A HIDDEN CURRICULUM OF CONTROL: THE INEQUITIES OF URBAN SCHOOLING

Nicole Mittenfelner Carl

A DISSERTATION

in

Educational Leadership

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

2017

Supervisor of Dissertation:

__________________________________
Sharon M. Ravitch, Senior Lecturer

Dean, Graduate School of Education:

__________________________________
Pamela L. Grossman, Dean and Professor

Dissertation Committee:

Sharon M. Ravitch, Senior Lecturer

Philippe Bourgois, Professor of Anthropology and Director of Center for Social Medicine, University of California, Los Angeles

Howard Stevenson, Constance Clayton Professor of Urban Education, Professor of Africana Studies

Rand Quinn, Assistant Professor
A HIDDEN CURRICULUM OF CONTROL: THE INEQUITIES OF URBAN SCHOOLING

COPYRIGHT

2017

Nicole Mittenfelner Carl

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 License

To view a copy of this license, visit

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/
For my middle school students
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks go to all of the individuals at Baker School who warmly welcomed me and made me feel a part of their community. Without your support, none of this research would have been possible. I especially thank Bianca\(^1\), Jalayla, Nyeisha, Rashanna, and Renee for their honesty, trust, and faith in me and Ms. Smith and Mr. Barnes for inviting me into their classrooms. In addition, I thank Ms. Carol for welcoming me into your home and for helping me to develop a unique understanding of Baker.

My mentor, dissertation chair, and friend, Sharon Ravitch, has been an indispensable part of this journey. Her guidance and reassurance gave me focus and direction and helped make this dissertation significantly stronger. Thank you to the other members of my dissertation committee. Philippe Bourgois, thank you for over a decade of mentorship and support of my research. Your scholarship and your commitment to participant observation inspired me throughout my research. Rand Quinn, thank you for your continued advice throughout the many hurdles of academic life and for your support of my research. Howard Stevenson, thank you for support and for your thoughtful insight about the way that racialized stress can be conceived at Baker.

Thank you to the many colleagues and friends who informed my ideas from the inception to completion of this research, including Peter Kuriloff, Torch Lytle, Gina Cappelletti, Kelsey Jones, Justice Walker, Adam Lewis, Charlotte Jacobs, Joseph Nelson, Michael Kokozos, and Jeremy Cutler. Thank you especially to my writing partner, AJ Schiera, for your positive reframing of stressful situations and feedback about the organization of my findings chapters.

Thank you to my family. To my husband, Jason, for keeping me grounded in “real life” during my years as a doctoral student and for your unwavering support and encouragement. To my children, Maxwell and Evelyn, for graciously understanding in toddler fashion when I had to work. To my mother, Iva Linda Baird, for moving from Dallas to Philadelphia to help us take care of our children. And thank you to my family of educators and those who are not educators but who believe in education, including my father, Nicholas Mittenfelner, grandmother, Lois Bishop, brothers, Matthew and Thomas Mittenfelner, my best friend, Gillian Kamata, and my many aunts and uncles.

\(^1\) These names and all of the other names used throughout this dissertation, including the name of the school, are pseudonyms.
ABSTRACT

A HIDDEN CURRICULUM OF CONTROL: THE INEQUITIES OF URBAN SCHOOLING

Nicole Mitenfelner Carl
Sharon M. Ravitch

This multi-year ethnographic study of a K-8 school, referred to as Baker School, in a low-income neighborhood in Philadelphia investigates the ways that hidden curricula of social reproduction and inequity shape students’ schooling experiences. The study employs ethnographic methods to explore, engage with, and better understand students’ experiences and perspectives of schooling at an under-resourced, urban, public school in a high-poverty neighborhood. The dissertation also examines how direct and indirect messages of possibility at the school influence students and teachers. I approach this study from an epistemological standpoint that situates students as important knowledge generators from which practitioners and scholars have much to learn.

This study is guided by a theoretical framework that considers how the naturalization of dominant values, beliefs, and actions has important consequences for students attending schools in under-resourced communities because these dominant beliefs are manifest in schools through overt and hidden curricula. Students’ perspectives and experiences of schooling processes in under-resourced schools are not often included in empirical research, and this ethnographic study has the potential to generate a new line of inquiry that centralizes students’ perspectives.
The study’s findings include that there is a hidden curriculum of control at Baker School in which schooling becomes primarily about controlling behavior. Relationships between students and teachers are strained as a result of the culture of control at the school, and to survive and thrive in this environment, students demonstrate *micro resistance strategies* as well as cultivate what I call a *habitus of fierceness*. The hidden curriculum of control, the systemic lack of resources, and the resulting power struggles and resistance culminate in, what I term, a *deficit default* based on deficit orientations of students, teachers, and parents. Finally, the study details the way that invisible macro structural processes impact students, teachers, and parents connected to Baker. However, instead of recognizing these invisible forces, students, teachers, and parents are blamed and blame themselves for the “failure” of urban, public schools like Baker. The study concludes by presenting implications for theory, practice, and future research based on the findings of this study.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................ IV

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................. V

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................... 1

The Myth of Opportunity ...................................................................................................... 1

The Study .............................................................................................................................. 5

Dissertation Overview ......................................................................................................... 8

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ......................................................................... 10

Cumulative Disadvantage and the Consequences of Naturalizing Capital and Habitus......... 11

Socialization and the Hidden Curriculum .......................................................................... 14

Symbolic Violence and the Consequences of the Culture of Power ................................. 16

The Transformative Potential of Teachers ......................................................................... 20

Summary ............................................................................................................................. 22

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN .............................................. 24

Site and Participant Selection ............................................................................................ 25

Data Collection Methods .................................................................................................. 27

Participant Observation and Fieldnotes ............................................................................ 27

In-depth, Group, and Informal Interviews ........................................................................ 29

Researcher Memos ............................................................................................................ 31

Sequencing of Data Collection Methods ........................................................................ 32

Data Analysis ..................................................................................................................... 32

Validity ................................................................................................................................ 34

Triangulation ....................................................................................................................... 35

Participant Validation Strategies ....................................................................................... 35

Thick Description ................................................................................................................ 36

Structured Reflexivity Processes ....................................................................................... 37

Researcher Roles and Positionality ................................................................................... 37

Credibility and Transferability .......................................................................................... 40

Ethical Considerations ...................................................................................................... 41
CHAPTER 4: A HIDDEN CURRICULUM OF CONTROL................................. 44
Implicit Policing: Socialization Processes of Control .......................................................... 44
  Policing the Classroom ........................................................................................................ 45
  Policing the Lunchroom ...................................................................................................... 56
  A Different Stance on Yelling ............................................................................................ 61
Relational Dynamics, Power Struggles, and Resistance .................................................. 65
Challenging Dominance and Fostering a Habitus of Fierceness ....................................... 71
Summary............................................................................................................................... 81

CHAPTER 5: INTERNALIZATION OF A “DEFICIT DEFAULT” .............. 83
The Disengagement of Parents and Guardians ................................................................. 84
  Essentialized Parent Narratives ....................................................................................... 87
  Parentification and Infantilization of Students ................................................................. 91
Operating in a Survival Mode .............................................................................................. 98
  Deficitizing Students ....................................................................................................... 101
  Deficitizing Parents and Projecting Frustrations onto Students ..................................... 106
A Deficit Default ................................................................................................................. 115
  Students’ Internalization of the Deficit Default .............................................................. 116
  The Disconnect Between Students’ and Teachers’ Experiences ...................................... 120
Summary............................................................................................................................... 128

CHAPTER 6: SYSTEMIC FAILURE AND THE CONFLATION OF
INDIVIDUAL AND SYSTEMIC RESPONSIBILITY ......................................... 130
Lack of Funding and Resources ....................................................................................... 131
  Faculty Burnout .............................................................................................................. 139
Struggling for Humanity: An Examination of Students’ Experiences ......................... 148
  Schooling and the Community: A Glimpse into Rashanna’s Experience ....................... 148
  The Student Experience of a Culture of Control: Nyeisha ........................................... 158
Symbolic Violence and the Invisibility of Macro Structures ........................................ 174
Navigating a Deficit Default with Resiliency .................................................................. 177
Summary............................................................................................................................... 182

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS.............................. 183
Education Does Not Equal Opportunity .......................................................................... 184
Democratizing Schools........................................................................................................ 187
Students’ Resiliency and Resources ................................................................. 191

APPENDICES .................................................................................................. 194

REFERENCES ................................................................................................. 196
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Myth of Opportunity

Education is perceived to be central to a meritocratic society in which individuals are rewarded for their hard work and achievement. However, in the United States, the concept and reality of meritocracy is primarily symbolic rather than a reflection of societal functioning (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). The neoliberal claim that individuals succeed based on their merit and hard work is part of how those in power use the idea of a meritocracy and individualism to justify their dominant positions (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 42). In the United States, a neoliberal, capitalist nation, “the system is rigged,” and “those with the most capital have the resources to not only maintain but also multiply their financial, social, educational, and residential resources” (Contreras, 2012, p. 153). The myth of meritocracy is important to schooling in the way that it allows the reproductionist nature of schools to persist unquestioned (see e.g., Anyon, 1980; Bourdieu, 1986; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 1983, Freire, 2000, 1998; MacLeod, 1995; Mills, 2008).

Broadly, a social reproduction argument means that schools reinforce (and thus reproduce) structural inequalities (Collins, 2009). This results in a society that pathologizes individuals and groups that do not succeed in this presumed meritocracy. Instead of recognizing the symbolic nature of educational meritocracy, educational
“failure” is often blamed on cultural deficiencies of students, families, or communities (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 2) or attributed to personal shortcomings (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 114).

If this reproduction argument has merit, then the ways that schools reproduce rather than change the status quo has significant implications for the current and future opportunities of students attending schools in communities with high rates of poverty. For example, in Philadelphia, almost one in every 2.5 children live below the federal poverty line (City of Philadelphia, 2013) compared to the national poverty rate for children of 21.1% or approximately one in five children (United States Census, 2014). Students attending public school in Philadelphia contend with schooling options that are largely perceived to be inadequate. The School District of Philadelphia (SDP), often described as in “crisis,” has laid off thousands of employees and closed dozens of schools in recent years (Quinn & Carl, 2013, 2015). Despite this, the SDP, the eighth largest district in the United States, currently enrolls approximately 130,000 students who are expected to overcome these significant structural challenges.

Income disparities in the United States have increased since the 1970s (Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009; Reardon, 2011), and the goal of funding compensatory public education to help reduce income disparities has not been achieved (Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009). Despite spending more as a nation on education, student achievement on

---

2 Social reproduction arguments have, in the past couple of decades, gone out of favor, especially in the education field (Collins, 2009; Rothstein, 2004). Drawing on Bourdieu (1984) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), scholars (e.g., Lareau, 2011) tend to focus more on cultural reproduction. Although these studies have merit, I argue that not terming the phenomenon social reproduction continues to reinforce the myth of meritocracy.
standardized tests has not improved (Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009). Although the United States has increased public education spending over the past four decades, great disparities exist between the amount spent on students depending on the city in which they live. For example, the per pupil spending for Philadelphia is approximately half of what the per pupil expenditure is for the neighboring Lower Marion School District (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015; Superville, 2015). School funding matters in producing achievement gap-closing effects on academic achievement and life outcomes (Jackson, Johnson, & Persico, 2016).

The SDP is in a state of constant financial crisis. The state of Pennsylvania took over the school district in 2001, which, in addition to bringing in an era of market-based education reforms (Cucchiara, Gold, & Simon, 2011), also replaced the mayoral-appointed school board with the School Reform Commission (SRC). The SRC consists of five appointed members, three of whom are appointed by the governor. Since 2001, the SRC has implemented a variety of market-based school reforms, including having different external organizations, both for and non-profit companies, run many of the District’s lowest performing schools, adopting turnaround policies for a number of schools that include replacing a minimum of 50% of the staff, and then in 2011, closing 24 schools. In addition to these reforms, the SDP has continued to face a budget deficit, low student achievement, declining buildings, and struggles with the teachers union, the Philadelphia Federation of Teaches (PFT). The PFT has been working without a contract for more than three years, and teachers have not had a raise in four years (Graham, 2016). The SDP projects a $500 million budget deficit by 2021, which does not include paying additional funds to the teachers union (Graham, 2016).
Pennsylvania’s school funding formula has been considered one of the most regressive in the country (Mezzacappa, 2015). School funding formulas are based on state, local, and federal funds in which federal funding makes up approximately 10% (Education Law Center, 2013; Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009), and local funds, which are based on property taxes, comprises approximately 50% of that formula (Education Law Center, 2013).3 A new funding formula for Philadelphia was passed in the summer of 2016, which will replace the old formula that relied heavily on local taxes and state contributions that were based on previous funds and not current enrollment. While the new funding formula is generally considered an improvement, it will not close the gaps in disparities between wealthy and poor districts (Churchill, 2016).

I approach educational inequity from an opportunity gap framework in which students’ opportunities are influenced by school and community resources and broader social inequalities (Carter & Welner, 2013).4 By shifting attention to “deficiencies in the foundational components of societies, schools, and communities that produce significant differences in education” (Carter, 2013, p. 3) instead of on students, this study critically examines students’ schooling experiences within one under-resourced school. The role of schools in social reproduction directly challenges notions of meritocracy. However,

---

3 The national average is 44%, and in Pennsylvania that number is 53% (Education Law Center, 2013).
4 Examples of factors that influence the opportunity gap are described by Welner and Carter (2013): “…the core reality remains: children who are growing up in poverty, children of color, and children whose native language is not English are deprived of many valuable supports, high-quality teachers, stable housing, safe schools and neighborhoods, up-to-date textbooks, health care, one-on-one tutors, expensive test-prep programs, and so much more. Students who excel on tests have often been exposed to vastly different economic and social realities beyond the classroom than those who do not” (p. 10).
schools, as a primary socializing agent, can and do impact students. Despite the prevailing meritocratic argument and critiques of it, little is known about students’ experiences and opportunities in under-resourced schools (Quaglia, Fox, & Corso, 2010). Even less is known within frameworks that index these students’ holistic lived experiences in ways that do not simply deficitize them and instead view them from a resource orientation and funds of knowledge perspective (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Questions of equity and educational opportunity are at the heart of this dissertation. An argument I make throughout this manuscript is that schooling is not equitable for students at Baker. The hidden curriculum of social reproduction (Anyon, 1980) persists, yet, as I describe throughout the dissertation, students and families are held responsible and blamed if they do not achieve social mobility. Furthermore, this dissertation articulates the particularities and lived experiences of hidden curriculum in schools.

The Study

This dissertation was conducted through engaging in a multi-year ethnographic examination of hidden curricula of social reproduction and inequity. The following research questions guided this study: How do students experience schooling at an under-resourced, urban, public school in a high-poverty neighborhood? How do messages of possibility at the school influence students and teachers? By possibility, I am referring to

---

5 I use the term under-resourced as opposed to “poor,” “low-income,” or “underserved.” I approach this study from a capital framework, which considers the resources from which individuals are able to profit. I want to be clear that the research setting, like all communities, is rich in a variety of resources that may or may not be acknowledged by broader society, and I do not intend to convey a deficit understanding by using the term under-resourced.
how teachers and students conceptualize the opportunities available to them as well as how they conceptualize themselves.

This study centers on the experiences of students, their opinions, experiences, and perceptions of schooling, and I explore, through students’ narratives, the direct and indirect ways that students learn about and understand what it means to be a student at Baker School (pseudonym). Furthermore, I examine the subtle and overt messages that students receive about themselves, their abilities, their preferences, and how they are expected to act in certain spaces. To describe a nuanced and complex picture, an ethnographic approach that combines participant observation and fieldnotes along with in-depth interviews with students, as well as interviews with teachers, parents, and other staff members is employed. Aside from a limited number of youth participatory action research (YPAR) studies, students’ voices and perspectives are not thoroughly reflected in academic literature (Bautista et al., 2013), and this has significant consequences for scholars, practitioners, and especially students. A powerful lesson from YPAR studies is that students have thoughtful opinions and ideas about schooling and ways to improve it. While this study does not directly employ YPAR methodologies, it operates from a conceptual understanding of the importance of learning from and with students and generating data based on their experiences and perspectives that can be used to improve adult understandings (Kuriloff & Carl, 2015; Ozer et al., 2013). An important theoretical and ideological grounding of this study is that students are experts of their experiences.

---

6 Schools in Philadelphia are often named after historical individuals. I use the pseudonym Baker School in reference to Ella Baker, an African-American civil rights leader. Many schools in Philadelphia are named after males, and I selected a Black female because many of the key participants in this study are young, Black, females.
(Carl, Ravitch, & Reichert, 2015; Jacoby & Gonzales, 1991; van Manen, 1990) and that they have important thoughts, opinions, and perspectives that can inform theory and practice.

This study suggests that students internalize negative perceptions about themselves, their school, and their community. These deficit orientations create a culture of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2001) in which students are expected to be (and then blamed if they are not) intrinsically motivated in a school dominated by disorder, disparaging language, and disruption. Throughout this dissertation, I demonstrate how this deficit ideology (Gorski, 2011; Valencia, 2010) develops and how students interpret and respond to it. By centralizing students’ experiences of schooling, this study contributes to more informed understandings of how schools and teachers approach, conceptualize, and interact with students.

This dissertation research presents theoretical, empirical, and practical implications. Examples of these, which will be discussed in detail in the final chapter, include thinking about what can be learned from students’ experiences and behaviors, designing schools so that they are more humanizing places, funding under-resourced school equitably, considering the purposes and goals of schooling practices, thinking about how to include students’ voices in schools, and examining the role of systemic inequality and racism. Furthermore, this dissertation research contributes to debates about the opportunities public schooling does and does not provide for low-income students of color. While much is written about the achievement gap, most empirical studies focus exclusively on quantitative data or on the perceptions of teachers and administrators. Adopting a student-centered methodological focus helps reframe understandings of
schooling and equity. This framework presents opportunities to help schools become more equitable, humane, and resource oriented rather than upholding and perpetuating schools as deficit-oriented environments.

Dissertation Overview

In Chapter 2, I discuss the theoretical framework that guides the study. Specifically, I articulate a theoretical framework that considers how the naturalization of dominant values, beliefs, and actions has important consequences for students attending schools in under-resourced communities because these dominant beliefs are manifest in schools through overt and hidden curricula. Chapter 3 situates the study methodologically by describing the overall approach, research site and participants, data collection methods, analysis processes, and validity and ethical considerations. The findings are presented in the next three chapters. In these findings chapters, I focus on the contextualized experiences of teachers and students at Baker and provide ethnographic thick description to illuminate aspects of the lived experiences of teachers and students and to remind readers that these are real people at a real school, not simply abstract facts or stereotypes. Chapter 4 articulates a hidden curriculum of control at Baker School. This hidden curriculum implies that schooling is primarily about controlling behavior. Relationships between students and teachers are strained as a result of the culture of control at the school, and to survive and thrive in this environment, students demonstrate micro resistance strategies as well as cultivate what I call a habitus of fierceness. In Chapter 5, I argue that what I call a deficit default toward students and their families becomes internalized. I also discuss how students, despite being parentified in many
regards and taking on additional responsibilities at home, are infantilized at school. Teachers, often as a result of frustration and stress, perpetuate deficit orientations and blame students and parents. Chapter 6 details the invisibility of macro structural forces. I show how these forces are evident in the lack of resources at the school and how they influence students and teachers. I specifically provide evidence of teacher burnout as well as two examples of the student experience of schooling. Chapter 7 offers implications for theory, practice, and future research based on the findings of this study.

Recommendations are presented for scholars, practitioners, and policy makers and include ways to focus on students’ experiences of schooling in humanizing and positive ways instead of deficitizing and blaming students and families.
CHAPTER 2: Theoretical Framework

This study is situated in a framework that has its formal theory roots in the concepts of cultural capital (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984, 1986; Farkas, 2003; Lareau, 2011), habitus (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1989; Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009; MacLeod, 1995), social reproduction (e.g., Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Collins, 2009), and critical pedagogy (e.g., Freire, 1998, 2000; Giroux, 1983, 2001; Moll, 2000). I combine and integrate these literatures to create a theoretical framework that considers how the naturalization of dominant values, beliefs, and actions has important consequences for students attending schools in under-resourced communities because these dominant beliefs are manifest in schools through overt and hidden curricula. Hidden curricula are maintained and reinforced through socialization processes related to capital and habitus and contribute to social reproduction in schools. I also describe how students and teachers can resist these dominant values through critical approaches to teaching and learning.

In the sections that follow, I describe how students attending under-resourced schools tend to be at a cumulative disadvantage when their values, beliefs, resources, and understandings do not align with those considered dominant. I then describe how socialization processes help reinscribe a hidden curriculum in schools that continues to reproduce structural inequality. In addition to this reproduction, significant consequences can result for students from minoritized backgrounds when they attend schools in which their backgrounds are not valued. Finally, I describe how teachers, as primary socializing agents, can help foster transformative rather than oppressive experiences for students.
Cumulative Disadvantage and the Consequences of Naturalizing Capital and Habitus

The ways that educational “failure” results in the blaming of certain groups of students for not working hard enough is related to the strong belief in individualism in the United States in which individuals tend to be criticized for lacking the personal drive and motivation to improve their lives. An example of this is the dominant and enduring language of the “achievement gap” rather than the other phrases such as “resource,” “access,” or “opportunity gap” that critique the prevailing deficit orientations. Furthermore, deficit orientations are often perpetuated by cultural hegemony in which dominant understandings of the world appear to be “common sense” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 65). These dominant, hegemonic ways of seeing the world often culminate in a culture of power (Delpit, 1995). The culture of power encompasses “a set of values, beliefs, ways of acting and being that…unfairly and unevenly elevate groups of people” (Barton & Yang, 2000, p. 873). The culture of power functions according to arbitrary norms, established by those with power, which are perceived as natural and that become normative and enforced by institutions. According to Delpit (1995), it is enacted in schools and classrooms through codes, rules, linguistic forms, communicative strategies, and ways of presenting the self that reflect the broader culture of power in the society. The naturalization of these habits, systems, values, and beliefs is directly related to understandings of capital and habitus.

Capital, which are resources that allow individuals to profit (Bourdieu, 1986; Wacquant, 2008), can be economic (financial and material), cultural (qualifications and goods), social (connections and networks), and symbolic (misrecognized as “natural”
Thinking of attributes as natural often leads people to misrecognize the resources (capital) necessary to participate in the culture of power. Habitus includes a set of dispositions that guide how individuals act and make sense of the world (Bourdieu, 1977); it encompasses one’s embodied preferences (Bourdieu, 1984; 1989) and includes “the mental structures through which [individuals] apprehend the social world, are essentially the product of the internalization of the structures of that world.” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 18) Habitus, like cultural and symbolic capital, is often perceived as “natural” or “earned.” This means that dominant forms of habitus and cultural capital are a part of cultural hegemony and perpetuate the culture of power in which certain values, behaviors, and interactions are valued and others are punished.

The favoring of certain values and actions over others is primarily invisible and unconscious, and this is precisely what makes cultural capital and habitus such powerful contributors to social reproduction because it appears as if individuals are rewarded because of natural abilities instead of for their forms of capital and/or habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986, 2001). The forms of capital and habitus that individuals develop through socialization processes from infancy to adolescence lead to both cognitive and non-

---

9 Because the acquisition of cultural capital is often more disguised than economic capital, “it is predisposed to function as symbolic capital, i.e., to be unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 245). Thus, symbolic capital represents other forms of capital that are often taken for granted or misrecognized as legitimate and not attributed as capital (Bourdieu, 1986, 2000). An example that Bourdieu (1989) describes is how the cultural capital of diplomas functions as symbolic capital. Although individuals do not have to struggle to have the diploma symbolically legitimated because it is “universally recognized and guaranteed symbolic capital” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 21), the other forms of capital necessary to get the diploma are not acknowledged, including the economic and social capital. Another example of symbolic capital is when “noble” qualities are attributed to wealthy individuals when they donate time or money because the economic capital necessary for such individuals to be able to do this is not recognized (Wacquant, 2008).
cognitive skills and habits that ultimately influence employment and economic opportunities (Farkas, 2003). Furthermore, the cultural capital of the dominant group⁸ is manifest in schools in ways that reinforce hegemony and reinscribe deficit orientations and that ultimately further sediment inequity (Bourdieu, 1998; Lareau, 2011; Mills & Gale, 2007). Unfortunately, schools in under-resourced communities tend to “turn out students who are cognitively and behaviorally unprepared to attain successful employment careers at middle-class occupations and wage rates” (Farkas, 2003, p. 557). This means that by privileging certain forms of capital over others, whether consciously or unconsciously, schools contribute to reproducing social inequality. Having and maintaining more capital and resources is also known as cumulative advantage, which is colloquially referred to as “‘the rich get richer’” (DiPrete & Eirich, 2005, p. 272). This entails that those with capital that mirror the dominant group continue to acquire more resources and those without continue to lack resources and are at a cumulative disadvantage (Farkas, 2003).

Because of the capital that students do or do not have, students from racial and social class backgrounds not a part of the culture of power are often at an additional disadvantage when they are silently blamed for not being determined or skilled enough to improve their life chances. The way that capital is legitimated and perceived as individuals’ natural abilities contributes to the reproduction of social inequalities and has significant implications for students. For example, it is often codified in the culture of

⁸ The dominant group refers to “the group that controls the economic, social and political resources” (Mills & Gale, 2007, p. 435).
power (Delpit, 1995) or in what others (e.g., Kuriloff & Carl, 2015) refer to as the hidden curriculum of power.

**Socialization and the Hidden Curriculum**

The hidden curriculum, coined by Jackson (1968), means that schools operate not only with stated purposes, goals, “and teacher-prepared objectives, but also in the myriad of beliefs and values transmitted tacitly through the social relations and routines that characterized day-to-day school experience” (Giroux, 1981, p. 284). The hidden curriculum has come to include the subtle messages of schooling that, according to many (e.g., Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 1976), continue to reproduce the hegemonic status quo. An example of this hidden (or not so hidden) curriculum in perpetuating class structures is how, as Bowles and Gintis (1976) describe, schools reflect the broader, economic conditions available to students. They state that students from racial and minoritized backgrounds tend to be concentrated in chaotic schools that emphasize rule-following, and the schools’ “minimal possibilities for advancement mirror the characteristics of inferior job situations” whereas schools in affluent areas tend to offer more opportunities for student participation and creative instruction (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 132). While hidden, this curriculum is still experienced, and both hidden and overt curricula impact students, their experiences, and their opportunities.

There are also ways in which students can resist the hidden curriculum (see e.g., Willis, 1977; Giroux, 1983), and teachers can critically approach teaching (see e.g., Freire, 1998, 2000; Giroux, 2001; Kincheloe, 2008; McLaren, 2003) in ways that educate students on the rules of the game and promote critical consciousness (Duncan-Andrade &
Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2000). Because students are uniquely poised to see things that adults do not and to interpret messages in different ways, examining students’ perspectives of school socialization processes is crucial so that the hidden curricula of power can be explicated and, ultimately, educators can understand ways to teach that are more holistic, less deficit oriented, and centralize student experiences.

Because of the entrenched belief in the myth of educational meritocracy described previously, students in under-resourced environments that are not critical of this phenomenon are blamed for individual deficiencies (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008), and the hegemonic imposition of certain forms of capital that maintain the status quo are misrecognized (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986, 1989, 2001). In addition to the hidden curriculum that is invisibly present in schools, the overt curriculum and its socializing effects matter to both students and teachers, and when schools in under-resourced communities adopt schooling practices that do not promote student creativity and teacher agency, they contribute reproducing instead of changing the status quo (Carl, 2014). Hidden and overt curricula are often represented in schools’ pedagogical approach. An example of this is reflected in how the “banking concept” of education – in which teachers are distillers of information that students passively receive – keeps people passive and therefore in subjugation (Freire, 2000). An aspect of the banking method of schooling includes “depositing myths indispensable to the preservation of the status quo” – myths that perpetuate hegemony and become normalized in education, including the individual schools, adults, and students within them (Freire, 2000, p. 139). These myths include that people live in a “‘free society’…the myth that anyone who is industrious can become an entrepreneur…the myth of the universal right of education…the myth of equality of all
individuals” (Freire, 2000, p. 139). Too many schools, especially in under-resourced communities, operate with a banking approach (Freire, 2000) or a transmission model (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Ravitch, 2011) of education.

While teachers typically do not consciously endorse such hidden curricula, even unintentional actions, especially by those with power over students, have powerful consequences. Teachers working in under-resourced communities (even teachers who may have previously lived in the school’s neighborhood) often have misconceptions about the local community (Moll, 2000). When teachers do not recognize the “funds of knowledge” of their students, students can experience constraint and disadvantages (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). In the next section, I describe potential consequences that can result when schools, and the individuals in them, do not challenge hidden curricula and the messages about certain groups of students that are perpetuated within such curricula.

**Symbolic Violence and the Consequences of the Culture of Power**

Socialization processes primarily occur in the family and the school (Bourdieu, 2000), and the relationship between the school and the family also plays an important role in the reproduction of social inequality (Bourdieu, 1986, 1998, 2000; Lareau, 2011; Nieto, 2008; Reay, 1998). Schools tend to privilege middle and upper class parenting styles (Lareau, 2011; Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Reay, 1998), and schools also tend to favor specific values and attitudes, or habitus, that reflect middle and upper class social and cultural capital. Teachers expect to teach students who are similar to themselves, and teachers’ individual teaching habitus is formed by the many years they spent as students
in which they determined what are and are not appropriate behaviors for teachers, students, and parents (Zevenbergen, 2006). There are consequences when the habitus and symbolic capital of teachers differs from those of their students (e.g., Lareau, 2011; Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Mills, 2008; Reay, 1998). Some students may cultivate a habitus, such as a hustler (Wacquant, 1998) or an outlaw habitus (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009), as a mechanism for surviving in schools when their forms of capital differ from the institutionally valued and mainstream forms of habitus and symbolic capital. Other students, typically from middle-class backgrounds, see their habitus represented in “the values that the school seeks to transmit consciously (and unconsciously) and to legitimate” (Mills, 2008, p. 80). Whereas students, who tend to be of color and lower socioeconomic status, often do not see their values represented at school. Instead, their habitus is not valued and/or is devalued, and additional constraints are placed on these students.

When teachers have different social class backgrounds than their students, students’ school performance is negatively impacted: “The evidence indicates that high-status teachers, both black and white, experience special difficulties relating to minority youngsters” (Alexander, Entwisle, & Thompson, 1987, p. 679). In a study based on participant observations, interviews, and surveys of a suburban school in the northeast United States, Calarco (2011) found that white students get more help and attention from teachers because of their direct actions. However, Calarco, like Lareau (2011), contends that social class, rather than race, is more of a determining factor in students’ help-seeking behaviors and schooling outcomes.
However, students’ race clearly matters a great deal and informs the ways that they are treated by teachers and school leaders (e.g., Dee, 2004, 2005; Howard, 2003; Tyson, 2013). For example, using data from a randomized experiment, there is evidence to suggest that there are educational benefits in the early grades when students, both Black and White, are taught by a teacher sharing their race (Dee, 2004). Teachers’ perceptions about students from different racial backgrounds have also been shown to impact students’ opportunities, particularly for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Dee, 2005). From an opportunity gap framework, in many schools, students of color are not exposed to college preparatory classes (Tyson, 2013). From a cultural capital framework, social class tends to dominate the discourse about the types of capital that students have and how this affects their opportunities. However, it is important that teachers recognize that students often bring cultural capital to school that can differ from mainstream forms of cultural capital (Howard, 2003, p. 197). Race matters, and the success of racially diverse students in the United States necessitates that teachers acknowledge and address their perceptions of racially diverse students (Howard, 2003). When teachers have deficit perceptions of students from different racial, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds, many unintended consequences can result.

