economy. Competition for students among this and the neighbouring secondary schools may increase this divergence as some schools succeed in attracting students already performing better academically and other schools fail to do so.

According to the teachers interviewed for the study, Site B attracted more than its share of marginalized students. The school had a higher proportion of special education students that the district average and significantly lower scores in provincial standardized test than the median for the district (EQAO, 2003). The school’s ESL population was much higher than average for even this diverse school district.

Discursive analysis

*Discourse*

Teacher talk is theorized as providing evidence of the operation of power/knowledge through discourse in schooling (Foucault, 1977, 1980) with real effects in the lives of student subjects (Henriques, 1984). In a key theoretical shift, a discursive approach displaces a conception of power as sovereign and decentres it and its operation (Foucault, 1977, pp. 6-13) into a broader social field with no specific or identifiable locus. Discourse is taken up by teachers as practically adequate to satisfy personal and institutional investments (Miles, 1989), and is articulated by them, in a specific location and historical moment, to other discourses. This articulation is the ground of a qualified

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18 Supporting data is outlined in chart form in Appendix C.
agency and of a politics of possibility and resistance (Hall, et al., 1996; Terdiman, 1985).

The meeting of student and teacher, shaped by the available and operant discourse, is a key point of intervention and interruption in the reproduction of the social through education. Making the operation of discourse in that meeting explicit opens the ground to an ethical, reformist and progressive pedagogical project, aimed at improving the diminished outcomes of students on the margin. This is the basis for this study’s argument for possibility.

Sovereignty

In Foucault’s schema, power is decentred and operates with real effects but outside of a locus, personal or structural (Dreyfus, et al., 1983). It operates as power/knowledge through discourse taken up by social subjects. It is not subjects themselves who produce discursive structures, rather they take these up, in Miles’ useful conception, as available and adequate to satisfy their investments (Miles, 1989). The subject’s role in the development of explanatory language structures then, is eliminated and questions of agency, alteration and resistance are settled in the same theoretical moment: possibility is not merely limited; arguably, it is denied (Hall, et al., 1996). For Foucault, power can neither be identified with a location or actor nor can a response/reaction be produced: there is no position for a response, merely the possibility to take up discourse.

This is one of the implications of the shift from sovereignty (and structure and formation) to the operation of power/knowledge through discourse. This shift to decentred power and the concomitant erasure of agency clearly present both theoretical and political problems for an ethical project of school reform. How, then, to intervene
and interrupt the (re)production of unequal academic, social and economic outcomes in
classed subjects that forty years of research into schools and schooling\textsuperscript{19} has named and
described?

Stuart Hall’s critique of Foucault and his introduction of discursive articulations
(Hall, et al., 1996), taking place in specific historical and political contexts, at the hands
of specific subjects and groups, restores limited but real agency, possibility and
resistance. Within an economic and historical context—indeed within a cultural matrix—
individual subjects and groups alter discursive structures through a process of articulation
and re-articulation. This process is allows the possibility of resistance and disruption.

“Truth” and possibility

In Foucault’s conception, discourse is productive of “societal ‘regimes of truth’
that work to ‘speak, classify, name, and establish the dominant and relevant categories of
knowledge’ ” (Peck, 1994, p. 92). Indeed, “discursive formations produce the object
about which they speak” (Dreyfus, et al., 1983, p.61). Fairclough proposes a view of the
operation of discourse as a technology for the production of knowledge and of regulation
as a “vehicles of ideology” (in Peck, 92). This is a departure from the Foucaultian
position and it echoes Stuart Hall’s critique of Foucault’s schema. As Hall notes, “What
Foucault would talk about is the setting in place, through the institutionalization of a
discursive regime, of a number of competing regimes of truth and, within these regimes,
the operation of power through the practices he calls normalization, regulation and
surveillance” (Hall, et al., 1996, p. 135). “Foucault’s argument [is] for the discursive as
against the ideological” (135). While recognizing the possibility of a polemical

\textsuperscript{19} See Chapter One.
motivation for Foucault’s refusal of the ideological, Hall argues that the mobilization of the ideological is critical for regaining the possibility of a political position which admits for more than the naming of a power of indeterminate positionality and intent.

Such a conception would deny the possibility of agency and resistance, while the recognition of the operation of a regime of truth does not, in itself, allow for the exercise of resistance “because [Foucault’s] resistance must be summoned up from nowhere” (135). Hall argues that while resistance is present in Foucault’s model, it cannot be conceptualized as having either a specific position or a relative strength (135). This is the result of a unitary conception of society in which the question of “dominance in ideology” (135) is erased.

In contrast, Hall proposes a conception of society itself as a “formation” in which competing regimes of truth “define an ideological field of force,” with the result of opening the way for “subordinated subjects” to take up discourses “which have some plausibility … while not being part of the dominant episteme” (136). This is an argument for the possibility of plurality in society. “The question of the relative power and distribution of different regimes of truth in the social formation at any one time … that is what [Hall calls] ‘the ideological effect’” (136). This understanding of the operation of power/knowledge in specific, multiple and contestable ways has a significant effect on the agency of the subject(s) of power through discourse, as it does, indeed, on the production of subjectivity and the positioning of the subject. It represents a key move toward positing a limited but real agency in the individual subject and in “social formations.”
Discursive Articulation

Hall’s assertion of possibility is supported by his observations about the articulation of discourse. “An articulation is … the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time” (p. 141). While this appears to echo Foucault’s assertion that power relations and the discourses through which they operate “are not univocal; [that] they define innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of power relations” (Foucault 1995, p. 27), Hall’s framing of the historicity and contingency of a discursive articulation and the agency it allows subjects goes beyond that of Foucault, for whom the technology of power/knowledge which is productive of the “soul” yields “a reality [that] is produced permanently around, on, within the body” (29). So, for Foucault, the “man [sic] … whom we are invited to free, is already himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself…. The soul is the prison of the body” (30). Conscious of the uses of Foucault’s insight into the operation of power/knowledge, I try, after Hall, to employ his theoretical framework while expanding the range of possibility for resistance and agency.

Closure, location and subjectivity

The concept of articulation provides a way out of the traps of reductionism and essentialism (Slack 1996, in Morley and Chen, p. 112). Hall’s phrase “arbitrary closure” is a useful way of thinking about the moment of articulation (115). With Foucault, discourse is seen to be constructive of subjectivity. For Hall, “[a]rticulation is the production of identity on top of differences, of unities out of fragments, of structures
across practices. Articulation links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality, this experience to those politics. And these links are themselves articulated into larger structures.” (Grossberg in Slack, p. 115). While recognizing the influence of contextual forces in the production of subjectivity, the subject is not reduced to an effect of power/knowledge. Rather, by starting ‘from below’, an element of negotiation and possibility is reintroduced. The conditioned, but ultimately indeterminate, quality of this “closure” is underlined by its ‘momentariness.’ While the locus of articulation may be internal it extends outward to practices, discourses and structures, avoiding determinism along with essentialism.

Neither Hall’s assertion of ideology, nor his use of articulation as a strategy to expand the range of a politics of resistance or possibility should be read as an appeal to the untroubled, unitary individual of modernity (Hall and Grosberg in Hall, et al., 1996, p. 135). As I have tried to make clear, rather, it is a turn to contextuality (see also Slack, 119) and positionality. Judith Butler clarifies the possibility of recognizing the insights of what she uncomfortably names ‘post-structuralism’ (Butler, 1992, 6) into the presence of power in the production of subjectivity, while pursuing a positioned political agenda (9). Her observation that “No subject is its own point of departure” points to the goal of “interrogating its construction as a pregiven foundational premise” (9). To do this is not to abandon politics (13), but to reframe it in more inclusive terms, which advert to the social without erasing the positioned and particular. It is, then, to reject essentialism or reductionism without abandoning politics (15). So, Hall’s observation that “an ideological discourse does not depend on the conscious intentions of those who formulate statements within it” (in Peck 109) can be read as a call to examine both the production
of the discourse and the position of the subjects who take it up as a practically adequate (Henriques, 1984) explanation of their experience (116).

Practical adequacy and personal investments

This use of the concept of practical adequacy is based on Robert Miles discussion of ideology as it is taken up by social actors (Miles, 1989). He names two key moments in this process. First, an ideology must be deemed to “refract through certain perceived regularities, and construct a causal interpretation which can be presented as consistent with those regularities” and, second, it must “serve as a solution to perceived problems” (80). If the distinction between discourse and ideology becomes blurred here, Fairclough’s suggestion that discourses be theorized as “vehicles of ideology” (in Peck, 92) may again be helpful. Importantly, subjects appear to take up discourses as a result of practical and ideological investments on a basis which allows for a greater degree of agency than the simple languaging of identity by discourse and power. To varying degrees it is possible, then, for discursive practices to be taken up or not, to be articulated and re-articulated to and with different elements, and to be altered in their adoption.

What is at stake, at a broader social level, is the naturalization of discourses into ideological structures (93). This naturalization produces the very “regimes of truth” which have such pervasive effects for human subjects. Valerie Walkerdine addresses the effects of both “discourses and regulatory practices” which operate in tandem with them (in Henriques et al. 1984, 176) in an educational setting. They both inform and shape pedagogy and practice and produce the student subject. David Shutkin examines the
effects of discursive and material practices\textsuperscript{20} in the deployment of information technologies (in Popkewitz and Brennan, 1998). His use of the concept of deployment is not incongruent with the theorization of articulation in Hall and others, but it emphasizes the role of institutional structures and practices (208). In both cases, the subjectivity and the position of students is theorized and analysed as the product of discourses, the practices which operate congruently with them, and the material conditions shaped by both. A focus on deployment emphasizes structure, while a focus on articulation emphasizes the contested nature of the effects in question.

\textit{Discourse in Education}

Discourse operates with important effects in lives of students and teachers. The operation of discourse makes certain realities visible while it suppresses and silences others (Britzman, 1991; Foucault, 1980; Peck, 1994). Evident in common-sense talk, in media accounts, in cultural products and practices, in policy documents and mandated school curricula (Kelly & Gaskell, 1996), in the inclusion and omission of analytical categories employed in study design, it is itself productive of inclusion and exclusion. It operates in the lives of students at the micro level (as in the institutional organization of schools) as well as the macro (as in the deployment of discursive articulations (Shutkin, 1998) in processes of globalization (Blackmore, 1999)).

Teachers take up discourses, on the basis of their availability and practical adequacy (Miles, 1989), to produce, among other things, constructions of student failure and success. Discourse structures their explanations, the moment and the terms of their encounter, the power relations, the academic and social outcomes and, ultimately, the

\footnote{As Hall points out, practices and material conditions also function discursively (in Morley and Chen, 145).}
very subjectivity of the student in the meeting of teacher and student: just as their articulation of available discourse is performed in a particular location to satisfy personal and professional investments. As I endeavour to show, this has both inclusive and marginalizing effects on students in schools and beyond.

Terminology

Urban

Teachers take up the term ‘urban’ to as part of their description of their schools and, by extension, of their students. The term has currency in common sense talk about marginalized students. As Popkewitz points out (1998), ‘urban’ is taken up in dominant discourse to name an Other. In the talk of teachers interviewed for this study, ‘urban’ is sometimes implicitly juxtaposed to ‘sub-urban,’ but is always a classed term: to be ‘urban’ is not to reside in the city, but primarily to belong to a particular class. To be an ‘urban’ youth is to belong to that same group and to be possessed of a variety of non-normative qualities, dispositions and behaviours of the white middle class.

Reasonable/Reason/Rational

Related to a construction of students as ‘urban,’ the construction of a rational agent, acting according to the dictates of reason, is evident in teacher talk in this study. While seldom used explicitly, it is used by teachers to categorize students according the appropriateness of their goals, desires and behaviours. Students who fail the test are deemed unreasonable or “beyond reason” (1998).

21 He makes the same claim for the term “rural” as a construction of difference in teacher talk.
The Other

In their constructions of successful and unsuccessful students teachers articulate a variety of discourses. One of the effects of these articulations is the production of a figure beyond help and reason (Popkewitz, 1998) that is Other than the norm. This figure is, arguably, implicit in the very conception of discourse in its role in the production of subjectivity: as privileged subjects take up discursive articulations and discourse produces a subject, it is an Other that is constructed. In the analysis of teacher discursive articulations which follows, I argue that an Other is constructed in the body of student subjects to satisfy the personal, professional and ideological investments of those teachers. Difference and alterity are central to the concept of the Other. Power relations of dominance are implicit in the concept and its deployment, as it serves both to marginalize and to maintain privilege (Fernandez, 2008).

Deficit thinking

Teacher adoption of deficit constructions to account for student failure is well documented. In deficit thinking, the subject is constructed as deficient in ways that produce failure. Richard Valencia identifies this individual and systemic response to student failure as endemic and persistent for over one hundred in years and links it to racist and oppressive discourses (Valencia, 1997). A key feature of deficit thinking is that it blames the victim (2), in this case the student, for failure and simultaneously exonerates the practitioner and the institution. Valencia identifies a variety of school practices which lend it an aura of acceptability (6-9) and points to its historical adaptability (10).

22 See, for example: Anyon (2005); Biddle (2001b); Brantlinger (2003); George Jerry Sefa Dei (1997); George J. Sefa Dei (2000); George Jerry Sefa Dei, et al. (1995); Dorn (1996); Fine (1991); Flessa (2006); Fordham (1996); Giroux (2001); Kelly and Gaskell (1996); Kozol (1991); Popkewitz (1998); Reimers (2000); Valencia (1997).
A current example of deficit thinking is found in the work of Ruby Payne (2005). Her description of a “culture of poverty” points to the failure of students of “lower” socio-economic status to succeed as evidence of a cultural problems associated with class membership and prescribes remedies to be applied by school systems and teachers. While some of Payne’s observations point to the responsibility of teachers, schools and schooling to teach every student, the import of her approach is to blame the victim and exonerate the teacher and institution (Delpit, 2012).

Flessa (2006) points to the key role of “attitudes” (24) in the production of explanations for student success and failure. These “attitudes” are significant factors in the selection and articulation of discourse by teachers to explain student success and failure: they are a function of teachers’ positions and of their personal and professional investments. Deficit thinking may usefully point to the class orientation of schools (27), but does so by silencing the dominant and normative category (25). The norm of middle-class membership and disposition, “culture” in Payne’s construction, is all the more powerful for its silencing.

An alternative to deficit thinking is offered in the work of Brantlinger (2003) and Lareau (2000, 2003). Brantlinger posits the deployment of discourses of exclusion in the service of the protection of middle-class privilege by parents, teachers and administrators in schooling. Lareau points to the different strategies, appropriate and reasonable in different social positions, used by parents in child raising. Middle-class strategies have greater congruence with the culture and practices of schooling with powerful effects in the lives of students. Popkewitz (1998; Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998) proposes a discursive approach to the question, opening the field to an analysis of the articulation of
discourse by teachers with profound effects in the production of subjectivity in students on the margin.

Disposition

‘Disposition’ is used in this study to name that effect of subjectivity which produces the individual’s response to an other (and an Other) and shapes their relations at least in one direction. In the students’ case this disposition will shape their response to the offers of schooling, both personal and on the part of teachers and the institution. Kumashiro’s use of the term is helpful, here: “… assumptions about and expectation of the Other—especially those held by educators—that influence how the Other is treated. In particular, … the internal ways of thinking, feeling, and valuing that justify, prompt and get played out in the … treatment of the Other” (Kumashiro, 2000). Kumashiro focuses on ‘disposition’ in the teacher. One of the foci in this study is on teachers’ understanding of their students’ dispositions. In the process of answering questions about student disposition, teachers make their own dispositions about their students visible and explicit. It is important to note the operation of power through discourse in these relations and their effects on student subjects (see also Foucault, 1977, 1980; Popkewitz, 1991).

Qualities (of the student)

Teachers’ constructions of students along discursive lines involve the assignment of a variety of ‘qualities’ to the student. Students are variously assigned qualities of urbanness, normality, ethnicity, and motivation, among others. These are discussed below in terms of the data collected in the interviews. The term ‘quality’ is used, here, to name the characteristics, themselves an effect of discourse and its articulation, assigned to students by teachers in their constructions and their explanations of their academic
success or failure. The term ‘quality’ as applied to student subjects is used to name and group characteristics assigned to those subjects in teacher talk. This assignment is theorized as a function of the operation of discourse articulated by teachers.

**Teacher investments**

Teachers’ construction of their students, and of student success and failure, is a function of their own subject position and of their personal and professional investments. These investments are evident—if often implicitly—in their introductions to themselves and their teaching history, in their descriptions of the schools in which they work, in their talk about successful and unsuccessful students (often framed in comparison or contrast, both implicitly and explicitly, to their own histories), in their assessment of unsuccessful students as deficient and their assertion of what is desirable in a student. I outline and discuss teachers’ personal and professional investments, as discernible in their talk, as a relevant precursor to a discussion of their talk as it affects student subjects and provides evidence of the discursive structures which inform it. Teachers’ own positions have an effect on their articulations of those discursive structures and their constructions of students, which they take up and produce as practically adequate (Miles, 1989) to satisfy the demands of their personal investments. The data discussed in this section intersects almost completely with the data discussed in other sections, but the focus of the discussion, here, remains on teacher investments as a determinant of their articulation of discourse in explaining student success and failure.

**A Moment of Reflexivity**

I came to teach in “urban” schools by accident. An immigrant at the age of twelve, I attended a suburban Toronto Catholic elementary school for one year and then a
Catholic high school: one of the original six, pre-public funding Catholic high schools in Toronto. The fit—my own sense of belonging—with the institution and its culture was partial at best.

Seeking employment, years later, I focussed my efforts on the high school from which I graduated and, finding no success, on others like it. Pre-service teaching training experiences, my own classed position\(^23\) and, I would argue, the very discourses identified and examined in this study, led me to believe I was best suited to teach “academic” students. The offer of employment in the school district’s first deliberately comprehensive secondary school came as an accident (I had a one week stint as an occasional teacher in the school) and certainly as a surprise. It was also the opportunity for collaboration with many young teachers who took up the rather eccentric principal’s claim that all students in the school could do better than succeed in their streamed classrooms: they could “move up” into the next and “higher” stream.\(^24\) One of my grade nine students in my first year at the school, then in the Basic (work-bound) stream graduated a few years later in the Advanced stream and went on to university. He eventually achieved a Master’s degree. While not representative of the norm, his story was far from unusual at that time in that school.

\(^{23}\) I recognize my own position of privilege on both sides of the Atlantic and a middle-class membership stemming back several generations.

\(^{24}\) Several times a year, the whole school gathered for assemblies in the gymnasium. There, in the style of Baptist revival meetings from another time, students who had “moved up” from one stream to another were asked to “come on up” to the stage to applause by the congregated students and staff. The image of these meetings is inscribed in my memory with sentimental and emotional tones, but these gatherings celebrated real achievements by students and staff who had been offered an alternative discourse and had taken it up to effect.
I offer this selective narrative sketch in an effort at reflexivity, to advert to my own classed position and to point to the importance of history and context for both teachers and students. I went on to work in three more “urban” schools, choosing them as the most likely places for an effective teaching practice: one that, at its best, could have some positive effect in the lives of students. I have received much as a result of this choice: well-remunerated in Ontario’s publically funded school system, I have also been able to hope that my working relationships have sometimes had good effects.
CHAPTER 3
The Student as Other

M: What would be your general description of the school where you teach and its students?
J: Um? In terms of like ethnic background?
M: Whatever you, whatever comes to mind.
J: OK. Uh, I would say, in general the students come from a lower socio-economic background, than, students at other high schools. It would be, considered a downtown, probably fairly inner-city school, mostly Portuguese background. Um, located on a very busy intersection, … and – I think that’s it. (Joy. Interview.)