Whether the process of legitimization is conscious or not, some students benefit while others do not (Henry et al., 1988; Lareau, 2011; Mills, 2008). The ways in which schools legitimate certain capital and habitus over others is a form of symbolic violence. This violence does not involve physical or bodily harm, and in the same way that symbolic capital is invisibly transmitted, symbolic violence is largely invisible; it is a form of cultural domination in which the symbols and practices of the dominant group
are imposed on all of society (Bourdieu, 2001). For example, because schools tend to reproduce the values, tastes, and ideals of the dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1984), symbolic violence, “a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling” (Bourdieu, 2001, pp. 1-2), is acted upon students because their own habitus and capital are degraded (Bourdieu, 2000, 2001). Symbolic violence tends to be unconscious, occurring in daily interactions (Bourdieu, 2001), and causes individuals “to ‘misrecognize’ inequality as the natural order of things and to blame themselves for their location in their society’s hierarchies” (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009, p. 14). One example is the way in which schools often assume that all students should exhibit middle-class cultural capital (Henry et al., 1988; Lareau, 2011). Students who do not have these expected forms of cultural capital can experience symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1984; Henry et al., 1988). As a result of this symbolic violence, some students are “distanced and Othered” because the school legitimizes certain cultures and marginalizes others (Horvat & Antonio, 1999, p. 320). Students with a different “background, however rich in experiences, often turns out to be a liability” (Henry et al., 1988, p. 142), and the racial and class othering that students experience causes pain, trauma, and hurt (Horvat & Antonio, 1999).

Schools are sites where individual and familial values and cultures intersect on a daily basis. Navigating between these intersections, or what Phelan, Davidson, and Yu (1993) refer to as “students’ multiple worlds,” can be difficult for some students. The symbolic violence and preference for certain values and habits at schools can make traversing these worlds even more difficult. Explicitly teaching the unequal power
dynamics that manifest in schools and society with students may help them to feel (and be) less marginalized and discriminated against (Delpit, 1995; Mills, 2008; Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1993; Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994). Part of this explicit teaching can help teachers and students uncover the symbolic violence and hidden curriculum in schools and points to the powerful potential of teachers.

The Transformative Potential of Teachers

Although teachers are not the direct focus of this inquiry, they profoundly shape students’ experiences. While acknowledging the ways that schools tend to reproduce the status quo, I also acknowledge that students and their teachers can resist this reproduction, and one explicit way to do this is to explicitly teach students about the rules of the game. This involves acknowledging and incorporating the different funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, 2000) that all students bring to school as well as explicitly educating students about the power that is involved in these differences. Broadly speaking, these practices may be considered culturally relevant pedagogy in which teachers’ actions affirm that all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or social class, can succeed (Ladson-Billings, 1994). These more transformative practices can also be conceptualized as critical pedagogy, which runs counter to the narrative that positions the teacher as the conveyor of knowledge and the students as the receivers (Freire, 1998; Johnson, 1995). These practices entail that teachers are not only aware of the capital that schools tend to privilege but also work to combat these power asymmetries (Giroux, 1983, 2001; Nieto, 2008).
One such transformational practice is to “[let] marginalized students in on the rules of the game” (Mills, 2008, p. 87). This kind of education helps teachers to “be involved in transforming the field rather than seeking to preserve the status quo” (Mills, 2008, p. 87, emphasis original). Understanding the powerful role of cultural capital and habitus becomes especially important for teachers because cultural capital “is what makes the games of society” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241). In practice, this may involve teachers acknowledging first that they are a part of the “culture of power” and then giving students the tools of this culture, such as being able to speak in Standard English (Delpit, 1995).

To be clear, Delpit and others (e.g., Alim, 2004; Cummins, 2009) are not taking a deficit view of students; they are advocating for giving students cultural tools that will help them be successful.

Habitus contributes to the reproduction of social inequities (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2007) and constitutes an understanding “for the game” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In the game of schooling, certain students tend to not have the “tools” to be as successful as other students. Because habitus is not fixed and can change when in different fields (Bourdieu, 1990), teachers can help students develop the tools valued by schools and the broader society. These cognitive and non-cognitive skills can translate into future economic opportunities (Farkas, 2003). Thus, educating students on the rules of the game is important, but teachers should also elevate students’ consciousness so that they understand how powerful these rules are and how to manipulate them. Schools are both sites of power and reproduction as well as dialogue and liberation (Giroux, 1983, 1985, 2001; Kincheloe, 2008). To educate critically, educators need to understand the
complex, historical, and individual ways that students understand the world (Giroux, 1985).

In addition to educating students on the “rules of the game,” transformative education involves understanding and incorporating students’ habitus. For example, this may mean recognizing the power of a hustler habitus (Wacquant, 1998) or an outlaw habitus (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009) and how these sensibilities can be harnessed in schools so that these students do not experience symbolic violence of being “othered” (Horvat & Antonio, 1999). Although leveling the playing field for students from minoritized backgrounds can be difficult (Bourdieu, 1986; Mills, 2008), there is great potential for schools and teachers, through critical teaching practices, to act as positive socializing agents and help increase students’ current and future opportunities (e.g., Nieto, 2008).

Summary

To summarize and integrate these various theories and their influence on the conceptual framework of this study, this inquiry brings together theoretical understandings of the ways that capital and habitus (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1986; Lareau, 2011) contribute to a hidden curriculum of social reproduction (e.g., Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 1983) and has important implications for the current and future opportunities of students in under-resourced schools and communities. Complicating this reproduction argument is the recognition that schools are not only sites of power and reproduction but can also be places of dialogue and liberation (Giroux, 1983, 2001; Kincheloe, 2008), and teachers can and do positively impact students
through more critical approaches to education (e.g., Freire, 1998, 2000; Giroux, 2001; McLaren, 2003). However, missing from this framework are students’ perspectives, understandings, and experiences of this hidden curriculum that unintentionally perpetuates social inequality through the socialization processes related to capital and habitus. There is much to learn about students’ experiences, especially since their voices tend to not be privileged in mainstream academic literature (Bautista et al., 2013).

An ethnographic approach that places primacy on contextual understanding is well suited to examine students’ experiences and perspectives through rich participant observational data of a school, in-depth interviews with students, their families, and their teachers, and a review of relevant archival data. Epistemologically, I approach this study through a critical methodological lens (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) that acknowledges the importance of power relationships in research, how facts are inextricably linked to values, that language is inherently subjective, that society privileges certain groups over others, and mainstream research unintentionally contributes to social reproduction (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). As described in the next chapter, I have incorporated various strategies, including structured reflexivity processes, throughout the data collection and analysis processes to help resist interpretative authority and to be as faithful to the participants’ experiences as possible while acknowledging the powerful role that I, as the researcher, play in all aspect of the research from topic, design, analysis, write-up, and dissemination (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).
CHAPTER 3: Research Methodology and Design

The study employs ethnographic methods to explore, engage with, and better understand students’ experiences and perspectives about socialization processes and the opportunities they do or do not foster. Ethnographic methods of participant observation and interviews are well suited to answer the research questions because these methods emphasize in-person field study and immersion to understand cultural meaning while acknowledging that culture is historically constructed (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I approach this study from an epistemological standpoint that situates students as important knowledge generators from which practitioners and scholars have much to learn.

This study examines students’ experiences in one Philadelphia school to explain the student perspective of schooling. One goal of the learnings from this research is to consider schooling processes that are more equitable and less hegemonic (and even counter-hegemonic). As stated previously, the following research questions guided this study: How do students experience schooling at an under-resourced, urban, public school in a high-poverty neighborhood? How do direct and indirect messages of possibility at the school influence students and teachers? By possibility, I am referring to how teachers and students conceptualize the opportunities available to them as well as their conceptions of themselves.

Examples of research foci included direct and indirect ways that students learn about and understand what it means to be a student at Baker School. I examined this through the subtle and overt messages that students receive about themselves, their
abilities, their preferences, and how they are expected to act in certain spaces. Additional examples of the schooling processes considered include how teachers do or do not incorporate students’ voices and opinions into their practices, how and what teachers teach, activities and assignments, how the school broadly and teachers specifically engage families, ways that students are disciplined, behaviors that are privileged, and behaviors that are punished.

As with many ethnographic studies, the overall approach was emergent based on field-based data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this chapter, I describe the research site and participants, methods of data collection, analysis processes, validity strategies, and ethical considerations.

**Site and Participant Selection**

The research took place at a Philadelphia neighborhood school, Baker School, with students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Baker School enrolls approximately 600 students. Its students are 95% African American, and 100% are classified by the SDP as economically disadvantaged. Baker’s results on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) are consistently below the SDP average even when comparing Baker’s PSSA results to other students considered by the District as economically disadvantaged (see Table A in Appendix A). For example, 29% of economically disadvantaged students in the SDP scored Proficient or Advanced on the English/Language Arts (ELA) PSSA exam in grades 3-8, and the result for the same exam at Baker is less than half of the District score for economically disadvantaged students. Although this study does not methodologically focus on these measures of
achievement, this information is provided as additional context regarding the school and its relationship to other schools in the District.

I engaged with participants, including, students, teachers and parents, in all grades and classes of the school. However, I conducted extensive fieldwork in two classrooms, a fourth grade class taught by Ms. Smith, a middle-aged Black woman, and an eighth grade class taught by Mr. Barnes, a twenty-two-year-old White man. I spent significant time with many students in these two classes, but my focal group of students included four eight grade girls: Bianca, Jalayla, Rashanna, and Renee. In addition, there were other eighth grade students, who were not as focal to the study, but that I observed and engaged with frequently, including Haleigh, Talik, Khalil, Kiandra, and Melvan. In addition to the eight grade students, a four fourth grade students were also focal participants in my study, including Nyeisha, Lashaya, Ireena, and Stefon. Many other students, in a variety of grades, were included in fieldnotes. As described previously, the students at Baker Elementary are predominately African American, and all of the students in this study identify as Black.

In addition to Mr. Barnes and Ms. Smith, other focal adult participants include the counselor, Ms. Johnson, a middle-aged Black woman, a grandparent volunteer, Ms. Carol, an older Black woman, the disciplinarian, Mr. Dixon, a forty-year-old Black male, and Ms. Crawford, a parent of six who is a twenty-nine-year-old Black woman. Additional adult participants, include for example, the lunch room supervisor, Mr. Kelly, a middle-aged Black man, the principal, Ms. Washington, a middle-aged Black woman, Ms. Redmond, a Black woman in her thirties, mother of eight, and parent volunteer, and the director of after school programs, Mr. James, a thirty-year-old Black man.
Although I observed school-wide events and activities, I primarily focused on students in grades 4-8 for a variety of reasons including my familiarity with this age range as a former middle school teacher. Middle school is also a time when students often begin to struggle with academic motivation and self-esteem (Anderman, Maehr, & Midgley, 1999) and consider dropping out of school (Rumberger, 1995). These factors shape the important perspectives that students have to share about their thoughts and experiences of socialization processes in school.

**Data Collection Methods**

Related to the overall ethnographic methodological approach described above, the primary data collection methods included observation and fieldnotes and in-depth interviews. Secondary data sources include researcher memos and archival data. Consistent with a qualitative approach, the research design was emergent and evolved based on learnings in the field (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The methods of data collection are described in the following subsections.

**Participant Observation and Fieldnotes**

To fully understand the ways that students in an under-resourced school experience schooling, including practices of the school and those working within it, participant observation and fieldnotes that occur in the school environment are an important source of data. Observations enable researchers to experience and document, through the taking of careful, detailed fieldnotes, the activities in which participants are engaged so as to get a first-hand account of participants’ behaviors and experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Consistent with the importance in ethnographic methods of
building relationships (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), I spent the 2014-2015 school year conducting exploratory observations and developing relationships with participants, including the principal, the counselor, a grandparent volunteer, and the director of after school programming. During my first year, I visited the school approximately once a week. Beginning in the summer of 2015, I started visiting the school approximately three times a week; some weeks I was at the school everyday. I spent approximately ten hours a week at the school during my second year of fieldwork. Observations occurred in classrooms, at school-related activities and events, during admission and dismissal, at lunch, during after-school programs and activities, at fieldtrips, school dances, report card conferences, in the hallways, and the like. Observing the school in a variety of settings and contexts helped contribute to a more detailed understanding of students’ behaviors and experiences. As focal student participants were determined and the observational focus begins to narrow, I primarily conducted observations in the settings and contexts of these students, which included Ms. Smith and Mr. Barnes’ classes and associated events with these classes including attending multiple fieldtrips as a chaperone with the fourth graders and attending one field trip, dance, and graduation with the eighth graders. I also observed report card conferences with families with Ms. Smith as well as with Mr. Barnes and the other middle school teachers. I got to know the families associated with the fourth grade students, especially Nyeisha and her mother, Ms. Crawford. Jottings were taken in the field and developed into fieldnotes as close to the actual time of the observation as possible (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011).

While participation in research settings often operates on a continuum (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), my presence as a researcher working with the school community was
established during my first-year at the school. As a means of developing reciprocal research relationships, I was involved in supporting other efforts at the school that are distinct from my dissertation research, including supporting the school in development, implementation, and evaluation of a service-learning curricula.

**In-depth, Group, and Informal Interviews**

Qualitative interviewing helps researchers to develop contextualized perspectives and to determine the range and variation of participants’ experiences so as to develop a holistic understanding of a phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this regard, interviews provide necessary insight about students’ schooling perspectives. I employed in-depth, also referred to as unstructured, interviews. This type of interviewing, common to ethnographic studies, allows for interviews to be inductive and relevant to each participant’s experiences (Carl & Ravitch, In Press). As such, pre-specified list of questions was not used. However, I often made notes of ideas I wanted to address at subsequent interviews, as many individuals participated in multiple interviews. These notes and ideas were based primarily on observational fieldnote data. Broadly, participants were asked about their thoughts, opinions, and understandings about Baker School and the surrounding community. Furthermore, participants were asked for specific examples that contextualize and describe their responses in detail. Interviews were based on emergent field-based data and also included conversations about events that occurred in and out of school, interactions with other participants, how individuals characterize themselves and how they are characterized by others.
The goals of the interviews were to develop a holistic understanding of schooling at Baker, and this included getting the in-depth perspectives of multiple stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other staff members. Some of the in-depth interviews occurred in a one-on-one setting. However, some of the interviews took place in a group format. This was not a part of the initial research design, yet, the middle school students enjoyed and requested to have group interviews. There were never more than four students in a group, and I followed-up with individual participants to address aspects that they appeared to not want to discuss in the group setting. All in-depth interviews were audio-recorded, with permission, and professionally transcribed. I then reviewed each transcript while listening to the audio recording to make sure transcripts were as accurate and verbatim as well. This combination of group and individual interviews with the students worked well as a means of data and perspectival triangulation, which I discuss in subsequent sections.

In addition to the in-depth one-on-one and group interviews, many individuals at the school participated in informal interviews. These informal interviews, which are common in ethnographic research, tended to occur spontaneously during fieldwork and resembled casual conversations with participants (Carl & Ravitch, In Press). The informal interviews were recorded as jottings and then developed into fieldnotes as close to the time of the conversation as possible. I conducted over 50 informal interviews and 33 recorded and transcribed, in-depth interviews with the participations described in the previous sections. The focal student participants participated in multiple and frequent interviews, which the students referred to as “group.”
Researcher Memos

Before, during, and after data collection, I composed multiple memos to reflect on and document research processes, capture emergent learnings, and discuss my positionality (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In these memos, I closely examined how aspects of fieldwork, emerging themes, and my social location and positionality impact data and ultimately findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Memos were composed ongoingly as a part of the data collection and analysis processes as well as at strategically selected points. For example, after conducting a few interviews with students, I wrote a memo that reflected on the type of data I was generating, how it aligned or differed from observational data, what follow-up themes I should discuss in subsequent interviews, who else I need to interview, and what I was learning about students and their experiences. The structure of these memos was informal; they were written in prose form, and also included bullet points of next steps. While many memos were written as internal sense-making documents, I also shared these with critical friends to initiate dialogic engagement (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). These individuals included my advisor and dissertation chair, other members of my dissertation committee, members of a research inquiry group, and fellow doctoral students. See Appendix B for an overview of memos that I composed.

Archival data. Pertinent internal and publically available documents specifically pertaining to the research setting as well as related to schooling in Philadelphia were reviewed. These documents helped to develop my understanding of schooling in Philadelphia as well as specific processes at the research site. Examples of such archival documents include personal, official, and popular culture documents (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). For example, personal documents included student work, teacher-created...
correspondence with parents, lesson plans, and student assignments. Official documents entailed, among others, school mission statements, posters, letters to parents, rules posted in classroom and hallways, handbooks, and publically available data from the School District of Philadelphia. Popular culture documents primarily included newspaper articles.

**Sequencing of Data Collection Methods**

The methods described above were employed concurrently throughout the data collection process. However, I spent considerable time immersing myself in the setting and taking fieldnotes and recording informal conversations before conducting in-depth interviews to help me develop a more complex understanding of the site before asking more specific questions in interviews. After initial observations and conversations, all of the data collection methods, including observation and fieldnotes, interviews, researcher memos, and review of archival data, occurred concurrently. For example, if participants mentioned a specific event or school program, I asked the participant or other participants for the relevant documents related to this event or program so that I could examine how what is presented in the documents compares with the interview data and fieldnotes. The triangulation of these multiple sources of data helped to develop a more rigorous and complex study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) and additional validity strategies, including triangulation, are described in subsequent sections.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis took place formatively so to help develop more nuanced and complex interpretations. During formative analysis, I composed analytical memos
that reflected potential themes and contradictions in the data, commented on fieldnote vignettes, and documented difficulties and learnings. I paid specific attention to three important aspects of data analysis including, data organization and management, immersive engagement, and writing and representation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Data was also analyzed summatively after all data were collected. I conducted multiple readings of my data corpus and employed open and axial coding processes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Open coding processes were as inductive as possible to develop emic understandings of the data (Maxwell, 2013), and axial coding combined inductive and deductive processes. I developed a code set that includes both descriptive and theoretical categories (Maxwell, 2013). For example, one emic code that recurred frequently was they listen when we yell. Examples of other preliminary codes include teachers in survival mode, students raising themselves, perceptions of motivation, teachers don’t understand us, and so on. Once all data were coded, codes were analyzed to determine key themes and develop thematically based findings (Gibson & Brown, 2009). While developing codes, code definitions, and themes, I deliberately looked for disconfirming evidence and alternative examples and explanations. I also systematically engaged with others to elicit feedback, challenge my interpretations, and scrutinize codes, themes, and findings throughout formative and summative data analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In addition to thematic coding, I employed connecting strategies to holistically look at data in their entirely rather than solely pulling coded excerpts with the goal of seeing relationships to broader contexts and the entire “story” of the data (Maxwell, 2013; Maxwell & Miller, 2008; Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014). Developing holistic stories of the data helped to keep the findings as contextualized as possible.
Writing is integral to analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña 2014), and throughout the data analysis process, I composed multiple analytical memos that reflected on processes, codes, and themes to document and further my thinking (Maxwell, 2013; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Examples of these memos are included in Appendix B. To resist interpretative authority in analysis and in my writing, I engaged in the validity strategies described in the next section as well as the dialogic engagement strategies described previously.

Validity

Consistent with many qualitative approaches and with ethnographic methods, I maintained a fidelity to participants’ experiences rather than to specific methods (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). While acknowledging that validity can never be entirely ensured (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), I am mindful of transactional processes as well as transformational approaches to achieving qualitative rigor and ultimately conducting a trustworthy study (Cho & Trent, 2006). To have a study that is credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable (Guba, 1981; Toma, 2011), I employed multiple strategies to help establish the validity of my data and rigor of my study. Specifically, I incorporated the validity strategies of triangulation, thick description, participant validation, and structured reflexivity processes to enhance the study’s validity, rigor, and complexity (Toma, 2011; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). These validity strategies are described in the following subsections.
**Triangulation**

I specifically consider methodological, data, theoretical, and perspectival triangulation. Methodological triangulation consists of between-methods triangulation (Denzin, 2009) by looking across data sources (observations, interviews, memos, and archival data) to see how, if, and to what degree data are consistent across different methods. Data triangulation entails that data sources are compared according to time, space, and person (Denzin, 2009). For example, when conducting classroom observations, I noted if students are responding and interacting differently according to the time of day, the location (e.g., classroom, hallway), or the person (e.g., science teacher versus math teacher). I also incorporated theoretical triangulation so that my findings, while as inductive as possible, are analyzed by considering contrasting theories. Because a social reproduction and cultural capital argument heavily influence my theoretical framework, I reviewed and considered literature that refutes this argument. Finally, I also incorporated a range of perspectives and stakeholders so as to achieve perspectival triangulation and develop a more complex and nuanced data set (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In addition to these processes of triangulation related to data collection, I also analyzed data by paying attention to connections and contradictions within and between different data sources, methods, participants, and theories; these processes are known as analytical triangulation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

**Participant Validation Strategies**

I “checked in” with participants, often called member checks or participant validation strategies, throughout the study to share emerging learnings and interpretations.
and to see how my interpretations do or do not align with participants’ understandings. Specifically, I had many informal conversations with Mr. Barnes, Ms. Smith, Ms. Johnson, and Ms. Carol in which I mentioned ideas and potential themes and solicited their thoughts. I also did this with my group of four eighth grade girls during our conversations and “tested” emerging hypotheses to elicit their reactions.

The specific processes of participant validation varied depending on the participant. For example, for students, I asked students questions that are related to a particular concept, theme, or finding; I asked these questions in a variety of ways to determine if and how their understandings change and how that aligns with or contradicts the data. For adult participants, I engaged in conversations with them about my emerging findings to determine if and how they resonant with their experiences. As participant validation processes are considered crucial to having credible findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2013), I engaged these participants throughout the study so that I could focus my data collection and analysis throughout my and not just at the end.

**Thick Description**

Consistent with the ethnographic methods, I employed the validity strategy of thick description, which refers to how researchers write about and describe a research setting and participants, to enhance the credibility, transferability, and complexity of a study (Guba, 1981; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Thick description includes providing accurate and thorough contextual information so that readers of the study will be able to understand processes as well as transfer and apply findings to different contexts. Thick description, as opposed to thin description, includes commentary and interpretations of
participants and events within the research context (Denzin, 2009). This includes making sure the study’s contextual factors, participants, events, and experiences are described clearly, with sufficient detail, and situated in contextual understandings so that research audiences and participants can develop more complex interpretations of the study and develop mental pictures of the research setting (Ponterotto, 2006).

**Structured Reflexivity Processes**

As described above, I employed structured reflexivity processes in the form of memos as well as engaged in dialogic engagement exercises with colleagues and advisers. Both of these activities helped me to monitor, analyze, and question ways that my interpretations are shaped by my understandings and experiences. Examining and monitoring the ways that my biases impact the data and findings was crucial to have a valid and rigorous qualitative research study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

**Researcher Roles and Positionality**

As a former School District of Philadelphia middle school English and lead teacher at a neighborhood public school in West Philadelphia for five years and mentor to first-year teachers in multiple schools throughout the District, I have conceptions of what “good” teaching looks like. I care deeply and am passionate about education in Philadelphia. I acknowledge that my “wisdom of practice” (Shulman, 1987) influences how I understand the world. However, as with all qualitative research, there is no universal truth, and my biases and understandings cannot be separated from my interpretations (Scheper-Hughes, 1992; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It is my goal to conduct “good-enough ethnography” (Scheper-Hughes 1992, p. 28) in which I do my best “to
listen and observe carefully, empathically, and compassionately” (p. 28). In addition, I built into my processes deliberate ways for me to subject my interpretations to scrutiny to resist interpretative authority.

In my role as researcher, I also acknowledge that additional power asymmetries exist. This is part of the reason why I employ ethnographic methods because “[a]lthough it is framed by the unequal relationship of ‘investigator’ and ‘informant,’ ethnography renders its practitioners vulnerable to the blood, sweat, tears, and violence of the people being studied and requires ethical reflection and solidary engagement” (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009, p. 14). There are both strengths and limitations to ethnographic methods, and while I attempted to conduct a valid and rigorous study that placed a primacy on participants’ experiences, I acknowledge that my understandings and biases influenced what I saw in observations, the participants I included and did not include in interviews, and the way I analyzed my data. I worked to subject my interpretations to scrutiny, and I am as explicit and transparent as possible about potential biases and assumptions that inform my understandings.

Furthermore, an additional aspect of my positionality is my race, age, and social class. As a young White woman, among a largely Black staff, racial dynamics were clearly at play. Furthermore, as I noted, my role as an educator and a doctoral student at an ivy league university further complicated certain relationships. Developing a presence as a trusted and respected member of the community took time, and it was not without frustration on either side. In addition, I live in close proximity to Baker; my children go to a preschool a few blocks away from the school. I often run into students and staff from Baker at the grocery store or on main streets. Although I grew up poor, my current social
location at an ivy league university and living near Baker but in a more economically resourced neighborhood, highlights and serves as a continual reminder of important aspects of privilege and resource that I cannot deny and that I must remain actively aware of throughout my engagement.

One of the biggest challenges I faced was how I decided to write about the teachers at Baker. I spent countless hours with them, and I understand how challenging and grueling their job can be on a daily basis. Yet, I was often frustrated with either their pedagogy or the way they interacted with children. I provide a fieldnote that illustrates some of the tensions and frustrations that surround my positionality at Baker.

Lamar keeps getting in trouble today. I have been in the class for a few minutes, and Ms. Smith keeps hollering at him: “Sit down, do your work, I have had it!” Ms. Smith walks over to the back of the classroom by the door to greet me. Lamar gets up to throw something away. She elbows me and says, “Follow my lead.” Then to Lamar, Ms. Smith yells: “Come here. Come here.” Lamar says, “I didn’t do nothing.” Ms. Smith hollers, “What did you say?” Lamar responds, “What?” Ms. Smith screams again, “Get over here.” Ms. Smith asks me in front of Lamar: “Ms. Nicole, why don’t you tell Lamar what White people expect of them?” I don’t say anything. She gets in Lamar’s face and says, “They are building more and more prisons because they think that is where you are going to end up. They expect that of you.” She continues, “You need to get a good job so you can afford things. You need to work hard. Minimum wage isn’t going to cut it. You are going to end up poor. Lamar don’t you have a lot of little brothers and sisters?” “Yes,” he says. Ms. Smith asks, “How many?” Lamar answers, “Eight.” She is surprised and asks, “Eight. Are you sure?” Lamar states, “Yes, counting my step brothers.” Ms. Smith asks, “And they all live with you?” Lamar says, “Yes.” Ms. Smith says to me in front of Lamar, “His mom is pregnant so it is about to be nine.” She then asks Lamar, “Don’t you want to set a good example for them?” He nods. I say to Lamar, “Hi Lamar. I’m Nicole. You seem like a nice kid. I hope that the next time I talk to you, you are not in trouble. I know that it is hard to sit still all day.” Ms. Smith says, “He doesn’t sit still all day. He doesn’t listen and just shrugs his shoulders.” (Fieldnote, 3/2/16)

This fieldnote is one example of many in which I was frustrated with Ms. Smith. Many factors were at play, including my race. I was upset with how she was treating the
students, and I was angry that she tried to make me a part of that. However, as I articulate in the findings chapters, it is clear that Ms. Smith, Lamar, and I were experiencing racialized stress (Stevenson, 2014), which is often not considered in largely homogeneous populations. I suggest in the concluding chapter that schools such as Baker take steps to address these instances with their staff and students. An additional factor that this fieldnote highlights is how I was conflicted about representing teachers negatively, as they are all too often blamed for education failure without recognition of broader systemic issues, and I address these issues in Chapter 6. What I have attempted to do is represent what happened at Baker faithfully to my data, and this means that I do not shy away from describing situations such as the previous fieldnote. However, I also show the complexities and nuances that surround daily life in this school for students and teachers.

**Credibility and Transferability**

The validity strategies described above are employed with the goal of conducting a rigorous and valid study that adheres to the qualitative notions of credibility (internal validity) and transferability (external validity) (Guba, 1981; Miles et al., 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). By triangulating between different methods and participants, checking in with participants to determine their perceptions of my findings, looking for alternative explanations and data that supports different interpretations, and seeking counsel throughout design, fieldwork, and analysis from mentors and peers, I enhance the study’s credibility and transferability. Furthermore, consistent with the ethnographic tradition, I describe the setting and context with enough thick description so that readers of my
research can fully understand the research context and determine how the findings do and do not compare to other settings, contexts, situations, and individuals; this will foster the study’s transferability so that the findings can be applicable to broader contexts without losing context-specific richness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Toma, 2011; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

**Ethical Considerations**

In compliance with federal regulations, all proper permissions were obtained. I informed participants that the study is entirely voluntary and that there are no consequences for not participating or for not answering any question in an interview. The University of Pennsylvania’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the SDP’s Research Review Committee approved the proposed study as a part of a broader study about student and parent voice with Dr. Rand Quinn. Furthermore, I obtained verbal consent as necessary before conducting observations before, during, and after school as well as written consent for all recorded interviews. In the subsections that follow, I describe these considerations and safeguards in more detail.

All interview participants were fully informed as to the study goals, procedures, and details related to time commitment; these processes were described in the consent form, and individuals had ample time to review the form and ask questions before the interview began. For interviews with students, permission was obtained from a parent/guardian, and students reviewed and signed an assent form. During the consent and assent form process, participants answered if they give permission for the interview to be audio-recorded. I informed participants the reasons and uses of the recording, but I
made sure to let them know that the decision is entirely up to them, that the recorder can be turned off at any time, and I did not take out the recorder until after participants agreed to be recorded. I did my best to maintain confidentiality for all participants, as they are de-identified in final write-ups. I protected participants’ privacy by storing all data on a secure PennBox folder or on a password protected computer.

I consider research ethics and safeguards from a relational standpoint that is crucial to conducting valid, rigorous, and ethical qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This standpoint acknowledges that participants are experts of their own experiences (Jacoby & Gonzales, 1991; van Manen, 1990). Because qualitative research is centered on relationships and the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative research (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006; Porter, 2010), it is vital to frame relational considerations as ethical issues (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this regard, I deliberately and systematically reflected my interpretations to scrutiny so as to resist interpretative authority and to generate analysis and findings that are as complex and nuanced as possible. These systematic processes included the validity strategies described previously, including participant validation and structured reflexivity processes. In addition, I documented research processes and analyses with transparency with both participants during data collection and in final write-ups.

Ethnography can help to humanize individuals and resist deficit orientations (e.g., Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009; Paulle, 2013). The culture of power (Delpit, 1995) is maintained through the naturalization of dominant habits, systems, values, and beliefs; this naturalization contributes to a hidden curriculum of social reproduction (e.g., Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 1976) that unintentionally perpetuates social inequality through
socialization processes related to capital and habitus (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1986; Lareau, 2011). Students’ perspectives and experiences of these socializing processes in under-resourced schools are not often included in empirical research, and this ethnographic study has the potential to generate a new line of inquiry.
CHAPTER 4: A Hidden Curriculum of Control

Baker School is universally described as “chaotic.” Although there are less chaotic days, which are considered “good days,” teachers, staff, students, and parents believe that Baker is “out of control.” In response to this, a majority of adults (teachers, staff, parents, and administrators) at the school contend that students “need” to be controlled.

Based on assumptions about what students at Baker “need,” I argue that Baker has a hidden curriculum of implicit and explicit policing that affects students, teachers, parents, and administrators. Furthermore, I describe how the school environment of unrest and disorder shapes the relational dynamics between students and adults, whose primary concern is controlling student behavior. This relational dynamic results in a deep power struggle between students and adults as they both vie for control and autonomy. While teachers attempt to control students, they also struggle for autonomy as professionals. Finally, I explain how the hidden curriculum of policing contributes to students’ internalization of control narratives. Students adapt to this environment by demonstrating a habitus of fierceness through what I consider micro resistance strategies.

Implicit Policing: Socialization Processes of Control

The processes of control at Baker are less explicit than schools with “no excuses” approaches to discipline (e.g., Whitman, 2008) or in schools with technical “paramilitary” (Devine, 1996) and “penal” (Nolan, 2007, 2011) discipline approaches. Baker is a K-8 school and does not have security detectors. There is one school police officer at the school about three or four days a week. Instead of hyper-surveillance and
policing, the control processes are more implicit. From the moment that students begin school at Baker, they are considered in “need of controlling,” and the duration of their schooling experiences is founded on this premise. This notion of needing to be suppressed is undergirded by the deficit orientations that adults in the school project onto students; they are related to paternalistic assumptions that students in urban schools need rigid discipline policies and traditional academic approaches because progressive education is “ill-suited” for “inner city schools” (Whitman, 2008, p. 5).

**Policing the Classroom**

Schooling, in this regard, is more focused on behavioral management than on learning processes. For example, the following fieldnote from a social studies class highlights how little learning takes place at the school and how the primary focus is controlling students’ behavior. Specifically, the arrangement of the desks, the student interactions, transitions in the hallway, and the approach to instruction illustrate how behavior, as opposed to learning, is the focus of this class. This fieldnote also details the classroom layout in Figure 1. Additional detail regarding this figure is described in Inserts A, B, and C.

I open the double doors to the middle school wing on the third floor. A glass panel is missing from one of the doors, and there are several ceiling tiles missing above them. Three boys are standing in the stairwell, two of them are holding their arms like a gun and are pretending to shoot each other from behind the doors. I walk into Mr. Barnes’ room. Mr. Barnes is a White, first-year teacher. He is currently teaching an eighth grade social studies class, and there are 14 students in the room when I walk in. They are working on the “Do Now,” which consists of two questions. A Do Now is common name for a warm up exercise that students are expected to do as soon as they arrive to a class; Do Nows are typically a brief exercise to focus students’ attention. The two Do Now questions are projected on the screen in the front of the room.
The lights are off in the room, and there are papers and food wrappers on the floor. The desks are arranged in rows with desks facing the front board, and most of the rows consist of scattered desks. Several students have their heads down, and other students are talking to each other. I sit in an empty desk at the end of the second row. I ask the student in front of me, Rashanna, if anyone is sitting here before I sit down. Haliegh puts her middle finger up to the student behind her, she looks back and notices that I saw her and says, “sorry” to me. The back “wall” of the classroom is a room divider and is shared with another middle school classroom. There are bulletin boards on this divider with seventh and eighth grade student work. The divider between the classes is very thin, and you can hear chairs dragging across the floor and students yelling and running in the other room. See Figure 1 for an overview of the classroom layout.

Figure 1. Mr. Barnes’ Social Studies Classroom Layout
**Insert A. Hand written poster**

| Be Ready | Come with a positive attitude  
|         | Have your materials with you  
|         | Arrive on time  
|         | Be in dress code  

| Be Respectful | Listen when others are speaking  
|               | Clean up after yourself  
|               | Don’t eat in our room  
|               | Try to understand the point of view of others  

| Be Responsible | Own up to your actions  
|               | Complete your work as best as you can  
|               | Think about your future  
|               | Worry about yourself  

*The words “Ready, Respectful, Responsible” are on posters throughout the school, including all of the classrooms and in the hallways. The posters often say, “Baker Students are Ready, Respectful, and Responsible.”

**Insert B. Bulletin Boards** **Along the Back Wall**

**The bulletin boards are covered in colored butcher paper and lined with border. The butcher paper is ripped in places, and the border is missing and ripped in places as well. The white rectangles represent student assignments.**

**Insert C. Pictures of the Desks**

***There are several broken student desks in the classroom. This typically entails that the top portion of the desk, as shown in this picture, is no longer secured to the bottom and falls off frequently.***
Most students sit in their desks with their coats on and their backpacks on the floor beside them or under their desks. A few students hang up their backpacks in the designed coat rack area, and a few students sit in their desks with their backpacks on and never take them off. A minute or two after I sit down, there is screaming in the hallway, and one female student walks in late. After about 15 minutes are spent on the Do Now, the class moves on to what students call the “copy notes” portion of class. These notes consist of several PowerPoint slides of large bullet points of text. There is a projector that displays the bullet points that the students are to copy in their notebooks. Three more female students walk in late, one after the other. One of these students, Ameena, walks around the room three times while eating chips from a small bag and then takes a seat and takes out a soda bottle from her bag and starts to drink it. There are now 19 students in the class. We can hear students running and yelling in the hallway and in the class next door.

During the “copy notes” portion of the class, it is now relatively quiet in Mr. Barnes’ classroom, but it is still very loud next door. Occasionally, you can hear the teacher, Mr. Webster, asking students to sit down. Mr. Barnes walks around the room while students are copying the notes, and he is writing some kind of notes in a journal that is sized like a large trade paper novel. About five students are copying down the notes. The rest of the students have their head down, are playing on their phone, or are eating.

The objective of the eighth grade social studies lesson, which has not been discussed, is written on the board. It states, “SWBAT [students will be able to] identify dissent.” I am curious if students know what dissent means, as it has not been discussed. About 30 minutes into the class period, it sounds like the class next door is finally getting started, and I can hear the teacher speaking to the class.

After students have finished copying the notes, Mr. Barnes asks them to make an inference about their notes. They are supposed to write 3-5 sentences about this inference and then turn the assignment in. Mr. Barnes walks around and checks on a few students’ work, and he says, “excellent work” to one student. During the time for students to write 3-5 sentences, a majority of students are on their phones, have their head down, or are talking to other students. Amir and Haakim, who sit on opposite sides of the room from each other are yelling insults back and forth. They get up and start play fighting meaning that they are both laughing and pretending to throw punches at each other. They sit back down after Mr. Barnes asks them several times. After about five minutes of the inference assignment, the students are now allowed to answer the questions in groups. Mr. Barnes tells them again that they will turn this assignment in.

Ameena is eating another bag of chips, and other students are asking her for a chip. Jalayla is also eating chips, but she is hiding them in her backpack, Haliegh sees and asks her for a chip. Jalayla refuses, and Haliegh says to
Jalayla, “Don’t be so light-skinned.” A few students ask Mr. Barnes to put the “notes” back on the projector. Students seem a bit unclear as to what they are supposed to be doing, and approximately two students are working on the assignment. Haakim and Amir start arguing again, and they are now chasing each other around the room. They are both laughing, but it appears as if they are going to start actually fighting. The rest of the class is commenting on what Amir and Haakim are doing, and Ms. Barnes is following the boys around the room and asking them to sit down. Amir starts to get very angry and begins screaming at Haakim, and the two students begin to fight. Almost immediately, Khalil breaks up the fight and separates the students just as it is almost time to change classes. Khalil walks Amir out of the classroom and appears to be trying to calm him down. The rest of the students get packed up and head out into the hallway to go to their next class. Students in grades seven and eight at Baker have four primary classes, including Reading/English, Math, Social Studies, and Science. There are two seventh grade classes and two eighth grade classes, and each of the four classes rotates as a group to different teachers throughout the day in addition to having one specials class and lunch.

As the students are getting packed up, Mr. Barnes tell me, “You might want to sit at my desk. The next class, seventh grade, coming in is really big.” I move over to his desk. There is utter chaos as the students transition. Ms. Forbes is upstairs blowing a whistle and yelling “get to class!” The seventh grade students are slowly trickling into the room. During the class change, there was a fight. From what I can gather from the students’ conversations as they enter Mr. Barnes’ room, a “big fat eighth grader” was fighting a “small seventh grader.” It takes a long time for the students to get settled. After about ten minutes, students start doing the Do Now. One male student comes up to me and asks, “Are you Mr. Barnes’ girlfriend?” I tell him that I am not, and he follows up with another question, “Do you work here?” I state that I do not. Another male student asks loudly, “Who is this young lady?” I state, “I am a researcher.” Kiandra states, “That is Ms. Nicole!” She comes over and gives me a hug. The class is pretty full about ten minutes after class started. There are currently 23 students. It is hard to count exactly because of my viewpoint at Mr. Barnes’ desk and the lights are off. I have learned that he rarely turns them on so that it is easier to see what is on the projector screen. He also thinks it clams the students. Another male student walks in late. The class is talking to each other quietly. Mr. Barnes pauses and says that he is waiting for them to get quiet. There is screaming and hollering going on in the classroom next door.

Mr. Barnes says, “This is the 50th day of school and I am not getting a lot of respect. I am going to wait.” He waits silently for a few minutes. “Class, it has been since early October that we did not get through a lesson.” Mr. Barnes is still waiting for the students to be quiet. Some students are very frustrated and yell

---

9 At a later date, I asked Haliegh what this means and where she learned the phrase. She said it is a common phrase in media like Instagram, and that it means being stingy or mean.
out, “shut up y’all.” The students get quiet after a few minutes and continue working on the Do Now. It is very loud next door. I hear Mr. Webster yelling at his class. A few students get up and walk out of Mr. Barnes’ room. Mr. Barnes walks over to me and says, “It is a really hard job, but it is also really rewarding to see how far the classes have come. Students cut class. There is a fight almost every day, as you saw. I can’t believe it was worse last year.” He then continues walking around the room looking at students’ work and jotting notes in his book. Mr. Webster is hollering next door; he says, “I am up at 5AM every day planning lessons.” A student yells out, “I am up at 8.” Mr. Webster continues, “I come here every day despite being disrespected to help you make more money and improve your lives to help you live anywhere you want to live and so that you can have a better quality of life.”

As students are working on the do now, Mr. Barnes says to me, “This class has come a long way. Normally it would take them a long time to get quiet.” “Do you like working here?” I ask. He responds, “I like working with my colleagues. And I like to see how far the students have come. This class, we used to not be able to do anything. It was utter chaos.” The students are supposed to learn about Columbus’ atrocities, but they don’t make it to the lesson because it took so long to come into the class and get started on the Do Now. The class gets packed up and lines up to go to lunch. I walk downstairs to the lunchroom with them. The students are supposed to walk in two straight, quiet lines, one line for girls and one for boys, as it was at the school where I taught. There are not two lines, it is more like one large group, and the students are not quiet. We reach the lunchroom, and Mr. Barnes turns to me, “Are you going to come up with me?” I say, “No. I am going to hang out with the students during lunch.” Mr. Barnes looks surprised, “Ok. I’ll see you later.” (Fieldnotes, 12/1/15)

All of the activities in Mr. Barnes’ class appear to be structured to control behavior, including the arrangement of the desks, the instructional activities that primarily consist of copying down notes for in the eighth grade class, how the warm up “Do Now” takes the entire 45-minute class period in the seventh grade class, and the “half-hearted” insistence that students are silent and walk in straight lines to lunch. Learning in this class, as well as many others throughout the school, seems to be synonymous with being compliant, and the class is organized in ways with un-rigorous learning activities that align with the notion that students at Baker “need” structure and to be controlled. Furthermore, students’ actions, such as their disregard for the no eating in
class policy among other rules and Haliegh putting her middle finger up at another student, signify their attempts to resist the controlling culture, which is discussed in more detail toward the end of this chapter.

Although many students resist these structures, both students and teachers appear to internalize the messages that schooling is about controlling behavior. For example, when students are asked about their day, they often respond by stating whether they got in trouble or “did work.” Teachers speak in the same terms, “She didn’t do any work today” or “He did his work.” Work, for example, consists of copying the notes in Mr. Barnes’ class or completing a worksheet in Ms. Smith’s class. There is very little discussion about students’ engagement with concepts and learning. Instead, adults and students discuss school in terms of how compliant students are or are not. At its “best,” learning is reduced to the behavior of completing an assignment, along the lines of the pedagogy of poverty (Haberman, 1991), and instruction resembles a transmission model of education (Freire, 2000; Ravitch, 2011). In this regard, compliance becomes a proxy for success at Baker.

Denise, a counseling intern from a local university, discusses how the school needs more resources in general as well as specific training for staff. She specifically mentions training for the teachers in an emotional support classroom for students who are classified as having “emotional issues.” Without prior discussion of control, Denise describes how in this class, which has a much smaller student to teacher ratio, the focus is still primarily trying to control behavior.

Denise: I was there [in the Emotional Support class] an hour if not more a week because Ms. Johnson [the counselor] did a class there, basically what I was told it was a special class for kids with emotional issues. I think it
was referred to as Emotional Support. There was a little girl in there who asked, because I would ask a bunch of questions and basically this one little girl was just emotional. They said pretty much all the kids had ODD [oppositional defiant disorder] or were diagnosed with ODD. It started off with seven kids with one head teacher and maybe three support teachers and then it got up by the time I left because another school’s teacher for that classroom in another school just left one day and never came back, so those kids had to be filtered to another school. It ended up being like eleven or twelve kids in that classroom and that transition is hard for any child so then it’s like transitioning all these kids with similar issues in one classroom and they had, they brought in one more support teacher. There was one two three four five teachers in there and maybe twelve kids and it was just, I mean it was chaos all the time.

Nicole: Really?

Denise: It was sad because a lot of them just needed the individual attention which you did have a fair amount of teachers, but it was I feel like more time was spent in that classroom on controlling the child’s behavior, which is obviously important, rather than teaching. I feel like it was always put on a movie because you are quiet or I saw some things I didn’t really like as far as restraints being used or things like that. I know they had after I left on Wednesdays they had someone come in I think he was from [the university] to do some type of cooking class with them, and they seemed to really like that. A lot of times I think Ms. Johnson would say they didn’t get to go outside today and I’m like those kids probably need playtime more than anyone so they should be going outside, but they would spend so much time on getting them under control. Then it was difficult because a lot of the kids fed off each other, so they’d be more behavioral when one was more behavioral and that was part of the attention seeking. That classroom literally was always chaotic and I know …

Nicole: They were young kids right?

Denise: They were like I want to say third grade and younger like third through first or something like that, first through third. I know one of the kids who was very behavioral and always hard to deal with, I just sat down with him to do a worksheet. At first, of course, as most kids do, he was asking me for all the answers, and I wouldn’t give them to him, but if he took the time to sit down with them and work with them he got it, but I also understand with thirteen kids you can’t give everyone specific attention. Some of those issues are go to training, but also larger systemic issues that are at play within the school as far as their resources. I remember telling some of my professors I was like, “This obviously isn’t a critique for you but a lot of the literature we read or a lot of just the things we are exposed to in schools do not prepare you for schools like Baker.” You have kids who aren’t able to focus on
academic work and you chuck it up to them being bad or not I don’t want to say not being smart, but it’s put on those other issues that aren’t at play but they have so many outside factors going on that they need support for that they are not getting support for, how you deal with that. I know with some of the students I talk to they were worrying about probation, they had parents in prison, they have been shot at and things like that they wouldn’t have necessarily gotten support for and just talk to in school. Ms. Johnson is one person for all those kids even if they did want to talk to her, and you don’t really read too much about that in the school setting like how do you, it’s not like kids have all they worry about. We have kids who are trying to work already and are taking care of their siblings and all that stuff, they are trying to navigate and it’s just going to be hard for anyone to be able to do. (Interview, 7/25/16)

Denise, who is in a master’s program at a well-respected university and Mr. Barnes, who graduated with an education degree from another such university, both describe being unprepared for the type of problems they encounter at Baker. Denise comments on pedagogical methods of controlling behavior (i.e., showing a movie) as well as deliberately keeping children inside because of the focus associated with controlling behavior. Despite the attempts at control, Denise still describes the class as “always chaotic.” As Denise mentions, students experience many outside factors that impact their feelings of safety and security. The systemic issues and lack of resources that impact schooling at Baker are discussed in depth in the Chapter 6. For now, I focus on discussing a hidden curriculum of control and policing.

Denise explains how when she worked one-on-one with students, they did well. Students are aware of teachers’ expectations. Depending on the teacher, students act differently in different spaces. In one class, students sit in their seats and talk quietly. In other classes, students refuse to attend and instead they play “manhunt” (a combination of tag and hide and seek) in the hallways. When this happens, someone says over the loud speaker that broadcasts to the entire school: “The eighth grade students in the hallway
need to report to room 504 immediately.” Students make the decisions about whether to attend class or complete assignments based on (1) if they like their teacher and/or (2) if they believe that the work is worth completing. Despite the attempts to control students, students resist these attempts and in turn teachers believe there is very little rule-following or enforcement at Baker. This, in turn, influences teachers’ focus on the need to control students.

Mr. Barnes states that lack of accountability is the biggest problem in the school.

What he describes appears to be ways that students resist a culture of control:

There doesn’t seem to be any [accountability] to the students, and I’ve heard these remarks so many times by the students themselves that they can get away with whatever they want and they’re aware of that. There really aren’t any consequences for their actions, so as teachers we are told if we are dealing with behavior, or academics, or what have you, the correct solution is to write up a pink slip and call home. And there are probably I would say 20 students who I’ve done that for on almost a weekly basis, and nothing happens. And you have students who remark on it who for instance, I had a student who was just yelling and beating this other student yesterday and I asked, “Why are you doing that? What are you getting out of that? Why are you doing this?” And his response was “because I can.” And like it’s hard to come back from that because [pause] it seems from the top – from on high there is really nothing that will be done. We don’t really suspend students, there’s in-house here, aside from that the consequences are pretty limited. We can’t hold students after school for detention. (Interview, 2/1/16)

Mr. Barnes articulates the frustration many teachers experience because they do not believe that they are supported in disciplining students. The attempts to control behavior at the classroom level (e.g., calling home and writing pink slips in addition to the other classroom structures described previously) do not have the desired effect, and the entire school is generally perceived as chaotic. The chaotic nature of Baker further reinforces the narrative that students must be controlled. Thus, with a formal academic curriculum
primarily focused on test preparation, a hidden curriculum,\textsuperscript{10} defined in Chapter 2, of implicit policing based on deficit orientations of “inner-city” students emerges. Schools in this culture of control are reproducing social inequalities by preparing low income students for menial jobs (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Anyon, 1980) or prison (Bourgois, 2003\textsuperscript{11}; Edelman, 2012).

The teachers at Baker, who are predominately middle-class black women, have adopted a philosophy that they “have to yell.” One faculty member, a veteran, Black, female teacher told me and another veteran teacher, “I might say ‘please, be quiet’ ten times but the students won’t listen to me until I scream, ‘Shut up.’” The other teacher chimed in, “It is what they know. It is what they are used to” (Fieldnotes, 12/11/15). I have heard many teachers, staff members, and fellow parents express this philosophy. Some adults adopt a mindset that there is nothing left to do but yell; however, this mindset comes from negative assumptions about students and their families and home lives that many adults do not fully understand (e.g., Gorski, 2011; Valencia, 2010). The mentality that students at this school must be yelled at carries over in all environments of the school, and in the next subsection I give an example of how this plays out in the lunchroom, a place where students would ideally be able to have fun with their peers.

\textsuperscript{10} Although what I describe as a hidden curriculum may be visible to some, it is not the expressed or stated curriculum of the school or the district and thus functions as a hidden curriculum, as defined in Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{11} In the preface of his second edition, Bourgois (2003) writes, “The most vulnerable inner-city residents are the children of children. They are chewed up and spit out by the American Dream, only to find themselves years later at extraordinary financial and human cost to the prison industrial complex” (p. xxiii).
Policing the Lunchroom

From my experiences as a teacher, student, and researcher in numerous schools throughout the United States, I have never been to a lunchroom that is silent. Students are generally expected to remain seated while they are eating, but it is also expected that lunch is a time when students will socialize and talk to their peers. At Baker, the lunchroom is a place of contention and chaos, even for the youngest students. Just like at the urban public school where I taught for five years, lunch is often the place in which fights occur, and students get in trouble. Teachers at Baker do not have lunchroom duty, thus, students are in the lunchroom with other school staff who may not know them as well. Controlling the students is often more difficult for these staff members, and at Baker, they attempt to establish control by yelling. The Kindergarten lunch, for example, consists of Mr. Kelly, a tall, black man, yelling at the students to sit down and be quiet.

I stopped by the Kindergarten lunchroom because I promised a few students in the schoolyard that I would say hello to them during lunch. Earlier that morning I also met a man, Mr. Kelly, who told me that he runs a structured recess program at the school during lunch, and I was also excited to see what this program looked like, as I thought it might have been good to have when I was teaching. Ultimately, I did not see structured recess. The lunchroom included a very noisy hum of kindergarten and first grade students talking and running around. Students are repeatedly yelled and screamed at by Mr. Kelly to sit down and be quiet. There are about five other adults in the lunchroom, which is also the gym, who hand out the lunches to the students one at a time, and the line for lunch wraps around halfway around the gym. The are pre-packed meals that are heated under a lamp, as no food is prepared at the school. While I was helping a couple kindergarten girls, Taylor and Malaya, who brought their lunch open up their lunches and clean up a mess after juice spilled, I noticed some commotion in the back of the lunch room. I learned a few minutes later from a university student volunteer that several students had accidents in the bathroom because they are not allowed to leave class to go to the bathroom because they are afraid the students will run the halls. “The kindergarteners are running the halls?” I ask. The volunteer says, “Yeah. That is what they think will happen.” The students sit at tables separated by class and sex, meaning that the female students and male students for each class sit at different tables.
The university student volunteer has been coming to the school since last year, and, without asking her anything, she tells me that “Mr. Kelly has to be really mean because last year it was utter chaos during the kindergarten and first grade lunch.” I speak to Taylor and Malaya for a few more minutes, and then I tell them that I need to head upstairs to see another classroom. They hug me and ask me to stay and play with them. I tell them that I will come to the playground with them tomorrow for recess. (Fieldnotes, 10/6/2015)

The university volunteer sums up the control mentality when she describes that Mr. Kelly has to be mean and that students have to be controlled or else there is “utter chaos.” However, the lunchroom is universally described as “chaotic” despite the yelling. During subsequent visits to the Kindergarten and first grade lunch, elementary students state that Mr. Kelly yells at them and makes them “stand on the wall.” Students who are “on the wall” are not allowed to play during recess, and they have to stand against the wall until their teachers pick them up. Isa, one of the first graders mentioned in the following fieldnote, articulates an example of how good behavior becomes synonymous with compliance, even in nonacademic spaces like the lunchroom.

During the kindergarten and first grade lunch, a group of first grade girls calls me over to their table. I squat down at the end of their table. A girl gets up and walks over to me. She says, “Hi. I’m Isa and sometimes I am bad in school, but I am going to take a deep breath and try to have a good day so that I can get an OK face.” Students in the younger grades are sent home with behavior charts daily, and a smiley face is good, a frown face is not good. An OK face entails OK behavior.

Nicole: Hi Isa.
Mr. Kelly walks by and yells, “Sit down.”
Liana: I’m Liana. L- I- A- N- A.
Nicole: Hi Liana.
Liana: I’m scared of Mr. Kelly.
Nicole: Why?
Liana: He makes you get on the wall.
Mr. Kelly walks right by our table
Liana: Hi Mr. Kelly
Liana smiles at me and give me a look while raising her eyebrows, kind of like see, he’s scary, after she says this. Mr. Kelly does not say anything to her.
Nicole: What is the wall?
Liana: It is boring. You have to stay on the wall until your teacher comes. I jot a quick note in my book.
Liana: What are you doing?
Nicole: Research so I am taking notes.
Liana: Does that mean that you are mean?
Nicole: No.
Liana: Ok. Good.
Mr. Kelly yells “sit down”
Liana: See, he says, 'sit down.'
Alexis: I’m scared of him too.
Nina: Me too.
Liana: My little brother is in my mom’s belly. He name is ‘No No.’
The first grade girls want me to write down all of their names. They are, “Chelsea, Isa, Alexis, Liana, Nina, and Noel”
Nicole: Nice to meet you, Chelsea, Isa, Alexis, Liana, Nina, and Noel. (Fieldnotes, 12/8/15)

In addition to Liana’s description of the control by fear and yelling atmosphere in the lunchroom, Isa’s statement about being “bad in school” and hoping to get an “OK face” is further evidence of the hidden curriculum of control and behavior.

The seventh and eighth grade lunch, is considered a place no one, including the students, wants to be. After a visit to the seventh and eighth grade lunch, the secretary, a middle-aged Black woman, saw me leaving the lunchroom and asked me, “What were you doing in the jungle?” I did not respond because I did not know what she was talking about, and she asked me again, “What were you doing in the jungle?” I finally realize she is talking about the lunchroom, but she has walked away (Fieldnotes, 12/1/15). Students adopt a similar mentality that the lunchroom is a dangerous place. Kiandra, a seventh grader I know from the after school program runs up to me in the cafeteria and exclaims, “Ms. Nicooole!” She walks up to me and gives me a hug and asks, “What are you doing here?” I respond that I am hanging out to see what lunch is like. Kiandra then warns me, “Be careful. You might get beat up in here” and runs off chasing Fahiym, a seventh grade
boy who also attends the after school program. Kiandra runs back over to me, and I ask her what they do in the lunch room. She responds, “Run around. Duh. We are kids.” I smile and laugh quietly and then ask if they go outside. She states, “Sometimes. Right now we are in trouble and can’t go outside for recess” (Fieldnotes, 12/1/15).

As Kiandra describes, the seventh and eighth grade students are frequently “denied” recess after lunch. I came late to lunch one day and was surprised to find the seventh and eighth graders playing in the school yard. I remark to the security officer, “I thought recess was cancelled for the rest of the year.” He responds, “It was supposed to be.” “I’m glad they are outside,” I say. “Recess is a good thing.” The security officer responds in a judgmental tone, “Well, they won’t have recess in high school.” During recess, the adults (the disciplinarian, the lunchroom staff, the school police officer, and Mr. Kelly) stand against the wall closest to the auditorium and talk to each other. They occasionally holler at students to come away from the fence where students often talk to older teens. When students are not allowed to go outside, the adults stand in front of the doors to the cafeteria to try to prevent students from leaving; however, the students typically find a way into the schoolyard.

Kiandra astutely points out that she and her peers run around because they are kids. At Baker, it appears as though the students are not allowed to be kids. Instead, their behavior “needs” to be controlled in all spaces of the school. In many public schools, including all of the 16 Philadelphia public and charter schools I have observed, elementary and middle school students are expected walk in two straight lines, one line for girls and one for boys. The younger students are supposed to “hip and lip” at some schools, including Baker. This means students are to put one hand on their hip and one
on their lip to remember to keep their mouth closed. Students at these under-resourced, urban, public schools are powerfully controlled in all spaces and grades.

In contrast, in the many resourced suburban schools and elite independent schools I have observed, students are allowed and expected to run around. This kind of physical freedom is seen as something they need for their successful learning. I remember the stark comparison seeing first grade students at an independent school rush toward the dining hall. No adults scolded them, but instead, a dean commented, “They should be running. It is good for them.” The hidden curriculum of control and implicit policing implies that students in “these types of schools” (i.e., under-resourced, urban, public school) should not be able to run or have recess.

Why is it that some children, who tend to be White and affluent, do not need to “hip and lip” and can run and play and other children, who tend to be Black and poor, must be controlled in all spaces of school? Although primarily racially homogenous in terms of staff and students, I believe that undergirding Baker is racial stress, which includes the often invisible, relational processes that result in “emotional overload or shock to an individual’s coping system before, during, and after racial interactions” (Stevenson, 2014, p. 28). Racial stress is not studied as frequently in racially homogeneous settings, yet it is ever present (Stevenson, personal communication, 2/15/17). The racialized stress I am describing is less the personal racial stress that Stevenson describes that entails when an individual appraises an experience as stressful, although individualized stress certainly occurs and is caused by these kinds of systematized control mechanisms. I am articulating institutionalized racial stress. For example, Baker has Black leadership, Black students, and majority Black teachers and
staff. However, the education system is designed for and by White people. Thus, racial interactions and racial stress are enacted and experienced constantly at Baker, and adults as well as students internalize the hidden curriculum of policing and control in a way that messages that Black, brown, and poor students need to be controlled because they lack an internal locus of control and are unwieldy. These racist tropes have deep historical roots in long-held conceptions of Black people as less than human and in need of corporal punishment, which dates back to slavery and even before.

**A Different Stance on Yelling**

Although a many adults yell at students to get them to listen, some do not. Mr. Barnes is a first-year, White teacher who studied education as his undergraduate major. In the excerpt that follows, Mr. Barnes and I are talking in a stairwell because the gym teacher is teaching in his classroom, there is a meeting going on in the faculty break room, and it was really loud everywhere else we tried to talk. Two students from Mr. Barnes’ homeroom, who frequently try to avoid being in class, stumble upon us.

Nicole: I want to continue something that really stood out to me that I’ve just been thinking a lot about, and this – I wonder where it comes from, I don’t know if it’s for you personally, or something you were taught at [School Name], or – but the idea that you’re like, “I’m not going to yell at my students.” Can you talk a little more about that?

Mr. Barnes: I just don’t see what it accomplishes. And I think as a kid you always kind of saw that the kids, who got screamed at the most, scream the most you know. So it always seems like a perpetuating thing where if you like just I think it comes out of decent human decency where that if you’re kind to people, you have a good shot that they’ll be kind back to you. So I always say, “Please do this, please do that, sir, ma’am,” and stuff like that. Even if I don’t get shown respect, which I am disrespected on a daily basis, I think it has helped, no matter how minuscule, I think showing them that they are people and they deserve respect, just like I’m a person and I deserve respect that all people deserve that basic human courtesy.
that I think that’s a powerful thing, and I think yelling at someone violates so much of that. And that’s like the thing like I first hear in the corporate world, you know feel like my boss is screaming at this guy and I can’t imagine, like you are adults. Like I wouldn’t even treat my 13 year olds that way in such a condescending manner; that yeah, I’m not going to yell at you, you know. And it is like one of the more shameful things in life where it’s like beginning this year when I was so depressed and so stressed, I did yell once. But just once but it’s like it’s probably going to weigh on me to my dying day that I yelled, you know and it was just like this sensory overload, and I can’t – like I can’t make an excuse for it but it was just like I felt like I was drowning and I just like had to yell to stop it. And it didn’t. It made me feel crummy and terrible.