Teacher constructions of marginal students as possibly unknowable and certainly unaccountable Others pervade the talk of teacher interviews for this study. Teachers name students as immigrant, ESL (English as a Second Language), Portuguese, Spanish, multicultural, working class, inner city, “thinking with their hearts” and unreasonable, among other constructions. Their talk articulates the figure of a successful, normative student against which other students are measured. In their talk, teachers take up categories of race and ethnicity, family and class. These are constructed as constitutive of a deficit (George Jerry Sefa Dei, et al., 1995; Flessa, 2006; Valencia, 1997) in the student and articulated to urbanness and lack of reason (Popkewitz, 1998). The normative

25 Pseudonyms are used throughout. The first reference to a specific interview names it as such. Subsequent references name the teacher only.
26Kumashiro takes up this term to “refer to those groups that are traditionally marginalized in society, i.e. that other than the norm…” (2000). I use the term to identify discourses taken up by teachers to speak about those same students, but with direct and important effects on the student: I emphasize the active and effective aspects of teacher constructions of students, their purpose for taking them up and their political effect. A genealogy of the production of an “Other” as an analytical concept would include Edward Said’s use of the term (Said, 1978, 2000).
27 This construction is sometimes explicit in teacher talk; more often implicit. It is evident as much in silences and elisions as it is in speech (Britzman, 1991; Foucault, 1980).
The construction of successful students is instrumental in the production of a construction of unsuccessful students as Other and beyond reason. Teachers’ investments—social, personal and professional—and their subject positions are at the centre of their articulations both of students’ normative and of their marginal subject positions through the adoption of this discursive strategy. Teacher talk about marginal(-ized) students stands in contrast to their talk about successful students, about themselves, about the institutions in which they labour and about the broader social context.

Two constructions of students, the successful and the unsuccessful, emerge in the talk teachers in this study produced. These coincide with and are articulated to others in which the binary normative/Other is operative. Student deficits, here as elsewhere in teacher talk, are constructed within categories of race, ethnicity, family, gender and class. The “urbanness” of student subjects and their lack of reason are constructed as commensurate to each other (Popkewitz, 1998). In this chapter, I attempt to identify teachers’ articulations of difference and Otherness in students. These are apparent even in teachers’ initial, general descriptions of the schools in which they work. In the course of the discussion, I introduce a discursive context for teacher Othering of their less successful students, as teachers take up discursive structures and articulate them according to their practical adequacy (Miles, 1989) to satisfy their personal and professional investments.

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28 Subjects take up discourse, as practically adequate to satisfy their investments. This is not to say that they act in conscious or deliberate ways. Subjects are multiple and contradictory and may well be invested in contradictory discourses and ideologies expressed as ethical commitments or principles.

29 See Chapter 6 for a fuller discussion.
My School

Teachers on their schools

Teachers’ construction of unsuccessful students as Others is evident even as they provide an introductory, general description of the schools in which the labour. The schools themselves, as well as their student populations, are constructed as being outside an often unspoken norm. Asked to “give a general description of [their] school,” teachers take up a variety of descriptors. These initial offerings, in each of the interviews, are remarkable for the spontaneity with which teachers, unsolicited to do so, take up a variety of related articulations of a discourse of difference.

Stephen, comparing his present school to others in which he has taught, begins his description by naming Site A as “not suburban, certainly urban” (Stephen, Interview). In this introductory description of his site he raises “demographics” and “family background” as significant categories. Alex describes the same site, his current school, as “an inner-city school with … working-class students with a heavy Portuguese background for, I would say, about 65 to 70 per cent of our students and then a mix of other students from places like Poland and Central America. And the area of the city has sort of always been an immigrant, you know, neighbourhood” (Alex, Interview). This is in contrast to his description of his previous school, where “it would be more of a mix of kids” and “more sort of upper middle-class, middle- and upper middle-class kids” (Alex). Alex’s present school is a “working-class school” (Alex).

Joy’s immediate response to a request to describe the school in which she teaches is to ask, “In terms of, like, ethnic background?” Encouraged to use any category of her choosing, she offers that
in general, the students come from a lower socio-economic background than students at other high schools. It would be considered a downtown, probably fairly inner-city school, mostly Portuguese background, located on a very busy intersection in …. (Joy)

Joy continues to contrast the school and its students to others in her experience—and her construction—in pointed terms throughout her interview. Class difference is a key element in her talk about the school and its students (Joy).

Other teachers are less explicit in their talk about their schools, but appear to take up the same discourse of difference. Maria, for example, goes to some pains to attenuate that discourse in her description of Site A. She takes up academic streaming according to ability as a descriptive category. She begins her description of the school by saying that the majority of students at the school are “non-academic” (Maria, Interview). This construction of the student population as being heavily weighted toward “non-academic” students (Maria), nevertheless, marks the school as anomalous. Her account of student success and failure, later in the interview, constructs non-academic students as being possessed of qualities that set them apart from an unspoken norm.

Lydia answers the same question with a comparison to her previous school, which was “very academic” and in which students were more “committed” (Lydia, Interview). This construction of the school and its students as different and differently placed is consistently taken up by her and other teachers in the study, as well. Lydia notes, for example, that she is unable to “cover the curriculum” in her present school. Her students at Site A are repeatedly described as less able, “less committed” and less “realistic” (Lydia).

Jane notes that “the students are from a … working-class background without much family structure” and that they are “very honest in that they know they’re not going
to be brain surgeons” and “pretty aware of their academic strengths? Um, limitations?”
(Jane, Interview). Like the other teachers’, Jane’s construction of the school—which she
names as “full of unfulfilled potential”—remains consistent throughout the interview: the
school and its populations are anomalous in her experience (Jane).

Perhaps the starkest expressions of a strategy of Othering through a discourse of
difference in response to initial general questions about the sites are in Pat’s and Tony’s
talk. At Site A, Pat responds to the question with laughter. When this is noted he says,

Well, I should laugh. It’s an inner city, composite school, with a lot of the
challenges that come with that. Very high ethnic Portuguese population
with all the challenges that come with that. Situated right on the subway
line. Where you have 70 to 75 per cent of your kids working part-time or
full-time. Where you have a very bad attendance record. (Pat, Interview)

Aside from the laughter—which could, arguably, be read in a variety of ways—Pat’s
construction is notable for spontaneously taking up ethnicity and urbaneness in explicitly
negative ways.

Tony describes the school as “multicultural” and possessed of a large population
of students identified as requiring special education support and English as a Second
Language (ESL) students (Tony, Interview). Like Anne, the other teacher at Site B, Tony
notes that they must contend with challenges that are not there at other schools.

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30 No further attempt to clarify the meaning of Pat’s laughter about his school was made.
The possible readings of his laughter and the explanation he provides range from an
expression of frustration with the challenges posed by his work to outright contempt
toward the institution and his students. In the balance of the interview Pat articulates
multiple and contradictory views about his school and his students. They appear to cover
the range of these possibilities.

31 For more on Tony’s use the term “multicultural,” see Chapter 4. Tony and other
teachers use the term interchangeably with “racial” and “ethnic.” In their speech these
terms are usually the antonyms for “Canadian.”

32 IPRC’d, in the jargon of Ontario schooling, names a student who has been the subject
of an Individual Placement and Review Committee, the body which decides on special
services identification.
Occasionally they contrast their school to another, using a standard of comparison defined by geography, ethnicity, class and student ability; at other times, they compare it to an implied, usually unnamed, ‘normal’ school.33

Anne describes her school as “a happy school … a warm inviting school” where the students have “a variety of issues: emotional, financial, cognitive.” The school has been “very successful at taking care of the underdog” (Anne, Interview). This construction is articulated to the largely silent (and silenced) construction of another—a normal—school in which students are not “underdogs,” but able and “competitive” (Anne). At Anne’s school, then, “students [have] a variety of issues: emotional, financial, cognitive” (Anne) and “come from, in general, a strata of society that is economically depressed. Most of [their] parents are fairly recent immigrants, actually to Canada. Working class, lower economic bracket” (Anne). The community has “lost confidence” in Anne’s school and sends a majority of students who are “Special Needs, IPRC’d”34 (Anne). Anne expresses concerns about her school being populated “way out of proportion” [Anne’s emphasis] with English as a Second Language students. The school “has an insurmountable job” (Anne). Anne appears to construct her entire school as outside the norm.

The ease and speed with which all the teachers in the study take up categories and constructions of difference to place their school and their students outside the norm

33 A “normal” school in teacher constructions throughout is white and middle-class.
34 In Ontario, IPRC stands for Individual Placement and Review Committee. This is the legally constituted body charged with identification, placement and review of students entitled to special education support, accommodation and/or program modification.
suggests the operation of a distinct discursive deployment\textsuperscript{35} (Popkewitz, 1998). The presence and operation of another construction, silenced and implicit, that of the ‘normal’ school, is just as important. It is against this largely silenced standard of comparison that teachers construct their current schools. In some cases, they have themselves taught in a more ‘normal’ school or schools. In others, the figure is taken up from readily available common-sense talk about schools and schooling or from the teachers’ own experience as students.

*The normal school*

Re-constructed from teacher talk, in which the figure of the abnormal school is prominent, that normative school would appear to be a comprehensive school, with a ‘balanced’\textsuperscript{36} student population composed of a majority of academic students, usually located in a suburb, with a racially homogenous (white), middle-class student population. In teachers’ views, such a school would be able to do its work without adapting to the specialized and, in their constructions, overwhelming needs of students in schools like those at Sites A and B. Rather, it could be rigorous in its academic demands. A “normal” school would have “students from all academic levels of ability and social abilities” (Anne). In Stephen’s view it would have “the majority of students … being academically inclined … a good command of language and literacy and numeracy” (Stephen). These students would be university bound as opposed to workplace oriented (Stephen).

\textsuperscript{35} See Blackmore (1999), above, who names this deployment as a mercantile, late-Capitalist effort with specific and narrow interests.

\textsuperscript{36} The concept of ‘balance’ applied to student populations and related to student placement in academic streams is taken up by every teacher in this study. Each teacher posits a ‘normal’ ‘balance’ as including a predominance of university-bound students. This is arguably at odds with proportions of educational attainment in the areas the schools serve as well as in the school district to which they belong, even when the data for a broader population is assessed (C. o. Toronto, 2006a, 2006b).
Teacher Identity and Investments

Teacher identity is uniformly rooted as middle-class. This identification is not affected by their histories and class identifications as children. Two of the teachers interviewed for the study point to working-class, immigrant childhoods (Tony, Maria). Two name their childhoods as working-class (Pat, Jane). The balance refer to middle-class childhoods. All however, claim middle-class status and, arguably, view their students through the lens of that status and position. In their discussion of student work ethic and motivation (see chapters 3-5) teachers point to a deficiency in the student that is contrasted to their own possession of both (Joy, Tony, Jane, Lydia, Pat).

Teachers compare their present school to others. In some cases they have either taught in or attended these schools (Stephen, Alex, Tony, Jane, Lydia); in others, they make the comparison to well known local schools (Pat, Maria, Joy). In all instances, their current school suffers in the comparison. Teachers identify with both schools and students who are academically more successful.

Ethnicity and race are raised in teacher talk about their school (Stephen, Joy, Tony, Jane, Maria, Lydia, Anne, Pat), sometimes in an explicit comparison to other schools (Joy, Tony, Jane, Lydia, Anne, Pat). In the process, teachers assert an identity for themselves in which categories of ethnicity and race are silenced. In one case, the teacher identifies with a WASP ethnicity, despite his Italo-Canadian heritage (Tony).

Teachers reveal personal and professional investments that are multiple and often contradictory. Teacher talk about their schools and students is explicit about a desire for
greater academic success in the institution37 (Alex, Joy, Tony, Jane, Maria, Lydia, Anne, Pat). Teacher talk about their desire for a “better clientele” (Pat), for more “committed” students (Joy, Lydia) and for students who are more compliant (Joy, Tony, Maria) is evidence of both personal and professional investment in the success of their students and, by extension, of their own success.

Teachers appear to be personally invested in positive relationships with their students. With individual exceptions (Stephen, Alex, Anne), these investments are in relationships with successful and compliant students. In each case, Stephen, Alex and Anne are conscious of the anomaly of investing personally in relationship with a less successful student.

The Student

In their discussion of their understanding of student success and failure, teachers take up a discourse which places a normative group of successful students in juxtaposition to another, a marginal and anomalous group of unsuccessful students.38 A composite description39 of each group, derived from teacher talk, follows.

The normative (successful) student

Teachers construct successful students as normative. It is against that normative figure that they measure all students. Successful students “work at the university level”

37 See below for teachers’ strategies for accounting for student failure.
38 In the two sections that follow a composite description of successful and unsuccessful students is developed. While each informant speaks from a different position, their talk is both internally and externally congruent. That is, they articulate constructions of both successful and unsuccessful students that are ‘of-a-piece’ with each other, whether within an interview or across different interviews with different informants.
39 In compiling these composite ‘descriptions,’ I have tried to avoid teacher utterances that are idiosyncratic to an individual. Where an articulation has pertinent counter-discursive elements, I have included it and commented on it.
(Maria). They are university-bound (Stephen). They are “thoughtful, reflective [and] put a lot of [themselves] in [their] work.” They are “enthusiastic readers… [and] really interested in writing” (Maria). Successful students “are patient” (Maria). They “have self-control” (Jane). They have “high standards for [them]selves.” “They explore things on a level much beyond the norm” (Alex). They are connected (Maria). They have an “intrinsic drive to succeed” (Anne). They go to “high school because they want to learn” and “are [in school] for the sheer … acquisition of skills or knowledge” (Lydia). They “are goal oriented … like being a lawyer or a doctor” (Tony). They are “mature and creative students, independent thinkers” (Jane). They are “where they should be and [know] where they should be and [want] to go to university and [want] to do the best they possibly [can]” (Lydia). They “have the work ethic” (Jane). “They have a desire to graduate” (Anne). They “are committed to learning” (Tony). These students are motivated.40 Successful students have “self-confidence. They are confident enough in their abilities to [be able to take personal] risk[s]” (Joy).41 They are “very inquisitive” (Tony).

They are good time managers (Joy, Alex) and are “your typical Type A personality” (Joy). This allows successful students to access extra-curricular activities and sports, which are themselves constructed as being productive of student success (Joy, Lydia). Successful students are so “regardless of what teacher is in the classroom” (Joy). Their behaviour is appropriate to the situation (Alex). They have “academic maturity or just maturity in general” (Alex). They make connections between their lives and their

40 The discursive articulation of student motivation pervades teacher talk and is examined in detail in Chapter 4.
41 ‘Confidence’ in the successful student is also named by Jane, Joy, Stephen, Anne and Lydia.
studies and “don’t compartmentalize” (Alex). They respond well to the teacher’s “different tones or moods” (Alex). They have a “good sense of humour and very good interpersonal skills” (Pat).

Family involvement, attention and expectations are key factors in the production of successful students: students who come “from a different environment, where their homework had been monitored and … instilled with the idea from day one that they were going to go on to college and university and graduate” are successful (Anne). Successful students “have family support” (Anne). Their parents “do everything to encourage [their] education” (Maria). They “value education” (Maria). Students who succeed “invest themselves [in school] and get something back for that investment. Either praise or positive reinforcement from teachers and parents…. They are more than likely … to come from what we call middle-class background, have more of a model in front of them” (Maria). Or, more directly, “they are middle-class” (Maria). If their “parents both went to university [they] are going to be encouraged” to succeed in school (Pat). “[T]hey have been nurtured and exposed to a lot of stimulation, a lot of luxuries” (Anne). They have a “breadth of experience” (Alex). Joy points to the importance of the “home situation. Are they coming home to a parent or two parents who are themselves motivated and make the kids do their homework and interested in what is happening?”42 (Joy). These parents are “interested in what the student is doing, attend parents’ night, pick them up from school, drop them off at school. [They] are more involved that way” [emphasis in informant’s speech] (Joy). Parents of successful students “understand the

42 The construction of motivation as a quality of the middle-class is worthy of note here. See Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.
Canadian educational system, because they were brought up in it or they are interested in it. They want to know more about because they are new to the country” [sic] (Jane).

Successful students are “polite and they’re well-groomed, but they are very functional” with [the teacher]” (Anne). They are compliant and “do everything the teacher tells [them] and [they] follow her instructions (Maria). They are “connected” to the teacher and this can be flattering to the teacher (Anne). They “are appreciative of what [the teacher is] doing for them” (Tony). Alex points out, with a critical tone, that often “these are traditional kinds of students that please teachers. They’ve learned to follow the rules and do as they’re asked and smile” (Alex). They are “clever and fun and witty” (Jane). They have a motivating effect on the teacher (Anne). They “have good social skills, especially in dealing with adults… so teachers like them” (Maria). They “know how to deal with adults in a way that results in positive outcomes” (Maria). They are often constructed as having gained this ability from their exposure to organized sport and other activities: they “are taught certain social skills and even like general knowledge skills that [they] might not learn in a classroom … by being involved with twenty other people at girl guides or whatever. Life skills” (Joy). They are “good team players” (Pat).

Successful students “identify with the system” (Maria). They “are willing to raise questions” (Maria). They respond to teachers’ interests: “they have the background knowledge” (Maria). They come to learning with “skills that [the teacher does] not have”

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43 Anne appears to use this word to point to a commodified relationship between successful students and their teachers: in her view, many successful students are clearly focused on gaining a credit, a mark and credentials and see the teacher as a means to a goal. Unsuccessful students are more focused on a personal relationship with the teacher. The role of Eros in the teacher-student relation is mentioned in Chapter 4 and again in Chapter 5.

44 Compliance is explicitly named by several teachers (Pat, Jane, Anne, Tony).
(Pat). These students behave appropriately. They “always do homework, put up their hands, answer questions in class, come up to the desk [to] ask questions if they don’t understand even the slightest little thing.” (Joy). Unlike unsuccessful students, they are not primarily social:45

They are always on topic and very seldom interact with other students during a lesson …. They are listening and are taking notes and I notice that they take notes [and] if I say something they’ll write down on the page, even if I haven’t written it down on the board. (Joy).

While ethnicity generally marks unsuccessful students (see below), the category is occasionally taken up by teachers in their descriptions of successful students. Joy chooses an “Asian” and a “Portuguese” student, both female, as two exemplary successful students. She adds, however, that the Portuguese student has “a Portuguese last name, but she doesn’t look Portuguese” (Joy).46 Tony chooses a Chinese student as an example of one of his better students. This student is “offered all kinds of opportunities” and “supported” at Site B. He is, perhaps, “the top math student in the province” (Tony).

Ability or intelligence may be a “limiting” factor in student success, but Maria does not “think intelligence is the determining factor, like family or culture” (Maria). In other teachers’ views successful students are “very, very bright” (Anne). Joy thinks that “students who are less intelligent but have the same drive … are very disciplined and come from a very disciplined background” will still be successful (Joy).

45 Teachers do not broach the topic of successful students’ “happiness” as they do for unsuccessful students. See the next section.
46 There may be a racial hierarchy in the operative discourse, here. Tony points to the school’s top math scholar’s (a male this time) ethnicity as “oriental” (Tony). As discussed in the following chapter, he takes up a discourse of racial difference more freely when dealing with lack of success.
The Other (unsuccessful) student

Unsuccessful students study at the Essential/Workplace or Applied/College level and not at the (normative) Academic/University level (Maria, Stephen, Alex, Tony, Joy, Jane, Anne, Pat). There is a “gap between them and the school” (Maria). Tony observes that “they don’t fit into the curriculum” (Tony). “They don’t have the language skills. They don’t have the organizational skills” (Maria).

Joy points out that “Not everybody has the same mental ability” (Joy). Alex, alone among the others, differs: “They all have ability,” while “their “academic skills lag behind” (Alex). These students are hesitant to use what skills they have, for fear of failure (Alex). In fact, they often have better skills than they realize (Alex). Their lack of confidence is often the result of “the institution and teachers” “knock[ing] it out of them” (Alex). They “lack self-esteem” (Jane). Pat offers he is “convinced every kid has ability” (Pat). Later in his interview, however, Pat reverses himself: “I think it is ability, when you’re dealing with something that’s finite as math or science. Or an ESL kid that doesn’t have the control of the language with a pen” (Pat).

Unsuccessful students’ lack of organizational skills is articulated to poor attendance (Joy, Pat, Lydia) and poor preparation (Joy, Pat, Jane). Poor attendance is a recurring theme in teacher accounts of student failure. This is often paired with

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47 Largely silenced as a factor in the production of student success and failure, “ability” is only occasionally named as such in teacher talk. See the previous section for teacher denials of ability and intelligence as significant factors in student success and failure.
48 Alone among the informants, Alex points to the effects of this lack of skills in the student as a lack of comfort in the classroom and a feeling of “being out of their element.” He is also the only informant who holds the teacher and the school responsible for this state of affairs as well as for its amelioration.
49 This is far from an isolated instance of multiple and contradictory talk. I try to report the salient articulations in teacher talk, while adverting to its multiplicity.
complaints about parental lack of involvement with the school or the student (Pat, Joy, Jane, Anne, Stephen). So “attendance [is] a major problem … and contacts to home. Usually, the student answers the phone. No parent at home, that kind of stuff. No work ever done.” (Joy). These students “don’t do their homework [and] they tend to skip classes” (Jane). “Parents of unsuccessful student “don’t have any control at home” (Joy).

The unsuccessful student’s family is a factor in the production of failure. On several occasions, teachers choose students who have a “single parent, abusive family” (Pat) as examples of lack of success (also Stephen, Anne, and Tony). Unsuccessful students eat a poor diet (Stephen, Joy, Pat) and they appear to do so by consuming expensive fast food despite having fewer means (Joy). They have diminished access to health and dental care (Joy). They “come from broken families” (Pat). They “come from a house where there is not a single book in the house” (Pat). Unsuccessful students’ “parents aren’t pushing them to go to college” (Jane). So students who need to work after school “to help support their family or to have spending money … less time is spent on school work or they’re tired from work and so they can’t do their homework” (Joy). Contrasting the families of unsuccessful students to those of successful students, Joy says they have a “parent or parents who might be working night shift, so they’re not there when the kids get home and there’s a little bit less control at home” (Joy). Family

50 Poor attendance is named a characteristic of unsuccessful students by every teacher in the study (Stephen, Alex, Joy, Tony, Jane, Maria, Lydia, Anne). In most cases students and their families are held solely responsible for this deficit.
51 See the next section for a discussion of “family” as a deficit in teacher constructions of unsuccessful students.
52 See the previous section for a discussion of the importance assigned to sport and extra-curricular activities. The next chapter addresses the discourse of class teachers take up in these constructions. See also Annette Lareau’s work on social class and schooling (Lareau, 2003).
influence goes well beyond the production of disposition in the student: financial
challenges in the family mean that students are excluded from extra-curriculars and sports
(Joy).\textsuperscript{53}

In much of teacher talk, student identification for special education support is both cause and explanation for lack of success. Unsuccessful students are “Special Ed” and “have a lot of exceptionalities” (Anne). This leads to a general failure in the school: “[it’s] reflected in the school’s ability to perform: … the band’s ability to play, … the art that’s produced, … the level of projects that you see…..” (Anne). These students are “behavioural” (Anne).\textsuperscript{54} In Joy’s talk the unsuccessful and the identified student appear to be synonymous: “They have something holding them back. Like, there’s learning disability, mild intellectual disability. All those IPRCs” (Joy). And,

I think part of that stems from, they’ve been, like ‘identified’ by some paper test that they have lower intellectual…. It’s almost like, ‘Wow, why should I even try? Because everybody thinks I’m stupid anyway’…. I’ve heard that a lot, ‘No, it doesn’t matter miss: I’m stupid.’ (Joy).

Alex takes up the theme of taught inability: “They’ve literally been told and then, from their experience, come to the conclusion, that they can’t do it. And it’s part of them being labelled as ‘Resource’ or ‘Identified’ ” (Alex). Lydia wonders whether lack of success may be the result of “years and years of frustration, to the point where they fell they just can’t do it” (Lydia). These students often “don’t know how to read and write” in grade

\textsuperscript{53} There is widespread, if often implicit, agreement that participation in extra-curriculars and sports is both evidence of as well as a factor in student success.

\textsuperscript{54} While poor behaviour or the label “behavioural” as an identified exceptionality is taken up by every teacher in the sample either implicitly or explicitly, Alex begins his description of an unsuccessful student with the observation that “for [him] it’s not behaviour” that marks the unsuccessful student. This conscious and deliberate clarification names an articulation with much currency in schools and stakes out the ground for a possible counter-discursive articulation.
nine (Lydia, Tony). IPRC’d students are constructed as having working- or lower-class membership and anomalous family situations: “These would be lower economic kids. Maybe one parent. Or even live with one aunt or uncle” (Joy).

Unsuccessful students have “an antagonistic attitude toward the teacher” (Maria). “They check themselves out. Whatever. They are not there” (Maria). “[They] are not invested” (Maria). These students do not get “a sense of who they are as people” from the school and do not “connect” (Maria). Their failure to comply goes hand-in-hand with a “complete disrespect for authority in terms of talking back, constant defiance, constant neglect of duty, not going to class, … vandalism” (Anne). Lack of compliance with school rules and behavioural expectations means that students in this group are often expelled from the school (Joy). The failure to respond to special assistance from the teacher is a marker of failure: working with even “the most brilliant kid, but … then to see him disappear, I think that’s the worst case scenario you can have” (Pat).

Unsuccessful students are named as “first generation Portuguese, immigrant” (Maria) and of “lower socio-economic cultures” (Joy). “They don’t speak English…. [They speak] Portuguese or Spanish” (Joy). They are “fairly recent immigrants” (Anne). They have “working-class parents” (Maria). They do not “receive much support at home” (Maria). They “tend to hang out with kids that are the same cultural or economic background” (Joy). Sometimes they sport “colour bandanas, hats” (Joy). While teachers do not point to gang membership a marker of unsuccessful students, some allude to the

55 Joy’s account brings to mind Michelle Fine’s (1991) and Signithia Fordham’s (1996) work on dropout and pushout.
56 Relationship and Eros are recurring themes in teacher accounts of student success and failure. A full discussion of this aspect of teacher talk is beyond the scope of the present effort. See (Britzman, 1991, 2010; R. I. Simon, 1992; Trethewey, 2004).
57 Not a single teacher remarks about successful students’ social preference.
possibility: “I don’t know what they all mean. Bloods, Crypts” (Joy), but they do appear to gather in “cultural cliques” (Joy).

Emotional states and challenges are markers of unsuccessful students. “Depression” is a factor in the production of student failure (Maria). Parents of unsuccessful students describe them as “lazy” (Maria). These students have “deep emotional problems,” they are “the most dysfunctional kids in the community” and come from dysfunctional families” (Anne). Some unsuccessful students have “severe emotional instabilities” due to “a lack of love” (Anne). As a result of personal and family challenges, students may not have “the emotional conditions that allow them to integrate in the school: EQ [emotional intelligence] is more important in succeeding than IQ” (Anne). Family dynamics are at root of good or poor EQ (Anne). Students may be unsuccessful as a result of addiction (Anne) or drug use (Jane). These students are “street-wise kids in terms of alcohol, sex, whatever....” (Pat).

Unsuccessful students “drop out”,58 because they are not invested in the school or what it has to offer (Maria). These students “do not invest themselves in school” like “middle-class students” (Maria). School “is boring to them, because they don’t have enough of a context to see how [the offerings of schooling] can fit into some other experiences or can be connected with other experiences” (Maria). “They appear to me to be less curious” (Maria). These students “do not have a natural, easy fit with the culture

58 Teacher talk in the data gathered for this study does not name or advert to any dynamic of “push-out” (George Jerry Sefa Dei, et al., 1995; Fine, 1991; Gambetta, 1996). Such a dynamic may or may not be operative in the two schools despite teacher silence on the subject. Signithia Fordham frames the issue as a function of the match between teacher and student (Fordham, 1996). Read through this lens, teacher talk does give evidence of exclusionary effects. Kelly and Gaskell point to the persistence of a discourse of difference in the production of the drop-out, across a historically shifting language practice (Kelly & Gaskell, 1996).
of literacy” (Maria). Instead, they “value … social interaction skills” (Maria). Their poor fit with the dominant culture of the school means “that they are insecure, so always need reinforcement or attention from other kids in the class. So that they are not focussed.” (Joy). Unsuccessful students “don’t want to work to their capability … they’re very happy with a 50” (Pat). They are “not committed to education” (Pat, Lydia) and want “the get [their] diploma and [their] fifty per cent for every credit and get out and go to the workforce” (Lydia). They need to be “motivated” to go to class, “motivate[ed] to want more than just the credit” (Lydia). These students are “unrealistic” about their prospects and their futures (Lydia, Jane). They do not hope for post-secondary education (Jane, Lydia, Pat, Stephen).

Unsuccessful students are possessed of different desires: they want to “go to world of work” (Joy, Lydia, Jane). They move quickly from schooling to employment and are “motivated by cash” (Stephen). They hope to be mechanics (Lydia), construction workers and plumbers (Joy, Jane). These students have low academic expectations so they do not complete assignments and “say ‘Am I passing?’” as a gauge of their own progress (Jane). They desire “graduation, … the black hat and some fancy shoes that they buy at the mall. Their parents take a video and it is the most monumentous (sic) thing that has happened in their lives since confirmation” (Jane). They “are not going on to college and graduate” (Jane). Their families expose them to the possibility of earning a living in a trade, so they opt out of post-secondary education (Stephen).
More than one teacher describes unsuccessful students as “very happy” (e.g. Maria and Anne). This happiness appears to exist in the student despite their academic failure and disengagement. These students are happiest being social: “what [they] enjoy about school is being around other people” (Maria). Unsuccessful students are more invested in social activities other than academic ones. These students may be engaged in “folkloric music” and “work in crafts” (Maria), or other activities labelled as “social” by teachers (Tony, Maria, Pat, Jane). “Social” is juxtaposed to “engaged” or “academic” in teacher talk. “School, for [unsuccessful students] is socialization [sic]” (Pat). Implicit in the juxtaposition is the construction of different (and certainly diminished) expectations for unsuccessful, happy, social students. This construction is both classed and raced. Teachers invariably name raced (also ethnic) and classed students when they point to happy, social students who are disengaged from academic pursuit.

In teacher talk, unsuccessful students benefit more than their successful classmates from good teachers and good teaching. Joy proposes that “the teacher makes the difference for the middle-of-the-road kids and the kids who are less successful…. [T]he teacher provides a consistent controlled environment for learning” (Joy). Several teachers name the relationship between the student and the teacher as an important factor (Stephen, Alex, Joy, Jane, Lydia, Anne, Pat). Jane names low expectations on the part of the teacher as a factor in student lack of success (Jane).

While largely silenced in teacher talk, the unsuccessful student’s economic and social challenges are occasionally articulated. Anne points to students’

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59 Anne describes her whole school as “very happy.” This happiness goes hand in hand with lack of success, a challenged and challenging student population and a failure on the part of the school to “succeed at anything” (Anne).
basic needs. And there are kids who have a hard time satisfying even food, water and shelter. Like, we have kids here who live in shelters and live from shelter to shelter. And the shelter system is completely overwhelmed. And you have to go from shelter to shelter to shelter for about three months before you literally become a client of the shelter organization (Anne).

Anne also points to the challenges of family tragedy and the lack of social and economic supports: “one parent who was the primary wage earner or the only wage earner dies. And there’s no money coming into the family in social assistance and the Ontario Works program doesn’t provide enough money for that family to carry on” (Anne). Pat also adverts to financial challenges as a challenge in unsuccessful students’ lives, but quickly states that “most kids work for the dollars, so they can buy the clothes or the car” (Pat).

Jane and Stephen observe that students work to support peripheral needs, rather than as a result of personal or family economic need (Jane, Stephen). Stephen says he has observed a decline in the number students who “need to work,” but not a concomitant decline in those who chose to work (Stephen).

**Deficits in the Other**

The exposition of teacher constructions of unsuccessful students in the previous section serves as evidence of the operation of a discourse of Othering. Articulated as a deficit in the student, it is taken up by teachers to account for student failure. Teachers’ accounts of student success and failure often turn to intellectual, emotional and social competencies. The articulation of these deficits by teachers in this study places responsibility for student failure firmly on the student, simultaneously exonerating teachers and schools. The onus for student success and failure in every descriptor identified in the preceding sections is on the student: it is what the student brings to the school that makes for success and lack of success, rather than anything the school or the
teacher has to offer. This may strike the reader as self-evident, and it certainly appears to strike the teacher informants in the study that way. The effect on students who do not fit the appropriate aggregate of qualities, however, is profound. It is this dynamic of construction and relationship that places the student beyond the influence of the teacher and the school, reproduces social structures and exonerates professionals and institutions of responsibility for righting the inherent individual and social inequity. In this power relation the effect on the student outside the norm is exclusion. Discursively, this strategy creates an Other who is beyond reason, redemption and relationship (Popkewitz, 1998).

Successful students are those already possessed of the skills and knowledge they need to succeed. They are the students who are interested in what school has to offer and know how to manage busy schedules. They are students engaged in creative endeavours. They are students who come to school prepared, with a clear sense of the distinction

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60 I discuss this complex of effects in the last chapter and try to point to some possible means of resistance, disruption and reform.
61 The production of this irrational Other is discussed in this chapter and in Chapter 5. I use the term ‘rational,’ throughout, as the adjectival form the noun ‘reason.’ ‘Rational,’ ‘reason’ and ‘reasonable,’ then, are largely interchangeable in this text. See Popkewitz (1998) for the theoretical source of this usage.
62 Reason in the student is the precondition of success. Only rational students take up the offers of teachers and schools. Indeed, rationality is constructed by teachers in this study as located and perhaps even produced by the intersection of compliance, membership in normative groups (ethnic, racial, social, gender) and the acceptance of that same offer. I discuss the evidence of this articulation of rationality in this chapter and in Chapter 5. Popkewitz (1998), after Foucault, discusses the uses of a discourse of rationality in the production of an Other. Pastorality and the redemption of this Other from an extra-normative and therefore suspect position (subjectivity) are made impossible, in a viciously circular discursive move, by the Other’s very lack of rationality, excusing practitioner and institution of responsibility. Teachers repeatedly, if obliquely, point to unsuccessful student’s lack of reason. This takes form, in teacher constructions, of the student having the ‘wrong’ goals, habits, economic strategy, priorities, likes and dislikes. See below for direct references to study data.
between work and play (but are still able to mix both). They are students who regularly
do their work. They are interested in what school has to offer. They respond positively to
teachers. They are also students named by teachers as “middle-class,” “goal-oriented”
and already engaged.

Unsuccessful students appear to teachers to be unable to manage their school,
work and private lives. They are interested in a “social” life at the expense of an
academic and economic one. Their interests are focused on the immediate and the
concrete. They are emotional. They are unrealistic about their goals. They are
immigrants, ethnic, ESL and raced. Importantly, they are not “middle-class,” but, for
example, “come from lower socio-economic cultures” (Joy). This complex construction
of unsuccessful student identity makes them Other, unaccountable, inscrutable and
unreasonable. In the eyes of the teacher the mismatch between the student’s habits,
disposition and aims is the evidence for the student’s lack of reason, accountability and
transparency of disposition. Differently framed, it is the student’s failure to take a
position as a normative neo-liberal subject eager to accept the offers of teachers and
schooling that produces a subject beyond reason and explanation.

The discourse teachers take up uncritically to account for student success and
failure is itself productive of those very outcomes. Students who are constructed as
successful will benefit from the construction, while those constructed as unsuccessful are
relegated to failure by the alternate construction. They stand outside the field of academic
success as a function of their lack of reason,63 their membership in marginal groups and

63 As in Lydia’s explicit assessment of students as “unreasonable” in their post-secondary
goals. Pat says that the majority of students in his school “think with their hearts”. Jane
their essential deficiencies. These deficiencies are evident in teacher deficit construction of students in three primary categories: race (conflated in teacher talk with ethnicity and culture), class and family. In teachers’ articulations these deficits intersect. They are discussed individually, below, in an attempt at some clarity. The intersection of the deficits of race, class and family in teacher talk and teachers’ constructions of their students is consistent with their personal and professional investments and with power relations in the neo-liberal, post-capitalist society. These power relations are themselves effects of power through discourse.

Race and ethnicity

In teacher talk, race—alternatively and interchangeably named ‘ethnicity,’ ‘culture’ and even ‘multicultural’—figures prominently as an explanation for student failure. As noted above, the category is silenced (with telling exceptions) in accounts of student success. Teachers are reluctant to breach social conventions in their talk about race, but manage to work the category into their accounts. So, as Anne says, “racial lines” are productive of a better or worse fit with schools and schooling (Anne): “there are some races that seem to, you know, I mean. You can. Family dynamics can be identified and generalized according to race, so there are certain cultural systems that actually work against their child’s ability to do well at school” (Anne).
Lydia, Joy, Pat and Jane name Portuguese students as unlikely to succeed. Jane notes that Portuguese “boys want a blue Honda and that Portuguese girls want a ride in the blue Honda, more than education” (Jane). Jane points to the preponderance of Portuguese students among the unsuccessful and posits a causal relationship between their ethnicity and their lack of success. Lydia observes that “Portuguese students … a lot of the boys would say, ‘Oh. I’m just going to work construction with my dad” (Lydia). Lydia makes a clear link between ethnic origin and the choice to refuse the offerings of schooling and teachers. Joy volunteers that lack of success and race/culture/ethnicity are causally linked. Pat names the school risible and unsuccessful as a function of its immigrant and ethnic (specifically Portuguese) student body. He names genetics and race as factor in the production of motivation (Pat). Anne argues a causal link between “racial lines” and student failure, singling out Caribbean students as an example (Anne). Tony goes further (see Chapter 4) and names race and genetics as firmly linked to student success and failure (Tony). Stephen, most reluctant among the informants to propose or accept any kind of causal link for student success and failure, hazards that there may be a “genetic” link with motivation in the student (Stephen).

What is in question, here, is not the validity of the observations teachers make about race/ culture/ethnicity as a factor in student success and failure, although there are certainly observations in the data for the study that—certainly for this writer—cry out for

\[66\] See Chapter 4 for a detailed account of Anne’s talk in this respect, but in the context of a discussion about student motivation. See, also, Family, for more talk from Anne about racial deficit as articulated to family deficit.

\[67\] Stephen avoids positing a causal link for student success and failure in a pointed, painstaking manner. Asked at the end of the interview to speak to anything of relevance that the interview may have missed, he states his reluctance to assign reasons for human behaviour to any one cause, especially social or economic.
argument and correction. What is significant, rather, is that teachers take up the
category from a variety of available discursive articulations as practically adequate
(Miles, 1989) to satisfy their investments. Importantly, teachers are willing to breach
dominant mores, with no prompting from the researcher, to take up deficit explanations
of student failure. This willingness—sometimes tentative, sometimes open and
deliberate—to name race and ethnicity or class as explanatory of student success and
failure is coherent with the need to reconcile personal and professional investments
informed by inclusive liberal discourse with the evident failure to meet success with
certain identifiable groups of students. Ironically, the strategy has a self-fulfilling
prophecy effect.

Of even greater significance is the effect of this discursive move on the student.
While cultural factors may well contribute to a mismatch between schools and students,
placing the burden of adaptation and accommodation entirely on the student contributes
to the justification of their failure—indeed, may make it a predictable and foregone
conclusion—and does nothing to open the ground for change, intervention or
amelioration. This is of particular importance in a diverse, immigrant society. Implicit in
the discursive articulation of racial deficit is the assertion that membership in an ethnic or
racial group other than “Anglo-Saxon” (Tony) is itself a deficit. Against that dominant
and normative figure all others are deficient.

68 Teacher informants produce a broad range of talk about their professional and, on
ocasion, personal investments. See above, in this chapter. Of relevance, here, is the
commonality among the informants of a stated concern with students’ academic success,
of a clear investment in the success of the institution (framed in terms of its survival in
the face of declining enrolment), of their reputation in the community, and of the
resolution of the tension resulting from the manifest goal of the institution to provide
academic success and social and economic equity to its students and their lack of success
to produce that for large and predictable groups.
Class

I have pointed to the alacrity with which teachers take up a discourse of class. Whether in their initial description of the schools in which they teach (Joy, Pat, Stephen, Jane, Anne, Maria, Alex, Lydia, Tony) or in their articulation of other markers of failure to working or lower-class membership, each teacher names this a deficiency. Joy’s conflation of ethnicity, working-class membership and family flaws is, perhaps, the clearest exposition of the articulation of this category of deficit to others: “I feel racist saying it, but a lot of the lower socio-economic cultures: like the parents haven’t graduated from high school or gone to college and university, so maybe it’s the generalized attitude at home” (Joy). Joy also points out students who are not bound for post-secondary education are “lower economic kids” (Joy).