Nicole: So do you think students pick up on it? Do they notice like do you think that they appreciate it –?

Mr. Barnes: Yeah. The other day one of my students said I was one of the nicest teachers in school, which I don’t even think is true. But I think he picked up on the fact that like it – I was asking someone to please sit in their seat there was a kid who was running around and like I think they saw that most teachers would yell at them; whereas I say, “Please have a seat. Can you please do it?” And like I get that that it’s a double edged sword because at one point you totally come off as a pushover, like this Mr. Barnes isn’t going to be like hard on us you know, and I think that’s what they’re used to. So I’m kind of setting myself up for failure in the discipline part of it because I think some of the best managed classrooms in this school have that really scolding the kind of discipline that makes students feel lousy. It’s effective but I don’t think it’s good for the end product, you know I don’t think it helps the kids in the long run because then they’re only becoming responsive to threats, and yelling, and all kinds of stuff like that. Speaking of

Bianca and Jalayla walk up to us.

Nicole: Hi! What are you guys up to?
Bianca: Looking for Deshawn and helping in the office, but the office is full right now and they don’t need us. What are you guys doing?
Jalayla: They’re doing an interview, you can’t tell?
Mr. Barnes: We’re doing an interview.
Bianca: Oh, you all recording?
Nicole and Mr. Barnes nod affirmatively.

Bianca: Hi recorder.
Mr. Barnes: Do you guys remember that time I yelled at you?
Bianca: What time you yelled at me?
Mr. Barnes: Like when I actually raised my voice in the class, you remember that?
Bianca: No.
Mr. Barnes: You don’t remember that?
Bianca: No.
Mr. Barnes: Do you remember it?
Jalayla: I don’t know. The last time–
Mr. Barnes: It was their class.
Jalayla: The last time you yelled at us is a long time ago.
Mr. Barnes: Yeah, that’s the time I’m talking about. In October.
Nicole: Do other teachers yell at you?
Bianca: Mr. Webster sometimes. Ms. Jenkins because we be bad.
Mr. Barnes: Why do you think they yell at you?
Bianca: Because people be running around the class and stuff.
Mr. Barnes: How does that make you feel when you get yelled at? Like not just like, “Could you please sit down?” Like when someone raises their voice say to you like, “Bianca, blah blah blah.”
Bianca: I gonna get mad back because – like if somebody yell at me, I’m not going to just let you yell at me because if you don’t like to be yelled at, so why are you yelling at me?
Mr. Barnes: So it all makes you feel like disrespected?
Bianca: Um huh
Mr. Barnes: Okay. So what’s the best way to get you to do something?
Bianca: So behave and do what you’ve got to do.
Mr. Barnes: No, I’m saying okay; let’s say you’re out of your seat you are across the classroom, what’s the best way to get you in your seat doing your work?
Jalayla: To ask nicely.
Bianca: To ask nicely and– like if they don’t listen just like just write them up.
Jalayla: Or just – I don’t know.
Bianca: All right, you did well, just ask nicely.
Mr. Barnes: Okay. Well, thank you, this concludes our interview.
(Interview, 2/3/16)

Not surprisingly, students would rather not be yelled at. Thus, neither Mr. Barnes nor the students appreciate the “control as yelling” atmosphere, however, this atmosphere is dominant at Baker School.

Mr. Barnes, like a majority of other first-year teachers, struggled during his first year of teaching. He was dedicated to students, and never missed a day of school until May when he left to teach in a suburban district. Mr. Barnes had an especially hard year, and he was physically assaulted by students five times. In March, a serious assault
occurred when Melvan, a seventh grade student, slammed Mr. Barnes up against the locker inside the classroom multiple times because Mr. Barnes had confiscated Melvan’s cell phone\textsuperscript{12} at the beginning of the class period. Mr. Barnes no longer felt safe at the school, and he also felt like the school and District were punishing him for reporting the assault.

Mr. Barnes prides himself on not yelling at his students, and many students believe Mr. Barnes cares about them because he “tried to teach” them. Although Mr. Barnes did not yell at students, he was still a part of the hidden curriculum of policing and controlling behavior that in this case (i.e., by policing student behavior and taking Melvan’s phone) ultimately led to pressing charges and formal policing, even though that is not what Mr. Barnes wanted. When Mr. Barnes decided whether or not he would press charges against Melvan, he spoke to many teachers at multiple schools in the District, and all of them had previously been assaulted and pressed charges against students.\textsuperscript{13} In this way, the relationships between students and teachers at Baker are based on tension, stress, and a struggle for power, which I discuss in the next section.

\textsuperscript{12} The school has a no cell phone policy. As you can see in Figure 1, there is a sign in Mr. Barnes’ classroom, as well as other classrooms, that has a picture of a crossed out cell phone and the words “No Cell Phone Zone.”

\textsuperscript{13} The American Psychological Association considers violence toward teachers “a silent national crisis” (American Psychological Association, 2016). According the National Center for Education Statistics (Robers, Kemp, Rathbun, & Morgan, 2014, p. 24), during the 2011-2012 school year, 10% of public school teachers reported a student threatening them injury, and 6% of public school teachers reported a student physically attacking them.
In addition to narratives about the “need” to control students, teachers are controlled at schools like Baker. Teachers’ professional autonomy is becoming increasingly limited as schooling focuses primarily on test preparation (Carl, 2014). There are several reasons for this. First, the teaching profession is widely regarded as a “semi-profession” (Ingersoll, 1999; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2011; Lortie, 1969; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2004). There are a variety of explanations for its semi-professional status, which include that it has historically been and is currently an occupation dominated by women, the widely held and deprofessionalizing assumption that “anyone can teach,” the way that teaching is influenced by laypersons, including non-educator school board members, and, especially in urban districts, teaching suffers from subpar working conditions and compensation. The professional status of teachers has been further limited by policies such as No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and Every Student Succeeds Act and similar standards and accountability reforms that require high-stakes testing, value-added teacher evaluations, fast-track teacher licensure and preparation programs, and scripted curricula (Carl, 2014; Mathis & Welner, 2015; Milner, 2013).

Teachers at Baker frequently discuss how they are told to implement a different curriculum, program, or test-taking strategy at every professional development. Ms. Smith makes several comments similar to this one: “Well, class, we were going to have a science lesson, but we have to work on textual evidence with this handout by the end of the day.” When I respond to Ms. Smith that I can relate to that experience from my time as a teacher, Ms. Smith asks:

*Ms. Smith: Where did you teach?*
Nicole: [School Name]

Ms. Smith: Oh, Ok. Because if you taught somewhere else, I would wonder if you knew what you are talking about. But you get it, and understand the students that are at our school. Writing with them takes a long time. It is also the time. We have people coming from the District every day checking to make sure that we are on track. We have so much to do and so much monitoring. (Fieldnotes, 11/30/2015)

Some teachers, including Mr. Barnes, are involved in external activist organizations. Teachers in these organizations state that participation helps to enhance their professional autonomy; however, these organizations have limited appeal because of their perceived political nature (Carl & Quinn, 2015). Although some teachers attempt to expand their influence through involvement in external organizations, what is important to note here is that teachers are also being controlled and deprofessionalized.

At Baker, teachers are trying to control student behavior, which results in students and teachers struggling for power in the school. The relationships between students and teachers, which are considered one of the most important aspects of schooling and student achievement (e.g., Kuriloff, Andrus, & Jacobs, in press; Stevenson, 2014, p. 122; Raider-Roth, 2005), are seriously strained and in many cases, broken. Instead, relationships between students and teachers often turn into battles for control. These struggles occur throughout the school, including the spaces mentioned previously: the lunchroom, the classroom, the hallway, and when students are denied recess.

These power struggles create an environment in which students and teachers are positioned (and then position themselves) in opposition to each other. One example is that teachers and staff look for anything to make the controlling of behavior easier. For example, some teachers and other staff at Baker have the mentality that the fewer students that come to school, the “easier” the day will be, meaning there will likely be
less disruptions or behavior issues to contend with once students are ousted, either temporarily (suspensions or absences) or permanently (expulsion). This creates a system that seeks punitive opportunities and measures. For example, when Nyeisha, whom Ms. Smith considers a “problem” student, is absent or has been removed to another room, Ms. Smith comments, “Nicole, I’m so sad you missed our lesson on synonyms and antonyms. Nyeisha was not here, and we were able to get so much done.” Ms. Smith and other teachers believe that their struggle to control behavior will be easier when students like Nyeisha are absent. Mr. James, the director of the after school program, articulates a similar mentality:

_It is about 5:30PM, and I am getting ready to leave. I stop by the after school programming room and say goodbye to James, the director of the after school operations at Baker. James asks me, “How was cooking class today?” “We had a nice time. I was with the red team today, and we made a good quinoa dish. However, there are few students participating and a lot of students are running around the gym.” James says, “Yeah, I know. We kind of just let them run around in there if they are not into it.” I respond, “I have noticed in general that there seem to be fewer and fewer students attending cooking club.” He responds, “Good. Especially on a day like today.”_ (Fieldnotes, 11/30/2015)

Mr. James and and other staff members frequently make similar comments of relief when students are not there, when engagement goes down, and when they can “get rid of” their “trouble makers.” If Mr. James sees me before the formal school day is over, he often asks, “How many fourth graders are here today?” He gets visibly excited when I said there were several absent or if a specific student was absent. It is important to note that most teachers would like smaller classes because they believe that they can be more effective when they have fewer children. However, at Baker, the hidden curriculum of implicit policing enforces a primary focus on controlling behavior. Thus, when “problem” children are absent or when a large number of students are not at school,
adults believe that controlling behavior and teaching are easier on those days. Even in spaces in which academics are not the central focus, including in the after school program, controlling behavior is paramount and “problem kids” are considered impediments. Thus, removing them increases the likelihood that behaviors will be easier to control. Part of teachers’ desire to do this may be related to conceptions of what makes a “good” or “bad” teacher.

Indeed, the hidden curriculum of policing and control is reinforced by narratives about who is a “good or bad teacher” and why. At Baker and schools similar to it, including the school I taught at for five years, teachers are celebrated or denigrated because of their ability to “control their class.” Parents, staff, and administrators speak in the same terms: good teachers control their classes and bad teachers do not. Danielle, a grandparent and occasional volunteer, believes that controlling your class means not taking “any stuff” from children. Describing a teacher who was threatened by a student the previous school year after the student was caught watching porn on his phone, Danielle states,

He [the student] told him, "You better not get me in trouble." It was like, I think if the boy had pushed him or something like this, the man, he really would not have been able to defend himself because it would look like...with him being the adult, but this boy actually threatening him. I would say you can't come back in my classroom ever. I'm going to call the police because you're threatening me now. You know how things are in the streets? They might try to bring somebody up here or some of the other boys might jump him in the classroom. He's just here to try to teach. I really felt bad for him. (Interview, 6/21/16)

The teacher Danielle is referring to, and all of the other middle school teachers that year, did not come back to Baker the next year. The rest of the staff had mixed reactions to these teachers, including comments such as “it is crazy up there [the middle school
wing],” “those kids are out of control,” “the teachers really tried, but they couldn’t control their classes.” Students also adopt this language of dominance. For example, if a student is asked why he or she is cutting class, a common response is, “I don’t want to go to her class. She don’t do nothing, and she can’t control her class.” Rather than blaming the teacher for “not controlling” his/her class or the student for cutting class, thinking about the relationship between the teachers and students is a way to reframe the issue (Toshalis, 2015). At Baker, the relationships between teachers and students as well as the relationships between students and the school are deeply strained. As a result of the hidden curriculum of control and policing, students and teachers understand each other and interact within in a power struggle. Cutting class is one way that students demonstrate resistance, or what I call micro resistance strategies.

Compulsory schooling and dominant schooling strategies often results in students resisting constraints put on them in the form of behavioral norms and imposed curricula (e.g., Waller, 1932). Resistance can be interpreted as a reaction to oppressive systems regardless of how unproductive that resistance may ultimately be (e.g., Ogbu, 1978; Willis, 1977). Ogbu’s (2003) framing of such resistance assumes that Black students agentically decide to disengage because they do not want to “act white.” Subsequent research (e.g., Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005) refutes Ogbu’s claim and states that all students, regardless of race, are achievement oriented. The danger in Ogbu’s theory is that it reinforces myths of equality of opportunity that do not actually exist for a majority of students in under-resourced schools and communities. Thinking about student behavior, or in this case what is generally considered student misbehavior, as a form of resistance to punitive or disaffirming external forces helps educators to consider the
reasons why students act a certain way (Toshalis, 2015). Considering resistance as important information about students can be a way to engage instead of punish (Toshalis, 2015), police, or control them. Micro resistance strategies can be viewed as ways that students respond to their environment, and if educators attempt to understand students’ experiences, they can help students re-direct their efforts.

Students’ primary way of resisting, especially in the middle grades, is cutting class. The middle school students frequently cut class, come late to class, and spend considerable time hiding and/or playing games in the hallway. As mentioned in a previous fieldnote, students begin to skip class as early as Kindergarten. Even many students who are considered by teachers as “good,” do everything possible to avoid class. Their responses vary from, “we’re not learning nothing,” “he don’t be teaching us,” “he picks on me,” or “it is boring in there.” I spent countless hours in the classroom, and instruction frequently consists of copying “notes” verbatim as they were written on the PowerPoint or board in middle school history classes or in answering questions on a generic worksheet in a fourth grade class. Instruction times were often few and far between in the middle school classes. Teachers had a hard time getting through a lesson because of fighting, arguing, or other disruptions. Throughout the fieldnotes and interviews presented in this chapter, there are many other examples of behavioral infractions that highlight ways students attempt to resist a culture of dominance and control.

Another micro resistance strategy that students employ is when they respond with the phrase “I don’t care.” For example, Nyeisha is yelled at for being late or not having her homework complete the very minute that she walks into Ms. Smith’s class. Neyisha
tends to respond by yelling back: “I don’t care! Stop messing with me.” Then Ms. Smith immediately gets mad at her for talking back to a teacher, and Nyeisha’s day is already off to a rocky start. Students in other grades often respond to teachers or other staff by stating, “I don’t care.” Teachers interpret these comments, which occur often from multiple students in all grades, to mean that students lack motivation and discipline. Of course, taking the time to interpret the motivations and reasons behind students’ micro resistances, including why students make such comments or have what is interpreted as an angry affect, which may be because they do not feel safe or respected, can help educators to include instead of exclude students (e.g., Toshalis, 2015). This responsibility should not solely belong to teachers, who are often unfairly blamed and struggling, without support, and being controlled in a system that confers dominance on certain kinds of teaching. To engage instead of exclude students, involves systematically re-envisioning and resourcing urban, public schools to help address the multiple issues facing the schools and communities, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 6.

**Challenging Dominance and Fostering a Habitus of Fierceness**

Thus far, I discuss micro resistance strategies students use to challenge dominant structures, and in this section, I describe how students challenge dominant structures and control mechanisms by performing in certain ways that may include violence, aggression, and other forms of resistance. From the explicit and implicit curriculum, students at Baker learn that they are in need of being controlled and that there are limited opportunities for them to succeed—both in and out of the classroom. Students, especially seventh and eighth grade students, are beginning to mistrust school and the opportunities
it claims to provide for them. They still internalize messages of success that involve “staying in school” (Jalayla), “not letting other kids bring them down” (Bianca), and “doing my work” (Renee). But, the middle school students are also aware of the limited opportunities for their parents. For example, Jalayla, Bianca, Rashanna, and Renee’s fathers (along with many fathers in the school) are in jail along with some of their siblings.

In an environment dominated by narratives of control, who needs to be controlled, and chaos, students develop certain sensibilities in order to survive and thrive. The sensibilities are related to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, individuals’ habits of heart and mind that influence how they react and respond to and in situations. Habitus, which is embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1989), is developed throughout a person’s life, but the adolescent and childhood years have a formative influence on habitus. Habitus involves the ways that individuals unconsciously learn how to act in situations that are influenced by their perceived opportunities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). From the implicit policing practices and the attempts to control them, which often do not succeed in the ways adults would like, students at Baker are cultivating a habitus of fierceness. This habitus is a mechanism for surviving in schools when their forms of capital differ from the institutionally valued and mainstream forms of habitus and symbolic capital (see Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009; Wacquant, 1998). Furthermore, this habitus of fierceness, which includes students’ micro resistance strategies, functions as a form of coping (e.g., Stevenson, 2014). For example, students often demonstrate this

While some interpretations of Bourdieu’s concept of habitus consider it to be fixed, I, along with others (e.g., Bourdieu, 1990; Horvat & Davis, 2011; Aries & Seider, 2005; King, 2000), consider habitus to be fluid, especially as a result of pedagogic work.
habitus when the habitus the school attempts to inculcate does not align with their own. It is important to remember that habitus functions at a “preconscious level,” and habitus is often “misrecognized as natural attributes” (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009, p. 42). Thus, thinking of the habitus of fierceness that students exhibit as a coping mechanism is one way to avoid thinking of this behavior in primarily deficit-oriented ways.

At Baker, students perform a habitus of fierceness in multiple ways. For example, some students, like Talik, are overtly physically aggressive and violent. He frequently fights with peers, punches walls, and throws and breaks objects. At the beginning of January, Mr. Barnes asked students to reflect on their goals. The following fieldnote includes Talik’s goals for 2016.

*I am talking to Talik, and I ask if he can tell me about his goals. I read them, and I ask if it is ok if I write them down. He says, sure. They read, “Talik’s 2016 goals. My 1st goal is to make it thru 2016 alive. The 2nd goal is to graduate 8th grade. Last but not least I want to make my family happy by dropping all negative feelings.” These are written neatly on a piece of white computer paper, and they are written in different colors and decorated with a few intricate designs. Talik is tall and skinny and his hair is in corn rows. I ask him about his first goal. Talik: The news says lot of people be dying. Nicole: Are you scared? Talik: A little. I have a temper, but I get good grades.* (Fieldnotes, 1/5/16)

Talik’s mother, Rachele, works with Talik to help him “control his behavior.” This was the goal after the report card conferences, which I observed, with Talik and his mother and teachers. Talik acknowledges that his “temper” could have serious repercussions, and his mother is trying to support him to stay on track. Talik’s teachers also appear to be invested in him and are working with his mother to help him get into a better high school that has more arts programs. According to his mother, he is heavily influenced by his peers, as most children his age are. However, at the end of the school year, the teachers
seem to have given up on Talik, and I see him get in more frequent fights. He tells me, reluctantly but with a smile, that he is the one who punched the window in Mr. Webster’s room and that he broke the glass on the hallway door. When I ask him why, he says, “because they made me mad.” Reflecting on Talik’s behavior toward the end of the school year, Talik’s teacher, Mr. Barnes, states,

I am 99% certain that he is on drugs. Yeah, because of how erratic his behavior was, how just explosive he could be at times and then totally sedated at others so unless he is severely bipolar which, again, could be possible, but it was also not consistent throughout the year either, particularly as we got to the end. He would just stand up and walk around in a daze, just like something seemed so wrong and it kind of came out of nowhere. It wasn’t just him messing around. This was something was seriously wrong with this guy. Again, we didn’t have anyone to refer to so on the pink slips I would just be like symptomatic of marijuana use and stuff like that. I was trying to report it as best as I could and nothing came … I don’t know what the school policy is if you suspect someone is on drugs, but I didn’t even see any confrontation happen. I don’t know if that’s because my pink slips ever got read or not. (Interview, 8/1/16)

While Talik’s situation is complex, at the root of his behavior, and the behavior of many students at Baker, is that they do not want to show weakness or fear. Students’
habitus are formed by a variety of factors related to their perceived opportunities in different environments. While the “laws” of schools are different than the “streets” (Coates, 2015, p. 25), protection behaviors learned in the community carry over into the school. Thinking of Talik as “bad” or “violent,” misrecognizes the multiple factors, including systemic racism as well as daily life in Talik’s neighborhood, that inform why Talik believes that he cannot show weakness. A habitus of fierceness can be thought of as similar to Anderson’s (1999) “code of the street” in that individuals are attempting to prevent future violence and protect themselves. However, a habitus of fierceness does not sort students and families in the binaried categories of “decent” and “street.”
Other students are not frequently physically aggressive, but still have taken on identities based on not appearing scared. Jalayla, for example, says that she does not have to fight anymore; people know she is “not scared.” She communicates that she feels strongly that she has proven herself to her peers. In this regard, Jalayla has accomplished a habitus of fierceness because she does not need to fight anymore. Every seventh and eighth grade student I spoke with, which is approximately 75% of the students, has been in at least one physical fight in school. A common response is, “if someone puts their hands on me, I put my hands on them.” Logically, they know they should tell a teacher, but teachers, for a variety of reasons, do not always respond, at least in a way that is satisfactory to students. In the following transcript, Jalayla describes how she got into an argument with a younger student who had been picking on her younger brother. Jalayla said that she was just screaming at the girl and could not calm down.

Jalayla: The girl in 6th grade, she was hitting my little brother. My little brother came and got me and told me. I was walking around the school looking for her. When her teacher told me she was in the classroom I went in there and I started yelling and screaming at her.

Nicole: Do you think that there could have been any other response?
Jalayla: Probably could have just told her teachers but that was the one that hadn't did nothing.
Nicole: How come?
Jalayla: Sometimes the teachers don't say nothing. So, I just took it upon myself to say something to her myself.
Nicole: I'm curious, how many times have you told a teacher and nothing happens?
Jalayla: A few times.
Nicole: Can you maybe give me an example?
Jalayla: For instance, a boy can hit you and I go tell the teacher, "He hit me." The teacher blame it all on me and say, "Well, if you wasn't in this place and you was over there where you are suppose to be then none of that would had happened." (Interview, 6/10/2016)
I have seen the situation Jalayla describes many times at Baker, so it is not surprising that students adopt a mentality of addressing problems themselves.

To many students and parents that I encountered at Baker, fighting can also be necessary: “if someone hits you, you hit them back.” Renee discusses when one might need to fight and talks about how students have a logic behind what they do:

Renee: [Talking about another school]. No. Nope. We don't smoke in the bathroom, we might fight but we don't fight fight, like they [at the local high school] do. They be having riots, they be jumping people there. We don't jump people here and do all of that stupid stuff.
Nicole: I remember hearing about them jumping that new boy.
Renee: What new boy? Oh! No, not that new boy. Well, yeah. I heard that he got jumped. That was outside of school, that was some other people. They never jumped inside of school. I know they tried to but they usually don't though because it's not right to jump people.
Nicole: Right. So when is it okay to fight?
Renee: It's not. If you have to fight, you have to fight. That's it. It's not okay to fight all of the time.
Nicole: Are there some rules that everybody just knows? I'm not meaning rules, rules but people know that in this situation, you needed to fight. How do people know that?
Renee: Are you feeling threatened? If somebody keep messing with you, keep messing with you, just keep picking with you, keep pushing you to the point and you feel threatened, you have to. They keep hitting you and stuff, you've got to hit them back. You can't just let somebody keep messing with you, keep messing with you, keep messing with you, cuz it's going to be irritating.
Nicole: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
Renee: Yeah that's irritating. Mess with you, mess with you, and mess with you.
Nicole: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Fighting is kind of a way of standing up for yourself?
Renee: Yeah.
Nicole: Have you been in a fight.
Nicole: What happened?
Renee: Somebody kept saying stuff to me, and I got irritated. I've got issues, anger issues, so I just kept getting mad. The person kept saying stuff so I got up and that person got up. She got in my face and I pushed her out of my face then she hit me, then we started fighting. Then I blacked out.
Nicole: You blacked out?
Renee: Yeah.
Nicole: Did you go to the hospital?
Renee: No. I blacked out when we was fighting. After we stopped fighting, I was all right. [Sniffs]
Nicole: What does that mean, you blacked out? You don't remember anything?
Renee: I don't remember what happened during the fight. She punched me then I hit her, then that's it. They said I scratched her and stuff and pulled her hair, and I don't remember that.
Nicole: When was this?
Renee: This was last year.
Nicole: What did your grandmom say?
Renee: She didn't say nothing. I told my mom and she was like "Well, you had to fight, you had to fight."
Nicole: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Did your grandmom know you got into a fight? No?
Renee: Nuh-uh (negative).
Nicole: What would she have said?
Renee: "Why are you always fighting" and all of this other stuff.
Nicole: So your grandmom doesn't want you fighting?
Renee: No.
Nicole: How come?
Renee: I don't know. I think she doesn't want me to go to jail and stuff. Get into trouble and messing up going to high school and stuff.
Nicole: Is that why you don't fight anymore?
Renee: Yeah, and people don't mess with me so I don't fight.
Nicole: You felt like, after you fought, people realized that "Okay I'm not going to pick on Renee anymore?"
Renee: I don't know. They probably did.
Nicole: Mm-hmm (affirmative)
Renee: But they don't mess with me. (Interview, 5/13/2016)

Renee offers a counter-narrative to one-dimensional view of fighting as universally “bad” and reinforces how universally associating fighting as negative does not take into account the survival logics that students cultivate and that reflect their habitus of fierceness.

Many students, like Renee, describe needing to have a reputation as someone who “can’t be messed with.” In communities that experience high levels of poverty and violence, combined with limited economic opportunity, strategic violence toward others can generate respect and prevent future conflicts (Brotherton & Barrios, 2004; Bourgois, 2003). Jalayla, an eighth grade student, describes how the school changed her: “I really
felt myself changing once I hit 4th grade. I would get into fights with teachers, throwing chairs, fighting, cursing, all that stuff. Every time the teachers used to tell my parents, then my parents they seemed shocked because they never thought I would be that type of girl.” When I asked why, Jalayla states,

Jalayla: Well in this school, I just had to show people. [Pause]. I don't know. I just had to show people that I'm not really scared. Just because I'm short that don't mean I'm not going to say anything to or anything.
Nicole: How do you show people you're not scared?
Jalayla: By sticking up for yourself, like fighting back. I'm not going to let nobody child bully me because I'm shorter then y'all or anything like that.
Nicole: What happens if you don't stand up for yourself?
Jalayla: They just going to keep picking with you because you not doing anything back, not saying anything. (Interview, 6/10/16)

In their environment, there is a real possibility that students at Baker could be picked on and harmed if they are perceived as weak. Thus, while such behaviors are typically considered in deficit ways by schools, teachers, and others, students are clear that they are adapting to their environments and “doing what needs to be done” to protect themselves. Other important considerations include that students do not feel safe or protected at school, and in the absences of protection, students protect themselves. In addition, the students at Baker School know the “rules” associated with demonstrating a habitus of fierceness, which include standing up for oneself or one’s family, not “starting stuff,” and “doing what you need to do.” Students also know when the benefit outweighs the cost (if it is worth fighting), in order to protect themselves. Finally, students know what the limits are, which may include jumping someone for no reason.

The mindset of not showing fear by acting/being tough is reflected not only by students but by teachers and administrators. For example, the principal at the school where I taught for many years would often get into screaming arguments with parents,
and other teachers had to hold her back on numerous occasions when she took off her earrings and charged a parent. Teachers at Baker will also comment directly to students that they are not afraid of them. Ms. Smith, a fourth grade teacher at Baker “gets in students’ faces” daily, and makes comments, including, “Hit me. Hit me and see what happens. I don’t play with these children.” Fear and intimidation becomes an important concept/process at Baker, and no one wants to appear afraid. The teachers that students respect are the ones who they believe are not afraid of them. Jalayla, Bianca, Renee, and Rashanna describe their favorite teachers to me.

Jalayla: It's like this. It's not a racist thing. Usually white teachers, the first thing they say, “I'm going to press charges on you if you hit me, if you do this stuff like that.’ A Black teacher will be like...
Renee: I'm hitting you back.
Jalayla: Yeah.
Rashanna: Like, Ms. Ferguson and Ms. Glenn, they'll pull out a broom on you in a minute.
All Girls: Yeah.
Jalayla: Ms. Glenn will pull out a broom on you
Nicole: Really?
Rashanna: Yeah, she'll put out a broom on you.
Nicole: A Black teacher would hit you back and a White teacher would be like ...
Jalayla: The cool ones would, like some of them. Some of the teachers would.
Rashanna: Mr. Webster might.
Renee: Yeah, because he's from the hood.
Rashanna: They hit Mr. Webster with the ball and he popped it with the scissors in front of they face and threw it back at them.
Jalayla: Mr. Crowley he will sit there, he'll write you up, he'll press charges.
Rashanna: Yeah, because he definitely threatened to press charges on me if my dad didn't come to get me that day. I heard him, he was trying to be sneaky, but he was super loud that day. He talking about if you don't do nothing about it then I'm going to press charges right now. I'm calling the cops. (Group Interview, 6/15/16)

Rashanna, Renee, Jalayla, and Bianca describe Ms. Glenn and Ms. Ferguson in ways that clearly show that the students believe these teachers care about them. In this schooling
context, it is clear that these teachers are also developing a habitus of fierceness, like I did as a teacher, in order to survive and thrive in a particularly fraught and tense environment. Students would say about me, “Don’t mess with Ms. Mittenfelner, she is just as crazy as we are.” At the heart of that comment, was a belief, at least I like to think, that students knew that I cared about them since I approached them within a resource-oriented framework that guided me to engage these kinds of issues and behaviors firmly and directly rather than simply scolding, deriding, or punishing them for some of their less-desirable (but non-threatening) actions.

Other staff members, however, like Ms. Forbes, behave aggressively toward students but do not garner student respect because of how they do so. Ms. Forbes, a Black woman in her fifties, often runs around the school with a whistle hollering (often with rage in her tone and manner) at students to go to class. She does not have a reciprocal relationship with students and uses her power to antagonize them. Her behavior is instead interpreted as disrespectful, even though it appears that Ms. Forbes is trying to mimic what she believes to be student behavior. For example, Ms. Carol and her grandsons discuss a time when Ms. Forbes antagonized a student.

Andrew: Ms. Forbes, she can get smart. She antagonizes students.
Ms. Carol: One of the kids, I think her name was Jayden.
Nicole: I know her, she's in 8th grade, right?
Ms. Carol: Yes.
Nicole: Yes.
Ms. Carol: She was coming up the hall, and she says something disrespectful to Ms. Forbes. [Cat meowing in background.] That's Jayden, you be the bigger person, you be the adult. Whatever. Forbes took something from her. She said you better give it back. Forbes says, ‘I'm not giving you back nothing.’ So Ms. Forbes called the [name of case worker organization] people, the people came down. As Jayden was walking, she's walking behind the girl, stand up Jalil. [Ms. Carol is yelling and demonstrating what Ms. Forbes was
"Ha, ha, What you going to do?" "Ha, ha ha ha! What you going to do? What you going to do?"

Nicole:  Ms. Forbes was doing that?
Ms. Carol:  Yes. That's antagonizing all right.
Nicole:  Oh my goodness.
Ms. Carol:  Yeah, that's abuse. The case worker came down with Ms…. Not Ms. Hill, Ms. Hill’s boss. I think her name is Margaret.
Andrew:  The Africa lady?
Ms. Carol:  No, not Ms. Lee. She's their boss, I can't think of her name. Anyway, she comes in, she walks rather fast, tall, short hair, I can't think of her name. Anyway, when Forbes came back, she said she's [Jayden’s] so disrespectful I said, "Forbes, you made a mistake." I said, "You antagonized that child, and you did it in front of the case worker supervisor." She looked at me, I said, "You followed her from auditorium out the door to the steps. You were wrong." She looked at me, and Ms. Ameile said, in the kitchen, she said ‘Oh Ms. Carol, I'm surprised you said anything.’ Because she was wrong. Forbes looked at me, and she went up stairs. I'm thinking she might have went to the [name of the social outreach organization]’s room. When she came downstairs she was rather nervous, I could tell by her body language, because she was wrong.