Tony is most explicit in his assessment of social class as a determinant of student success or failure: “Well some kids stay within their class. I mean they, you know they don’t have any aspirations. I mean you know, if your mother’s a hooker, you might wanna be a hooker too, you know. If your dad’s a doctor, you might wanna end to be a doctor” (Tony). Tony clearly articulates social class to family as a deficit productive of failure. Lydia points to working-class membership as productive of diminished goals in students and Jane supports that view in her disappointed account of working-class students refusal of post-secondary education (Lydia, Jane). Mary’s assessment of successful students as middle-class implies the converse: an assessment of lower- or working-class students as unsuccessful. She points to a deficiency in working-class

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69 See the section *The Sites*, in Chapter 2.
70 She also provides the clearest expression of the intersection of these three categories.
71 See Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of Tony’s utterance.
students which manifests itself as “a poor fit with the system” and no “investment in the culture of literacy” (Mary).

The student’s membership in the working-class, “lower classes,” “lower economic” class or “lower socio-economic cultures” is named a deficit she or he cannot surmount. Only one teacher raises the possibility that this may not indeed be a deficit or that it can be addressed so that it does not impede academic success. In the balance of the interviews, membership in this social group is posited as a factor of failure. Whether this is the result of a mismatch between the school’s offerings (Mary, Stephen, Lydia, Jane, Pat, Tony), the production of wrongheaded desires in the student (Stephen, Pat, Joy, Lydia, Jane) or the effects of deprivation (Anne, Stephen) remains beside the point so long as the deficit is assessed to be intractable and essential. Teachers do not question the value of institutional offerings for classed students. Neither do they raise the possibility of a review or change in these same offerings.

Family

The families of unsuccessful students are, similarly, named deficient by all but one of the informants for this study. Mary points to families in which children are allowed to “come in hungry, tired, not well slept. This is the adult world: being allowed to roam around the streets [like] an adult. Studying ‘til two in the morning with no

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72 Alex goes some way in his denial of difference in terms of class, while naming it as a category. Along with the others, he names class a factor of academic success. Alone among the informants, he explicitly refuses it as a strict determinant.

73 Alex is, once more, the proponent of a different discourse. In Alex’s view, while parents may “want their kids to do well at school, what they’re modelling says otherwise” as they assign work a very high value. This “may not be their fault” and “it’s easier for the schools to screw things up … it’s a lot more difficult than we think for the parents” (Alex).
parental intervention. Sleep over at boyfriend’s house” (Anne).74 The contrasting images in Mary’s talk (hunger, lack of supervision, sleeping out and *studying into the early morning*) notwithstanding, the clear import of her words is to blame the family for a lack of structure and care. Joy, Pat and Lydia name the inaccessibility of parents as a factor in student absenteeism and academic failure. Stephen points to chores and childcare duties assigned to children in some families as a deficit. He and Joy point to poor diet as factor in student failure. Each of these factors is attached to a deficiency in the family. Lydia regrets that unsuccessful students do not receive “that extra push” from their families (Lydia).

Family deficit is beyond the scope of a teacher’s practice. It has an effect on the student which is discernible in her performance and engagement, but is part of his character. In teacher talk it is a component of the student’s subjectivity. Here again, the teacher and the institution are exonerated. Notably, programs and practices aimed at addressing the effects of the deficits teachers construct in unsuccessful students and their families are never raised by these same teachers. No mention or suggestion is made that the schools could promote engagement with their offerings through practices which bring teacher and student together outside the classroom (breakfast clubs are one possible example). Indeed, their students are beyond engagement: teachers’ accounts are aimed at

74 Talk about race intersects with talk about family deficit: “there are just family dynamics in different races that prepare a child more appropriately for the traditional school environment.” “If you come from a background where, for whatever reason, you have never really been encouraged, trained to subscribe to [the kind of laws and rules that organize schools], you don’t do well in the very structured system [of schooling]” (Anne).
explaining students’ inability to take up teacher and school offerings, rather than a remedy for that posited lack of engagement.

_deficits in other(ed) students_  

Teachers take up a range of explanations in their accounts of student success and failure. In these explanations, teachers offer that students attend or are truant, possess the requisite skills for academic success or lack even the most basic ones, make an effort or not, complete assignments or fail to do them, engage with the curriculum or do not. Their common sense explanations focus on student behaviours, family structures and dynamics, and issues of compliance with institutional demands. Teachers take up a discourse of student Othering through an articulation of deficit to produce these explanations. They offer observations about students and schooling as self-evident and self-explanatory. Their talk implies and explicitly names fundamental deficits in their unsuccessful student subjects. These fit broadly in categories of race, class and family.\(^{75}\) Teachers do not appear to question this ‘order of things.’ Rather, they take up and articulate discourses of deficit as being ‘common-sense’ and beyond examination. Questions about a possible cause for the predictability of student success and failure along the lines of class, race and family do not arise spontaneously in teacher talk. The second part of the interviews for this study probes such questions in an attempt to identify the discursive structure which produce this apparent ‘common-sense.’

\(^{75}\) Silence about gender, even when prompted, is notable in teacher talk produced for this study.
CHAPTER 4

Motivation And Drive

M: Do you think it’s possible to generalize about what…. Could you make some sort of general statement about students who succeed or fail?
S: Uh-m, no, I, no, uh-m, if, I, I think it’s, it’s drive.
M: Well what accounts for some students being driven and others not being driven?
S: You know, *that* I don’t know. That I don’t know. Uh-m. I, I don’t know.
M: Okay.
S: It, it could be innate, uh, it could be, you know, just. It, it could be cultural. It could, I don’t know. It, it could be gen. You know, I was gonna say that it could be genetic. I, I don’t know.

(Stephen)

Probed for their understanding of the reasons for the behaviours, dispositions and deficits of students, teachers—like Stephen in the in the quotation above—seem puzzled. What internal or external factors in schooling, institutional or social structures and personal dynamics might teachers name in an account of students’ behaviour and disposition? What shapes the students’ response to the offerings of teachers and schooling so predictably and uniformly in certain marginal and Othered groups? What might produce the characteristic of failure across the groups of students they name and in the general populations served by the institutions in which they work? What, in teacher talk, might explain students’ ‘choice’ of a position that leads to their success or failure?

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76 As noted above, I understand ‘disposition’ as that effect of subjectivity which produces the individual’s response to an other (and an Other) and shapes their relations (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 27).
77 Teachers construct success and failure in the student as a ‘choice,’ beyond explanation, even when probed in the interviews. This is consistent with a neo-liberal, mercantile discourse in which the subject of capitalist discourse, self-interested and possessed of agency, is proposed (Blackmore, 1999, 2000). See Chapter 5 for a discussion.
As discussed in the previous chapter, discourses of class, race and family deficit, in a variety of congruent, albeit differently positioned, articulations are taken up by teachers to explain the tension between personal, professional and institutional investments. A second set of questions and probes aimed at eliciting articulations of the factors for student success and failure follows the introductory questions that produce much of the data analysed in the previous chapter. In this set of questions and probes (see Appendix A), teachers are asked to account for the apparent predictability of success and failure in groups of students already named, whether implicitly or explicitly, in their talk. These question and probes produce a variety of puzzled and even frustrated responses. At least initially, teachers have difficulty articulating a response. One teacher takes up the question with eagerness, stating that it is both interesting and important (Alex). One teacher repeatedly dodges and even refuses questions and probes, raising his own questions about their intent, import and validity (Stephen). Given enough opportunities, however, every teacher informant offers a possible explanation. Each of these is discursively consistent. 

Moving beyond the Common Sense

While some teachers take up the construct of drive or motivation (the terms are used interchangeably in teacher talk) as a factor for student success and failure at what appears to be a common sense level, it is when pressed for an explanation, a determining factor for student membership in the groups they construct as successful or unsuccessful,

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78 These investments, as evident in the data for this study, are discussed in Chapter 2 and 3.
that all turn to a discursive articulation of drive or motivation as decisive.\textsuperscript{79} In a stark expression of this articulation, for example, Anne says, “He had everything going against him from day one. And yet this kid, had a drive in his heart” [Emphasis in informant speech] (Anne).

Asked to reflect on what might make a student motivated or unmotivated, teachers, again and again, appear to have difficulty. So, for example, asked where a student’s drive to succeed might “come from,” Jane replies, “I think that. I don't know. I have no idea” (Jane). Several teachers articulate drive and motivation to other factors. One rejects the possibility of worthwhile speculation about its source outright. Teachers seem unable, and occasionally pointedly unwilling, to speculate about its genesis in students. Rather, students are constructed as being motivated or unmotivated at what appears to be an essential level. Only one teacher offers the possibility of a counter-discursive articulation, taking up a discourse in which schools and teachers have a part in the production of student marginalization (Alex) and in which families are explicitly, if only in a general sense, exonerated of responsibility for student failure.

In this chapter, I list and group teachers’ articulations of drive and motivation as decisive factors in the production of student success and failure. These include motivation and drive as qualities\textsuperscript{80} of the student, motivation and gender, motivation and race/ethnicity, motivation and class, motivation and the family, motivation and relationship, motivation and the teacher, motivation as choice, motivation and

\textsuperscript{79} In several teachers’ articulations of this factor in student success and failure, the words desire and passion are taken up. This points to the operation of a discursive articulation in which motivation and Eros are paired (Simon, 1992, p. 72ff).

\textsuperscript{80} The term ‘quality’ as applied to student subjects is used to name and group characteristics assigned to those subjects in teacher talk. This assignment is theorized as a function of the operation of discourse articulated by teachers. See also Chapter 2.
“reasonableness” (Popkewitz, 1998) and motivation as an essential quality. A discussion of teachers’ construction of the question they are seeking to answer when they take up motivation and drive as an explanation follows.

Motivation and drive as qualities of the student

The students who are self-motivated will succeed regardless of what teacher is in the classroom. Like, they will teach it to themselves, if they have to. (Joy)

Teachers take up motivation and drive as common-sense explanations of student success and failure. Students who are motivated—or, more emphatically in the quotation above, self-motivated—succeed. So, successful students “love to do what the curriculum is all about;” (Tony). They are “inquisitive” (Tony), have “the commitment to learning” (Tony), have a “genuine enjoyment of learning, discovering new things… and in their mind they have a goal to become something (Tony). “They see the importance of getting an education” (Tony). They are in school “for the sheer … acquisition of skills or knowledge” (Lydia). Each of these constructions of student success names or implies motivation, drive or commitment as the factor of that success.

Internal and external motivation.

In teacher talk, motivation may have an internal or an external locus. Internal motivation is valorized over external. Joy distinguishes between motivation and self-motivation, naming “students who are self-motivated” (Joy). So, a student with an “intrinsic drive to succeed” (Anne) or one who is “self-motivated” (Joy) is spoken of with admiration, warmth and approval. These are students who are “questioning, wanting to know… wanting to be clear about expectations so they could do the best they could. Interested in class. Listening. Homework done. Studying for tests” (Lydia). Internally, or
self-motivated students “are where they should be and [know] that that’s where they should be and they [want] to go to university and they [want] to be best they … possibly could…. Maybe that’s what their parents [are] expecting or that’s what they expected of themselves. They [are] self-motivated” (Lydia).  

In contrast, unsuccessful students are not “bad kids, mean or malicious…. In general, [they] just [have] less motivation” (Lydia) or are motivated towards an undesirable end, usually constructed by teachers in terms of immediate economic gratification (as Jane on Portuguese boys, girls and cars, above). Some fail to attend as a function of their lack of ‘commitment,’ a code for motivation: “Over half the population that’s on paper [registered in the school] is not in full attendance, is not there. Or is not committed to education” (Pat). They are just not “eager to come to school and learn” (Lydia). They would do better if “they weren’t just there to get through… and placed more importance on learning” (Lydia). Teachers note that some students may be motivated to work, but for the “wrong reasons.” So, externally motivated students are so as a result of “their own families…. They want to have a family, a wife or a husband, and children, and a house, and they want to have cars…” (Lydia). Students may be

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81 The apparent ambivalence about self-motivation and (external) parental motivation may be evidence of teachers’ articulation of student academic success to membership in a specific economic class (see Chapter 3). This appears to go beyond student possession of social capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Popkewitz (1998, 2002) frames this kind of discursive dynamic as the assignment of “reasonableness” to some students and the exclusion of others from possession of the quality on the basis of their membership status in an unspoken “normal” (see Chapter 5). Brantlinger (2003) argues that this is a function of and a strategy of the middle-class protecting its privilege. As she points out, privilege does not exist without marginalization. Indeed, it produces it (p. 13).

82 Teachers rate the “reasonableness” of student motivation and expectation along lines of class and family background. See Chapter 5.

83 This assessment of student motivation is applied by Lydia exclusively to unsuccessful students, as evidence of their wrong-headed motivation. It is not clear whether this or any
externally motivated as a result of pressure being placed on them by teachers or the institution or their family. “They may be driven by fear…. I see kids who are driven by marks” (Stephen). Or students may aim for a “pass” (Pat), “the merciful fifty” (Tony) or the achievement of a credit against their diploma (Jane). Rather than seeing an intrinsic value in schooling, they are motivated by material or practical considerations.84

**Motivation and ability**

Articulated to the offer of motivation and drive as an explanation for student success and failure is teachers’ general refusal of ability as an explanatory factor. Teachers observe that they do not “think it’s ability… It’s just desire. Commitment…. Where there’s a will, there’s a way” (Tony). Students of “average ability, with a willingness to learn, … should be able to succeed in our system” (Tony). Rather than skill or level of ability, “[it’s] dedication, work ethic, [that]’s important. It’s drive” (Jane). Teachers use a variety of terms to name the same quality in the student: “commitment,” “will,” “willingness,” “dedication” and “drive” are not strictly synonymous with ‘motivation,’ but are used interchangeably by teachers and are discursively articulated.

Lydia contrasts the same site’s (Site A) student population to that of her previous school, which she describes as “very academic” (Lydia). In her present school, she has had to “rewrite [her] board notes, in a vocabulary that [students] could understand” (Lydia) but, she notes that “the challenge wasn’t so much in the actual teaching, [but in]

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84 In teacher constructions of student motivation, the goals, desires or indeed the motives of unsuccessful students are largely silenced, invisible or unreasonable. See Chapter 5.
getting the students to come to class and to want be here and to wanna to be interested
in what we were talking about” (Lydia). Here, the teacher herself becomes the factor of
(external) motivation. Students need to understand the “importance of ‘I’m going to be
committed,’ ‘You’re going to be committed,’” she says (Lydia). Lydia then moves
quickly to point to different levels of motivation in different curriculum streams: students
in Academic and College streams are more motivated than those in Essentials and
Workplace streams. She wishes she could motivate the latter to set their goals beyond
mere achievement of a credit (Lydia). Motivation, not ability, is the key. Motivation and
placement in academic stream are firmly linked in teacher talk.

In an apparent contradiction of the denial of ability as explanatory of success or
failure, the binary “motivated/unmotivated” is coupled to the binary “academic/non-
academic”. While the Ontario secondary school system streams students according to
level of skills and ability, and now to post-secondary destination, teacher informants in
the study imply and often state explicitly that student performance and placement into
discrete academic streams is the result of their level of motivation. One teacher,
bemoaning the poor results achieved by students in his school and hopeful of change in

85 Lydia is not alone, in this respect. A sense of teacher responsibility for student
outcomes is evident throughout the interviews. But it is seldom constructed as the salient
element in teacher accounts of student success and failure. Rather, it appears be the
prompt for the production of other explanations of that success and failure.
86 The official discourse around academic streaming in Ontario deliberately focuses on
course content and post-secondary destination. Arguably, this is a function of a related
discursive deployment, which constructs the student—indeed every social actor—as an
agent capable of the full range of academic, social and economic achievements
independent of ‘external’ (social and economic) conditions. I argue in the next chapter for
the operation of a related (neo-)liberal, individualistic, mercantile discourse, taken up by
teachers to satisfy their own investments. In practice students continue to be sorted out
into streams on the basis of institutional assessments of the their ability, as defined by
teacher and institutional practice.
the future wishes “to receive, more academically minded kids” (Pat). Ultimately, teachers’ denial of ability as a factor in student success and failure confirms the salience of ‘motivation’ in their constructions of the student. In those constructions, it is motivation or its absence that sorts students even into academic streams.

Teacher talk, then, takes up a discourse motivation with a silencing effect on the categories of ability and class in their possible analytical and critical dimensions. This is part of a discursive move, discussed in the next chapter, in which a quality internal (essential) to the student is assigned as an important factor in student success and failure, rather than social, economic or historical conditions. Professional and institutional practices and their discursive effects are exonerated, here, as responsibility is placed firmly in the body of the student.

Motivation and Race

It’s multicultural, okay, it’s not a, it’s not a … homogenous group so you got you know, kids from different backgrounds, ah, you know, different needs. Whereas, you know, if you’re livin’ in a white-Anglo-Saxon neighbourhood, okay, you pretty well know what you’re catering to. The kids are motivated in a different way. (Tony)

Teachers in the study sample articulate motivation to ethnicity and race, along a continuum of more or less explicit talk. Most do so tentatively and often apologetically, sensitive to a breach of the decorum of liberal democratic speech. Some use code words like “multicultural.” Several conflate the concepts of ethnicity and race in their articulation.87 One teacher adverts to the significance of social categories, but denies a

87 See Chapter 3.
simple link between cultural identity or membership in an ethnic/cultural group, racialization and the presence or absence of motivation (Alex).88

_Norms, moral codes and race_

In the passage that introduces this section, “multicultural” is code for diverse and racialized. “Anglo-Saxon” is named outright—tellingly—as the normative category against which others are to be seen and measured. The discussion of “multicultural” turns quickly to “cultural,” then to “ethnic” and then to race.89 In one form or another, every teacher in the study takes up this articulation of motivation to race/culture/ethnicity, just as each teacher takes up a discourse in which unsuccessful student subjects are positioned against the un-racialized, unremarkable, invisible, silenced norm. The figure of motivated un-racialized, un-“culturalized” students is never made explicit: this construction is the invisible ground, the visible figure is the unmotivated (in some cases, differently motivated90) Other.

Even such coded talk turns quickly to blunt statements about motivation in different “cultures” and “races.” The transition from the general, covert and occasionally positive to the blunt, specific and pejorative is measured, but inexorable:

… the recent immigrants, … like the ones who come here, … depending on what country [they]’re coming from, [have] a greater will to succeed

88 Stephen denies the possibility of applying similar categories in an account of student success and failure: “the difficulty I have is one, one can get caught in justifying success attributing—I shouldn’t say justify, but attributing success to socio-economics, to culture, to ethnicity” (Stephen).
89 It is worth noting that the teacher who articulates this norm identifies, in a multiple and contradictory way, as the son of “hard working and very successful immigrants” (Tony) and, simultaneously, as a member of the normative, non-ethnic, non-racialized group.
90 It is important to note that the category of race/culture/ethnicity is sometimes deployed with positive as well as negative effects on the students. It is the assignment of particular qualities, whether positive or negative, to students on the basis of their membership in a group that is noteworthy. See Chapter 3.
and come up to speed…. [F]rom the poorer countries, those kids have a harder time coming up to speed, depending on when they get here” (Tony)

quickly becomes “Jamaicans, you know, nice kids. But lazy. Very lazy, you know” (Tony) and “I think with some Filipinos, the same type of thing” (Tony). Aware of having breached a moral code, the teacher quickly steps back, stating that he “mean[s] to say you can’t label all of them. You can’t label. It’s tough to label them.” (Tony). Does the last sentence advert to the power relations in the meeting of teacher and student or merely to a breach of the decorum of acceptable professional speech? This exploration of the acceptable limits to transgression against moral and societal codes is evident throughout the interviews and most clearly in the talk of Anne, Mary, Joy, Stephen, Pat and Tony.

Some teacher talk about race/culture/ethnicity and motivation is more direct. Prompted to account for “the kids who are willing to try and those who aren’t” and to explain what “makes one student try and the other one not try” (Interviewer), Pat immediately offers that “it’s certainly partially genetics” (Pat). This teacher, like Tony, also quickly reverses, articulating “genetics” to family structures and dynamics. In his view, “self-motivation is crucial” (Pat) and it is a function of the family. Revealingly, though, he then gives the example of a Portuguese immigrant family: a family he both racializes and exoticizes in his description. This occurs as he links their “Portugueseness” with his remarks about genetics, motivation and success. Othering is evident in his disbelief and disapproval of their parenting practices and family habits (“at four o’clock

91 Here the teacher articulates this failure in motivation in Jamaicans to other deficits, those of the family and of moral character: “The fact that are lot of them are fathers while they’re in high school, you know, father to more than one child, more than one mother [sic], you know” (Tony).
in the morning he’s sitting up watching something [on TV]), as well as in his condescending exoticization of the family: “Jesus, the grand-mother brought over this Portuguese fish last night, in this beautiful sauce. Magical, right? Lovely people! But I know for a fact, there is no reading going on in that world.” (Pat). His talk is both classed and raced.