Nicole:  Yeah.
Jalil:  Was this from last year?
Ms. Carol:  No. This was 2 weeks ago. I was telling the kids how she, and she did. If if someone had asked me, you did it. You were wrong.

(Group interview, 4/28/2016)

What I infer from this story is that Ms. Forbes does not seem to understand that she does not truly understand students’ experiences and behavior. Students want adults to care about and respect them, not to intimidate and mock them.

Summary

At Baker School, a hidden curriculum of control emerges in which learning is forfeited for behavioral control. This is related to assumptions about students that maintain that students at Baker “need” controlling. Students, through micro resistance strategies, push back against this culture of control. Furthermore, students navigate this environment by demonstrating a habitus of fierceness. The habitus that students cultivate
demonstrates resilient and adaptive problem solving, which are necessary skills for their environment in and out of school. To think about this habitus from a resource instead of a deficit orientation involves understanding students’ experiences and trying to learn from, instead of control, their behavior. I continue to discuss ways to approach students and their experiences in non-deficit ways in Chapter 6.
CHAPTER 5: Internalization of a “Deficit Default”

The hidden curriculum of control, the systemic lack of resources, and the resulting power struggles and resistance culminate in, what I term, a deficit default based on deficit orientations of students, teachers, and parents. In this chapter, I show how this deficit default ideology develops. The perpetual disinvestment of urban schools and neighborhoods contributes to the distrust parents and the local community feel about the school as well as the way that staff engage with parents. While staff often describe parents as “uninvolved” and “not engaged,” schools and districts have failed to engage parents (Auerbach, 2002, 2008). As a part of the narrative of “uninvolved” parents, I describe a range of ways in which students, beginning in third grade, are “parentified.” Furthermore, while adults at Baker acknowledge that many students are parentified, students are also simultaneously infantilized as a result of the rigid, culture of control described in the previous chapter. I then highlight how many teachers at Baker operate in a survival mode, triaging emergencies and focusing on day-to-day tasks and challenges. I argue that unintended consequences of this survival mentality include that many teachers, often as a result of frustration, blame and then deficitize students and/or parents/grandparents. I specifically focus on two teachers, an eighth grade teacher and a fourth grade teacher, and discuss ways that teachers deficitize students and parents based on their internalized deficit views of them and their communities. Teachers, students, parents, the community, and the school are continuously described negatively, and the individuals within them also internalize these negative messages. I close the chapter by
focusing on students’ experiences and perspectives and highlight how students believe that teachers disrespect and misunderstand them.

The Disengagement of Parents and Guardians

Parents are central stakeholders in education. Yet, urban public school systems tend to not view them as such. Despite trying for decades to increase parental involvement, public school systems continue to try to engage parents, many of whom are living in poverty, in the same ways that they engage middle class parents (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lareau & Schumar, 1996). Although these strategies of engagement do not work (and never have), schools and districts continue to engage parents in these ways and are surprised that they get the same results of what is considered low parental engagement. Because the behaviors of these parents do not conform to middle class parenting values, parents in these environments tend to be perceived as “not caring,” “uninvolved,” and “lazy.” This rhetoric is a classic example of a deficit orientation (Valencia, 2010), and describing parents in these terms overlooks the systematic failure of multiple systems that has contributed to lack of economic and educational opportunities (Anyon, 1997, 2005). The education system was not “successful” for many parents whose children attend Baker, and yet educators and policy makers are consistently asking parents to trust and believe in this system. Danielle, a grandparent who has three grandchildren and two great nieces attending Baker and whose five children and their father went to Baker, is trying to explain why parents do not come to the school:

Danielle: I'm not sure if the parents have just stopped caring because the system has failed so much, maybe for them, in certain instance or whatever but
it's really hard to pinpoint why. I guess if we could figure out why, we wouldn't have that problem. We could get them here. Back to school night, as a parent, I would want to come, I want to be there, I want to see who's who and get that one-on-one with the teacher so you can know who the teacher is so you can have that relationship. So, if anything is going on because if you can't be there, it all depends on ... Sometimes what's going on at home you can't really, you may not have money to get there. Last time that might be the case. The parents might not have the funds to get to school and they might have a lot of children at different schools, so they might have gone to another school. I think sometimes that what's going on in the household with the parents, the parents may be young. That doesn't mean that things should be going on, but sometimes things are going on in the household. They may not have much. Their mom may have different boyfriends coming in and out. Just maybe what a lot of people call ghetto, that person where they just don't care just, "Just get in here" or "You best do this." It's a lot different. How can I put it? They just may not care, "I'm not going over to the school because I don't feel like it. It's too hot". They just have any kind of excuse not to do it and they just won't do it. I have no idea why and I'm trying to think of someone that I may know or may have seen. I think maybe the parents need help. If you help the parents, then you'll be able to help the children and the parents will be able to see that it's not as bad as you think. Even if it is, there's someone out there that may be able to help you, that you can talk to. You have to start somewhere.

Nicole: So what would that help look like? I think that's an interesting suggestion, and I've actually heard it from a couple other parents that I've talked to. What would that help look like?

Danielle: Maybe sending a letter out or a questionnaire and ask the parents, "What would help you to help your child?", or "What would help you?" It's not just about the children, we want to help you, if you need help or if you know of someone that needs the help. What would they need help with? I think it would come better from the parents' point of view. Maybe if you had a checkoff list or something so that way, they may not want to actually write something down, so maybe put a checkoff list, like parent's higher education. Maybe if they had something over here where the parents could get help maybe with their household. Maybe like an area that would bring the parents in to here and not just at the different community places that does that type of help. That might be a good thing. They could get in here.

Nicole: Yeah.

Danielle: Because it's supposed to be a community school now.

Nicole: It is but I don't see a lot of that.

Danielle: Right, so maybe we have to get more community things going on here at the school, where the community is.

Nicole: Right. (Interview, 6/21/16)
Danielle acknowledges the way the “system has failed” parents, and she is confused and frustrated by what she perceives to be parents not caring. Other important aspects to note, include how Danielle describes that the school has not reached out to parents to solicit information about the kind of help they would be interested in for themselves and their children. Danielle was a part of the parent and school association when her children attended the school and has been asked to help create a new association, as there is not currently one. When she was a leader in the parent association, she describes how she had to “bribe” parents with food or other items to get them to come to the school. However, she states that the school was more involved with the community than it is now, even though it is currently considered a community school. Like many aspects of Baker School, titles such as a community school appear to only be for show, as there is very little involvement with the local community. Although Danielle’s family has been “successful” by middle class educational standards, with a daughter finishing her doctorate in another major city, Danielle and her family still live in the neighborhood. She describes the local community as getting “better and worse.” She says,

It's getting better and worse at the same time. We are trying to improve the neighborhood. They have the delis that are open and people just hang around. It's not really good. They just hang out there all day and go into the store. People do things that are illegal, but we still try to keep a positiveness with the children even though they have to deal with that themselves and they're just children and they really shouldn't have to. That's the way society is. If you don't get any help from everyone, if everyone doesn't pitch in and help and do their part it makes it harder for the people that are trying to help and improve. We'll get there. It may take a little longer but we will get there. (Interview, 6/21/16)
Danielle’s hopefulness and what she describes as a “positiveness” is in contrast with the four common and essentialized narratives that adults, including other parents, have about parents whose children attend Baker.

**Essentialized Parent Narratives**

There are four common, essentialized, narratives of parents at the school, including (1) they do not work and are supported by government assistance, (2) they are in jail, (3) they are on drugs and/or mentally ill, or (4) they work several jobs and barely make ends meet. All four of these narratives are true to some extent for the parents and families I got to know. Nyeisha’s mother, Ms. Crawford, is an example of a parent struggling with mental illness. The school has reached out to help support her, but these efforts are largely superficial. The interactions with Ms. Crawford are tinged with a combination of judgment and frustration. The mentality that parents do not work is shared by staff and fellow parents. Ms. Carol, a grandparent and regular volunteer at Baker, talks about the Crawford family in the following fieldnote.

*Ms. Carol and another woman from an outside agency are arguing about whether it is or is not neglect if your children are late to school everyday. Ms. Carol believes it is. After the other woman left, Ms. Carol says to me, “I think that is neglect. Your child is late to school every single day. Then you pick your child up early every single day. They are missing a lot of instruction, and I think that is neglect.” Ms. Crawford is at the school this morning and has been in a lot of meetings, she walks out of the office and into the counselor’s office. After seeing her, Ms. Carol says to me, “You know Nyeisha, she is the oldest, and she is raising all those other babies.” I ask, “Who supports them?” Ms. Carol responds, “You do. Welfare.” She pauses and says, “We do.” Ms. Carol continues, “I almost cried, Nicole, when I found out that she [Ms. Crawford] was going to have another baby. One day at the beginning of the school year, she [Ms. Crawford] comes in here and says to me that she is so overwhelmed that she wants to go home and kill herself. This is when I learned that she is pregnant with her seventh. I told her, ‘You wait right here.’ I went into the office and I got the counselor, Ms. Johnson, and I told her what Ms. Crawford said, and Ms. Johnson came out here*
and took her into her office. I never would have forgiven myself if something happened.” (Fieldnotes, 12/1/15)

During Nyeisha’s report card conference with Ms. Smith and her mother, Ms. Crawford, Ms. Smith began the conference by saying, “Nyeisha is going to be retained if she doesn’t start doing her work.” Ms. Crawford turns to me and asks, “What is retained?” I say, “It means Nyeisha would repeat the fourth grade again.” Ms. Smith jumps in, “It means left back.” Ms. Crawford gets upset, “Well, Ny Ny [Nyeisha’s nickname], I told you your teacher likes you or else she wouldn’t leave you back. I want more for you, Ny Ny. I didn’t graduate eighth grade, but I got farther than you are now.” Nyeisha’s mother is always trying to convince herself and Nyeisha that Ms. Smith likes Nyeisha. She wants Ms. Smith to help nurture and parent Nyeisha, and Ms. Smith decidedly states, “That is not my job.” Ms. Smith is a middle-aged Black woman who used to live in the neighborhood; her siblings went to Baker. She seems to genuinely care about students’ future prospects. Later in this chapter, I describe Ms. Smith’s view of parents in more detail. Two of Nyeisha’s younger siblings, Nadira in second grade and Niles, a kindergartener, were also in Ms. Smith’s room running around during the conference. Ms. Smith got so frustrated with them that she sent them to another teacher’s room. At the end of the conference, I am curious what our game plan is moving forward, and I ask, “Do we have a plan?” Ms. Smith responds, “Nyeisha is going to get it together. Right?” Nyeisha smiles sheepishly. Ms. Crawford states, “You are checking in on her right, Ms. Nicole? How is she doing in the after school program?” Before I can respond, Ms. Smith states, “You know I have been talking with Mr. James, and he said she is acting up in the after school and that she might get kicked out. I have been talking with
the people in the [behavior support program], and Nyeisha might get sent to an alternative school.” Ms. Crawford states, “I am just so tired. I am so tired.” Ms. Smith asks, “What about Nyeisha’s father? Is he around? Can I get his number?” Ms. Crawford states, “Yes. Call her father. I can’t do all this by myself. Ny Ny, give your teacher your dad’s number.” Ms. Smith states, “I’ve asked for it. Nyeisha says she doesn’t know it.” Ms. Crawford responds, “She knows it. Give it to her. Nadira and Niles, let’s go get your report cards.” Ms. Crawford is 29 years old. She has six children, and is expecting her seventh in July. She is self-described as bipolar and often admits that she is overwhelmed and needs help. Ms. Crawford fits two of the four essentialized parent narratives, including that she does not work and receives government assistance and is dealing with mental illness. It is also important to note that I saw Ms. Crawford at the school quite frequently; although she admits to being frustrated and not knowing what to do, Ms. Crawford is trying.

Ms. Redmond is a mother of eight and currently has three children in the school. She frequently talks about how she is trying to get them into another school. Ms. Redmond aligns with the narrative of parents who do not work, and teachers and other staff frequently mention this. For example, Ms. Smith makes comments similar to other teachers: “I’m glad she is here, but you know she is here everyday so you know she is not working.” Thus, teachers have a negative mentality about Ms. Redmond and other parents even when they are engaged in the school. Parents, it seems, cannot win. They are almost universally blamed by teachers, and I articulate this later in this chapter. It is also important to note that Baker does not have the additional resources that might be necessary to better engage parents. The school is not functioning, is in disrepair, and does
not have basic staff such as a full-time nurse. This situation with parents is emblematic of the larger systemic disinvestment of urban public schools like Baker in which they are not given the resources and investment to be successful (e.g., Anyon, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006). There are parents at Baker who do not fit neatly into the essentialized narratives. Ms. Carol, a grandparent, is one of these individuals.

**Ms. Carol: A Counternarrative**

At Baker, with an enrollment of close to 600 students, there is one consistent parent/grandparent volunteer, Ms. Carol. Ms. Carol and I became good friends, and I visited her house several times. We had an immediate connection because her sister is a former colleague of mine from when I was teaching in Philadelphia. Ms. Carol sits at a desk in the front hallway everyday from approximately 8:00 AM to 2:00 PM. Her primary responsibility during the morning is filling out late slips and giving students a late note to take with them to class. She is often very busy especially between 8:45 and 9:45 AM. After that, she asks visitors to sign in on the visitor log and then asks them to report to the office. Ms. Carol has three adult children. Her son has one daughter in college, and her youngest daughter’s son, Jalil, goes to Baker. Ms. Carol has another adopted son, Marshall, who just graduated high school. She is a foster mother to Marcus, Tyree, and Andrew, who all attend Baker. Tyree and Andrew are brothers, and they came to live with her when Andrew was ten months and Tyree was two years old. Marcus has been with Ms. Carol since he was three. She was fostering Marshall for several years as well before she adopted him. All of the boys refer to Ms. Carol as “grandmom” and that is how she describes her relationship to them at Baker. It was only after a year of getting
to know each other that she told me she is technically their foster mother. Tyree and Andrew see their mother occasionally, and Marcus sees his mother more frequently. When Marcus won the African American History Contest at Baker, Ms. Carol made sure to text his mother pictures. Ms. Carol is dedicated to her grandchildren and the rest of the children at Baker. She is universally loved. I spent considerable time sitting with her at her desk in the front hallway, and as students walk by, she greets them by name, and many students stop to give Ms. Carol a hug.

Ms. Carol says that she is is at the school everyday to check on her “babies.” She is hoping to send all four of her grandchildren to a different school next year, when I asked why, she stated, “I don’t want them going here. The School District offers nothing for these children.” She has been trying to get them into a new school since her boys started at Baker. So far, she has been unsuccessful in her efforts. Previously, all of her grandchildren attended a nearby elementary school that Ms. Carol describes as “much more like a family” and with a “principal who did not tolerate any nonsense.” Ms. Carol is the primary consistent parent/grandparent volunteer in the school, and offers an important counternarrative to the essentialized narratives of parents. Ms. Carol is also an important positive figure in the daily life of Baker.

Parentification and Infantilization of Students

Part of the narrative of unengaged parents is that students at schools like Baker are parentified. Faculty, at Baker, state that this begins in third grade. Definitions of parentification can signify a role reversal in which children take care of their parents (Chase, 1999), when children act more like a peer to their parents (Burton, 2007), or
when children take on parental roles for their siblings (Burton, 2007). Challenges of
parentification or adultification for students are that despite seeing their parent as a peer
and/or taking on increased responsibilities at home, such youth are expected to behave
subordinately toward adults in school (Thompson & Maris, 2014). In this section, I
provide examples of how students at Baker are parentified. I also describe how
parentified students can experience challenges when adults in schools expect them to
behave subordinately (e.g., Thompson & Maris, 2014). I argue, then, that students at
Baker are simultaneously parentified and infantilized.

Teachers at Baker state that students are parentified because once students are in
third grade, their parents show up to the school with less frequency. Looking at sign-in
sheets for parent events such as back to school night and report card conferences and
comparing these across grades, teachers notice a decline in parent attendance beginning
in third grade. In addition, this is the grade when students begin walking to and from
school by themselves. Students at Baker, like fourth grader Nyeisha, begin to take on
additional parental responsibilities including taking care of younger siblings. On the way
to school, fourth grader Nyeisha and two of her younger siblings, Nadira in second grade
and Niles in Kindergarten, walk several blocks by themselves to school. On the way to
school, it is a “good day,” according to the kids, when they have money to stop by the
corner store to pick up lunch, which consists of a couple of twenty-five cent chip bags, a
soda, and a Little Debbie cake or Honey Bun. All students are provided a free lunch at
school, but these are not universally liked, and many students also bring their lunch in a

15 Another important aspect to note in relationship to the parentification of youth is that
young Black boys, in particular, are viewed as violent and threatening (Ferguson, 2001;
black plastic bag from the corner store. The school lunches are referred to as “schoolies” or “freebies,” and are pre-packed lunches that are delivered to the school in large boxes and warmed before serving, as no food is prepared on the premises. Nyeisha, Nadira, and Niles’ teachers frequently complain to the counselor and other school leaders that the Crawford (their last name) family smell of urine and are late to school everyday. I spent considerable time in Nyeisha’s classroom, and as soon as Nyeisha opens the classroom door, she is greeted with remarks and questions from her teacher in front of the rest of the class, including, “Why are you late?” or “Late again?” As noted in the previous section, Nyeisha’s mother is 29 years old and pregnant with her seventh child. Nyeisha is responsible for caring for her four younger siblings, and as a result, Nyeisha is often late to school because of these responsibilities. The family has been in and out of homeless shelters and agencies. Ms. Crawford explains,

You know. My children and me, we are kind of growing up together. And when we are in a program for [homeless] mothers and children, we do good. Then as soon as we are out on our own again, things start to fall apart. It is so hard for me to get my bipolar medicine, and I really be about to lose my shit on these kids. (Fieldnotes, 1/27/16)

Nyeisha, age ten, has a lot of pressure on her to get herself and her siblings to school, and then once she gets to school, she is in “trouble” most of the day. Nyeisha’s experiences illustrate how many factors make schooling complex at Baker. All of the adults Nyeisha is frequently in contact with, primarily her teachers and her mother, are frustrated and overwhelmed. For example, Ms. Smith, Nyeisha’s teacher, says, “I am fed up with Nyeisha. She needs a parent. I did not sign up for this. This is not my job. But, you know, I can’t teach here. You know how hard it is. Day after day, I am told to implement a new thing to prepare for the test. I don’t ever have time to teach”
Adults, like Ms. Smith and the counselor, know that many students, like Nyeisha, have little parental support at home and that they are helping take care of younger siblings. However, at school, adults infantilize Nyeisha and students like her in the school environment that expects absolute control. For example, Ms. Smith screams at Nyeisha for coming late to school and attempts to control her behavior by commanding her to walk in a straight line with her hands behind her back and to sit in her seat without talking or fidgeting. Ms. Smith gets repeatedly frustrated when Nyeisha does not do what Ms. Smith commands. Ms. Smith expresses these requests in shaming and disparaging ways that erase the heroic nature of Nyeisha’s daily life caring for her younger siblings.

Mr. Dixon, a tall, middle-aged, Black man and the school disciplinarian, states that students are raising themselves and take on parenting roles for younger siblings: “Students are essentially raising themselves and raising their little brothers and sisters. They are working hard in the day to day at home” (Fieldnotes, 3/9/16). Mr. Dixon represents the way that students are simultaneously parentified and infantilized at Baker. He describes how students are raising themselves, yet he still believes that students need to be controlled more. He discusses this in the following fieldnote.

Mr. Dixon and I are speaking in the schoolyard during recess. “Everyone is really hype today because Jada is going to fight someone,” he states. “Jada and her boyfriend are the new Ike and Tina. They fight all the time. Jada’s aunt is here. She is a teacher at a fancy school, but Jada doesn’t listen to her. Jada doesn’t listen to anyone.” I met Jada’s aunt earlier during the day, and she was called down during our conversation to come to the office to talk to Jada. Mr. Dixon continues, “You know some students, like Ameena, they really only listen to me. Rashanna only listens to me.” Mr. Dixon calls over to Edward and tells him to chill because he looks like he might be about to get in a fight. Then says to me, “Too many of these mom spoil they kids. Edward is an example.” A student throws the basketball at another student in the head. The student who threw the basketball is Vance. Mr. Dixon explains, “Vance, he is another one, his mom lets him do whatever he wants. I tried to 21 him [kick him out of the school]. He tried
to burn the school down on the first day. He wasn't even registered to go to school here yet. He went into bathroom and then smoke started coming out. His Mom just sent him to school and told him to register himself. I couldn’t 21 him because his mom said he was trying to hurt himself and not anyone else. They put him in crisis and then said he did cyber school. He has been back for a couple of months now. His mom. Come on. How you send your kid to school to register himself? He listens to me, but I'm not afraid to put my paws on him. More of these kids need a foot in they ass.”

Ameena walks by us and screams to another student, “What the fuck are you thinking?” Mr. Dixon and I hear her. Mr. Dixon asks Ameena, “What is on your head?” Mr. Dixon is referring to her hijab. Ameena touches her head and smiles, “Oh. I’m sorry.” Ameena walks over to us and we discuss high school for a few minutes. I ask Ameena, “Where are you going to school?” She responds with the name of the local neighborhood high school, which is considered a terrible place by all students and adults, and then laughs. “No sike. I’m going to [name of another neighborhood high school].” Mr. Dixon tells her, “You’d have to join a gang if you go to [the local high school].” Ameena retorts, “No. I wouldn’t. I’m not going there.” Ameena walks away and rejoins a group of her friends. Mr. Dixon says, “She has so much potential. She is a natural leader.” I ask, “What is going on with her?” Mr. Dixon states, “No structure, no consequences, no structure. Her dad drives a cab and always says he has to work. Her mom is some diplomat in Ghana or something. I've never seen her. I keep telling the dad that he needs to do something about her or else she is going to get in big trouble.” (Fieldnotes, 3/30/16)

Ameena’s father works long hours as a cab driver, and according to Mr. Dixon and other teachers, her mother is not involved. Thus, Ameena is parentified in many respects, yet, Mr. Dixon fears that as a result of this, Ameena will end up in trouble because she needs more parental involvement, which to him involves providing structure and consequences.

A common belief that teachers discuss is that students act “bad” because they are “not afraid of their parents.” The disciplinarian in the school describes this to me: “These kids need a boot in they ass. My son does not act this way because he knows I will put a boot in his ass.” Ms. Smith describes a similar version of this: “The parents need to do something.” She demonstrates hitting someone as she says this. She continues, “These kids aren’t afraid of their parents because the parents don’t do anything.” Ms. Martin, a
forty-year-old Black woman from Jamaica, chimes in, “I was always afraid of my parents.” Ms. Smith adds, “Me too. If I acted the way these kids act, my mom would beat my ass.” Ms. Martin agrees. What many teachers either do not know or forget is that students are often fending for themselves. Thus, when students act like adults and take on parental roles, it makes sense that they do not need to fear adults in the ways that Mr. Dixon, Ms. Martin, Ms. Smith, and other staff would like. In this regard, adults essentially blame students for situations that they cannot control.

Rashanna and I are talking about students and their relationships with parents, and she states, “Yeah, most of the kids don't listen to their parents.” “Why not?” I ask. We continue our conversation:

Rashanna: Because they [kids] do what they want. Destin and them, Destin's dad doesn't really tell him what to do, because Destin makes his money, pays his own phone bill. Destin does what he wants.
Nicole: Really?
Rashanna: The way he makes his money, I can tell what his future is going to be. Behind something that looks like that door, that gate right there.  

*Rashanna points to a large metal gate on the inside of the library door.*
Nicole: Does he not see that that might be the future he has?
Rashanna: Yeah. Him and his brothers sees it and his friends, but in their mind, they're not going to end up there.
Nicole: Why do they think that?
Rashanna: Because in their words, they have two feet and they're going to use 'em.
Nicole: To run?
Rashanna: Yeah, but you can't run forever.
Nicole: Do you think most of the boys in this school have that mentality or just some?
Rashanna: All of them.
Nicole: All of them? What about the girls?
Rashanna: Some of the girls. Some of the girls just follow the boys.

*Interview, 5/3/16*

Rashanna describes how students, like Destin, fend for themselves. She references that Destin will likely “end up in jail,” but that he and his peers do not think it will happen to
them. Rashanna refers to one of the consequences of parentification in which students like Destin join the illegal economy as a means of surviving, which requires fending for themselves.

Melvan, a seventh grader, is another student who fends for himself and appears to not listen to his parents. He is also one of the students who assaulted Mr. Barnes. Melvan has been at Baker since fourth grade. Melvan’s mother, Ms. Green, started attending school everyday in November and December because of frequent phone calls from his teachers and the disciplinarian. Ms. Green admits that she does not know what to do about her son. She went to all of Melvan’s classes with him. His teachers state that there was no change in Melvan’s behavior with his mother there. According to Mr. Barnes, Melvan seemed to think it was funny that his mother was there. Melvan and his mother got into an argument on the second floor outside Ms. Smith and Ms. Martin’s classrooms. They were screaming at each other, and the Principal was called to help intervene. When Ms. Washington, the Principal, arrived, Melvan hit his mother and then ran out of the school building. When retelling this story, Ms. Smith shakes her head and says, “He hit his mother in front of the principal! Our parents are so young” (Fieldnotes, 12/17/15).

The school disciplinarian, Mr. Dixon, thinks that students “need more structure and consequences.” He believes that Melvan, who was sent to an alternative disciplinary school, is an example of what happens when parents are busy and/or absent and students do not have consequences. Mr. Dixon, who was getting ready to go to Melvan’s disciplinary hearing, explains why Melvan does not listen to his mother:

Melvan has no real consequences, and he has seen his mom doing things, and he lost respect for her. So many of these kids are really just raising themselves. You
Mr. Dixon believes that parents need to be more involved and provide more structure. However, he also knows that many students do not have that structure and are taking care of themselves and their siblings. Thus, while students are simultaneously infantilized and parentified, the adult staff at Baker, who acknowledge how students are parentified, expect students to conform to rigid behavioral requirements. When students resist the culture of control, the reason, according to school staff, is because they do not have structure and consequences at home. Consequently, a deficit default toward students and parents emerges, and I continue to discuss this throughout the rest of the chapter. As Chapter 4 discusses, students survive Baker School and the local community by demonstrating a habitus of fierceness. Teachers attempt to survive and thrive at Baker, and one way they do this is by operating in a survival mode.

**Operating in a Survival Mode**

Prolonged exposure to stressful interactions in high poverty schools can be mentally and physically toxic for students and teachers (Paulle, 2013). This stressful environment of Baker generates behaviors that may be considered negative or maladaptive, and both teachers and students demonstrate these behaviors. Baker is generally considered a hard place to teach, and students recognize this. For example, Rashanna (5/3/16) states, “It is hard to be a teacher here.” Teachers feel disrespected by students, administrators, and parents. Teachers are also frustrated and have not had a raise in years as a result of stalled contract negotiations (Graham, 2016).
Every month, teachers describe how they are told to try a new approach and
overwhelmed by a constant focus on test preparation so that they “can’t teach.” Teachers
do not find the school professional development helpful, but teachers support each other
through informal networks. For example, teachers who teach the same grade, sometimes
called a “grade group” often support each other. The fourth grade teachers lesson plan
together, and each teacher is responsible for different lessons (e.g., math, reading, social
studies, science). These teachers also have lunch together in Ms. Smith’s classroom. They
take turns hosting the students who have lunch detention, and when needed they watch
each other’s students if a teacher needs to send a child to another class for a “break.” Ms.
Smith states that if someone from the fourth grade team has to cover (watch a class
during their preparation period) a middle school class that they “go together to help each
other.” This is because the teachers and other staff in the school consider the middle
school students and that entire wing of the school to be the “worst” and “out of control.”

The middle school teachers each teach a different subject, so lesson planning
support is not a part of their informal network. However, the middle school teachers
describe relying on each other as a space to “bitch and vent.” For most of the year, the
middle school team consisted of three first-year, White, male teachers, who are, as a
student describes “new to the game,” and one veteran Black, female teacher, Ms. Jenkins.
The English teacher was not hired until November, and there were two teachers in that
role before they hired him, and another first-year teacher was hired to temporarily replace
Mr. Barnes, who left in May following a student assault described previously. All of the
middle school teachers relied on Ms. Jenkins for insight, mentoring, and support. The
teachers at the school, and especially the first-year teachers, do not believe that they
receive “adequate” professional support from the principal. At best, they are happy when she “leaves them alone.” Veteran teachers also express this sentiment, and a majority of teachers state that they are relieved when the principal is absent and leaves them alone. For example, Ms. Smith states, “Ahh today is Wednesday and we have grade group and have to show her [the Principal] all of this data. I hate grade group. When it is cancelled, we dance.” Ms. Smith dances for a few seconds. “When she is out, we do a dance.” Ms. Smith does another dance (Fieldnotes, 3/16/16).

In general, teachers believe that they are not supported by the school administration, especially related to student discipline. One example of this is that, according to many teachers, the principal stopped allowing students to be suspended in November because by then the school had already suspended the total number of students as it had suspended the previous school year. This, teachers believe, allows students to internalize that they can do whatever they want. Schools in Philadelphia are rated each year, and one of the factors that goes into the rating is the number of suspensions. As Rashanna and other eighth graders articulate, many aspects of schooling at Baker are done for appearance purposes: “to make it look like it’s a good school.” Mr. Webster affirms this: “All of the data, attendance, behavior, test scores, are manipulated so that the school looks like an OK school on paper, and it is not. It is one of the worst schools. When I came here, I was shocked because I thought the school looked OK on paper” (Fieldnotes, 6/20/16). Comments teachers frequently make when asked how they are doing include, “I’m hanging in there” or “I’m trying to make it through the day.” These statements, said with visibly fraught affect, come from both new and veteran teachers.

Mr. Dixon, the school disciplinarian, says, “I am just burnt out. I'm not sure if I’m going
to make it. I am drained” (Fieldnotes, 3/30/16). The burnout and frustration that teachers experience, which I discuss in depth in the next chapter, can have unintended consequences that impact students’ schooling experiences. One of these consequences include that teachers talk to and about students in disparaging ways. Ms. Johnson, the school counselor, comments on the impact this can have in the following fieldnote.

Some teachers just talk to kids any kind of way. They say things like you are ignorant like your mom. I’ve heard a first grade teacher say you’re stupid to a child. That student will never listen to you. There is one White student in the school, Matthew. He was in Ms. Anderson’s class, and she is White. She was so mean to him. I don’t know if that is about him being white. We had to switch his class. He is now in another class. He does have a lot of issues. His mom is a drug addict, and he lives with a foster family. I don’t know what the deal was. Ms. Anderson just really did not like him. I remember actually hearing her say in front of Matthew, so I know he heard it too. She said, ‘Now that Matthew is gone we can have a party.’ (Fieldnotes, 6/14/16)

Ms. Johnson points out that Matthew would never listen to that teacher, Ms. Anderson, because of how she repeatedly disparaged him. She tells me that there was no way he could learn in there, so he was moved to another class. The consequences of teachers’ frustration and stress that results from teachers’ operating in a survival mode tend to culminate in deficitizing students and/or deficitizing parents and are part of how a “deficit default” becomes normalized at Baker School.

Deficitizing Students

Mr. Barnes, is a first-year, White male teacher in his early 20s. After finishing his undergraduate education degree and student teaching, he started his first formal teaching position at Baker. Mr. Barnes states that he wanted to be a teacher since he was in high school
because it was like a meritocracy like if you were doing the correct thing, you’d be rewarded, if you weren’t doing the right thing you’d be punished. So I loved getting the praise from my teachers, I loved getting the attention I wasn’t getting at home, and I don’t know just something about that like it seems like a very just sort of system when it’s done right to me, it seems like it’s one of the few places where justice can truly operate. (Interview, 2/1/16)

As Chapter 4 describes, Mr. Barnes was assaulted for the fifth time in March, and he began to become demoralized. He states that the assault and the subsequent bureaucratic hoops he had to jump through to feel safe as an educator contributed to feelings of despair. He posits, “The educator’s safety is not taken very seriously at all. Yeah, you have to get the police involved it seems like to actually get something done, and even then it seems like it’s a slow process.” We continue our conversation:

Nicole: Why do you think that is? I mean–
Mr. Barnes: It makes you feel very defeated to see that even something as serious as this is – it gets run through like this bureaucratic system that just takes forever you know. I think our District is too big, I don’t think we have enough staff, I don’t think we have enough resources to actually have any of these things dealt with efficiently.

Nicole: So at one of our first interviews, you know you talked about just like how really committed you are to teaching.
Mr. Barnes: Yeah.
Nicole: Do you still feel that way?
Mr. Barnes: Oh, absolutely, yeah. I mean I’m just still haven’t missed a day, haven’t come in late. Even in the wake of that like [the last assault] I didn’t go home early, so my commitment I think is stronger than ever. I think I need to reevaluate where I’m teaching because this is too much, this is just too much for me to handle. (Interview, 3/4/16)

Mr. Barnes states that not only is this environment too challenging for him, but also that he does not believe that teaching at Baker is making him a better teacher. When I ask him what he needs to get better as a teacher, he describes students who care and have internal motivation:

Mr. Barnes: I don’t feel like I’m becoming a better teacher. I feel like I’m becoming a stronger human being, I feel like I’m proving my own
resiliency to myself, and I’m having those very small victories, but I don’t feel like I’m actually like leaps and bounds getting better at what I’m doing, it’s just more like survival. And I – especially this young in my career I do feel like I do need to get better at what I’m doing. When I was student teaching every day, I felt like I was getting better and better at it you know, like measurably, like I could just rattle off the things that I feel like I was becoming a more efficient educator on, and here I feel like I’m stuck on the same skill that we were on, on day one. It doesn’t feel like I’m actually progressing in any way.

Nicole: What do you think you need to get better?

Mr. Barnes: I think you need – students in general who are going to care; I think there’s a huge lack of motivation here, and that – I think the better – the incentives that they put in place here are really fantastic; like I think [program name] the fact that you can get paid for school is unbelievable. I think that the fact that they’re in the Philadelphia School District, and so much rides on these two years [of middle school] for them, that itself should be motivating, and I don’t see it. So I don’t know what’s lacking, I don’t know why the majority of our students fail to feel motivated and just feel apathetic, and don’t seem to recognize that the choices they make today are going to affect the rest of their lives. And no matter how much I try to drive that point home, it seems like they’re just tired of me like preaching to them now. So I think I need to go somewhere where students do have some sort of sense of motivation, internal motivation where like this is important and I should do it.

Nicole: Do you think that you might need like you know more professional development, more collegiality, more – because I mean–?

Mr. Barnes: I think those things can help, but at the end of the day I mean so many teachers here just feel defeated, and they’re like veterans who’ve been doing this for a long time like I’ve never seen it like this where there’s just no motivation. So I think this is kind of an outlier in that sense, and I think I need to see a more normalized kind of situation where there is that traditional motivation, education’s important, that I think that would validate a lot of things for me, it would make me feel like I shouldn’t – there’s more I can do and drive me to work harder. Like when I was student teaching at [school name], I would be one of the first people in, and one of the last people to leave because it just made me want to work because I feel like I was helping them; you know I felt like it was really helping those students, and in turn I was getting better at what I was doing.

Nicole: So do you feel like this population is just hard to teach?

Mr. Barnes: That’s what I’ve gotten from people who have worked in other places, that this is just a very challenging school to be in. And then I was saying – they’re not even saying it’s still worse but they’re
saying that it probably has the least motivation out of any place they’ve ever been. So I don’t know what’s missing because it seems like there are so many incentive programs and so many things that intuitively you think would drive their motivation and make them want to get those things, and it just doesn’t seem to be there. (Interview, 3/4/16)

Mr. Barnes believes that Baker is a difficult and highly challenging place to teach, and the vast majority of the staff at the school agree with that assessment. Mr. Barnes also directly deficitizes students by stating that their internal motivation is “missing.” It is worth noting that he mentions internal motivation and how students are not invested in the incentive programs at the school, which in actuality are not based on internal motivation but are rather an approach of carrots and sticks (e.g., Kohn, 2006). The example that Mr. Barnes describes is of an incentive program that pays students to go to school. I question Mr. Barnes in the following excerpt of our conversation about if schooling or the approach should be changed, and he believes that the staff is doing a good job of engaging students, but that the students are not receptive to it. He also contends that veteran teachers are struggling here, and that he, as a first-year teacher, does not have the expertise to know what else to try. It is generally acknowledged that the first year of teaching, regardless of the school, is incredibly challenging (e.g., Worthy, 2005). For Mr. Barnes, the challenges at Baker and his personal traumatic experiences influences how he primarily blames the students:

Nicole: Do you think maybe they’re just like not interested in school? Maybe we need to change schooling a little bit to–?
Mr. Barnes: Oh, I’m always for that, yeah. I think – when so I mean they all know the stakes of the PSSAs [state-wide standardized test] and everything and that alone seems wrong to me, and I think we have systemically made school more boring. But when you do have people like I would argue that the majority of teachers here do try to go outside the box and still deal with the PSSAs, still play ball
there, but also try to make it entertaining and engaging to them, while imparting those skills that they still need to develop at this age. I think people are trying to do a really good job here, like I’m very impressed with the staff at the school, but it just doesn’t seem like there’s much – anyone is really being receptive to it like in the student body.

Nicole: Do you think – have you ever thought like, “Okay, I’m just going to try something completely new. This isn’t working; I’m going to try something brand new?”

Mr. Barnes: Oh yeah, yeah, like sometimes I would just like drop it and like I’ll have them just analyze like song lyrics, just like hook them into something you know, and then try to tie it back in and it doesn’t seem to be much interest. And it’s just like at the end of my rope like I’ve – this is all in my first year and that’s a hard thing because I don’t have all the resources that like a seasoned teacher has. And even when I talk to Ms. Jenkins, who’s been in the education field for like two three decades now, she’s had all those different things at work and she is like running out of stuff. So it’s hard for me to be like, as a first-year teacher I’m going to you know reinvent the wheel and come up with something, that this lady who’s like who I admire greatly and who like I would imagine would have the most control over these kids, she’s saying that she’s losing control over them. So it’s difficult for me to produce these resources that I don’t even know exist yet, so yeah, I’m constantly like I’m on Pinterest all the time trying to look for stuff because like it’s just – I’m not coming up with it on my own, you know, whereas I try it and it’s just not working out, so I need outside help.

(Interview, 3/4/16)

Mr. Barnes states that he is “burnt out.” He also repeats several times that he and other teachers feel “defeated.” Although he is trying hard and has yet to miss a day of school, it is quite clear that he internalizes and projects deficit orientations on to the students to make it seem like they are “the problem.” While he acknowledges that the District lacks resources, he does not see how the entire system contributes to the problems he faces at Baker or how his considerations of students as lacking motivation and essentially “unteachable” strongly influence how he teaches and relates with students as well as how students learn, respond, and engage in his class. Instead, he directly and
indirectly blames students. This is a direct embodiment of deficit ideologies in which systems of oppression are not recognized (Gorski, 2011; Valencia, 2010). In addition, as a first-year teacher he is very much in survival mode and often struggling to make it through each day. Mr. Barnes projects his struggles on to his students. Instead of thinking about his teaching, the school, or the boarder system, he considers “these students” (see Nygreen, 2013) to be the problem. In the next subsection, I describe Ms. Smith, who is not struggling in the same way that Mr. Barnes is. However, she is “fed up” and frustrated. Ms. Smith tends to primarily blame parents, even though her frustration is often taken out on students.

Deficiticizing Parents and Projecting Frustrations onto Students

Ms. Smith is a middle-aged Black woman with dread locks who has been teaching for 14 years. She has taught at Baker for several years, and prior to teaching at Baker, she taught at two charter schools. Ms. Smith is both respected and feared. She says,

> Ms. Washington [the principal] told me to use classroom management the other day because Nyeisha was in the hallway. I start screaming at her. This is the second time we have had it out. You are not going to talk to me any kind of way. I am an adult. I was going to address her again today, but I have to cover because too many people are out. I don’t think she is going to want to talk to me. Ms. Washington told me, ‘you are too aggressive.’ I yelled at her in the lunch room the first time in front of my class. My kids were saying that I cursed Ms. Washington out and I didn't, but I got in her face. She hasn't brought that up to me again. She just says, ‘You are too aggressive for me Ms. Smith.’ (Fieldnotes, 3/16/16)

Ms. Smith has an established presence in the school. Faculty in the school look to her for advice and guidance and listen to her opinions. I ask the counselor, Ms. Johnson, if Ms. Smith is respected and she answers,

> Yes. She controls her class and controls everything actually. She is respected, and
as a staff, we all respect everyone. However, some teachers don't agree with her methods. Baker is about survival. The environment is hard. There are four teachers like Ms. Smith. I'm not perfect. I yelled ‘shut the hell up yesterday’ at the students. (Fieldnotes, 6/14/16)

In addition to reinforcing how teachers are valued and celebrated if they can “control their class,” Ms. Johnson declares that “Baker is about survival.” Ms. Smith, like all teachers at Baker, is struggling and attempting to survive. Ms. Smith, who is originally from the local neighborhood, demonstrates a habitus of fierceness, as evidenced in how she engages with students and the Principal. However, Ms. Smith has considerably more power at Baker than students, and this habitus, while still very much a coping mechanism (e.g., Stevenson, 2014), has direct and indirect consequences on students.

Ms. Smith prides herself on having her class under control, and she does not tolerate misbehavior. The following fieldnote illustrates common interactions between Ms. Smith and her students. The fieldnote begins with Ms. Smith using fear to have the class engage in a close reading of a text.

Ms. Smith asks the whole class, “As I read, you are supposed to?” The students respond in unison, “Track.” Track means that students are to follow along and point to the words with their finger while Ms. Smith is reading. Ms. Smith comments, “You are not tracking, Lashaya. You told me yesterday that you mess with me on purpose, but I can mess with you more.” Lashaya smiles and then starts tracking. After Ms. Smith finished reading, she says to me, “Nyeisha was good yesterday. It was her first day of after school. Christopher is gone. He moved and started at a new school. Thank God. Kristen moved too.” She then turns back to the class and asks about words from the text, “What is distraction?” Many students answer. She asks, “What is embarrassed?” Ireena states, “When you feel silly and ashamed.” Ms. Smith says now to the students, “Ok. Use context clues. Is this story in the past or present?” A student answers, “The past.” Ms. Smith asks, “How do you know?” The student states, “The picture of the car looks old.” Ms. Smith respond, “Good. And what about the price of a car. Can you buy a new car for two hundred dollars now? They said you could buy a new car for a couple hundred dollars.” A couple of students say you can, but that it would not be a new car.
Ms. Smith then tells the students, “Let’s make an inference. What did the family use Thunder [the name of the horse] for? They didn’t want the horse to feel like it has been replaced by the car.” Ms. Smith is asking inference questions related to details. She called on five or six students, and no one knew the answers. At 9:59AM Nyeisha walks in. She waves at me, and I wave and smile at her. A student from another class is sitting in her desk. Nyeisha is upset, and Ms. Smith asks the student to move and points to another desk. This student is taking a break in Ms. Smith’s room. Ms. Smith returns to the rest of the class and asks, “Why is the car important?” No one knows, and she is getting frustrated. She states, “Sit up. No leaning. Kids. This isn’t my life. You don’t get it. You have to get it together. We talk about this all the time. When you get older you need a career, because there won’t be a lot of jobs. We talk about this all the time. Come on.” Marshall sneezes, and she says to him, “Cover your mouth. That is so basic.” This is the fifth time she has asked him to cover his mouth since I arrived. Ms. Smith asks the class again, “What are you being asked to do? Will you look at the question? Come on. I have had it. I have to work very hard. You do nothing. Just sit there.” Ms. Smith asks again, “What is the inference?” The class finally gets the answer. Marquise says, “I said that.” Ms. Smith yells, “What are you going to do. You didn’t say that. How are you going to tell me what you said?” Ms. Smith gets right in front of his face, and she speaks to him in a severe tone as she says this. She goes over to the phone and calls for Marquise’s social worker. She says, “I’m tired of him arguing with me. He needs to leave.” After she hangs up the phone, she says to the class, “Ok. Plan your writing.” The students are writing an answer making an inference about the passage they just read. It is called a constructed response question, which is a type of open-ended question that the students will have on the PSSA. Marquise’s worker comes to the door, and Ms. Smith says, “I’m tired of it. He is always talking back to me. I’m tired of it.” Marquise leaves the class with his worker. Ms. Smith turns to the rest of the students and tells several to “sit up.” As Nyeisha is settled in her desk, I say, “Good morning, Nyeisha.” She tells me, “I was good yesterday.” I say, “That is what Ms. Smith told me this morning. I am so glad to hear that you had a good day.” Nyeisha continues, “My mom told me that I should be good every day.” Ms. Smith tells the whole class, “Ok students. Sharpen your pencils.” Students line up near Ms. Smith’s desk to sharpen their pencils. Ms. Smith says, “Back up. Back up. You need to be here.” She motions to the end of her desk. Ms. Smith sharpens the pencils and passes them back to the students.

Ms. Smith talks to Lashaya privately and then Lashaya moves to a new seat to sit by herself. She asks Rashed, “Are you tired?” Rashed says, “Yes. I stayed up late.” Ms. Smith says, “I’m going to have to talk to granddad.” Ms. Smith says quietly to me, “Rashed came from [another school]. He was so on point when he first got here. His writing is excellent. Now he is starting to slip up. I am going to talk to his granddad. Rashed is sweet. The girls like him. He is cute.” She continues to talk to me while the students are working independently, “I just don’t know what to do about the lack of achievement. I don’t know if it is us,” Ms. Smith points to her skin as she says this, “or economics. I’m thinking it
is economics. I just don’t know. You know Stefon. He is so smart. His mom is worried he is going to end up like his dad who was in jail for 8 years. He is so smart. I am having him go to the fifth grade for reading. There are so many jailhouse lawyers. They don’t have common sense.”

Sammy gets up to throw something away. When he sits down. Ms. Smith whispers to me, “Sammy’s dad is white. He talks black. It is kind of funny. He really cares and is involved. I am not sure where the mom is. Nyeisha’s mom was here yesterday. She is a waste, and it is so sad.” (Fieldnotes, 2/10/16)

The near-complete lack of trust in students to behave or “act right” is sedimented into the school culture. Ms. Smith is able to teach more than other teachers because she is feared, however, Ms. Smith lacks confidence in her students primarily because she considers their parents “a waste.” In addition, the fieldnote also describes how Ms. Smith not only deficitizes parents, but also deficitizes the community and her race when she states, “I just don’t know what to do about the lack of achievement. I don’t know if it is us,” Ms. Smith points to her skin as she says this, “or economics. I’m thinking it is economics. I just don’t know” (Fieldnotes, 2/10/16).

As the fieldnote continues, Mr. Kelly, Ms. Smith, and Nyeisha are all yelling, and Ms. Carol points out that everyone at Baker is hollering all the time.

I walk back downstairs because it is time for the fourth-sixth grade lunch. I hear Mr. Kelly in the hallway screaming, “You don’t say nothing to me. You ask me.” He screams and repeats this a few times. I then hear Ms. Smith is yelling at Nyeisha because she has a soda. “You don’t need a soda.” Nyeisha runs away from her to the lunch room, and Ms. Smith throws up her hands and says, “I’ve had it.”

Ms. Carol who is in the hallway as well, says to me, “The kids are hollering; the teachers are hollering.” She shakes her head. On my way to the lunchroom I stop by the after school programming room. Mr. James tells me that Kiandra left for the charter school because her mother thinks it is too chaotic here. I ask how Nyeisha is doing in the after school program. He says, “All of the kids told me not to put her in there because they don’t like her. They say she is mean to them. So that was more reason for me to put her in there, so far so good. You know it might be that Ms. Smith doesn’t like her and so the kids don’t like her.” Mr. James and I talk more about the after school program and students he
has kicked out. I hang out with the fourth graders during lunch, and then I leave to go home for lunch.

At about 2pm I walk back into the school through the front doors. I hear music as soon as I get out of my car. It is a nice song that I don’t recognize, like of sounds soul and pop music. I see a car parked in front of the school, and Ms. Crawford, Nyeisha’s mother, is sitting in the passenger seat singing and dancing along with the song. There is a young child in the back seat. The driver’s seat is empty. She smiles and waves at me, and I think to myself that she looks really happy, and I am glad. This is the third time I saw her at the school so far today.

I walk to Ms. Smith’s classroom on the second floor. Ms. Smith seems frustrated and says, “Nyeisha complained of a stomach ache. I took her to the nurse, and the nurse said nothing is wrong with her. Nyeisha she just lies and lies. Her mother is worthless. And it is so sad. It hurts me. She was awful after lunch. You know I think she is so far gone. She is mentally ill.” I ask, “Has she been evaluated by a psychologist?” Ms. Smith responds, “No. But she should be. She is just so far gone, and her mom is really so much of the problem. It makes me so sad when she says she doesn’t know what to do, but it is because she doesn’t listen.” A few minutes later, Nyeisha walk back into the classroom and starts gathering her things. She has been in the behavior support room (BSR) because, according to Ms. Smith, she was awful. Ms. Smith asks Nyeisha, “What are you doing?” Nyeisha says, “I’m not staying in here. I am getting my things and going back to BSR.”

After school I see Ms. Smith yelling at Nyeisha again in the hallway. I can’t hear what she is saying, but I see Nyeisha walk away from Ms. Smith and into the cafeteria and then Ms. Smith turns around and throws up her hands. Ms. Smith walks up the hallway and sees me and says, “You know I just don’t know how much longer I can do this.” I ask, “How long have you been teaching?” Ms. Smith says, “14 years. I like this population, and they need it, but it is just so hard. It just hurts me.” As we are talking, a parent knocks on the door. It is Nyeisha’s mother, Ms. Crawford. Ms. Smith says in a very nice tone, “Hi. Come in.” Ms. Crawford asks, “Is NyNy here?” Ms. Smith states, “She should be in the cafeteria.” Ms. Crawford walks quickly toward the cafeteria, and we see her in the door way talking to Mr. James. I hear her ask, “How is she doing?” as she enters the cafeteria. Ms. Smith whispers to me while Ms. Crawford is in the cafeteria, “She is worthless. I just don’t know. I am not a mother, but I think it is hard to be a mother. I think you have to sacrifice. I know that my sister did for my nephew. She was really strict, and now he is happy and he thanks her. She was tight,” Ms. Smith mimics kicking, “and she had to sacrifice a lot.” Ms. Crawford walks back up the hallway. I ask, “Is everything ok?” Ms. Crawford states, “Yes.” Ms. Smith says, “Nyeisha walks home.” Ms. Crawford says, “Yes. She always does. NyNy is going to walk to my mom’s house after school and then they are going to walk together over to my house.” Ms. Smith responds, “Ok.” Ms. Crawford opens the door to leave. I say, “Goodbye. Have a good evening.”

(Fieldnotes, 2/10/16)
Ms. Smith is frustrated, and she frequently discusses how much she cares about “this population.” However, she takes out her frustration directly and harshly on students, even though she primarily blames the parents, whom Ms. Smith considers “worthless” and “so much of the problem.” Ms. Smith directly deficitizes individuals and does not recognize the structural and systematic forces that impact parents like Ms. Crawford (Gorski, 2011; Valencia, 2010).

A frequent comment Ms. Smith makes to and about her students is “they don’t get it.” She is referring to life in general and specifically what they need to do in order to be successful. Ms. Smith believes that the stakes are higher for the students at Baker because they have so many challenges to overcome. For Ms. Smith, “the parents need to be parents.” She states,

“They [referring to her students] don’t understand how hard it is. They don’t understand work because their parents don’t work. They think that rent is just based on your income, that utilities are just paid. They don’t know that the stakes are so high and they don’t know about working for things.” I ask, “What can we do?” Ms. Smith responds, “I don’t know if there is anything we can do. The parents need to be parents. They are so young and they don’t know how to parent. You know, I am not a parent, but I know it is hard. My sister, is a doctor, and she was a single mom, and she stayed on my nephew. She rode him so hard, and now he thanks her for it. He is at Harvard getting his MBA. He worked for the NBA in finance. He is probably going to be the chairperson of the NBA. Oh we are so proud of him. My sister did so good, but you know it wasn’t easy. She was on him like a hawk. She didn’t let him get away with anything. His dad is a doctor too, but he wasn’t around and didn’t do anything.” I ask her again, “So what can we do for students who don’t have parents like your sister?” Ms. Smith states, “I don’t know. They need to step up. They need to be parents. I don’t know. I don’t think there is anything we can do. All I know, and I keep telling my students this, is that if Trump gets elected, they better watch out. A lot is going to change. There is not going to be all of this free stuff anymore. I mean I work so hard, and I pay taxes, although I work to not pay that much taxes, but I pay my share. These kids don’t understand that all of these handouts are going to stop.” (Fieldnotes, 4/1/16)

Ms. Smith perpetuates negative narratives of parents whom she describes as not working
and receiving, as she states, “handouts.” She says these kinds of comments frequently to students as well as other adults at the school. Ms. Smith tries to educate her fourth graders about the importance of a career, and she becomes increasingly frustrated, as the following fieldnote describes, when her students focus on things such as shoes, which Ms. Smith does not consider important.

As soon as I walk into Ms. Smith’ room today, Lamar hollers out, “Ms. Smith is wearing Bobos.” He is talking about her shoes. She gets in Lamar’s face, and says, “What did you say? What.” She throws him out of the class. To the rest of the class, Ms. Smith says, “I don’t get this. Why do you care so much about shoes? You have nothing. You know that. Where do you get what you have? Where do things come from?” Marquise states, “Our parents give it to us.” Sammy answers, “Things come from our parents.” Ms. Smith then remarks, “Why does your community, why do we, talk about shoes? Why do we care about shoes?” Marquise responds, “I know. I know. People want Michael Jordans.” Ms. Smith says, “What should we care about?” Students call out things, including, “good credit,” “a career,” “a house.” Ms. Smith explains to her class, “You know all of the shoes are made in China. Your Michael Jordans and my Bobos are all made in the same place. You know how much it probably costs to make those expensive shoes, about 5 dollars. It is just stupid to care about that.” She then says to me, “I don’t know what is wrong with my people.” She returns to the class and says, “You have to stop caring about this crap. So yeah, Ms. Smith wears Bobos, but I don’t care.” (Fieldnotes, 3/9/16)

To Ms. Smith, the stakes are incredibly high for students at Baker. In many ways, Ms. Smith is attempting to provide students with cultural capital (see e.g., Lareau, 2011) and to help them navigate the culture of power (Delpit, 1995). She says that she wants her students to be successful, which she thinks of primarily in terms of economic social mobility. She, unlike Mr. Barnes, believes that her students should be learning everyday, which contrasts with the way that Mr. Barnes deficitizes students and focuses more on controlling behavior, even if he is not yelling. Ms. Smith also focuses on controlling behavior, but she primarily blames parents and not students. Ms. Smith frequently makes comments similar to this one: “They [referring to her students] aren't bad. They just drive
me crazy. I am trying to keep them from ending up like their parents” (Fieldnotes, 5/17/16). For Ms. Smith, the parents are the problem, and she has zero tolerance for them. Ms. Johnson explains, “Ms. Smith is trying to save the world. She means well, but she can be really hard on the kids sometimes. I tell her that we can't make parents be parents. We can only do so much.” (Fieldnotes, 6/14/16).

In the following fieldnote, Ms. Smith is “nervous” because Nyeisha, who Ms. Smith has a contentious relationship with, is not at school and was seen walking in the street. Ms. Smith appears to be genuinely concerned about Nyeisha, and she then describes how Nyeisha’s mother and other “parents need to parent.”

Ms. Smith says, “A woman came to my door this morning, she works with the older students upstairs, and she said that she saw one of my students, she thinks her name is Nyeisha, walking in the middle of the street. This was just a few minutes ago, so around 10. That is the time Nyeisha normally gets to school. She said that Nyeisha told her she was going home. I told her that she has never been to school. I told the woman to tell the counselor, Ms. Johnson, and the front office because Nyeisha has not been to school today.” Ms. Smith tells me that she doesn’t know what Nyeisha is doing and that she has done this before. I ask if her brother and sister are there, and they are. Her mother is not with her, and Ms. Smith says she is “very nervous.”

Ms. Smith states, “Nyeisha’s mom, she is overwhelmed. She needs the help honestly. She has 6 kids with one on the way. Nyeisha needs a mom. Her mom doesn’t know what to do. It is chaos in that house. Different dads. Nyeisha and the older kids, two older kids, I think they have the same dad. Then the younger ones have a different one. And the new baby will have a different one. There are at least three dads. The thing is if your mom slacks, you lose. You know she told her Nyeisha that if she is better, that maybe I would be a mother to her. That is not my job. I am conflicted. You know these are my people, and I am really conflicted. Things are different. The parents. The kids tend to stay in the neighborhood, they don’t leave. There are parents who went to school here, there are teachers here who taught the parents. People in this neighborhood tend to stay in this neighborhood. You know I was in this neighborhood once. Yes. My sister went to this school. We lived on [street name]. My parents, my mom and dad, were not educated, but they wanted more for us. We, my sister and brother, are educated. We all have advanced degrees.”

She points to Stefon. “You see him there. He is really smart. He gets perfect scores on his PSSA and his benchmark. He is so smart. His dad was in jail
for 8 years, and he is out now. His mom really tries, and she really stays on him. Stefon is angry at the world. We are working to get him into a better school, but his behavior. I always tell him, “NO one cares that you are angry.” I tell my class that. The world does not care that you are angry. He is so smart. My nephew is no smarter than he is. You know, my nephew, the one who is quitting his 6 figure salary as an analyst at ESPN to go to Harvard. He went to Stanford undergrad. He is amazing. He takes care of all of us. It is PARENTING. My sister. She made sure that he did that. He always used to write her letters, and we go back and read those. He thanks her so much now for all that she did for him. She was divorced, his dad is a doctor too, but it really was my sister.” (Fieldnotes, 1/5/16)

Ms. Smith believes that parenting is key, and although she clearly deficitizes parents, her deficit lens is nuanced and complex. For example, Ms. Smith acknowledges Stefon’s mother’s efforts in the previous fieldnote. Parents have mixed reactions to Ms. Smith. Many parents like her “strict” style, and like Danielle mentions in Chapter 4, Ms. Smith does “not put up with any stuff from children.” In the following fieldnote, Ms. Carol describes a different parental perspective:

I ask, “Do you have a favorite teacher here?” Ms. Carol responds, “NO. But I have a least favorite.” “Who’s that?” I ask. Ms. Carol says, “Ms. Smith.” I wasn’t expecting Ms. Carol to say this, primarily because she knows I spend time in Ms. Smith’s class, but I don’t think it shows. I ask her, “Why is she your least favorite?” Ms. Carol answers, “I don’t like how she talks to the children. She said to my grandson, Andrew, in front of me, ‘I don’t know how she puts up with you. I would have given up on you.’ I was so red. Nicole. I was so angry. I said to Andrew, ‘Don’t you listen to that. I would never give up on you. I love you. Don’t listen to her.’ If that is what she says to him in front of me, I can’t imagine what she says to him when I am not there.” I tell Ms. Carol, “I can’t believe she said that. What did you do?” Ms. Carol says, “I talked to Ms. Washington [the principal], and I got him out of her class. She hasn’t talked to me since then. You know what is weird, the kids love her. Andrew did not want to leave her class. But now she doesn’t talk to him either, and that made me know that I made the right decision. That is no way to talk to children.” (Fieldnotes, 1/12/16)

Ms. Carol articulates the disparaging way that Ms. Smith talks to students as well as the complexities surrounding her presence in the school. Certainly not all students and parents love or appreciate Ms. Smith, but neither do all of them hate or vilify her. Ms.
Smith appears to be more successful in teaching than Ms. Barnes primarily because of where Ms. Smith places the locus of blame. Although Mr. Barnes does not yell at his students, as discussed in Chapter 4, he does not appear to believe in them. Ms. Smith yells at students, yet she believes in them. Both teachers contribute to the hidden curriculum of control. These two complex narratives provide insight into the deficit default that surrounds parents and students at Baker. Ms. Smith is attempting to educate her students about the culture of power (Delpit, 1995), and this comes with unintended consequences, such as contributing to the deficit default as the next section discusses.

A Deficit Default

At Baker School, students, teachers, parents, and administrators view each other, themselves, and the school negatively. A common narrative is that students attend Baker as a “last resort.” If there is another option, students take it. Students with more involved parents often transfer to charter schools, and many students in the middle grades attend Baker because they were kicked out of their charter school for behavior infractions. When Ms. Smith discusses students in her class who she thinks are smart or have potential, the first thing she says is how she wants to get them into a better school: “I want to try to help get him [Stefon] into a better school. He is just so angry. I am working with his mom to get him into a better school because he is so smart. He would do well in a different school if he can control himself.” Students who previously attended a charter school describe their former schools as more rigorous and having far fewer discipline problems. The middle school teachers are all new to the school this year, and a comment they make frequently is, “I heard it was worse here last year. I don’t know how that is
possible.” Parent volunteers describe this school as far “worse” than previous schools their children attended. Students, primarily in the older grades, also talk about Baker School as “way worse” than their old schools. The mentality is that if you have another option, you do not go to this school.

As described in Chapter 4, Mr. Barnes and other teachers spend a large amount of their instructional time correcting or attempting to manage classroom behaviors with very little school structures, interventions, or communication. The narratives that students need to be controlled, the infantilization of students, the notions that “students don’t care,” negative associations about parents and parental engagement, and descriptions of how students do not have positive home experiences result in a deficit default toward the students and families at Baker. From veteran to first-year teachers, there is a narrative that students “don’t care.” When asked about different ways they have tried to engage students, teachers, as in the example of Mr. Barnes previously in the chapter, state, “It doesn’t matter what I do. The students don’t care.” Adopting the mentality that “students don’t care” allows schools and society to not be blamed for students’ lack of educational opportunities (Theoharis, 2009).