Motivation, race and social class

The articulation of motivation to culture/ethnicity/race is, in turn, articulated to other discourses. Social class is often conflated with this category: “I mean, you go to Forest Hill, I mean the kids in those schools are a lot more successful…. You go to Our Lady on the Hill,\(^92\) for instance, and they don’t teach Applied\(^93\) courses there.” (Tony). The multiplicity of articulations, and their fluidity, is evident here, as the teacher articulates motivation to culture/ethnicity/race and ability/level of difficulty.

One teacher moves directly to an articulation of motivation to race and class. In an exchange remarkable for its position at the very beginning of the interview as well as the teacher’s spontaneous, immediate, unprompted and seemingly disingenuous adoption of the discourse, Joy answers the question “what would be your general description of the school where you teach and its students?” with the following:

\begin{itemize}
  \item J: Um. In terms of, like, ethnic background?
  \item M: Whatever you, whatever comes to mind.
  \item J: OK, uh, I would say in general the students come from a lower socio-economic background than students at other high schools. It would be considered a downtown, probably fairly inner city
\end{itemize}

\(^{92}\) A pseudonym for a secondary school in an affluent neighbourhood.

\(^{93}\) “Applied” is one of three academic streams in grade nine and ten in Ontario. The Essential stream captures the least skilled student; the Academic stream, those deemed to be possessed of the greatest skill, achievement and prospects. The Applied level is for students headed to non-professional post-secondary training.
school. Mostly Portuguese background, um, located on a very busy intersection in Toronto. And, I think that’s it. (Joy)

While it is possible to argue that the complex of culture/ethnicity/race is not the dominant category in the articulation which produces this talk, Joy’s spontaneous return to descriptions of her students in terms of race (“both in a grade 11 university biology class and both scoring in the 90s. Very independently self-motivated. One comes from an Asian background and the other I don’t know what her background is. It might be, I don’t know. She’s got a Portuguese last name, but she doesn’t look Portuguese”) points to the centrality of the articulation in her construction of student success and failure and of motivation in particular. The same teacher further articulates ethnicity to class and to family deficits as she offers motivation as explanatory of student success and failure.

J: um – I feel racist saying it, but a lot of the lower socio-economic cultures, like the parents haven’t graduated from high school or gone to college and university. So, it’s the maybe generalized attitude at home that will, ‘my dad makes really good money and I’ll just go into the company with him when I finish high school or if I finish high school’ (Joy)

The phrase “lower socio-economic cultures,” repeated by the teacher and following, as it does, an assessment of her own talk as “racist” points to the operation of a discursive articulation in which culture/ethnicity/race are linked to class and family deficit.94

Motivation and Class

T: Well some kids stay within their class. I mean they, you know they don’t have any aspirations. I mean you know, if your mother’s a hooker. You might wanna be a hooker too, you know. If your dad’s a doctor, you might wanna end to be a doctor. (Tony)

94 The conflation of the economic (class) and the cultural (race) in Joy’s talk is clear. Articulations are made in a context. The speaker’s subject position, their investments, and other discursive elements are always at play. This teacher—like Lydia, Jane and Stephen—speaks with some emphasis about the difference between her own “background” and that of her less motivated students.
The articulation of class to other discursive constructions about motivation has already been mentioned. Motivation and class or social position are foregrounded in teacher talk and often taken up as primary explanations of student success and failure. In the quotation from Tony, above, a direct link is made between “aspiration” (motivation?) and class. Class, here, is reified and constructed as static and reproductive of itself. Middle-class status is represented by the figure of a “doctor,” while working- (lower-) class status is represented by the figure of a “hooker.” It would be disingenuous to read the choice of figures as neutral in value.

Underlining this articulation of deficit in students within the category of class, the teacher continues the conversation by linking “middle-class” membership to good parenting: “I think any good parent will address, ‘What do you wanna do when you grow up?’ And I’m saying depending on what class you’re in, it’s gonna be discussed more realistically than in other classes. I mean that’s just human nature, I think, just.” (Tony). Parents in working-class families will not discuss the issue “realistically” (Tony). Realism, here, is clearly linked to a fixed and intractable class membership. Parents in working-class families will not pass on the proper motivation (Tony, Jane, Pat, Joy, Maria). The lack of realism and, arguably, reason (Popkewitz, 1998) in working-class students and their families is evident. The discourse of motivation, articulated to one of class, serves to underscore deficit thinking about those outside the norm and to justify unequal outcomes.

95 The recursive quality of this discussion is a function of the multiplicity of discursive articulations at play. Or, differently framed, of the intersection of the categories of race, class and gender in the production of student success and failure.  
96 See Chapter 3.
Class

Class, like family, is seen to be a predictive (and productive) factor in student motivation. Teachers note that “[c]lass is important too” and that “if you’re middle-class, your kids… it might be a little easier for them.” (Tony) The same teacher articulates class to culture: “The kids are motivated in a different way here. Here, the kids are coming from different … home environments. Different expectations. Some no expectations at all…. Middle-class and not multicultural.” (Tony). Other teachers take up the same discursive articulation. They do so in remarkably untroubled tones: in teacher talk this appears to be the order of things. Middle class membership, with its expectations, is productive of motivation.

Joy takes up the same discursive structure when she speaks of “lower socio-economic cultures” in which “parents have not graduated from high school”. In these “cultures,” “maybe the generalized attitude at home will [lead students to not] finish high school” (Joy). It is this “general attitude,” produced by faulty motivation that leads the student to “go into the company with my dad. He makes really good money.” (Joy). The teacher observes that the students will “probably make more money than you or I ever will,” but in her construction students maintain their status in a “socio-economic group” by virtue of “not being a professional,” and working “in a trade.” (Joy). In this construction, social class is not a function of income and despite a wistful, perhaps envious, note in the teacher’s talk about the student’s financial prospects, in her eyes the student’s refusal of further education is unreasonable and wrong.

97 See Brantlinger (2003) for a discussion of the ways in which “hierarchies are structured into meritocracies,” excluding children from unequal backgrounds and maintaining class privilege (1998).

98 Joy’s conflation of class, race and culture is discussed above.
Stephen takes up the logic of student motivation articulated to class, as well. He names students from less affluent backgrounds as able, but motivated by faster access to work. So, they seek “employment first, and employment fast.” In Stephen’s understanding, these students do not turn down post-secondary education, but ask themselves “how can I get the greatest number of skills or the quickest development of skills in order to get into the workplace with a higher level education” (Stephen). While this construction allows for coherence and rationality in student motivation, its firm articulation to a discourse about class does little to disrupt predictable outcomes. A parallel to the students described by Paul Willis almost forty years ago is sadly evident (1977).

It is clear in the balance of the interviews that teachers’ own identification with middle-class (Joy, Pat, Tony, Lydia, Maria, Anne, Alex) and in one case upper-middle class (Stephen) status is core to both their identification and their constructions and explanation of student success and failure. This identification contributes to their view of the unsuccessful student as Other. Only one teacher identifies as working-class: Jane names her family working-class. Nevertheless, she described her students as both “working-class” and unmotivated and beyond reason (Jane). This apparent inconsistency may be the effect of Jane’s identification with a working-class upbringing and her simultaneous, but silenced, acceptance of her middle-class status as a teacher. Tony is clearer, even if more clearly contradictory, in his identification: he takes up a discourse of motivation by pointing to the experience of his Italian, immigrant, working-class parents, while explicitly claiming middle-class membership and even making an oblique claim at

99 See Teacher Investments, Chapter 2 and Teacher Identity and Investments, Chapter 3.
WASP identity for himself. In his speech, the shift in identity is not hampered by ideological demands.

Motivation and Gender

Motivation and gender are articulated to each other in a range of constructions. Some teachers appear to deliberately select male and female students as examples during their interviews, some point to differences between male and female students. The nine informants for the study name female students as examples of motivated and successful students fifteen out of eighteen times and name male students as examples of unmotivated and unsuccessful students seventeen out of eighteen times.\footnote{Teachers were asked to provide general descriptions of two successful and two unsuccessful students after the introductory exchanges in each of the interviews. See Appendix A.} Motivation and gender are often articulated to ethnicity. Teachers do not appear to make an appeal to LGBTQ categories, though one takes up a discussion of ‘Out’ students as very successful.\footnote{Pat is silent about less successful ‘Out' students. The near complete silence throughout the interviews about the well-documented challenges faced by LGBTQ students in secondary schools is notable and a call to attention.} This may well point to the suppression of the categories. While this same suppression may be consistent with dominant discourse in the broader social realm and certainly with the dominant (public) discourse of a Catholic school (both school sites for this study are publically funded Catholic schools) in particular, the data for this study is insufficient to support a specific hypothesis.

The articulation of gender to ethnicity is evident in several instances. A teacher at Site A refers to her Portuguese boys’ lack of motivation. She reports that they are bound for construction work with their fathers and turn down the advantages offered by education, both secondary and post secondary (Lydia). Another teacher from the same
site points to lack of motivation in her students, citing their interests as being “a car for the boys” and “a seat in that car for the girls” in place of further education (Jane). Here too, teacher talk articulates gender to ethnicity and class. Teachers articulate a different construction of successful and unsuccessful students, and a different gendered and raced account of their motivation, depending on their construction of their student’s ethnicity. As noted earlier, hierarchies of race may affect the articulation of discourses and categories. So just as a male, Asian student is the exception in an otherwise consistent discourse of ethnicity, female, Portuguese students are the normative ‘unmotivated’ student: even less motivated than male, Portuguese students.

Motivation and Relationship between Teachers and Students

Despite a persistent framing of motivation as residing in the student and lying in a sphere beyond the effect of the institution, teachers turn with constituency to talk about motivation and teacher-student relationships. In each of the interviews, teachers include observations about the student’s personal response within the teacher-student relation. This is true of both successful and unsuccessful students. In the former category, successful students are willing and able to participate in a productive relationship with teachers and others in schools; in the latter, they either refuse to participate or are not equipped to participate. There is, beyond the professional and academic, a personal dimension in teacher talk about their students and their acceptance or refusal of relationship with educators.\footnote{See the discussion, in the previous chapter, of teacher investments and of Eros in particular.}

Motivation may be born of a passion for some activity or subject or person. While circular in terms of an explanation, this construction points to an articulation with Eros
and teacher-student relationships. Here motivation is both internal, with passion residing unexplainably and arbitrarily in the student, and external, being the response to the call of another person. Teachers describe successful students as “young person[s] who are driven to be successful in something” (Stephen). Successful students are “passionate” about a specific discipline. Driven students may have a “love” of a subject, a “passion” for learning, an “affinity” to an instructor (Stephen). “There’s some magic that happens and they go” (Stephen). Jane, Maria and Anne’s choices of students offered as examples of success articulate the importance of relationship, and in particular of the student’s response to their offers as key to success. Anne says,

And I always thought of this kid as a kid that was drowning in pool and would take himself down to the bottom of the deep end, but just throw up a rope. Just in case any one might be walking by…. So, this kid and I connected. And, we connected when he was in grade 10 and for some reason he just took a real liking to me. I was very flattered, that I had such an impact on a … on a student. And … I found a tremendous amount of energy to give to this student. (Anne)

Anne’s utterance is the introduction to a counter-intuitive description of her most successful student. It begins with the description of a student marked by all the qualities of the margin as evident throughout the data for this study, but moves quickly to name the student as successful. The key to this student’s success is his ability to reach out to the teacher (by “throw[ing] up a rope”) and her acceptance of this invitation at a very personal level. The relationship becomes productive of the student’s success and of the satisfaction of personal investments for the teacher. This emphasis on the personal and

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103 Simon frames Eros as a troubling concept in the development of a pedagogy of possibility: its operation in the relations between teacher and student can be an imposition at the level of pederasty, or at the other extreme, a Buberian relational moment (Simon, 1992, p. 70ff). A fuller discussion is beyond the scope of this project. A recognition of
the relational places an extra burden on marginal students, while improving outcomes for student subjects possessed of the proper qualities. Relationship has a high value in teacher investments. With the exception of Anne and her needy student, teachers describe unsuccessful students as less adept in personal relationship. Their very refusal of the offers of teachers and schooling is a refusal of relationship which places them at a disadvantage as teachers’ investments are challenged and denied. The converse is true for successful students, who are constructed as successful as a function of their possession of the requisite qualities for relationality.

A figure in the broader social imaginary may inform teacher constructions, here. It is itself a product of the dominant discursive articulation of neo-liberalism and individualism discussed in the next chapter. It is also evidence of the pastoral (Foucault 1977, 1980) at work through discourse. The teacher as magnet is a well-known—and worn—figure in popular culture.\textsuperscript{104} While the figure appears, at first glance, to promote the responsibility of the teacher to affect student success, the heroic and exceptional portrayals of teachers and, ultimately, the students’ requirement to exercise their posited agency reveal the discursive import of these pieces: student motivation, no matter how achieved, is the key. The possibility of an alteration in teacher practice at level of methodology and, more importantly in relational terms, of teacher disposition, or of a

\textsuperscript{104} Evidence of this discursive articulation is discernible (and, therefore, readily available for consumption in the broader social context) in a series of films about teachers and students on the margin. \textit{To Sir, With Love} and \textit{Stand and Deliver} (as well as \textit{Up the Down Stair Case} in a negative exposition of the type) come to mind. In these films, the relation of teacher-student is presented as that of ‘saviour-victim.’ Social factors serve only to set the stage: personal disposition, agency and motivation rule.
concomitant alteration of institutional practices operating discursively is silenced and erased.

*Essentialism*

Teachers, then, take up a discourse of motivation to explain student success and failure. They articulate this discourse to a variety of other discourses. These variations are fundamentally of a piece. Teachers account for student success and failure as an effect of motivation, in turn articulating that motivation to gender, race, class and relationship. Teacher accounts and the articulation of the discourses which inform them are, in turn, affected by their investments and by institutional demands and productive of the discursive deployment (Foucault, 1977, 1980; Shutkin, 1998) under discussion. These are discussed in a previous section, but are significant and efficient in the selection of discourses and their articulations by teachers. Unsuccessful students are read as deficient in some or all of the categories of class, race and relationship, but fundamentally on the basis of their (lack of) motivation, in an effort to account, in Miles’ (1989) phrase, with “practical adequacy” for the dissonance between teacher investments and student performance. Ultimately, teacher talk places the unmotivated student beyond reason (Popkewitz, 1998, 2002; Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998)105 and, in turn, justifies the persistence of a reproduction of the social (Bowles & Gintis, 1977; Bowles, et al., 2005; Giroux, 2001).

Ultimately, teacher talk frames students as motivated or unmotivated at an essential level. The difference between motivated and unmotivated students is beyond explanation. Motivation is either present or absent in the body of the student. Teachers

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105 See Chapter 5.
are at loss when asked to account for the presence or absence of motivation in the student. Stephen, for example, persistently and seemingly pointedly refuses to speculate about the difference between motivated and unmotivated students. Tony simply replies to one such probe that “everybody is different and has a mind of their own.”

This construction of motivation—or drive, or commitment—as a central quality of successful students has the effect of silencing the social and structural as factors in the production of student success and failure, and indeed of subjectivity and subject positions. Located in the student, and seemingly immune to the effects of teaching or other institutional practices, it is used to exonerate teachers and schools from a responsibility in student failure. It presumes a unitary, preformed human subject, the “individual” (Henriques, 1994) of the (neo-)liberal narrative.106

The concept of personal “drive” is central to teacher explanations of student success and failure. An expression of a meritocratic, mercantile, agentic, individualistic construction of the subject, this explanation is evident—implicitly and explicitly—in all the interviews. This essentialist construction of student and teacher is productive of a variety of effects including the exoneration of the teacher and the institution from responsibility for student outcomes and the silencing of analytical categories including the societal, the economic and the historic (at both the institutional and personal level). Paradoxically, the attribution of fundamental and essential qualities to the student subject (including an unpredictable, arbitrary and intractable agency) negates possibility in the meeting of teachers and schools with students on the margin. The silencing of the social, the economic and the historical in favour of “drive” or motivation sabotages analysis and

106 This figure is discussed in detail in the next chapter.
places responsibility in the “unreasonable” (Popkewitz, 1998) Other. Simultaneously and as a result of the same discursive dynamic, it has the effect of silencing the social and structural as factors in the production of subjectivity and subject positions. It exonerates teachers and the institution from a productive role in the student success and failure.

Motivation as a Choice

Essentializing students and motivation is the precursor and precondition of a further discursive move. In this move, students “choose” to be motivated or otherwise, to be successful or unsuccessful. Here, responsibility for success and failure is placed, once more and with yet greater clarity, squarely in the student. The figure of the neo-liberal, self-interested, economic agent emerges as the root of this explanatory discourse.107

Though teachers are at a loss to account for the presence or absence of the critical quality of motivation in the student, they often articulate it as a choice of the student. In this articulation, while students may have the same class, family or racial membership; they may be constructed as immigrant or “Anglo-Saxon” (in Tony’s all inclusive label); they may be able or otherwise: but they choose to be motivated or not. Joy gives the example of sisters who are differently motivated: “I can think of a girl … and her sister is brutal, OK? Major truant …. But the older daughter is extremely self-motivated, very hard worker, all the time questions, attends class, very conscientious” (Joy). Tony points, reluctantly, to his own children: “I mean I could look at my own family and I have three kids and one took to school like water and another one hates school with a passion. … Mother and father are both teachers” (Tony). He accounts for the difference saying, “Just,

107 This is not to argue against student agency or to suggest a unilateral responsibility on the part of the institution. It is, rather, to point to a discursive deployment with real effects for students. This neo-liberal discursive deployment is discussed in detail in the next chapter.
just the commitment to learning. I think some of them are committed to learning and, and not just to get to the, to the prize at the end” (Tony). Stephen wonders at the rate of academic success as well as the high proportions of students applying for university in his new school.108 Having described the student body as similar in several significant ways (economic means, academic streaming, ability) and, therefore, denied social categories as significant, he explains the difference at the level of “choice” (Stephen). Lydia describes her own efforts to affect student “commitment” and “motivation” (Lydia), implying the possibility of choice in the matter. Jane, Pat and Maria make similar observations about their role in eliciting greater motivation in their students.

The high incidence of student failure in marginal groups (those marginalized, essentialized or otherwise Othered in teacher articulations) implies a pervasive choice to be “unmotivated” in those groups. If teachers are puzzled by the apparent illogic of this state of affairs or by their inability to explain the relationship between motivation and success, they do not reveal it in the course of the interviews for this study. Even when probed to reflect on the puzzle of the intersection of poor choices and membership in groups outside the dominant one, they revert to an essential construction, where even choice is beyond explanation. In Stephen’s reply to such a probe, “That, I couldn’t say” (Stephen). This elision of the social and the economic has privileging and advantageous effects on middle-class students and marginalizing effects on working-class students.

Elements of counter-discourse

In a lone counter-discursive articulation, Alex describes unmotivated students as not wanting “to make an attempt… not being particularly motivated,” “having

108 Stephen has transferred to a new school from Site A at the beginning of the school year in which the interview for this study was conducted.
difficulty… see[ing] [education and graduation as valuable] … and for whom school’s not a good experience,” but—significantly—being able to respond to “prodding and encouragement” (Alex). These students need “every last little best … teaching practice, whatever you can find” (Alex). They will then show they “have more skills than they think they have and they always have more skills than the resource teacher … will claim” (Alex). Alex appears to move towards upending the dominant discursive articulation, here, opening the field to a variety of possible explanations for the student’s lack of academic success and for teachers’ intervention and agency.