Students’ Internalization of the Deficit Default

Despite the systematic failure of Baker and the overall systemic failure of public education in the United States, which I discuss in the next chapter, teachers, staff, and students both project and internalize this deficit default and messages of failure. Students, as the following discussion with four eighth grade students demonstrates, often describe the school as a “bad school.” The students also describe the school, teachers, and fellow
students as “bad.” They suggest that the way to improve the school is to start completely over with “new” students. In addition, the students discuss how any improvements to the school, such as murals on the walls, are entirely superficial and just for show.

Nicole: What does it take to be successful and what advice would you have? Say you were talking to a fourth grader and you wanted them to be successful, what would you say?

Rashanna: The advice I have is find the right school and no ... What it takes to find the right school and the advice I have is don't go to Baker.

Nicole: Okay, so let me hear a little more about that.

Rashanna: Just don't here, it's not a good school that you should be in.

Nicole: Yeah, where did you learn, like how did you know it's not a good school?

Jalayla: Cause we go here.

Rashanna: I've been here so long.

Nicole: Yeah ... What makes it a "not good" school?

Bianca: The kids, some of the teachers.

Rashanna: The teachers.

Renee: The principal.

Jalayla: The food.

Bianca: Of course your fat self going to say the food. I think the main part that makes this school a bad school is Ms. Washington [the principal]. She needs to go. My mom don't like her.

Rashanna: She is going, we just won't be there when she gone. She's not coming back next year.

Bianca: She should have been gone. You see what this school look like?

Jalayla: She, Ms. Washington, she's not like a

Rashanna: It's like dust on everywhere where dusters next to them.

Bianca: Right, right.

Rashanna: Like the computer has dust on them and there's the duster that's leaning on them. The duster there is literally leaning on the stuff with the dust on it, and they're not using it. It's just like dust everywhere. How does dust get stuck to the floor like that?

Rashanna points to the dusters on top of the broken, dusty computer monitors and is laughing.

Nicole: Say more, do you all agree with Rashanna's advice?

Jalayla: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Bianca: I do. Renee?

Renee: Ummm. Well, yeah, I agree.

Nicole: You agree? The main reason you think this isn't a good school is because of the teachers and the principal.

Renee: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
Bianca: The principal ... And some of the students because we can't just blame it all on the teachers and the principal because some of students here are bad here.

Jalayla: Ms. Washington’s not ... She's not really like a real tough, tough principal like that is what this school needs, like a real mean principal.

Rashanna: No, she too mean that's why don't nobody like her, don't nobody listen to her.

Bianca: No, she's not ...

Rashanna: She don't do nothing, like ...

Bianca: She not mean, she just-

Rashanna: Somebody, she is in her office all day and she won't do nothing ...

We don't see her most of the day.

Bianca: She's tough on like small things, but on the big things, she don't do nothing about it but on the small things, she wants to do things about it. It's no big deal.

Jalayla: Like don't wear uniform, it's a whole big deal.

Bianca: Yeah, big problem, but if somebody's phone goes missing or somebody goes missing out the school, she won't make a big deal out of it. "Oh, it's not my fault."

Rashanna: She don't care. Ms. Johnson and them are going to be the only ones asking, "Did you see the child?" Ms. Washington, we don't see her. She's going to be at home or in her office. She got a sign on there that says, "Don't enter without permission."

Bianca: Yeah just like when my mom was coming because she was getting smart with me and stuff, so my mom came down here and she was not trying to talk to my mom. They were like Ms. Washington is in her office and all of that. My mom was like, "Well tell that 'b' to come out ..." and she was not trying to come out.

Jalayla: She don't like sitting there talking to talking to parents.

Rashanna: Every time my mom comes to get my phone from her, she doesn't want to coming out, she be saying that we got to schedule a meeting and all that.

Bianca: Or if not, she sends other people to sit there and talk to the parent.

Renee: Yeah, like Mr. Dixon or Ms. Forbes.

Rashanna: The girl’s parents were up here snapping. They were saying she was dumb, just because she has a degree, that don't mean she got no sense. They were waiting for her. They said she didn't get here yet, they still sitting in the office waiting for her.

Jalayla: Not Ms. Washington, she would be in a meeting.

Bianca: She makes excuses.

Rashanna: She don't let nobody in her office though.

Bianca: She's like, "Don't make me call your mom." She'll talk to your mom over the phone, but not in person.
Jalayla: You have to pay attention, the only time she lets them in her office is when they have food or something.
Rashanna: Yeah, when they dropping her food off. Her whole freezer is filled with food, we went in there to get something before, she had all these frozen dinners and stuff in there.
Jalayla: She has jars of candy and stuff.
Rashanna: Yeah, jars of candy on the table.
Renee: Who that?

*Students are banging on the library doors and peering through the window.*
Bianca: Who’s that Deshawn, his little ugly self, and Edward. They need to go somewhere.
Jalayla: They're not even Ms. Dockett’s classroom right now.
Bianca: Right, like they're just on the school.
Nicole: That's not ...?
Jalayla: That’s Ms. Roberts classroom. [Referring to the screaming coming from next door.]

Nicole: Let's talk more about what Rashanna said. Is there a way to make Baker a better school?
Bianca: Get rid of the principal.
Rashanna: I think they should just let go all the students and just start over with new applications and stuff.
Jalayla: They need to for real do this school over.
Rashanna: Just take everything, start over. They need to repaint it, paint the floor, the ceiling ... The ceilings look like some floors or they're just all bulked in and stuff. I don't think no school honestly got this type of ceiling no more.

/[Students are chiming in and adding things that also need to be redone.]
Bianca: There's a whole, almost the whole ceiling in every room is messed up.
Rashanna: No school really got no ceilings like this no more.
Jalayla: They need to fix the lights.
Bianca: Yeah, like nobody has ceilings like this no more.
Rashanna: Or lights.
Nicole: I do like ... You guys have a lot of nice murals on the walls. My school didn't have that.
Jalayla: Yeah, they just started putting …
Rashanna: They just mainly focus on the walls though.
Bianca: Yeah, they don't clean-
Rashanna: Like the ceiling is leaking water, but the walls got posters all over, make it look like it's a good school.
Bianca: Right.
Rashanna: It's pictures of the students with books in their hands, I bet none of those students don’t know what them books is about, or anything else about those books. Most of them probably ... Yeah, they probably don't know how to read, most of them holding them.
Bianca: Or don’t know how to read.
Nicole: You think it's just for show?
Renee: Yeah.
Bianca: Yeah, I think it's just to make the school look good, but for real, for real, it's not good. They just want the visitors and stuff to think it's in here. They...
Rashanna: The visitors who came last time, they got all the students out the classroom with uniforms and told us to walk around with the visitors.

*The loud speaker is going off: “Pardon the interruption. Ms. Johnson call the main office.”* (Group Interview, 5/25/16)

As this conversation highlights, these students internalize a deficit default surrounding the school and themselves. For example, the advice they have for younger students to be successful “is don’t go to Baker.” Baker is “not good,” according to these students, because of “teachers,” “kids,” “the principal,” and “the food.” The students also comment on the state of the physical building: “Like the ceiling is leaking water, but the walls got posters all over, make it look like it’s a good school.” The students articulate how many efforts are primarily for appearances. The students also internalize the hidden curriculum of control when they make comments like “this school needs a real mean principal.” I have heard many other students make similar claims. Finally, when I asked the students how Baker could be better, Rashanna’s answer – “I think they should just let go all the students and just start over with new applications and stuff” – is a powerful example of how the deficit default becomes internalized. The internalization of the deficit default is an example of symbolic violence, which I discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

**The Disconnect Between Students’ and Teachers’ Experiences**

Teachers often misunderstand student behavior and experiences, and regardless if the teacher is from the local community (e.g., Moll, 2000), there often remains a
disconnect between students’ and teachers’ lived experiences. This disconnect contributes
to and reinforces the deficit default at Baker. In the following excerpts from a
conversation, Bianca, Rashanna, Renee, and Jalayla, all eighth grade students, discuss
how many teachers do not understand them. They begin by discussing how caring about
students is a part of understanding them (Noguera, 2009). Specifically, the girls state that
some teachers, like Mr. Crowley, a first-year White male teacher, do not understand
“where we come from” or “that we are do or die.” What they say teachers need to
understand is that, for them, “tomorrow isn't promised. You can't be threatening us with
our grades and things like that.” Furthermore, students point out what they perceive to be
a disconnect between teachers who have “degrees” and their parents, many of whom do
not.

Nicole: We're talking about Mr. Crowley.
Bianca: I don't like him.
Nicole: How come?
Bianca: Cuz, he want everybody to get kicked out of graduation. I don't
like him. I don't know about them, but I don't like him.
Nicole: Tell me the different between Ms. Jenkins and Mr. Crowley.
Rashanna: Ms. Jenkins care.
Bianca: Ms. Jenkins care yeah and Mr. Crowley don't.
Renee: She don't be like, I don't want you all in graduation.
Bianca: He be like I'm going to do everything I can to get you all kicked
out of graduation.
Nicole: Do you think that Mr. Crowley just doesn't understand that you all
take what he says seriously?
Jalayla: He don't understand where we come from.
Nicole: You don't think he understands where you come from?
Jalayla: Nope.
Rashanna: That we are do or die.
Nicole: What does that mean?
Bianca: He don't understand what we try to tell him.
Jalayla: Basically, we live in like a tough neighborhood, right?
Renee: So, we take everything to the heart.
Jalayla: Exactly.
Rashanna: Do or die.
Renee: Right
Jalayla: Basically
Nicole: Give me some more examples about that. Ideally, my research could help teachers to better understand. What does he need? I'm not going to tell him specifically, right? What does a teacher maybe like him-
Renee: He need to understand tomorrow isn't promised. You can't be threatening us with our grades and things like that.
Jalayla: Exactly.
Renee: Some of our parents didn't go to college. That's probably going to be the first time...
Jalayla: That's the thing I hate about teachers. Y'all sit there… They constantly throwing at us how they got they degree and that high education.
Rashanna: They be like we got to respect them
Bianca: They are like I got my teacher's degree. What you got? You don't got nothing.
Rashanna: There's no respect for us. They say, we got this many degrees, this that and the third. They don't know. Most of us can make more money in a day than they make in a year. They just expect when they look at us to not think that.
Jalayla: I hate when they do that.
Renee: They always try to do that.
Bianca: Yeah.
Renee: They are always like.. What if you all didn't get your degree?
Jalayla: Exactly. I hate when they throw that in our faces. Oh well. You all so hype because you all got you all's teacher's degree. You all's Master's degree. All that other type stuff. What we supposed to care for? We not worried about what you all got? We trying to worry about what we need to have.
Nicole: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
Jalayla: I hate when teachers always say that. That's their favorite thing. "What do you all got? Because I got this."
Nicole: They say that to you specifically?
Jalayla: Yes.
Bianca: Yes
Renee: They are like I got my teacher degreeeeeee
Bianca: I got my teacher degree. I got a master's degree. What you all got?
Renee: But y'all working as a teacher though. You all could've been a nurse, anything else, but you all a teacher teaching us so ...
Jalayla: They be like, well since I got all that. I don't really got to teach you all. I can let you all sit here-
Bianca: Yep.
Nicole: You hear a lot of teachers say things to you, like I have this, right? How does it make you feel when they say that?
Renee: Be like ‘okayyy..’
Jalayla: It makes you want to punch them in they faces.
Bianca: No, I just be like, okay? You're telling me for? I don't care.
Renee: Watch this when I go to college and yep.
Rashanna: I think they expect for all our houses to look like crack houses or something the way they talking.
Bianca: Right. This why I think Mr. Crowley think he better than us or something.
Jalayla: I think he racist.
Bianca: Probably is.
Rashanna: I’ll take pictures of my house and show him.

These students are angry about the perceptions of social hierarchy based on credentials, which in this case is the symbolic capital of having status conferred as a result of a diploma (Bourdieu, 1989). Teachers are “throwing at us how they got they degree and that high education,” but as the girls describe, that does not mean that students respect them. In fact, in the local community, higher education does not have the same status. Instead, students note the way that teachers disrespect them by making comments about what they (teachers) have that students do not. Students interpret this as a lack of respect and care, and is an example of how teachers’ lack of understanding can translate into a lack of care for students as persons (e.g., Noguera, 2009). In the following excerpt, the students bring up a teacher, Ms. Jenkins, who cares. Although Ms. Jenkins also makes comments about having degrees, the students describe how Ms. Jenkins shows that she cares about them and their education.

Renee: We'll say we don't care and he'll be like, okay you don't have to care. He be like, I got my degree and we were like we don’t don’t care. Ok.
Jalayla: Ms. Jenkins probably said that probably once.
Rashanna: That’s like when they say stuff like you already got through school. No, duh, you already got through school. You're stating the obvious. Ain't you all here teaching us?
Jalayla: Ms. Jenkins probably only said that once, right? One time before-
Nicole: You've heard other teachers say it besides him.
Jalayla: Mm-hmm (affirmative), but he say it often.
Bianca: He say it often.
Rashanna: Ms. Jenkins say it all the time.
Nicole: Ms. Jenkins says it all the time?
Rashanna: Yeah, she say she already got through school a lot. She might not say it to her class a lot. They said Ms. Jenkins to be letting them make dust mansions and all. She do not let us barely pull out our hand.
Bianca: She don't even let us get up out our seat.
Jalayla: This is what Ms. Jenkins I think she do care about our class education and stuff-
Renee: It's the way that we be acting.
Jalayla: Yes. I think that's why-
Renee: You know how we got Kwame,
Rashanna: They said she admitted to her class that she show favoritism.
Renee: Yeah Tanisha told me that.
Jalayla: Yeah, but she probably do show favoritism, but I just think that she know our class. Our class was for real for real. We got really smart kids in our classroom. That's why I think she-
Renee: We're higher than them in math.
Jalayla: For real, for real. So that's why I think she always putting pressure on us and want us to do more work than her class could.
Renee: Right, we're higher than them.
Nicole: What does it mean to say that your teachers think that you live in a crack house? They don't understand you. They have these stereotypes or what do you think?
Jalayla: Don’t you know how some people think about how you dress and all that stuff. So they go with the way we act and all that. They take that as, oh well you probably live in this such a house and your house is probably not all that. And your house is probably not that nice looking. It probably look dirty. Just because by the way that we dress or we act.
Nicole: Has a teacher ever said anything like that to you?
Renee: No.
Jalayla: But I can tell they probably be thinking it.
Nicole: At the beginning of the conversation you said that Mr. Crowley doesn't understand you, right?
Jalayla: He don't.
Nicole: What specifically does he not understand?
Renee: It's hard!
Jalayla: It's hard to be us.
Rashanna: At this point of the year, all I want is these teachers to understand if they say something to me on Monday, I'm going to hit em. I don't care.
Bianca: No, because they going to try to kick you out of graduation.
Rashanna: I don't care. Let them. I'll wait until Tuesday and hit them right after the graduation while we walking up with trophy. Hit them right while we walking down the aisle. I don't care.

When Rashanna says, “I think they expect for all our houses to look like crack houses or something,” she is discussing ways that teachers deficitize students and make assumptions about students’ lives that largely stem from a lack of understanding of the multiple worlds that students navigate (Phelan et al., 1993; Phelan et al., 1994) and is informed by stereotypes. Jalayla expands on this and states how she believes that teachers, like Mr. Crowley, judge students based on “the way that [they] dress or [they] act.” The students also discuss how they feel and would like to respond when teachers disrespect, misunderstand, and deficitize them. Students’ desired responses connect to their habitus of fierceness in which they do not want to show weakness. In the following excerpt, the students’ discussion demonstrates an internalized deficit default about themselves and their community. Renee, specifically, articulates an internalization of the need for students at Baker School to be controlled:

Nicole: Renee, you said that they don't understand that it's hard. Explain more about that.
Jalayla: It’s shooting…
Renee: We're from the hood. So, everyday is shooting, this, that, and third. Of course, we going to come here and act how we do. Run around. We're not used to sitting down, being proper, and this, that and a third.
Bianca: Yeah.
Renee: We going to run around. Be-
Jalayla: We going to want to have fun, but-
Renee: Exactly.
Jalayla: They think they'll ... like we-
Renee: That we're just supposed to sit and do our work and be quiet. Not say something back. We're not from where he from. We're going to get smart. We're going to want to hit you. We going to do this and third. We're going to act up.
In the next excerpt, the students discuss what it would take for teachers to understand them. They suggest that like teachers, like Mr. Crowley, get to truly know them and the community and that teachers try to emphasize with students without deficitizing them. This means understanding, as the students describe, that their lives are “hard.” However, this also means letting students know you genuinely care by trying to understand their experiences and not forming deficit assumptions based on stereotypes. Furthermore, the students reference a need for additional support to help teachers do these things.

Nicole: Basically, you're trying to say ... Tell me if I'm characterizing this correctly. Some teachers don't understand [the local neighborhood]. They don't understand ...

Renee: Philadelphia period.

Nicole: Philadelphia period.

Nicole: Let's go back to Mr. Crowley, using him as an example. He doesn't understand that sometimes your life is hard. You might go through some things before ... what is it? How can he better understand you? You might not want to come in and sit like this [hands folded]. I don't know many 8th graders that want to come in and sit like this, right? No matter where they're from, but [this neighborhood in] Philadelphia is a different place than he grew up. How can he teach you better? How can he understand you? Be a better teacher?

Bianca: He need to find somebody that teach teachers because he need help.

Nicole: He does have someone, right?

Bianca: No. He ain't teaching him right.

Nicole: What do you think, Renee?

Renee: What you say?

Nicole: How can Mr. Crowley have a better understanding? Understand that it's hard?

Renee: Let him stay down in [this neighborhood] for about a month. He going to start acting like us and being like we do. Acting crazy and stuff.

Bianca: No, I say 2 months. Two months.

Renee: Yeah.

Jalayla: Let him stay down here for two years and I bet you he going ...

Rashanna: He going to be dead.
Bianca: Right. He ain't going to be able to survive out here.
Renee: For real.
Rashanna: I bet he already going to be hung by the time he walked out the building. I don't like him.
Nicole: Tell me about Ms. Jenkins. Does she understand you?
Jalayla: Yeah, Ms. Jenkins understands us because ...
Renee: She from down here.

In the last excerpt of this conversation, the students discuss how teachers, especially Mr. Crowley, call their parents to report negative student behavior. The students characterize report card conference by saying, “It’s like they’re out to get us.”

The crucial relationships between teachers and students (e.g., Kuriloff et al., In Press) cannot develop because of a lack of trust students have in their teachers, the complicated relational dynamics and resulting power struggles between students and teachers, and the deficit ideologies teachers have about students and families (Gorski, 2011). Furthermore, this excerpt also highlights the complicated relationship between the school and parents that are often informed by deficit orientations of parents.

Nicole: What about Mr. Crowley?

Ms. Roberts is yelling in the background. Her classroom is next to the library, where we are meeting. The students and I often meet during a missed prep in which students have free time and often sit and talk or play cards.

Jalayla: He just call our parents. That's all he do.
Nicole: Does he only call for things negative?
Bianca: Yeah.
Renee: Yep.
Jalayla: He don't never call for nothing positive.
Rashanna: He'll say it to us, but he won't call…
Nicole: He will say positive things to you?
Jalayla: Watch when report card time comes. He'll say positive things when we by ourselves, but when we [with our parents],
Rashanna: Then we the worst kids in damn world.
Jalayla: Yeah, but when it comes to our parents, Oh your child does this and she needs to learn this and she needs to learn that.
Nicole: I have sat in on those report card conferences. What do you all think about those?
Rashanna: They lie. They say a lot of stuff that's not true.
Jalayla: They really do.
Rashanna: It's like they're out to get us.
Bianca: I mean, you see us run around and stuff like that. They make it bigger than what it really is. They make it seem bigger than what it is.

(Group Interview, 6/15/16)

An important basic concept of teaching is that students want to know that their teachers care about them. For Bianca, Jalayla, Rashanna, and Renee that involves trying to understand their lives and what they go through at home and in the community. Instead of thinking about students’ home lives through a deficit lens, other ways to consider students can include thinking about how they are problem solving at school and at home and the adaptive way that they respond to often-challenging environments. For example, when students fight other students, they often do so as a means of surviving and establishing a habitus of fierceness. When students state that they “don’t care,” this can be a way of not showing investment in something or someone to protect oneself. Bianca, Jalayla, Rashanna, and Renee articulate their understandings and frustrations about schooling at Baker, and they offer important insights that teachers, and other educators, can learn from. Our conversation also highlights the importance of paying attention to systemic inequality, which is discussed in the next chapter.

Summary

Although attempts to engage parents and families have not been successful at Baker, negative and essentialized narratives of parents persist. Surrounding all of these narratives is the premise that students are parentified as a result of their family circumstances. Many students at Baker fend for themselves and take care of younger siblings. Despite this increased responsibility, students are infantilized in the culture of
control and policing at the school. Teachers, in a similar way to how students cope with the stressful environment of Baker with a habitus of fierceness, also cope to the schooling environment by operating in a survival mode. Consequences of this survival mentality is that teachers tend to deficitize students and/or parents and perpetuate the deficit default at the school. Students internalize these negative orientations, but they also try to push back against them through the habitus of fierceness described in Chapter 4 and by noting a disconnect between their experiences and the way that many of their teachers do not understand and care about them.
Like when I was younger, I thought I was always going to wear ballies and barrettes and always have the same friends, and always feel the same way about people now. I used to like think everything was joyful. I used to always have hope. At this point, I don't really know what hope is. Sometimes I have it. Most of the time I really don't care about a lot.

-Rashanna, eighth grade student

CHAPTER 6: Systemic Failure and the Conflation of Individual and Systemic Responsibility

Students, parents, teachers, and administrators generally agree that Baker is not a “good” school. It is also important to explain that Baker School functions in, is a part of, and is affected by other systems that contribute to Baker’s status as a “failing school.” These systems include, for example, the local and national public education system, tax revenue systems, the job market, the justice system, health care, child protection agencies, and so on. However, the ways in which a variety of other systems and policies affect Baker are often ignored or denied, and instead, individuals (primarily students, teachers, and parents) are blamed for the school’s “failure.” In this finding, I describe the disinvestment in urban, public schools by beginning with the lack of basic resources and the daily impacts on students and teachers at Baker. I articulate the ways that some teachers are burnt out in this under-resourced, stressful environment and explain how these macro-level inequalities, which are often invisible, result in teachers and students struggling for their humanity. Specifically, I focus on the examples of two students, an eighth grader and a fourth grader, to contextualize their experiences of schooling. I describe the symbolic violence that occurs at Baker and how students and the broader society internalize this. Finally, I conclude the chapter by articulating the resiliency that
students and teachers have as they navigate the challenging, stressful, and at times toxic (Paulle, 2013) schooling environment of Baker.

Lack of Funding and Resources

As introduced in the beginning of this dissertation, a central component of the systemic failure of urban, public schools is a lack of funding and resources. Such schools cannot be successful until broader issues of poverty and racism are considered (Anyon, 1997), which involves addressing multiple policies (health care, housing, tax, etc.) that directly impact education (Anyon, 2005). In addition, income disparities have increased since the 1970s (Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009; Reardon, 2011), and the goal of funding compensatory public education to help reduce income disparities has not been achieved (Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009). Despite spending more as a nation on education, student achievement on standardized tests has not improved (Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009). However, although the United States has increased public education spending over the past four decades, great disparities exist between the amount spent on students depending on the city in which they live. For example, the per pupil spending for Philadelphia is approximately half of what the per pupil expenditure is for the neighboring Lower Marion School District (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015; Superville, 2015). School funding matters in producing achievement gap-closing effects on academic achievement and life outcomes (Jackson, Johnson, & Persico, 2016), and Pennsylvania’s school funding formula, although revised, will not close the gaps in disparities between wealthy and poor districts (Churchill, 2016).
These disparities are evident in Philadelphia schools, such as Baker. Baker School was built at the beginning of the 20th century, and there have been two additions to the original building. The most recent addition was completed in the 1960s. Physical aspects of the building are in need of repair, including the plumbing and the roof, which leaks frequently. When asked questions about the school, the physical appearance is one of the first things students discuss. Students describe the school as “dirty” and “falling apart.” By “falling apart” students are often referring to the peeling paint on the walls (see Image 1) or the ceiling tiles that frequently fall from the ceiling or are missing (see Image 2). Other common comments include mentioning the trash everywhere, the lack of toilet paper and soap in the bathrooms, and the leaks. “Why can’t this school just look like a good school?” Jalayla, an eighth grader, asks. Her friend, Bianca, adds to the conversation: “They could try to make it look bright and happy instead of depressing.” As discussed in the previous chapter, Rashanna, a fellow eighth grader, states, while laughing at the irony,

Like the computer has dust on them and there's the duster that's leaning on them. The duster there is literally leaning on the stuff with the dust on it, and they're not using it. It's just like dust everywhere. How does dust get stuck to the floor like that?”
**Image 1.** Doors leading from the stairwell into the front/main hallway

**Image 2.** Third floor hallway
The principal, Ms. Washington, is in agreement with the students about the unacceptable condition of the bathrooms. She stops me one morning as I come into the building and asks,

“Nicole, do you see this dirt?” She is pointing to a picture she took on her phone of one of the bathrooms. “Would you let your house be that dirty? No, of course you would not. This is unacceptable. They mean to tell me that this is one day’s accumulation of dirt? I don’t think so. I am so tired of trying to force people to do their jobs around here. One day’s dirt and it looks like this? I don’t know, Nicole, I am so tired. I am so tired of this.” (Fieldnotes, 1/29/16)

I cannot comment about the dirt in the other bathrooms, but the staff bathrooms are so dirty that I tried to avoid going to the bathroom at the school even when spending full days there. I remember thinking Rashanna might be at least partially exaggerating when she told me during one of my first visits to the school, “I don’t go to the bathroom here. I wait. There is no toilet paper, no soap, no paper towels, and they are so dirty.” However, I soon learned that she was not exaggerating. I adopted a similar approach to try and avoid using the bathrooms after nearly vomiting while washing my hands in the staff bathroom because the utility sink, which is right next to the hand washing sink, was filled with foul smelling, mildewed, brown water.

Other aspects of the physical building that impact students include that the school does not have an official gym. The cafeteria and the gym are the same; thus, gym classes, which students have once a week, either take place outside when it is warm or in the students’ homeroom classes during the winter or on rainy days. In addition to gym, the other specials classes, which are generally referred to by students and teachers as “prep”

---

16 Teachers have their “preparation period” when students go to these classes, and thus art, gym, and other classes are referred to by students and teachers as “prep classes” or
classes” include art, gym/health, science prep, math prep, and computer/writing prep. Some groups of students, such as one of the eighth grade classes, never had art all year because of a scheduling issue. During the many gym classes I sat in on, which took place in the students’ homeroom classroom, students watched videos from the 1980s and were asked to complete worksheets that involved labeling body parts and organs in the respiratory system, for example. The science prep classes were taught by a man on his way to retirement, Mr. Phillips, who was also absent for several months during the year. Mr. Phillips is generally respected by teachers and students. He is a tall, Black man in his late 50s. Despite being absent for so much of the year, he is not disliked. Teachers, with a kind of reverence and empathy, say, “Mr. Phillips, he is tired. He has been at this for so long. He is just tired.” Students also listen to him and seem to respect him largely because he has been at the school for many years. However, his pedagogy is sorely lacking. For example, during one of the days Mr. Phillips was present, he came into the eighth grade students’ homeroom classroom, pulled up a video on You Tube about magnetics, and told the students to watch it.

Other schools’ specialty classes might include art, music, a foreign language, theater, computer programing, and so on, and Baker’s offerings of specialty classes are limited and primarily focused on test preparation. During computer prep, students are expected to spend a significant amount of time taking practice standardized tests online. The computer prep is taught by a teacher that students love, Ms. Roberts. Ms. Roberts is a Black woman in her 50s. Students always try to stay and help Ms. Roberts; they come to “prep.” When they do not have one of these classes, students and teachers alike comment: “I didn’t get my prep!”
her class as frequently as they can. She has been teaching at the school for 10 years. Although the students love her, they frequently talk about how she “does not know anything about computers.” For example, Rashanna states, “She is not qualified to teach computer. She was supposed to teach writing, but they told her to teach computer. She doesn’t even know how to turn the computers on” (Group Interview, 6/7/16). Despite not learning anything about computers or technology in her class, the students think that Ms. Roberts is a good teacher, and they respect her. They go to her for advice, comfort, when they need a break, to hang out, or to avoid being in another class.

The math prep class, taught by Ms. Myers, a middle-aged Black woman with ties to the community, tends to involve remedial math. During one math prep class, the students were instructed to answer two problems and then sit and talk quietly. A majority of the students skipped the class. There were two students who came to math prep on time, and six more students joined by the end of the period. The eight students completed their two math problems and then two students slept while the rest played a card game. When I asked the students why they do not go to math prep, a common response included: “We don’t do anything in there.” In addition to the eight students who attended class, a few other eighth graders ran in and out of the math prep classroom. Kwame ran into the room for a few minutes, got into an argument with another student, picked up a broom and started chasing the student around the room, dropped the broom, and then ran out. Ms. Myers reflected on this experience to the remaining eight students: “You know it doesn’t hurt me if you don’t come to class and do your work. I get paid either way.” These kind of comments are especially jarring to students. Students, as I describe in more
detail at the end of the chapter, say that these statements make them “want to punch them [teachers] in they faces” (Jalayla, Interview, 6/15/16).

Teachers and students are significantly impacted by a lack of basic educational resources, such as textbooks. For example, the seventh grade social studies class has a small set extremely out of date textbooks. Other Philadelphia public schools have social studies textbooks that were published within the past three years. The current social studies curriculum that teachers are expected to follow refers to these textbooks, which is just another challenge for teachers at Baker. Mr. Barnes discusses the textbook situation in which there is one textbook for the eighth grade students.