He names class as a category within a minute of the beginning of the interview. Asked to describe the school in which he works (Site A), he names it an “inner-city school with working-class students.” He then expands on the effects of inner-city, working-class status for his students, he says it has 

positive and negative effects, no doubt…. It has to do with values and how they spend their time, and … what is important to them. They’re, they’re, they are, they’re very conscious of, they’re very conscious of, of money…. and I think that’s one of the differences between … a lower-class and a middle-class [family] …. money is taken care of or it’s less of a on-going or daily concern. So that those other things can … they can be going to piano lessons or they can be going, you know, fill in their days with all kinds of activities, both adult and kids. (Alex)

Without abandoning the deficit thinking that characterizes most teacher talk about motivation and class, Alex appears to open the ground to a counter-discursive articulation in which student motivation, and the choice to take up the offering of schools and schooling, has some internal logic and reason in social terms.

Yet, while Alex’s intent appears to be counter-discursive, here, exonerating students and their families and placing the burden of responsibility for student success and failure on the teacher and the institution, it is worth noting that he takes up the same
discursive structures while, at least superficially, challenging them. Unsuccessful students may be so mostly as an effect of schools’ and teachers’ failure to motivate them appropriately, but it is motivation that still determines that success and failure. And the motivation remains firmly located in the student, no matter its genesis. Alex’s talk does move away from essentializing the student and partially reverses the dominant view of causality and responsibility. And it opens the field to the possibility of disruption and intervention by introducing socio-economic, class and relational categories as significant factors. But it remains firmly within a discourse of motivation.

Teachers are unable to account for the predictability of academic outcomes in certain specific groups on the margin. Their talk about successful and unsuccessful students constructs raced and classed students as marginal and unsuccessful. Pressed to account for the inequities they have described, teachers consistently and uniformly take up a discourse of motivation. They construct motivation as an essential quality of the student. Its presence or absence accounts for success or failure. This articulation is an effect of neo-liberal, individualistic, mercantile discourse. It supports dominant ideologies and reproduces social structures. It is taken up by teachers, themselves invested and situated in a neo-liberal social, economic and historic context, to satisfy the demands of personal and professional investments. A figure of the student, indeed of the individual of neo-liberal society, emerges from teacher articulations of discourse to account for student success and failure. That figure is the subject of the discussion in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5

The Figure in Dominance

Many people … hold the view that the society is, in fundamental ways, open. They believe that individuals carve out their life paths by drawing on their personal stores of hard work, effort and talent. All children are seen as having approximately equal life chances. Or, if children’s life chances appear to differ, this is seen as differences in raw talent, initiative, aspirations and effort. (Lareau, 2003, p. 60)

The student in teacher discourse

In the last two chapters I have argued that, in their constructions of student success and failure, teachers take up and articulate discourses of marginalizing and Othering effects on certain predictable groups of student subjects. These discourses of Othering and of motivation, I have proposed, are taken up for their ready availability to satisfy personal and professional investments common to teachers. Their investments, and the discursive articulations teachers take up (and reproduce) as practically adequate (Miles, 1998) to satisfy them, have a ready fit with the institutional structures and practices of schooling, themselves operating discursively.

As teacher talk in the interviews for this study unfolds, the figure of a normative student, a social and economic actor and agent, emerges. This figure, itself the evidence and product of a discursive deployment, is the “figure in dominance” (R. I. Simon, 2005) against which other, marginal, figures and subjects are measured and given a shape in teacher talk and the constructions it expresses. Emblematic of the dominant discourse taken up by teachers to account for student success and failure, this is the figure of an independent, self-sufficient, self-interested, mercantile and rational social agent. It is

109 See chapter 3 for a specific discussion of teacher investments. The effects of those investments are discussed throughout.
constructed as an individual possessed of agency acting within a social and economic field.

This discursive articulation of individual agency informs the articulations discussed in the previous two chapters. I argue below that it is, in fact, this dominant discourse of individuality that is productive both of teachers’ subject positions (and their concomitant investments) and of students’ subject positions (in which teachers and their constructions/relations with the student are themselves productive factors). Constructed primarily to satisfy teachers’ personal and professional investments, the ‘figure in dominance’\textsuperscript{110} has the additional and important effect of furthering a process in which the historical, the social and the economic—while sometimes acknowledged as useful in descriptive terms and valorized as the ground of a reasoned and reasonable subjectivity in successful students—are denied, silenced and suppressed as factors in the production of student failure and marginalization, with particular import in the lives of students constructed as ‘unsuccessful’\textsuperscript{111}

The figure in dominance serves, among its several functions, to create a place on the margin, beyond reason and outside the desirable social norm, which at once produces and accounts for failure in Other students. These are the students who fail to meet the profile of the normative ‘figure in dominance.’ They are constructed as deficient in the qualities this figure embodies and possessed of qualities which are the converse of the desirable normative ones. Theirs is the failure to take up the kind of agency and economic

\textsuperscript{110} It is through the production—the deployment—of this figure that teachers bolster and protect their investments (personal and professional, social and economic) and justify institutional failures and structural inequities.

\textsuperscript{111} The denial of causality is a central feature of this and the other discursive articulations examined in this study.
thinking that individualism, liberty and rationality offer and imply. This is particularly clear in the construction of the unsuccessful student as unmotivated, unreasonable and urban (Popkewitz, 1998): the shadow of the figure in dominance. Teachers articulate a discourse of ‘student potential’ to the primary discourse of (neo-) liberal agency in an effort that, while appearing egalitarian, in effect contributes to the reproduction of unequal social structures.

_The Figure in Dominance and its Shadow on the Margin_

The figure in dominance, evident in teacher construction of the student and in dominant social discourse, then, is that of an independent, self-sufficient, self-interested, mercantile, rational individual, possessed of the agency required to meet personal, social, economic and, certainly, academic challenges. This individual responds reasonably to economic demands, is motivated (driven) to succeed academically, is appropriately classed and is conventionally gendered. The subject proposed in—and produced by—this discourse exhibits a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant middle-class work ethic (Brookhiser, 1997; Peck, 1994) and satisfies the requirements of successful membership in neo-liberal society (Blackmore, 1999, 2000). Its shadow is urban, working-class, unmotivated, unreasonable and ethnic.

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112 Popkewitz argues that the quality “urban” and “rural” in teacher constructions of students have similar Othering effects.
113 Teachers in the study are almost completely silent about issues of gender as it relates to student success and failure. I mention the exceptions in the previous two chapters. This very silence points to the operation of a normative and unchallenged discourse about gender and sexuality. This discourse appears to be heterosexist. See the discussion, in Chapter 4, about gender.
114 Brookhiser and Peck both discuss this construction of the ideal subject of neo-liberal discourse. See chapter 2.
The motivation/drive discourse:

Motivation is a key quality of the figure in dominance. As the previous chapter argues, motivation is, paradoxically, articulated both as an essential quality and as the object of a choice by the student. In its essential aspect, it is constructed by teachers as having no origin, simply residing in the student subject perhaps at the “genetic” level (Tony, Alex, Stephen, Jane). Teachers also—and often in the same breath—claim that motivation is a function of student choice. Apparently contradictory, these positions have internal consistency when considered as elements in the construction of the social and economic agent of liberal and, certainly, neo-liberal discourse: the figure in dominance under discussion. Teachers certainly utter both constructions as congruent and compatible. Motivation is a fundamental and constitutive quality of this (neo-)liberal subject: it is a function of its posited agency and self-interest and constructed as an essential quality of the individual. Choice is its corollary: the individual agent is free and able to choose. To choose according to the logic of dominant discourse is to be ‘reasonable,’ while to choose otherwise is to be “beyond reason” (Popkewitz, 1998).

Lack of motivation is, similarly, constructed as an essential quality in the unsuccessful student and the effect of a choice by the student. In this complementary construction, it is a failure on the part of unsuccessful student subjects to exercise their agency and pursue their own best interest. This places the student subject beyond the

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115 Teachers do articulate motivation to other characteristics or qualities in the student, often making an apparent association between, say, middle-class membership and motivation. They consistently and uniformly, however, reject these same social associations as explanatory of the presence of motivation in the student subject. See Chapter 4.
logic of the dominant discourse and her failure beyond the influence of teachers and
the institution. In either case, the causes of success and failure reside firmly in the
student.

Merit

If agency is implicit in motivation, the valorisation of some social subjects over
others according to a meritocratic logic and standard also flows from it. Teachers
construct their successful students as meritorious because they have chosen a ‘moral’
virtue (at some personal effort and cost): that of motivation. The corollary of this
articulation is the lack of this moral virtue, of a moral flaw or a transgression, in
unsuccessful students: students are unsuccessful as direct result of their choice of a(n)
(im-)moral disposition.

It is this construction of the successful student as virtuous and, by extension, of
the unsuccessful student as—to remain with the implied religious construct—‘sinful’\textsuperscript{116}
which supports the denial and silencing of social categories and factors in teacher talk
about student success and failure. Students are successful or unsuccessful as a function of
a personal and a moral choice. Here again, the categories of race, class, family and
gender are taken up and articulated by teachers along with other social markers, but they
are made accidental and insignificant. Their explanatory aspect or any causal link to
student success and failure is denied as choice, motivation and agency are constructed
and articulated to be the efficient causes in the production of that success or failure: this,

\textsuperscript{116} Both sites for the study are publically funded Catholic secondary schools. Informants
for the study have chosen (of fallen into) work at a Catholic institution. Remarkably,
teachers are silent about the Catholicity of their institution or practice, in either positive
or negative ways. The religious constructs present in teacher talk appear to be more in
line with dominant discourse present in a broader social context. Peck (1994), Brookhisser
(1997), Popkewitz (2004) are helpful here. See below for a more detailed discussion.
despite a clear association in teacher talk of the original categories with, respectively, successful and unsuccessful students.

Meritocratic thinking, to state the obvious, has a valorizing effect on the meritorious student and the opposite on the unmeritorious student. Of importance to this discussion is the assignment of merit or its lack to predictable classes of student subjects (even as these categories are silenced) and the practically adequate (Miles, 1989) function of this deployment in satisfying personal, professional and institutional investments: the exoneration of the teacher and the institution chief among them.

**Self-interest**

Teacher accounts of academically successful students uniformly construct a self-interested (*and* a “self-motivated”) individual. Whether these students are “interested in what they are doing” (Lydia), “driven toward a goal” (Stephen)—or in a more critical construction, “functional” and interested in learning for reasons beyond its own intrinsic worth (Anne)—they have a fit with teachers’ investments and with the institution’s that originates in their own self-interest. Seldom explicitly stated, this self-interest is pervasively implied in teacher constructions of the successful student. Successful students know what their goals are (Stephen, Maria, Anne, Pat) and move towards them. They see beyond the moment to a future (social and economic) goal (Stephen, Pat, Lydia, Tony, Jane, Joy). They aim for professional rather than other work (Jane, Joy, Pat, Tony). They can ignore the pull of the crowd (Jane, Joy, Anne) or the lure of peer influence (Tony, Pat, Alex).
This quality is essential to the proper function of the individual of neo-liberalism (Blackmore, 2000; Peck, 1994). It is self-interest which ‘drives’ the individual to social and economic achievement; just as it is self-interest which, in this discourse, drives society (synonymously with the economy) forward. More important in this context, however, is the effect of this dynamic on the teacher-student relation. The self-interested student responds positively to the offerings of teachers and schooling because they are adequate to meet the demands of her or his self-interest. The teacher-student relation, then, is constructed as one in which individuals (both teachers and students), moved by self-interest, find a good fit within the institution: that is, successful students, moved by self-interest, do not need to be convinced of schooling’s value or induced to respond to teacher and institutional offerings and investments (Stephen, Pat, Joy, Jane, Lydia; see also the discussion in chapter 3) with exonerating effect on both teachers and the institution. Neither is compelled to change their pedagogical or relational offers.

Unsuccessful students, instead, may need such inducements. Teachers in this study largely place those students beyond the reach of their influence. As the preceding discussion seeks to illustrate, unsuccessful students do not take up the offers and offerings of teachers and schooling. In teacher constructions, they do so, in part, as a function of their misapprehension of their own best interests. They either do not act in self-interest or they misunderstand their own best interests. Their lack of fit with schools

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117 The construction and use of figure, endowed of agency, enlightened self-interest and reason, is discussed in detail below.

118 A different dynamic operates, simultaneously, in this relation. I mention the role of Eros in the teacher/student relation, in passing, throughout. See especially p. 72.

119 It is tempting, here, to note the similarity to a discourse of false consciousness.
and schooling is ample of evidence of this and is revealed in the behaviours discussed above.\textsuperscript{120} While teachers appear to advocate for a change in the student, it may be that the teacher and the institution would serve the student better by adopting a more appropriate pedagogy: one for which a different construction of the unsuccessful student is the precursor and precondition. I try to point in the direction of such a pedagogy in the last chapter of this study.

\textit{Economic or mercantile}

A corollary to self-interest, in a capitalist field of social and economic relations, is the economic or mercantile quality of the successful subject: the successful student, in this context. In teacher accounts, the economic implications of student fit with schooling are as pervasive as they are, almost always, implicit. Whether in Tony’s account of “different motivation” in the children of “hookers” and “doctors,” in his reminders of the hard work that brought his immigrant parents success, or in his choice of examples to illustrate who desirable students might be (those living in Toronto’s Forest Hill neighbourhood), the economic and the mercantile inform his talk (Tony). In Stephen’s talk, “successful middle-class and upper middle-class people” are named as normative and compared to the (working- and lower-class) students at Site A. He names these people as “affluent” (Stephen). In Joy’s construction, students’ economic desires are foregrounded.\textsuperscript{121} So, too, is their fit with teacher investments and with reasonableness (Joy). In both Joy’s and Lydia’s accounts, successful students possess qualities of

\textsuperscript{120} See ‘The Student’ in Chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{121} This is true both in her description of her successful students and in her description of the unsuccessful students. The former are described as being possessed of proper economic instincts, while the latter of diminished, undeveloped and insufficient ones. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the classed articulation of this construction.
organization, time management and self-control that would find an easy fit with the
time management and self-control that would find an easy fit with the
language of the literature of business management (Joy, Lydia). These students are
steeped in the culture of team sports and self-discipline (Joy, Anne, Lydia) and all that it
can teach about proper behaviour and disposition in a corporatized social.122 Successful
students are described as “being where they should be” and having the right goals like
“wanting to go to university” (Lydia). Lydia also names the economic desires and
strategies of her unsuccessful students as irrational: they are “unreasonable” (Lydia)
about their goals. Again in the teacher talk, the possession of sound economic/mercantile
thinking is articulated to the proper operation of reason in the student.

And here again, the construction of the unsuccessful student as unreasonable in
her or his economic interests is the corollary. Unsuccessful student are named as lacking
in the requisite and reasonable economic and mercantile qualities. They seek the
immediate over the long-term. They work after school when they could be studying.
They want objects and goods now. They are interested in starting a family at the wrong
time in their lives. They like good clothes.123 Teachers’ accounts, here, appear to imply
that the successful student exists in a rarefied and disembodied reality in which only
study, learning and discipline are valorized. These students are beyond the call of the
mundane in the form of material goods, immediate gratification and the offerings of
family relationships. In fact, teachers are judging that the unsuccessful student is a poor

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122 Annette Lareau examines the effects of class membership and the child raising
practices it produces on student fit with schools and schooling (2003).

123 Teachers uniformly disapprove of unsuccessful students’ economic and social goals
and strategies. Joy and Lydia, for example, objects to those students’ economic
aspirations at the cost of a middle-class educational strategy. See the discussion “The
(Un)Reasonable Student” in Chapter 3 as well as the section on “Rationality” in Chapter
2 as well as the discussion below, in this chapter.
economic and mercantile actor in her lack of discipline and in his attention to the present at the cost of the future. Here, teachers appear to be blind to the privilege of some students and very clear about the deficits of others. Teachers’ talk about their own investments and desires turns to the material and the economic often enough. It is the unsuccessful students failure to take up a sound (and appropriately classed) economic strategy that teachers construct as reasonable and likely to succeed that is in question.\textsuperscript{124}

\textit{Middle-class membership}

Middle-class membership and disposition are constructed as qualities of the successful student, the figure in dominance. This is consistent with a neo-liberal discourse of agency and individuality. Teachers’ own identification as middle-class, often in the course of pointing to the deficits of their unsuccessful students, serves to underscore the middle-class identity of the figure in dominance. Successful students are uniformly possessed of ‘middle-class qualities:’ whether they are named outright as middle-class or simply described as having had the privileges and experiences of middle-class children,\textsuperscript{125} successful students \textit{are} middle-class.

Where there is an exception and a teacher offers the example of a successful student from a working-class background, that teacher remarks on the success as notable and abnormal. This occurs only once within the admittedly relatively small sample of the interviews for this study: in Anne’s talk a student living in poverty and challenging

\textsuperscript{124} A fuller discussion the classed construction of student success and failure is undertaken in the preceding two chapters, while the discursive underpinnings of this articulation and its implications for classed student subjects is discussed in the final chapter.

\textsuperscript{125} Annette Lareau names this middle-class strategy for the maintenance of privilege “concerted cultivation” (Lareau, 2003). Ellen Brantlinger examines the practical and discursive strategies deployed by middle-class parents to protect their children’s privilege through schooling (Brantlinger, 2003).
family circumstances is academically successful, but only with the teacher’s help and as a result of exceptional personal “drive” (Anne). This amounts to a reaffirmation of the norm. Here the student exhibits the qualities of a successful student despite and non-normative class membership. While this student does not fit the full profile of success as predicated in this discourse, it is his possession of individual agency and drive that is valorised in the teacher’s talk and that is the operative factor in his success.

Work-ethic and being WASP

The figure of this motivated, self-interested, economic actor is articulated to another: the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant individual. Tony uses the term ‘White Anglo-Saxon Protestant’ outright. He identifies with this group and posits the exemplar of the successful student as being “White Anglo Saxon Protestant, not multicultural” (Tony). Tony’s choice of figures is not accidental in this context. In naming WASP identity as a factor (and perhaps a synonym) of success, he is taking up a dominant discursive articulation in Western society.

Janice Peck describes the operation of this discourse in the reproduction of racism and social and economic inequity in the United States (1994). Peck points to the articulation of a discourse of Protestant work ethic to one of race. In this articulation, members of the dominant group, middle-class WASPs, have the correct work ethic for

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126 Tony uses the category to include economically successful Catholics: he is describing students at a Catholic secondary school who are, presumably, predominantly Catholic.

127 Janice Peck discusses the deployment of three discourses in the silencing of racial (and racist) injustice in American society as she examines host and guest talk in Oprah Winfrey’s series “Racism 1994.” The three discourses, operating in teacher talk as well, are a religious one, a liberal one and one of WASP “work ethic.” See below and Chapter 6.

128 I discuss the racial (and arguably racist) content of his utterances and their articulations to a discourse of motivation above (Chapter 4).
social and economic success, exemplified by white middle-class values, articulations and behaviours. Raced subjects do not. Their inequitable social and economic situation is the result of this lack. In Peck’s analysis, however, a discourse of sameness (as opposed to equity) silences the call for amelioration of this inequity: all social actors are individuals and structural analyses do not apply. A very similar dynamic is evident in teacher articulations of student success and failure.

Successful students work hard, do it for the sake of the work itself, for the joy of learning, for the right reasons. This is, again, an articulation with moral import. A certain kind of behaviour is valorized and another is denigrated. In teacher talk, work ethic is central to the construction of the successful student (see Chapter 3). In the broader social imaginary, work ethic and membership in a non-immigrant, non-racial dominant group is a marker of success. These are also salient qualities of the individual of liberal society. It is hard work, along with enlightened self-interest, that produces success. The corollary of this articulation is the existence of non-WASP\textsuperscript{129} subjects, named as “multicultural” and deemed as lacking a work ethic. In schools, this becomes a justification for academic failure in large swaths of the student population.

The unnamed figure against which all students are being measured, particularly in terms of motivation, is the reasonable, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon, ambitious, rational, free agent of a mercantile meritocracy. It is taken up by teachers to exonerate them from culpability in student failure, shifting responsibility for it firmly onto and into the student subject. These discursive dynamics structure and inform teachers’ talk about motivation.

\textsuperscript{129} The contradiction implicit in naming an ethnic group as the non-racialized norm should be as obvious as it is detrimental to the teacher-student relation and, more importantly, the student herself.
in particular and student success and failure in general, throughout the interviews for this study.\textsuperscript{130}

\textit{Agency}

Every teacher in the study posits personal agency in the student. Those who are deemed successful are those who exercise it. Teacher talk, here, is on a continuum. At one end is a denial of structure (social, economic, historical or institutional) in the production of student success and failure. At the other, teachers point to structural and occasionally personal factors as contributing to student success and failure. The overlapping articulations of motivation and choice imply personal agency. So do the articulations of self-interest and work ethic. This is internally consistent: to posit motivation, choice, self-interest and work ethic in the absence of agency is nonsensical.

The clearest statement of this dynamic in teacher talk is Stephen’s refusal of external factors in the production of student success and failure. At the end of the interview, asked to add anything he felt might have been missed, he says,

\begin{quote}
I guess the difficulty I have is one can get caught in justifying success or attributing—I shouldn’t say justify, but attributing success to—socio-economics, to culture, to ethnicity, you know. All these other things, but I’ve taught kids who have been in poverty situations who just were fine. (Stephen).
\end{quote}

This denial of the social and the economic implies personal and individual agency in the student (and the teacher). Importantly, it blames the student for his failure, just as it assigns merit to the successful student. Tony, puzzled at the difference in academic achievement in his own children, says that “they all have a mind of their own, they

\textsuperscript{130} The function of discourses of individuality in supporting a capitalist and neo-liberal status quo is of greater importance in a broader social sense. I focus, here, on the immediate practical adequacy (Miles, 1989) of discursive articulations in a specific sub-class.
exercise their mind” (Tony). He credits his own academic success to the exercise of personal agency: responding, in grade school, to an insulting remark about his intelligence made by another student, he sets out to prove her wrong (Tony). Both aspects of his account are applied to his students: successful and unsuccessful. For Pat, the difference between student success and failure is their choice to apply themselves (Pat). Jane wonders at students’ failure to “use their talents” and points to successful students who act in their own best interest. In fact, much of the teacher talk discussed in these pages is unimaginable in the absence of personal agency in the student.

Even Alex, most conscious of the informants of structural, contextual, personal and institutional factors, returns to student engagement as the fundamental requirement for academic success. He names the “relationship” of student and teacher as important and the social and economic context of the student as significant, but states that “every student can be successful” (Alex). And despite his awareness of social and economic context and history, he implies that all students can exercise the choice to succeed. Even where structure and personal characteristics are adverted to, teachers ultimately posit the possibility of success for all students based on the exercise of agency. Here as well, Anne’s account of the student who succeeds despite being marked by all the signs of failure relies on the operation of personal agency on the part of the student to account for his eventual success.

_Urbanness_

Students who find a good fit with the ‘figure in dominance’ are named as “suburban, not urban” (Lydia). The student populations of the two schools in which teachers in the study work are spontaneously described by them in terms of their
‘urbanness.’ In most teacher talk only the first term in the urban/suburban binary is named, and with pejorative value. Unsuccessful students are constructed, among other things, as ‘urban.’ The descriptor ‘urban’ has greater import than mere geography. It intersects with and is articulated to other constructions. So the ‘urban’ student is also ‘raced,’ or “cultural,” “ethnic,” “multicultural” and “working-class” in teacher utterance.

Urbanness is constructed against the normative and silenced ground of suburban-ness. It is outside the norm, as it is beyond reason and explanation (Popkewitz, 1998). Joy turns to economic descriptors early in her interview, naming students’ “lower socio-economic cultures” (Joy). Arguably, this is more than a way of naming the students’ social position. Rather, it appears to be designed to name a quality of the student subject and is articulated to other elements of discourse about unsuccessful students.

Rationality

The rationality131 (or irrationality) of the student is articulated, as the discussion above seeks to point out, to other qualities in the student. Teachers construct their successful students as rational and their unsuccessful students as irrational or beyond reason (Popkewitz, 1998; Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998). Lydia produces a typical instance of this articulation: successful students are “where they should be” and “wanted to go to university” and “be the best they probably possibly could” (Lydia). But less successful student are “unrealistic” about their academic goals, their employment goals and their prospects (Lydia). Other teachers echo this articulation of reason with student success in the figure of the normative students. More often, this is done by way of constructing unsuccessful students as beyond reason, but the discourse is sufficiently

131 As discussed above, ‘reason’ and ‘rationality’ are used interchangeably throughout. They are related both in meaning and etymology.
discernible in its affirmation as well. Embedded in teacher talk about successful students is a construction of these students as reasonable: they are reasonable insofar as they subscribe and submit to the logic of schooling and the offers of teachers and the institution. In this dynamic of professional/institutional offer and student acceptance, the student demonstrates the qualities of normalcy and rationality. The converse is also true.

While teachers confer ‘rationality’ to successful students implicitly, they are explicit about their unsuccessful students’ lack of reason. As we have seen, unsuccessful students have the wrong goals (Lydia, Jane, Stephen, Pat, Tony, Joy) and fail to act rationally in their own best interest. Their lack of rationality, however, is often constructed at a more fundamental, even essential level. Pat explains that his less successful students “don’t have the work habits, they don’t have the work ethic, they don’t have, maybe the desire, sometimes. They don’t have the ability on certain levels. They have learning difficulties as I say 40% are special ed,” but “they’re very intelligent here, with their heart, up here [placing the palm of his hand on his heart]” (Pat). Both the articulation to other discourses and the construction of a student subject beyond reason (or, possibly, of an alternative type of reason) are in evidence here.

Pat describes his relationship with the (largely unsuccessful) students at Site A: “I love them for that because they think with their hearts.” Not a description of emotional intelligence or multiple intelligences, this has the effect, rather, of placing the unsuccessful student firmly outside the bounds of reason and intelligence at a fundamental level. Pat goes on to say that he does not “care what they have done, [does not] care what their mark is,” because “here [again placing the palm of his hand on his heart, emphasis in informant’s speech] they’re magnificent” (Pat). Whether exoticizing,
eroticizing or romanticizing the unsuccessful student (or a mix of the above), Pat places these subjects beyond reason and beyond the influence of the teacher and the institution in all but a small subset of expectations, limited to their diminished and anomalous capacity. The negative effects on the student are as profound as their construction by the teacher is Othering and exiling. Asked “what about academic success?” for this group of students, Pat says,

ah, you know, it’s not that important to me to be honest. I think a kid doesn’t have to be, I don’t put a lot of credence in higher education in one level. I look at my own experience which you know… Yeah I did well at school, but you know I learned the system (Pat)

Pat’s utterance raises questions about the effect of his views about higher education on his students. This is particularly true for those who are less successful in his construction. Will they be encouraged to further their academic careers? Beyond reason and influence, unsuccessful students are also beyond the core institutional mandate: one strategy for negotiating the tension inherent in this state of affairs is to construct the anomalous subject as deficient and to deny the importance of academic success for students outside the norm.132

Potential in the Student

An important effect of a neo-liberal discourse of individual agency is the production of possibility for the (socially) properly placed student subject and a denial of possibility for the improperly placed student subject. In a discursive move that seeks to mask these inequitable effects, potential is posited by teachers as being equal in all students (Stephen, Maria, Tony, Jane, Alex). The articulation of potential, in the body of

132 Lisa Delpit (2012), among others, points to the particular importance of a culture of high expectations for marginalized students.
the student, echoes democratic discourses of equality (though not of equity) as well as psychological discourses positing a *tabula rasa* infant (see Henriques (1984) and Shutkin (1998)). As a direct result, difference—social, economic, historical and cultural, not to mention individual—is silenced and erased. Some students reach their potential as a result of their exercise of the requisite qualities (drive, choice, self-interest, reason). Other students do not reach, indeed do not reach for, their potential because they do not exercise the same qualities. This is a function of choice. As such it has the value of a moral flaw or deficit. All social actors are equal in their potential and have the same social and economic chances (Lareau, 2003).

Janice Peck names a dynamic of equality, present in Puritan political thought, which emphasized the “equality of individual souls” in terms of their salvation with the concomitant effect of supporting “the creation of the liberal state” (1994). In their talk about potential as a quality of the student, teachers are taking up an articulation of this individualistic moral and political discourse. Ironically, the original (and arguably subversive) import of the discourse is upended in teacher talk: in the process of erasing difference, rather than producing the possibility and equity that Puritan and liberal discourses in early capitalism had among their effects, current teacher talk about potential and equality silences and elides the material, political, cultural and historical factors which make student subject positions blatantly unequal. Rather, this discourse proposes, students are equal in ability and potential: it is their choices (moral and reasonable or immoral and unreasonable), which produce their success or failure.

Stephen’s exposition of this discourse is concise. In an exchange designed to explore student ability and achievement he says about students at Site A that many
students had “the potential, whether they exercised it or not was another story but, ah, I believe had the potential” (Stephen). Moving to a new, more academically successful school, Stephen sees himself as “churning out potential” (Stephen). Jane takes up the discourse in her opening comments, responding to a request to describe the school where she teaches: “I would describe the school as full of unreached potential” (Jane). Student potential for success is constructed as present and available, but not met. In the balance of the interview she focuses on student potential and their failure to achieve it as a significant element of her experience in the school. Anne describes her exceptional student’s success as climbing out of a challenging and diminished situation to achieve his potential:

He was to me, my most successful student…. And I always thought of this kid as a kid that was drowning in pool and would take himself down to the bottom of the deep end, but just throw up a rope. Just in case any one might be walking by…. But by the end of it, … he really became much more mature…. And he graduated. (Anne)

Anne’s student, unequal in his chances in all but potential (“Very disturbed boy, had a history of behavioural and learning exceptionalities. Right from birth” (Anne)), achieves a measure of success as a function of his potential and the application of his drive. Tony makes it clear that, given an equality of potential, the onus for success lies with the individual: “The potential was there but, ah, the spirit’s not willing and that’s, that’s the problem basically” (Tony).

Alex proposes that students are possessed of more potential than teachers and schools allow for: “every kid has way more potential than the … teacher gives them credit for, yes” (Alex). While he is clearly critical of teachers and schools, he takes up the discourse of potential with the same effect, ultimately, on the student: while he alerts the
listener to the real effects of teachers’ and schools’ material and discursive practices on the student subject, he asserts the equality of students in terms of their potential. Alex’s re-articulation of this discursive structure may be evidence of the ground for resistance and possibility.

The articulation of potential in the student as ubiquitous and subject to the exercise of agency is a feature of the same discursive deployment that produces the figure in dominance. It posits an individual equality that erases the effects of social, economic and historical inequities and largely erases the possibility of resistance in the shape of a counter-discursive articulation. This poses a challenge to those committed to a project of possibility. The next chapter attempts, in part, to identify opportunities for counter-discourse, resistance and the production of possibility.
CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The difficulty I have is one, one can get caught in, in, in, in justifying success or, or attributing—I shouldn’t say justify, but attributing success to, ah, socio-economics, to, ah, culture, to ethnicity….

(Stephen)

Teachers’ discursive articulations are a significant factor in the production of students’ subject positions with real effects on their success or failure in schooling and beyond. This dynamic—coherent with institutional practices and structures, themselves operating discursively—limits possibility, creating a subject beyond reason and redemption (Popkewitz, 1998) in the body of the marginal(-ized) student: the Other of teacher discursive practice about student success and failure. Teachers’ discursive articulations construct a ‘figure in dominance,’ an expression of the ideal subject of neo-liberal discourse. This construction is the ground of teachers’ inclusion and exclusion of students. It is the norm against which students are measured in the meeting of teacher and student. The effect on students who fail by this measure is lasting and profound. Agency, to the extent that it exists for students and teachers, is constrained by these structures of social reproduction.

In their accounts of student success and failure teachers take up available discourses and articulate them as practically adequate to satisfy the demands of their personal and professional investments (Miles, 1989). Teacher articulation of available discourse in this context takes up dominant discursive structures and reproduces social structures and hierarchies through the inclusion of some predictable groups of students
and the exclusion of other, similarly predictable, groups. In the process, teachers and their institutions are exonerated of responsibility for students’ academic failure.

Discursive articulations do occur in specific locations: historical, cultural, social, economic and political. They are, therefore, positioned (Butler & Scott, 1992), arbitrary in their closure (Hall, et al., 1996) and open to alteration and counter normative articulation (Hall, et al., 1996; Terdiman, 1985). This positionality and arbitrariness opens the ground to intervention and to a possible disruption of processes of social reproduction as they are languaged by teachers onto their student subjects. While the data for this study points to the dominance of discursive articulations privileging predictable groups of students and marginalizing other predictable groups—of the reproduction of social inequity through the Othering of students on the margin—it also provides some evidence of the possibility of counter-normative and counter-discursive articulations and of resistance on the part of teachers (see Alex, above, for example). Herein lies the possibility of a hoped for interruption (e.g. Katz & Dack, 2013) and alteration of the structures and dynamics of social reproduction. Herein, as well, lies the ground of a hopeful pedagogy and practice of possibility (R. I. Simon, 1992) benefitting students on the margin.

In this final chapter, I review the key findings of the study, suggest what effect the processes they identify may have on marginalized student subjects and point to possible strategies for disruption and intervention.
Teachers’ Explanations of Student Success and Failure

I have argued that teachers articulate available discursive structures to explain student success and failure in a series of distinct and discernible moves. They first take up common-sense explanations as obvious and sufficient to the task. These are readily available explanations which support the construction of a marginal identity for the unsuccessful student and a normative one for successful ones. In these explanations, teachers name urban schools and neighbourhoods as Other and deficient, just as they name unsuccessful students themselves Other and deficient. Discourses of race, class and family are articulated to each other and to talk about the rationality of the student to produce an Other outside the norm. This set of articulations takes up a deficit model (Brantlinger, 2003; Dehli, 1996; Fine, 1991; Flessa, 2006; Fordham, 1996; Valencia, 1997) for marginalized and unsuccessful students.

Prompted to account for the disproportionate prevalence of academic failure (as named and defined by teachers themselves) in their urban schools, teachers make a second distinct and discernible discursive move. They take up and articulate a discourse of motivation which explains student success and failure by appealing to an apparently innate and essential quality in the student. Students succeed or fail as a function of the possession of—or, alternatively, a deficit in—the quality of motivation. This quality—rather than ability, social or historical or economic conditions, school structures, teaching methods or any other factor—accounts for student success or failure in teachers’ construction. While teachers explicitly deny the importance of factors outside this essential quality of the student, they do articulate the discourse of motivation to the discourses of identity and deficit they originally took up as common sense. This second
articulation supports and reinforces the essentializing, Othering strategy of the first discursive move. While motivation is an essential quality of the student which allows teachers to deny the effects of social position and schooling or teaching, it is, ironically, articulated by teachers to class, race and gender. Student social identity as constructed by teachers once again becomes productive of success and failure.

This process of construction and articulation is informed by the discursive presence of a ‘figure in dominance,’ coherent with and supportive of the discursive articulations produced by teachers. This figure is the emblem, the effect and the evidence of the operation of meritocratic, mercantile, agentic and implicitly racist discourses. I argue that this figure, a normative language structure in this as well as the broader social context, is at the root of teacher explanations of student success and failure and, by extension, of the marginalization of certain predictable groups of students. The ‘figure in dominance’ evident in teacher talk privileges a rational, self-interested, mercantile, white, middle-class subject at the expense of all (O)thers.

These processes are of central importance in the re-production of unequal social positions and structures and have a ready fit with—indeed find their raison d’être in—teachers’ personal and professional investments: they explain student failure while they collaborate in its production as they justify white middle-class privilege, exonerating teachers and their schools from responsibility for diminished outcomes for students on the margin. A disruption and alteration of these processes of marginalization, however, may be possible. This possibility has its ground in the inherent instability of discourse (Terdiman, 1985), in the arbitrary and historically open nature of discursive articulations (Hall, et al., 1996) and, more concretely, in the counter-normative discursive utterance of
some teachers in this study. Moments of *aporia*, the ground of alteration of processes of articulation and re-articulation of discourse, are evident in some of the interviews for this study.

**Specific Findings**

*Teachers’ Personal and Professional Investments*

Teachers’ personal and professional investments provide the impetus for the discursive deployment identified in this study. As Miles (1989) points out, discourses are taken up as practically adequate to explain the social and satisfy subjective investments. In the talk produced in the nine interviews for this study, teachers seek first to account for, then to explain, the disconnect between their own personal, professional, institutional and broader social goals for students and the diminished outcomes of many of those students in urban schools. This disconnect is a source of tension and often discomfort for teachers, as it rubs against both their professional ideals and their personal desires.

Teachers ponder the puzzle of student failure in urban schools as one that has immediate effects on their own assessment of their efficacy and of their professional identity. The disconnect also affects teachers at an immediate and subjective level: teachers’ personal desire for their own professional success is undermined by student failure which is, by simultaneously, teachers’ own failure with students. Importantly, here, teachers turn to discursive tactics that blame the victim and exonerate the institution and the practitioner, while reproducing the social.

This can be read as a strategy for the protection and preservation of teachers’ own privilege. Teacher investments are, to state the obvious, a function of their subject positions. Their subjectivity—middle-class, white, “Anglo-Saxon” as it reveals itself in
their talk—shapes teacher responses to marginal Others and seeks to justify itself. All but one teacher firmly identify as middle-class. Several point to difference in their students along racial and ethnic categories. An alternative strategy might advert to difference and point to teachers’ professional responsibility to address its demands in the interest of all students, especially those on the margin. The seeds of that strategy are discernible in Alex’s talk, but remain undeveloped and counter-discursive. All teachers, including Alex, choose exonerating discourses over critical and reformatory ones.133

Producing the Other: Common Sense Explanations

The common sense explanations for student success and failure teachers take up focus on the fit of the student with schools and schooling. Teachers posit that students who find a ready fit with the institution and its offerings succeed while those who do not find this fit fail. Teachers’ own investments appear to inform this construction of student success and failure. In this set of utterances, a normative student is contrasted to an Other student who is un-reasonable in her or his goals and aspirations. This Other student is raced and classed and the product of a deficient family.

Here, unsuccessful students are constructed as “unrealistic” about their prospects and futures when they aspire beyond the limits of their present classed position. Teachers appear to be negotiating the tension caused by the demands of personal and professional pastoral desire through a bracketing and refusal of their mandate to alter and improve marginal student subject positions through schooling. Rather, they articulate discourses of class to others of race and family deficit to justify the status quo and lay the ground for a

133 The role of Eros mitigates these choices, as discussed in passing in a Chapter 4. Here teacher passion and desire to affect the life of an other drives different responses and behaviours on their part. In the end, though, teacher talk in these very instances is still the talk of privilege speaking to the margin and has a pastoral and even colonial dimension.
construction of the student as unreasonable. The discursive articulation of class, race, family deficit and student failure is as pervasive as it is clearly evident in the talk teachers produce in the interviews for the study. Teacher utterances, here, often transgress against social mores regulating speech about class and, especially, race, revealing essentializing beliefs about students on the margin.

Teachers achieve these discursive ends by taking up available explanations about student success and failure that include the urban nature of the schools in which they labour. These explanations imply a comparison to unnamed, silenced, normal schools. Those schools are suburban, less diverse, primarily middle-class and upper middle-class institutions in which students are primarily university bound. The spontaneity with which these explanations are taken up and their ubiquity suggest the operation of a discursive deployment which emphasizes difference as a structure of ranking and exclusion.

Difference is also evident in the behaviours and qualities which teachers name as productive of student success and failure. Successful students are compliant, engaged, interested, realistic and able to defer gratification. They are organized and have had the experiences outside of schooling which produce willing and capable student subjects. They are realistic in their expectations and their strategies.

Unsuccessful students are, in many ways, the converse of the successful student. They do not comply with institutional demands and requirements. They fail to take up the offers of both teachers and the institution. They are less interested, or appear to have different and less easily discernible investments. They are, as a result, not realistic or reasonable in the eyes of teachers. They appear to live in a “happy” present in which immediate gratification in the form of practices, experiences and material goods are of
great importance. They are “social” as opposed to “academic.” They are, finally, moved by emotion, rather than intellect. These qualities and dispositions are articulated to their (diminished and marginal) social position, just as the qualities and dispositions of successful students are articulated to their (normative) social position. Both constructions are classed and raced.

**Motivation: Essentializing the Student and Blaming the Victim**

Motivation is proposed by teachers as the essential (in both senses of the word) quality of the successful student. In teacher constructions, motivation—and not ability or social or economic circumstance—is the condition for academic success or failure. Yet, having motivation is both a choice made by the student—a construction which foreshadows the production of the ‘figure in dominance’—and closely aligned with the student’s identity as a classed and raced subject. Both constructions, one articulated to the other, place the student—both successful and unsuccessful—beyond the scope of teaching and of personal or institutional intervention.

Though teachers are at a loss to account for the presence or absence of the critical quality of motivation in the student, they articulate it as a choice of the student. In this articulation, students may have the same class, family or racial membership, they may be constructed as immigrant or “Anglo-Saxon,” they may be academically capable or otherwise: but they *choose* to be motivated or not. Motivation is a fundamental and constitutive quality of the (neo-liberal) student subject: it is a function of its posited agency and self-interest and constructed as an essential quality of the individual. Choice is its corollary: the individual agent is free and able to choose. To choose according to the
logic of dominant discourse is to be ‘reasonable,’ while to choose otherwise is to be “beyond reason” (Popkewitz, 1991).

The construction of motivation as the essential quality in academic success for students serves the practical purpose of silencing critical analytical categories of class, race and gender as relevant factors. Indeed, the lived lives of students are suppressed and silenced as productive factors in student success or failure. By shifting the focus to a quality that is both, paradoxically, essential to an individual and the object of a choice on the part of that individual, context—social, historical and economic—is elided and silenced.

The key term, here, is the ‘individual’: by individuating success and failure and positing personal choice as the factor of academic success these discursive articulations silence the social, suppress the historical and discount the economic, while valorizing the individual, the essential, the personal and the arbitrary. The clear implication for teachers and schools, is that they have limited if any effects on students, unless those students are disposed, by the exercise of personal choice or of the possession of an essential quality, to take up the offerings of those same teachers and schools. That the students who fail to do so are the unsuccessful and marginalized is now an unutterable verity and outside of the ‘logic’ of the discursive articulation and deployment.

The normative individual in teacher talk is White, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant. It is against that figure that teachers measure students as ethnic, immigrant or raced. Ironically, no teacher informant in the study can lay claim to membership in any WASP category, except the first. This does not interfere with their use of the standard or with their personal identification with it. The effect on students is ranking and exclusionary.
The Figure in Dominance: Justifying Privilege

Each discursive move discerned in the data for this study is consistent with a process in which teachers are exonerated of responsibility for student failure (and, perhaps, but less clearly and certainly less emphatically, for student success) and the demands of their personal and professional investments are met. Each move is informed by the operation of a meritocratic, mercantile, agentic and rationalist discourse of which the ‘figure in dominance’ discussed in Chapter 5 is emblematic. It is in the discursive articulation of this figure—and the deployment of which it provides evidence—that the process of justification and exoneration of teachers and their institutions of their failure with marginal(-ized) students meets its purpose.

Teacher talk in the interviews conducted for this study articulates the figure of a successful, normative student against which other students are measured. The shadow of this successful, normative student is an Other. In the construction of this Other, teachers take up categories of race and ethnicity, family and class. These are named consistently and persistently as constitutive of deficits (George Jerry Sefa Dei, et al., 1995; Flessa, 2006; Valencia, 1997) in the student and articulated to urbanness and lack of reason (Popkewitz, 1998).

The discrete figure produced in teacher talk as normative, the ‘figure in dominance,’ is the underlying standard against which students are judged capable of success or relegated to a diminished outcome, deemed reasonable or unreasonable, included or excluded, invited to dialogue or placed among the intractable and beyond redemption.
Because the normative figure taken up by teachers in their relations with students is that of the ideal neo-liberal subject: of the self-interested agent of a mercantile, late-Capitalist social, the dynamics of the relation are profoundly affected. The teacher student relation becomes one in which individuals, moved by self-interest, find a good fit within the institution or fail to do so. This transactive ethos precludes progressive and reformative efforts and effects as the ground of the meeting between teacher and student becomes one informed by (sometimes) mutual self-interest in which the commodity of schooling is traded. In this process, students who enter schooling on the margin are relegated to leaving school in the same margin. Teachers’ work is, increasingly, *delivering* the curriculum on offer, evaluating and ranking. It is less and less cultural, social, political and dialogic work. The student’s failure to act in their own self-interest and to take up the offerings of schools and teachers merely confirm their place among those beyond help and redemption.

The meeting of teacher and student is informed, indeed formed, by these discursive dynamics, with important effects on the student. While the teacher holds all the power in this complex relation, the responsibility for all outcomes is transferred to the student, exonerating the teacher and the institution. Student social position is beyond alteration by teacher practice. Privilege and marginalization are reproduced with regressive political effects. In an implicit assertion of agency as universally available to the individual in society, teachers blame the victim and reward privilege. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that teachers are blind to privilege while blaming the victim of social, economic and political marginalization for her lack of privilege. Privilege is its own reward.
Silences and Silencing

Some of the silencing effects of teachers’ discursive articulations about student success and failure have been named and discussed in passing, above. Yet, the discursive deployment through which teachers exonerate themselves and their institutions for that same student (success and) failure operates with silencing effects in a variety of areas. Silences and silencing are as discursively significant as the speech which produces them (Britzman, 1991). A silenced category—or social, economic or historical reality—is itself productive of subjectivity and concrete outcomes in the lives of student subjects. Silencing is part of the process through which possibility is limited.

Teacher talk about student success and failure silences the social, economic and historical as an analytical tool. Ethnicity and race, though evident in teacher talk, are denied as valid and acceptable categories with the effect of precluding any possible reflexive process about them as they apply to teacher practice and disposition. Culture as a category—articulated to and conflated with ethnicity and race as it is—is languaged by teachers as being visible only as a marker of difference. Class is deliberately denied and silenced as an analytical category, as family deficit and motivation replace it as explanatory of student success and failure. Stephen’s denial of these categories, concisely expressed in his words used as an epigraph for this chapter, sums teachers’ silencing strategies.

Teacher talk achieves these silencing effects, in part, by positing an unnamed and unspoken norm against which Others are produced (see above, in this chapter). It simultaneously takes up common sense explanations for student success and failure in a denial of critical categories. Indeed, the silencing of the critical is at heart of the
discursive strategy and deployment in evidence in the data for this study. For example, while teachers’ accounts of student success and failure are profoundly classed (and raced), the very category is suppressed and silenced in favour of explanations ranging from the common sense, to motivation, to the student’s deficiency as measured by the standards of the ‘figure in dominance’ discussed above.

*Exclusion*

The constructions and categories taken up by teachers to account for student success and failure are evidence of ranking and exclusionary practices which operate in schooling through the application of a broad common-sense understanding of the social (Bourdieu in Lareau, 2003). These competencies are filtered through the lens of student competencies and deficits with the system and with teacher investments, revealing a sorting criterion based on deficit constructions of the student informed by categories of race/ethnicity, family and class (Flessa, 2006). Articulated to these deficit constructions, teachers take up discourses of motivation and agency.

Exclusion is achieved by teachers and the institution of which they are agents, by placing the onus for student success and failure firmly on the student: it is what the student brings to the school that makes for success and lack of success, rather than anything the school or the teacher has to offer. Ultimately a function of the assertion of agency and self-interest, this has profound exclusionary effects in the bodies of predictable marginal student subjects. Those students who do not fit the within the norm are excluded.

Teachers’ identification with successful students, on the basis of class and ethnicity, supports their exclusionary articulations. That this rubs against the grain of
personal and professional investments is the genesis of the complex discursive strategy argued in this study. Teachers in the study identify as white, middle-class, unraced, motivated rational subjects. This subjectivity is productive of personal and professional investments. Students who do not find a ready fit with these investments—or, indeed, with teacher subjectivity—are deemed beyond reason and redemption and excluded.

*Possibility and Disruption*

Then I started to realize that these kids don't necessarily behave that way. It depends on what boundaries they're given. It's a prejudice of the middle class to look at the poor and say: 'They can't help it, they were born that way.' It's what schools do all the time: it's not our fault, it's our intake.”

(Katharine Birbalsingh in Anthony, 2011)

Birbalsingh’s reflection touches on two dominant and conflicting responses to the issues raised for teachers by unequal student outcomes. She comes to her critical conclusion about the marginalization of students on classed (and raced) principles while a teacher in a London school. Her “realization” leads her to a rejection of progressive politics and an adoption of the very individualist, late-capitalist discursive articulations which inform the marginalization of students by teachers interviewed for this study.

While she advocates a disruption of teaching practice it is not clear what she would propose to disrupt the articulations of discourse which teachers produce as practically adequate (Miles, 1898) to address the demands of their subject positions.

Arguably, the import and intent of policy in the current moment in education—one which begins with Harris in Ontario and continues through permutations and

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134 Birbalsingh delivers a series of public talks about her experience, culminating in an impassioned presentation to the 2011 all party conference of the British Conservative Party.
adjustments to the present day—has been to address teacher practice through a system of standardized measurement of student performance. When teacher ‘culture’ is addressed\textsuperscript{135} in these policy deployments, it is through a lens which ignores power relations and subjectivity, and certainly the critical categories of class, race and gender. Economic and demographic realities are often ignored. If discourse and power are operational in processes of exclusion and social reproduction, they must be explicitly addressed in any intervention and effort at reform of schooling. What means might be considered to achieve this end?

If this discussion of student success and failure theorized on the basis of discourse has value, a response to the operation of dominant discourse in schooling must advert to the operation of power/knowledge and its limited amenability to resistance. I rely on Hall and Terdiman in positing the possibility of a limited and positioned resistance, finding its basis in processes of re-articulation by specifically positioned subjects as well as in the inherent instability of dominant discourses. This is not, emphatically, to claim easily accessible possibility with some ideal ‘correct approach’: certainly not with the current brand of top-down ‘data-driven’ policy directives. The history of teaching practice and of institutional deployments appears to me to be strewn with the detritus of failed, if often well-intentioned, solutions to the problem of student failure. Certainly, the lack of substantive change for students on the margin over the past forty years speaks to this.

Rather, I would suggest that through a thoughtful challenge of dominant discourse and the re-articulation of both the problematic of student failure on the margin and possible approaches to its attenuation, progress is attainable for the most marginal student

\textsuperscript{135}See, for example, DuFour (1998).
subjects. The suggestion, then, is to challenge and resist dominant discourse about student success and failure and its attendant effect. In schools, in the context of publically funded institutions in Ontario, this will require a dialogic practice in both teaching and administration, a commitment to teacher professionalism and resistance to the deskilling efforts evident in much provincial policy, a data-based discussion but of the correlation between social and economic realities that challenges ideological positions, the careful naming and at least a partial neutralization of ideology (both the dominant one and that of the educational reformer), and a focused longitudinal effort on the part of schools as communities of practice to address the real needs of their most challenged students.

This is utopian thinking, perhaps. It is clear that such an effort is a difficult one to enact in institutional contexts in which practice is informed by a broader social and political in which critical categories are suppressed at the level of dominant discourse. The political and institutional demands and constraints on teachers, administrators and their practice are evident to anyone with even a passing knowledge of public education. Yet, until a change in discourse filters up, it is not possible to effect change.

Promising practices will include dialogue about teacher practice and a challenge to dominant discourse, analysis of the social conditions of successful and unsuccessful students, and the development of school and teacher practices fostering relationship and engagement. That these are by necessity local, temporally and subjectively positioned, specific in time and place and clearly small scale is both obstacle and opportunity. Macro top-down approaches, to the extent that they have been more than politically correct posturing, have done little to change outcomes for students on the margin. The very nature of a counter-discursive approach, of a resistive and disruptive re-articulation,
places it beyond the reach of policy and systemic deployments. That, however, is not
to say that the systems and policy cannot be affected by localized, grass-roots resistance
and re-articulation. While possibility is situated in the micro, it can affect and influence
the macro.

Reflections for a Pedagogical Practice of Possibility

While I hope that the implications and significance of this study for a pedagogical
practice of possibility are evident within the analysis and discussion, I continue to be
conscious of the genesis of this effort. The questions that eventually produced this study
continue to drive my practice: now as an administrator in an urban alternative school. And
my colleagues in teaching and educational administration—both old and new—have not
abandoned their pursuit of better outcomes for students on the margin or their
examination of the factors for diminished outcomes for these same students. That those
efforts continue to meet with partial success at best must ever be the central focus of an
ethical pedagogical practice. What does it mean to better understand the teacher-student
relation with specific reference to the production and reproduction of student success and
failure? What is needed to promote and support the development of teaching dispositions
and practices that are effective in redressing unequal social and economic circumstances
and inequitable outcomes for students marked as deficient by class and race?

I conducted the interviews on which this study relies for its data while teaching in
an urban, comprehensive, publically funded Catholic secondary school. As I write this, I
work as a vice principal in a secondary alternative school in the same school board. The
two sites for which I am responsible serve students who were unsuccessful in completing
their high school diploma. The sites serve three distinct groups of students: sixteen to
eighteen year olds, eighteen to twenty-one year olds, and over twenty-one year olds. My sites are located along the same subway line as the schools chosen for this study. Students come to us from every part of the city. Many come after being unsuccessful at the very Site A and Site B from which informants for this study were drawn.

Our students come to their studies moved by hope and burdened by the challenges of lives lived largely on the social and economic margin: they are the unsuccessful students whose plight this study seeks to address. Their hopes appear to be similar and coherent: greater success in school, the achievement of a diploma, improved language skills, greater proficiency in English, acceptance to apprenticeship programs, acceptance to college and university, recognition of experience or diplomas or degrees earned in another country. I think of these, my students’ hopes and goals, as similar and coherent because they seem of a piece: they all point toward social and economic success (equity) and membership in that shrinking and increasingly exclusive club, the middle-class. The challenges they face are multiple and varied. Our students come to us frustrated by rigid educational practices, burdened by unaddressed and often unidentified learning challenges, carrying part-time and—too often—full-time jobs, separated from their families in the city or abroad, caring for their own children and families, dealing with physical and mental illness or addiction. Many find a new sense of belonging and relationship in our learning community. Some achieve their immediate goals quickly, while others struggle longer and often drift away before positive pedagogical and therapeutic relationships can be established.

In the midst of what sometimes seems the educational equivalent of a large urban hospital’s emergency department, the school’s staff works (mostly) together to address
student needs effectively. Our practice focuses on possibility and invitation. The evidence of the importance of the key moment of meeting between teacher and student is everywhere to see, both in our successes and in our failures.

In those meetings and all the practices that inform them, the findings of this study have some relevance. An opportunity for disruption of exclusionary discourse and the rearticulation of explanations and constructions of students at the level of their subjectivity and relations is present in all our processes and practices. Our students enrol and re-enrol four times each academic year. Every nine weeks, they enrol in two new courses. They apply, meet with a guidance counsellor, discuss their goals, choose appropriate courses, often join co-curricular activities, take advantage of the nutrition program, engage with each other and the professionals in the building, complete course work and either move on or register again. Each of these moments and processes is an opportunity for teaching staff, professional staff and support staff to meet a student with a personal history and a social and economic context and respond to that subjectivity inclusively.

The institutional practices of the school, then, must be focused on those meetings and the production of possibility that can come from them. From student intake to evaluation of achievement, each practice needs to advert to the diminished circumstances of our students without, in turn, diminishing possibility for them or constructing a deficit in them. It is that possibility that, in our best practice and on our best days, is the product of the relationships, the team work and the workflows that support and scaffold student success. Specific examples of such a relational practice include a focus on the whole person and a screening for economic and social needs at intake and beyond, a focus on
achievement and a conscious and explicit challenge to deficit constructions of the student, deliberate and programmatic identification of obstacles to student success at the individual and the cohort level, a collaborative model of student service delivery inclusive of professional staff and community organizations, financial supports (as limited as they are) for student transportation and nutrition, alternative practices in the area of attendance, a growing blending of online and in-class course content delivery to support students with attendance and other challenges, intensive social and emotional supports.

This list of practices is effective, I argue, only insofar as the educational staff take them up with an invitational and inclusive disposition: only insofar as processes of Othering, exoneration and exclusion are radically disrupted. That, in part, is the work of educational administration. The co-option of mandated institutional processes, practices and initiatives in the service of that radical disruption is both possible and desirable. Whether in conversation with staff about a student or in the course of the analysis of student success data, the discourse can, relentlessly and with determination, be rearticulated to include, to reframe, to relate and to support. It can be rearticulated to produce possibility rather than reproduce social and economic inequity.
REFERENCES


Deosaran, R., Kane, T., & Wright, E. N. (1975). *Student's background & its relationship to program placement*. Toronto: Board of Education for the City of Toronto.

Deosaran, R., & Toronto Board of Education. Research Dept. (1976). *Program placement related to selected countries of birth and selected languages*. Toronto: Research Dept., Board of Education for the City of Toronto.


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Informants by age, gender, subject taught and date of interview.

*Chart of informants by gender, subject and years of teaching experience.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Subject taught</th>
<th>Years Experience</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Social Science</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>April 22, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>April 17, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>June 28, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Visual Art</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>June 10, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>March 21, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>June 9, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>April 15, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>June 4, 2003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Interview Questionnaire

TEACHERS’ UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONDITIONS FOR STUDENTS’ EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

GENERAL BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

1. What your are your teaching areas?
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. How long have you been teaching at your present school?
4. Could you give a general description of your school and its students?

QUESTIONS RELATED TO MARKERS OF STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT.

The following set of questions focuses on student academic achievement.

In answering them, please do not name any students. Please focus on students who are not currently under your supervision.

1. Can you think about two of your “better” students?
2. Would you please describe them?
3. Can you think about two of your “at risk/worst” students?
4. Would you please describe them?
5. Do you think it is possible to make general statements about students who succeed or fail? If so, what would they be?
6. Thinking specifically about “better” students, what qualities or characteristics help students succeed?
7. Thinking specifically about “worse” students, what qualities or characteristics make it less likely that students will succeed?
8. Thinking about factors not related to the student as an individual, what other factors help successful students do well?
9. In your opinion, what would be most likely to improve the least successful students’ chances of success? (probes below to be used as needed)
   a. personal characteristics
   b. personal habits
   c. social
   d. family
   e. school
   f. culture
   g. classroom
   h. ministry of education
QUESTIONS RELATED TO CURRICULAR, MATERIAL AND CULTURAL CONDITIONS IN SCHOOLS

1. In your opinion, what school conditions affect student achievement positively or negatively?
2. In your opinion, what other factors, not directly related to school, affect student achievement positively or negatively?
3. Thinking about the success of your students, what are the biggest issues facing you as a teacher? Teachers in general?
4. Thinking about your teaching career, have you noticed any changes have you that you think affect student success? In schools? In society? In students? (probes below to be used as needed)
   a. social
   b. curricular
   c. school
   d. political
   e. economic
   f. attitudinal
   g. cultural
5. Are the needs of students addressed in the curriculum?
6. What is your response to this gap (if one is perceived)? What is the school’s response?
7. In your opinion, what effects have recent curricular and other educational changes in Ontario had on students in public schools?
8. Are there relevant issues this interview did not address? Please feel free to comment on them.
Appendix C: Social and Demographic Characteristics for the Catchment Areas of the Schools in this Study (2001 Census)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighbourhoods*</th>
<th>Site A</th>
<th></th>
<th>Site B</th>
<th></th>
<th>City</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total persons</td>
<td>51,220</td>
<td></td>
<td>53,980</td>
<td></td>
<td>44,845</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total households</td>
<td>22,760</td>
<td></td>
<td>18,205</td>
<td></td>
<td>22,425</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median household income</td>
<td>$55,596</td>
<td>$36,097</td>
<td>$45,031</td>
<td>$47,912</td>
<td>$44,922</td>
<td>$48,306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment rate</td>
<td>66.1%</td>
<td>64.8%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>63.8%</td>
<td>68.3%</td>
<td>60.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education post-secondary total with or without degree or diploma</td>
<td>28,345</td>
<td>26,385</td>
<td>14,630</td>
<td>21,095</td>
<td>22,885</td>
<td>1,051,920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration (first generation)</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
<td>69.0%</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as primary home language</td>
<td>59.4%</td>
<td>51.3%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>54.9%</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low income family incidence</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low income individual incidence</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>43.0%</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low income population in private households incidence</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Neighbourhoods are numbered in the order in which they are described in Chapter 2. The schools draw their student population from each of the three neighbourhoods for which data is reported, but in each case a disproportionate number of students come from one or two neighbourhoods. These are italicized.