Mr. Barnes: Yeah. They had one book so occasionally I would scan things out of it and make copies of that, which I do not think is legal, but …
Nicole: They had one textbook for the entire 7th and 8th grade students for social studies?
Mr. Barnes: It was 8th grade, yeah. There was a small set of 7th grade, but they were also so dilapidated and old that it was actually more harmful to use those.
Nicole: Okay.
Mr. Barnes: That I just clearly made my own.
Nicole: Okay. Wow. I can’t believe I didn’t know that.
Mr. Barnes: It was like those books were made as the Soviet Union was falling apart. A lot of those countries don’t have those names. It was bad. It was really bad so I made it. Yeah, for 8th grade we had a singular textbook. For 7th grade there was maybe half the class set so you could probably pair people up. Actually, what I did was I went to my old teacher supervisor at [another Philadelphia public school] and asked if I could borrow her textbook and make copies out of it and stuff.
Nicole: Okay. The students at [another Philadelphia public school] in the 7th grade have textbooks?
Mr. Barnes: Yeah. It was a different textbook. It was updated and fine.
Nicole: In your scope and sequence if you had one, it would have been referencing the textbook that students had at [other Philadelphia public schools]?
Mr. Barnes: Like the more recent one, yeah. Ours was outdated so, again, the scope and sequence naturally didn’t reference things in our book. It
Nicole: Wow. Was [the principal] aware of this?
Mr. Barnes: Oh, yeah. That was like before school had even started. She was like, “Just so you know there are really no textbooks.” I don’t know. I think going to school for history these days they instill in you that textbooks are not great so you should really be reaching out. It wasn’t like the end of the world. There were some days where it probably would have been nice to have it as a reference point, but we didn’t. That was certainly not a deal breaker or anything, but looking back it’s kind of … I don’t know. It’s sad, but it’s also a little funny that it worked out as well as it did just with really no tools, but I don’t know. I guess that’s the way it’s going because now you have to do more investigative research to make sure that what you’re finding isn’t either myth or white washed. That sounds like kind of the skill I was trying to teach them so it did kind of work perfectly with how I was going about it. (Interview, 7/29/16)

Teachers at Baker have to buy many of their own materials, including copy paper. There is a library at Baker, but like many schools in Philadelphia, there is no librarian so the library does not function as a library that students can use. At Baker, the library is a place where teachers have meetings because it has an air conditioning unit. Baker has a nurse at the school two days a week. On the other days, the job of nurse falls to the principal. The school’s only counselor often fills that role as well. The limited number of nurses in some of Philadelphia’s schools has been a problem since the 2011 budget cuts and layoffs. In 2014, two students died in Philadelphia schools that did not have a nurse assigned to them at all (Strum, 2015). When teachers and other staff take over additional responsibilities, it can lead to increased stress and contribute to feelings of “burn out,” which is discussed in the next section.
Faculty Burnout

In addition to the physical appearance of the school, the lack of funding and financial resources are evident in staffing issues. On the first day of the 2015-2016 school year, Baker did not have a secretary or a middle school English teacher. It was not until November that there was a permanent teacher hired for the middle-school position.

Before that, there were three other teachers in that position who left prior to his hire. It is also important to note that all four of the middle school teachers were new to the school this year, and three of the four were first-year teachers. During the previous school year, there was considerable turnover of middle school teachers as well. There were seven different teachers that school year. Thus, in two years, there were 15 different teachers in the four middle school teacher positions. At Baker, teacher turnover and a constant stream of inexperienced teachers creates additional problems, including possibly contributing to the power struggles between teachers and students discussed in Chapter 4.

In addition to this high teacher turnover, the school has difficulty getting substitute teachers. This is a phenomenon that occurs in many Philadelphia public schools, including the one I taught at for many years (see also McCorry, 2016). When this happens, teachers lose their 45-minute preparation (prep) period and instead have to “cover” or teach another class. For many weeks at a time, the teachers at Baker would not have a single prep period. It is not uncommon for approximately six to seven teachers (out of a staff of 28 classroom and specials teachers) to be absent each day, and there never was a day in which I visited the school in which all teachers were present.

The consistent lack of substitute teachers, the increasing disciplinary issues, and the general chaos at the school contributed to faculty exhibiting signs of burnout, which
include, among others, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Depersonalization includes “negative, cynical attitudes and feelings about one’s students or colleagues” (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010, p. 1060).

First-year teacher, Mr. Barnes, describes, multiple times, how he is extremely burnt out:

Nicole: Yeah. So are you planning to teach somewhere else next year?
Mr. Barnes: Yeah, I’m going to try site selection, but I’m open to whatever it’s like just I don’t feel like it would be any better. And this is – but I have no desire to do administration, I have no desire to do anything but be a classroom teacher. And I think if I were here again next year, I would not be in that mindset anymore because this alone is like, I’m burned out, like I’m just outright burnt out at this point and you can only do that to yourself for so long. I still have to – I’m burned out now and I still have 73 days to go, and that’s a considerable amount of time but not many breaks or anything in between.
I’m going to like – my philosophy on this job will be my philosophy on life in general is like it’s like a movie, you only get to see it once and that’s to just try to take it all in as much as you can. So I’m not going to be absent if I can physically get out of bed, or I’m not going to be you know late or anything if I can help it because I’m just going to give it my all and try my very best, but I think this year is the most I can do that. I really think if I try to come back next year I would just probably quit, I don’t think I can make it. I don’t think I can make it through this year, you know to be totally honest with you. I’m just every day it’s like inconceivable that there’s more, that we’re not at the end yet you know. And that’s the toughest thing to try to find ways to keep moving, and like occasionally I’ll have like an epiphany. Like I was in the shower the other day, and I thought of what they could do for the quarter three project, and it’s like in the beginning you’re planning that stuff out before they’re here, but once it hits, it’s so hard to plan ahead because like just your day-to-day plans don’t go well, so the fact that you have to plan weeks in advance it’s really tough to do. I feel like I trained for a five mile run, and I still got 15 to go, you know, like I hit the wall. What I felt coming in here today just like that knot in my stomach just feeling nauseous and everything, dissipated because of how that first class went. I mean when I like take the train or drive in like
sometimes I like almost I miss stops and stuff because it’s just like I can’t accept that I’m voluntarily coming back, you know. But I’m trying. (Interview, 3/4/16)

The way that Ms. Barnes, as described in the previous chapter, blames students and believes that the student population at Baker School is “unmotivated” in general and “hard to teach” is evidence of how he demonstrates the signs of “depersonalization” associated with burn out in which one has negative associations of one’s students (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Mr. Barnes is, like most first-year teachers, struggling. However, he is trying. He has not missed a single day of school and is often at the school more than an hour early. Consistent with the other signs of burn out he demonstrates, Mr. Barnes does not feel like there is anything he can do, and he receives little support from the school administration.

In addition to the lack of support teachers experience, many teachers, like Ms. Johnson, take on additional responsibilities. As described previously, there is only a nurse at the school two days a week. This means that other staff have to take over these responsibilities. There is one counselor for 600 students, and the counselor ends up acting as a substitute teacher, defacto principal, nurse, secretary, and counselor. Ms. Johnson, the school counselor, taught two classes, covered at least one class a day, recited the morning announcements, acted as the school nurse, met with parents, was responsible for the eighth graders high school applications, was the eighth grade sponsor who planned trips, the dance, and the graduation ceremony, and was supposed to meet with students, but that part of her job was often limited because of the multitude of other aspects of the school for which she was responsible. Ms. Johnson is a middle-aged Black woman with two young children in grade school. She has been at Baker for five years, and before that
she worked at several other schools in the District. Ms. Johnson is very well-liked by teachers and students. She exudes kindness and openness, even though she frequently also demonstrates signs of being overwhelmed. She cares about the school and the students. Her colleagues often describe her as doing “everything.” When I first met her in 2014, another teacher told me, “She is the principal, nurse, disciplinarian, substitute, and counselor. You name it; she does it.”

When Ms. Johnson and I speak one on one, she is often trying to multi-task. This includes prepping for two of the classes she teaches a day by looking on YouTube for a video to show the students. All of the teachers have District-provided computers, and there are screens and projectors in each of the classrooms. Thus, showing a video is a common approach by many teachers in a pinch, but pinches seem to happen with regularity at Baker. Ms. Johnson reads the morning announcements every morning over the loud speaker, which also includes reciting the pledge of allegiance and the daily affirmation (see Image 3). She has many meetings with parents and wears a walkie-talkie so that she can be contacted. Other staff frequently use the walkie-talkie or loud speaker to request Ms. Johnson to report to another meeting, the office, or a classroom.

*Today Ms. Johnson and I had about five minutes alone when I found her in an empty classroom on the third floor. She was making a coffee and invited me to sit with her. We spoke about being moms, and she was relishing the quiet of this classroom. Of course, after five minutes, her name buzzed over the walkie-talkie, but she didn’t need to go far as we heard the yelling on the other end of the hallway soon enough. Two eighth grade students were yelling at each other, and it escalated into a physical fight. Ms. Johnson counseled one of the students afterward while another teacher spoke to the other student, and the other staff members tried to usher the other students back into their respective classrooms from the hallways.* (Fieldnotes, 2/16/16)
Ms. Johnson understands the many struggles that students go through daily, often before they get to school. She tries to mentor and counsel students like Bianca, Jalayla, Renee, and Rashanna, but her interactions are often rushed because Ms. Johnson has far too many critical roles and is in a constant stage of triaging these roles. Thus, her dealings with students primarily involve “putting out fires” rather than being able to be intentional and planful in her primary role as counselor. One example of these “fires” includes when Ms. Crawford tells Ms. Johnson that Ms. Sanders “grabbed Nadira [her daughter in second grade] by the shirt.” I was standing with Ms. Crawford when she tells Ms. Johnson: “I don’t buy clothes for the teacher to be grabbing them. I saw her grab Nadira’s shirt.” In addition to speaking with angry parents when the principal is not available, other roles include dealing with emergency student situations (e.g., a missing student), serving as the nurse, overseeing dismissal for the many different busses, mentoring a counseling intern, running programs and partnerships with local organizations and
universities, helping the eighth graders apply to high school, hosting a high school fair, filling out a large amount of district and state paperwork, and teaching two classes a day.

Ms. Johnson’s roles are similar to other counselors in the schools I have worked and researched in; however, many counselors do not also teach classes, although it varies depending on the school.

Ms. Johnson does a great deal for the students and school. She is universally well-liked by students, teachers, and parents. However, on several occasions later on in the school year, Ms. Johnson reacts explosively by screaming and throwing papers, her walkie-talkie, and anything else within reach. The counseling intern, Denise, spent considerable time at Baker with Ms. Johnson and describes an incident which, according to Denise, “illustrates Johnson’s burnout.”

Denise: She was always being pulled out of things and there was just one defining moment and I talked about it in class for a while, basically I just saw the manifestations of burnout by Ms. Johnson and she got very, very upset with Ms. Mercer. They were pretty good friends and Ms. Johnson was just very candid with me all the time and telling me her true opinions about people to me. I knew she was very close with Ms. Mercer and basically was they were like the two teachers who take on many of the principal’s responsibilities and when she was out, would take over her [the principal’s] roles. Ms. Johnson was being put into a meeting with a teacher and then with a student issue, but then she had to cover a class. She was like a permanent substitute teacher, and she was supposed to cover a class for Mercer, but Mercer ended having the class two periods in a row and apparently it’s a very challenging class. Ms. Mercer came down and wasn’t happy about it, and Ms. Johnson was like, “I don’t know which one to deal with I’m doing ten different things.” Then she, to put it in short, just freaked out. She cursed and threw her walkie across the hall and then stormed out the office and she went to her office which obviously wasn’t far and just was like not yelling at me but to me type of thing. She was like, “I hate this school,” and there were people, I could hear people coming in the hallway and listening and she was like, “I
hate it here like the last thing I needed was something from her, someone like her yelling at me.”

Nicole: Ms. Mercer was yelling at her?
Denise: She wasn’t really yelling at her, well she didn’t raise her voice but there was strife between them and Johnson felt that from Mercer. Then so Johnson is like, “I don’t need that from her we were supposed to be a team. I had stuff to do,” and she was really saying how she didn’t like the school, and there were at least two students in the hallway. She was in her office and I kind of left the door open, I was in the doorway I followed her into her office but I left the door open because when she came in there she threw her laptop, threw a chair so I was like oh God. I was like oh God and then so Mercer comes up, she looks at me she goes, “Is she is talking about me,” and I’m just silent I was like ah, and she was like, “Are you talking about me,” she is like, “Get out of my office. I don’t want to see your face. Get out of my office.” While this is happening I go get the walkie she threw across the hall literally from almost from her office like a little bit far office into that doorway.

Nicole: Which one? The one where like you go into that open stair well where the benches are?
Denise: Yeah.
Nicole: All that way like down past the restrooms?
Denise: Yes, yes, yes. So she threw it so I went to go get it. She threw it, and I went to go get it and then by the time I came back Mercer had closed or Mercer had left and the female school cop was in there. I don’t think the lady knew who I was and half the time they think I’m a student anyway, so she kicked me out she shut the door kind of and I’m just like okay so I’m standing in the hallway hearing her yell, like going off.

Nicole: She is yelling now at the officer.
Denise: Yeah, but it was that yelling not at but to type of thing, and then Washington [the principal] comes out because someone went and told her and Washington knocks on the door she is like, “It’s like me can I get in,” and they are all in there then Mercer gets pulled in. Then this was the best part so ok, then the principal, Mercer and Johnson are all in there who is doing the buses?

Nicole: With the security officer?
Denise: Yes, who is doing buses those are the four people you would call for buses, so I’m with her everyday so I’m trying to do it. There is one parent who is there in Ms. Forbes room all the time.

Nicole: Yes Ms. Redmond [parent volunteer].
Denise: Yeah, so she is kind of trying to help but I’m standing out the door, buses are showing up, and I’m telling kids and I’m like I have no idea what kids go where. There is so many kids I was like no one
can leave. So I was at the door and I’m like, “No one can leave yet I’m sorry but I can’t like this is going to be on me. No one can leave yet.” Except there were few people that I knew because they would be a part of the school’s different day cares and I knew them. A few kids left and then what’s her name Mercer comes out and you could tell she had been crying and she was like, “I got it from here,” she went actually, “Thanks I got from here.” Then Ms. Redmond comes up to me she goes oh Johnson excuse me no, Ms. Redmond comes up to me before Mercer comes back and she was like, “Johnson wants you,” and I was like, “I’m doing this I can’t leave because no one else is here.” I didn’t, no I was like, “What do you want me to do these kids are just going to literally leave.” There have been times when six year olds were like, “Oh I’m going to walk home,” and I’m like, “No you are not wait for your mom, your mom is coming.” I knew there were kids who leave and they shouldn’t and then you obviously have the issue of what if someone tries to take a child. I was like I can’t leave and then Mercer finally comes back but then there is no one in the auditorium so I go to the auditorium and then a little bit later Johnson finally comes out and she sees me and as far as I can remember she actually touches my, like rubs my shoulder and she is like she just says sorry in passing. I was just like I don’t think I even said anything and then she was joking with other teachers and one of the other teachers I forget who, I forget her name, joked with her about her going crazy or something real quick and she was like, “It’s been a bad day.” Then before we left once the kids had left she was like, “I’m really sorry.” She apologized, but one she was like clearly burned out, two it was also very dangerous for her to throw a freaking walkie because a child could have been walking by. Two it’s irresponsible that you had no one there to run dismissal, but there was a lot of things at play, but that was my craziest I think incident at Baker but it was like … Still on one hand it was just like the school has so much need. I feel like what do you do when a lot of issues come down to resources. Resources for I think they need more than, well that’s another issue having officers in schools but they need more support for behavior and keeping kids out of the hallway. I think they also need more trainings for how to better understand and deal with the many issues. (Interview, 7/25/16)

Denise’s description of Ms. Johnson’s burnout also highlights how a lack of resources, including understaffing and insufficient training and professional development, impact faculty and in turn harm students. I observed a similar scenario to the one Denise
describes. During one of the final graduation practices with the eighth grade that Ms. Johnson led, she became increasingly frustrated with students who were running around the auditorium, did not know the lyrics to the songs they were supposed to sing, and were not taking practice seriously. Ms. Johnson throws her walkie talkie across the auditorium, and screams, “Shut the hell up!” She then starts crying and tells the students that the principal just told her that some of them will not be able to participate in the ceremony. Ms. Johnson yells, “I fight for you. I do so much for you. But I can’t argue on your behalf when you don’t do what you are supposed to do.” She is screaming for so long and so loudly that the principal walks in and beckons Ms. Johnson into the hallway. The principal tells the students that practice is cancelled for the day and tells the teachers to take the students back to class (Fieldnotes, 6/17/16). As the counselor, Ms. Johnson’s primary role is to support and advocate for students, which she clearly tries to do. However, she is overwhelmed, ends up doing multiple jobs in the school, and she, as well as the students, suffers.

Ms. Johnson, Mr. Barnes, Mr. Dixon, and many other teachers at Baker are burnt out and struggling. Part of this burnout is related to the lack of resources and disinvestment in schools like Baker. Other components of this burnout are the stressful and toxic (e.g., Paulle, 2013) environment of Baker and continuously trying and failing to control students’ behavior. In the next section, I focus on the student experience of Baker and highlight the daily experiences and struggles of an eighth grade student, Rashanna, and a fourth grade student, Nyeisha.
Struggling for Humanity: An Examination of Students’ Experiences

As the previous chapters describe, the hidden curriculum of control and policing, the resulting power struggles and resistance, as well as the systemic lack of resources culminate in a deficit default based on deficit orientations of students, teachers, parents, and the entire school. Teachers, as this chapter illustrates, are burnt out. Much in the same way that teachers are burnt out and struggling, students are also struggling. Many students at Baker navigate complex challenges daily as well as take care of themselves and younger siblings. This section focuses on the contextualized experiences of two students, an eighth grader and a fourth grader, at Baker to remind readers that these are real students at a real school, not simply abstract facts or stereotypes.

Schooling and the Community: A Glimpse into Rashanna’s Experience

Rashanna is an eighth grade student who has attended Baker since Kindergarten. According to Rashanna, the “categories of people [students] include cool, nerdy, stinky, weird and just like outcast. No one talks to them” (Interview, 5/31/16). She describes herself and others describe her as one of the “cool” and popular students. Rashanna discusses wanting to be an investigative police officer. She also loves art and is a talented artist. Rashanna missed out on opportunities to explore her artistic talent and to participate in the mural club because she never had art all year because her class was never put on the art teacher’s schedule. Rashanna explains, “Yeah. I came back to the school this year because I thought we was going to have her [the art teacher], but we didn't.” She continues, “I don't know [if we will have art]. First, it was supposed to be the second marking period. Then they switched it to the third. Now they switched it to the
fourth. And we still haven’t had art” (Interview, 5/3/16). Rashanna often skips her other classes and goes to the art room. She describes how she skips English:

I don’t go to his class... He actually tells me that he likes it better when I am not there, so I don’t go. But he better give me a good grade since he told me not to come his class. (Interview, 5/3/16)

Rashanna is not deeply invested in grades, but she points out that Mr. Webster encourages her to not come to class and thus she believes it would be unfair for him to fail her. I have observed the English teacher, Mr. Webster, tell students to leave his class. As mentioned in Chapter 4, other teachers, school leaders, and staff often make comments about how they are glad that there are few students in attendance or that they hope a certain student will not come to school, and Rashanna is one of these students. She is frequently in trouble with teachers and other adults. My experience of Rashanna is that she is a smart, caring, and intelligent young woman; however, based on comments from teachers and other staff members, this is not the experience other adults have. Mr. James, the director of the after school programming at Baker, tells me that Rashanna is “terrible.”

*Mr. James mentions that he saw me talking to Rashanna in the cafeteria. He says, “Well, yesterday when you weren’t here, she was cursing out Mr. Kelly. They were in a screaming match. She is always going off on somebody. It must be learned behavior. If you had seen Rashanna yesterday. She cursed him out like there was no tomorrow and then she just walked away.”* (Fieldnotes, 2/10/16)

I have never seen Rashanna behave this way. I often see her put her head down in class, and she seems to rarely complete assignments, but I have never seen her yell at an adult.

---

17 As in other interviews with Rashanna, ellipses indicate pauses and not that something was removed.
Ms. Johnson, the counselor, knows Rashanna well and thinks that she has a lot of potential. Ms. Johnson also thinks that Rashanna has very limited parental involvement.

Rashanna tries to avoid going home; she is either at dance at the recreation center, at Deana’s house, or with her cousin. She respects her mother because she works several jobs, but Rashanna is angry that her mother is never around. In the following excerpt from one of our conversations, Rashanna describes how she raised herself and her nephew, who is four. This is another example of how the students at Baker are parentified and of Mr. Dixon’s argument (see Chapter 5) that students do not listen to their parents because they have lost respect for them. Rashanna discusses her disappointment in her family when they do “dumb” things and “leave” or are taken from her; she cites these aspects as reasons why she says she “doesn’t care because no one cares about” her.

Nicole: When you said you thought your life was going to be the same forever, what do you mean the same? What's changed?
Rashanna: Like when I was younger, I thought I was always going to wear ballies and barrettes and always have the same friends, and always feel the same way about people now. I used to like think everything was joyful. I used to always have hope. At this point, I don't really know what hope is. Sometimes I have it. Most of the time I really don't care about a lot. Like if you ask Mr. Dixon he'll say that most of the time I say I don't care a lot. For the most part I don't. I don't really feel as though I need to. I'm not going to act like I care if I don't. I don't give them excuses because I still don't care.

Officer Perry: Excuse me real quick. Is Edward in your class?
Rashanna: No
Nicole: Let's talk about two things you said. What do you mean when you say you don't have hope?
Rashanna: I don't. I don't really like believe most things people say, I know it's not true so I just don't listen. I chose not to. I like close my ears and my mouth. I just don't talk. I just completely zone that person out. I don't like advice very much.

Students are yelling in the background.
Nicole: So a lot of people try to give you advice. What kind of advice are they giving you?
Rashanna: They don't think that I should act the way I do. I don't really feel like my mom and dad should be telling me anything. My mom was at work most of my life. My dad was locked up most of my life. I learned from the streets, just like most of the other kids in this school. We all taught ourselves.

Nicole: What did you learn?
Rashanna: I learned not to care and don't listen. Listen to yourself cuz... nobody will give you better advice than yourself.

Nicole: When you say you need to learn not to care, what made you stop caring?
Rashanna: Other people didn't care about me.
Nicole: Like teachers, family?
Rashanna: Most people in my family they said they would never want to leave me [pause] this that and a third, and then they did something dumb. They either got took from me or left me. I mean... most people I can't really blame for it. For some reason, even the people who are here I feel like they left me. It just made it even worse when my grandma died two days after my 10th birthday. So, after awhile... I just stopped caring. I don't get attached to a lot of people. Only person I'm really attached to now is my nephew. I basically raised him. His mom never really was around. (Interview, 5/11/16)

Rashanna states that she raised herself and “learned from the streets.” One of the things she learned is to “to run and hide cuz that's what we all do” (Interview, 5/11/16). This running and hiding is often in reference to the police. Rashanna states that she frequently worries about getting killed or going to jail. After the eighth grade dance, which I attended along with Ms. Washington, Ms. Jenkins, Ms. Mercer, and Ms. Johnson, Rashanna tells me on Monday morning, “The other night, Friday night, we literally almost got killed” (6/20/16). Rashanna describes how the peers she was with threw a bottle a man’s truck. They didn’t know the man was outside, but then he started yelling and went into his truck and pulled out a gun. She and her peers hid behind other cars, and then Rashanna states that the cops came and everyone started running. Rashanna frequently tells me about events similar to this one, and this event and others appear to
speak to the ways adults at the school do not understand what students go through in the
“streets.” I ask Rashanna if she was scared:

Nicole: What did it feel like on Friday night? Were you scared?
Rashanna: Yeah, but it's something that we're used to. Cuz is like a everyday
thing for us.
Nicole: Worrying about getting killed is something you worry about
everyday?
Rashanna: Yeah, or going to jail

Rashanna describes being scared but also used to her fear. She states that many of her
peers are not as scared, like Destin, because he has a gun. I ask if it is common for people
to have guns, and Rashanna answers:

Rashanna: Yeah. Most of the boys in this school got guns. They won't bring
them into the school but they do got guns.
Nicole: Why do they have them?
Rashanna: Because they get them ... Some people's parents give them to them.
The boy last year, everybody in the eighth grade jumped him last
year. His mom gave him a gun and brought him back to school.
(Interview, 6/20/16)

Rashanna tells me that her mother got a gun many years ago as soon they moved to this
part of Philadelphia. Rashanna describes being afraid and glad they have a gun at home:

Our dog went missing out the house. Then, my brother called her [Rashanna’s
mother] one day and said that the men were sitting in our yard ... They opened our
gate and sat in out yard. Our steps are like ... This is the steps to get in the gate
and our door is all the way back here. My brother called her one day and said that
the men were sitting in our yard ... They opened our gate and sat in out yard.
(Interview, 6/20/16)

Although Rashanna states that she is used to being afraid and often presents herself as
unafrad, in many of our conversations, she appears frightened and wants to learn how to
use a gun: “She [Rashanna’s mother] said she would teach me how to shoot it, just in
case someone come in here or something” (Interview, 6/20/16).
On multiple occasions, Rashanna makes comments about how the students at Baker bring the community into the school: “We bring the outside into this school.”

Rashanna describes how certain behaviors become ingrained in her peers and her family:

Like Haakim, he think that he can do what he want. He think that he can, he says don't fight, he will kill you, or he'll shoot you because I know Haakim's uncle. That's just how his uncles were. Haakim's uncles hung with my brothers. That's how they are. Haakim uncle went with my sister. That's how she is. All his friends, that's how they are. It's just like their natural instinct after awhile. And then gangs and all that, if they want you, you don't really have a choice.

(Interview, 5/11/16)

Rashanna is part of a well-known family in the community. Her dad and older siblings were a part of a local gang and are either currently or have already served time in jail.

Rashanna is 13 years old, but she looks like she could be at least 16 or older. She states that when she and her friends are chased by the police that they do not bother her because she looks like she is so much older and not with the younger kids.

Rashanna has an interesting relationship with the police. She is frequently involved in negative situations with them or running from them, however, she says that she wants to be a police officer. During one encounter with the police, Rashanna describes that officers came looking for her at three in the morning. Rashanna was at her friend’s house, where she frequently spends the night, and the police could not get anyone to answer the door after banging for some time. Rashanna states that they were asleep and did not hear anyone. The next day, the police come to Rashanna’s house and question her about a phone call a male student made from her phone threatening to kill an officer:

So he basically said they killed his brother, so he's going to kill one of them. They didn't know who it was from the voice. They wanted me to tell. They basically
said they were going to lock me up if I didn't tell. But I still didn't tell cuz I wasn't going to. (Interview, 5/31/16)

Rashanna states that the “cops” were playing “good cop, bad cop” with her. Rashanna says, “The lady was the good cop, the one who sat down. The man was the bad cop. He just stood there staring at me. I just was laughing. So after awhile, they had to get rid of that act” (Interview, 5/31/16).

The justice system has directly impacted Rashanna’s family, as the adults in Rashanna’s life are never around primarily because they are or have been in jail:

Rashanna: I think I'm more so mad at my dad when he goes to jail than my brothers because my brother was like locked up 6 years. That's another reason that like me and Haakim aren't like super close.
Nicole: Why?
Rashanna: Like, when me and Haakim were younger we used to be like super close. We used to play games and stuff because he used to always be at my Grandma's house or his uncle’s. After a while, we just realized that his uncle was the reason that my sister got locked up and my brother got locked up.
Nicole: I didn't know your sister got locked up, too?
Rashanna: Yeah, my sister got out of jail at the beginning of last year.
Nicole: Why did your sister and brother get locked up? Did they get locked up at the same time?
Rashanna: No. My sister got locked up a little bit after my brother. My brother turned himself in after the cops came looking for him the day that they locked up Haakim uncle. When he came home from work and found out he just turned himself in.
Nicole: What did Haakim’s Uncle have to do with it?
Rashanna: Haakim uncle the one who got my brother into doing dumb stuff.
Nicole: Do you want to tell me what kind of dumb stuff?
Rashanna: Like, selling drugs and dumb stuff like that. Now my brother, he like, I mean he didn’t no more, but after a while his name was still somehow found in it.
Nicole: He's still in jail?
Rashanna: No, he got out of jail 2 or 3 months ago. My dad got out like February. My other brother's in jail now. I don't know what he did.
Nicole: How long has he been in jail?
Rashanna: A few months. (Interview, 5/31/16)
At Baker, Rashanna is feared and respected. She embodies a habitus of fierceness in which other students and often other adults do not mess with her. I have never seen Rashanna fight. Rashanna told me that she used to fight, not necessarily in school, but in the community. However, she states, “But at this point I don't feel like fighting. It's not something that I need to do. It's like immature.” She would only fight “if you put your hands on me or my family” (Interview, 5/31/16). Rashanna states that teachers do not understand students’ experiences and that is part of why Rashanna and her peers state that they do not care about schooling. Rashanna, however, does care about school, as she discusses in the following excerpt when she states that fighting is “dumb” and that it will not help students in high school. However, she also mentions how the community experiences, which involve not showing weakness, deeply impact students’ experiences in and out of school. This is shown in one incident, where Rashanna recalls a “fight club” scene in the hallway:

Nicole: You said, “I don't care. Like ask Mr. Dixon. He would say basically I don't care.” What don't you care about?
Rashanna: Anything really. He tries to give me that whole, I'm going to get out of here soon speech. I feel like most of the people who tell me that don't go to this school. They don't know how it actually is here and like not even the teachers understand. A few days ago or so.. they were having full blown fight club in the bathroom. And then me, Jalayla, Haliegh, and Bianca left off the floor and Ms. Johnson and them had all ran into the girls’ bathroom.

Nicole: The girls were doing this?
Rashanna: Yeah. Like the whole hallway was filled with people. For some reason everybody was out in the hallway, like everybody.

Nicole: No one was in class?
Rashanna: No. We were all just walking around in the hallway and stuff. And they were like they are fighting in the bathroom. Ms. Johnson and them ran in there and everything got quiet cuz when they start fighting it got super quiet then it got super loud, like super, super loud. It was a lot of people screaming. Nobody in the hallway knew what was going on.

155
Nicole: Why did they decide to do fight club?
Rashanna: [Pause] To me, I think most of their maturity levels are just like down here. They consider to me as too mature, but they didn't live the same way I did. I had no choice but to grow up. My nephew only had me at the end of the day, so... I had to grow up. I feel as though there is nothing wrong with them still being kids and having fun, but they're still too old for that. They have to remember that they're on their way to high school, and high school's only four years. Middle school and elementary school is like nine, and most of them aren't going to college, so, that's all they have.

Nicole: Why aren't they going to college?
Rashanna: They just don't think they can do it or... they learn from most of the people on the streets that they don't have to.

Nicole: Do people get hurt? Sometimes I know there's been play fighting and then there's fighting. Sometimes play fighting turns into real fighting like are people getting hurt?
Rashanna: No. They learn how to just walk away.

Nicole: So they might be hurt, but they wouldn't show it?
Rashanna: Yeah. Showing being hurt is not something that most of us want to do cuz showing weaknesses, people are just going to hold that against you... like forever. And Everyone thinks that they know you. Most people don't act like they know me because they know I'm going to get mad. (Interview, 5/11/16)

Rashanna clearly explains that a habitus of fierceness is necessary because “weakness” will be “forever” held “against you.” This underscores they way that students cope with (e.g., Stevenson, 2014) and navigate (Yosso, 2005) their environments to their advantage. However, these strategies that students employ are primarily considered negative because they do not conform to middle class values and capital (e.g., Lareau, 2011). In this regard, the students are blamed for not acting a certain way without recognizing the adaptive way in which students, like Rashanna, navigate their multiple worlds (Phelan et al., 1993; Phelan et al., 1994), largely by themselves, in order to survive.

Rashanna frequently states that she is ready to “get out of this school” and out of the neighborhood. She believes that the best scenario for her is to move out of Philadelphia or go to a boarding school. Both of which are not happening next year, as
Rashanna will go to a charter high school in Philadelphia. It is also important to note that Rashanna was able to draw on navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) to navigate the high school selection process and avoid going to the neighborhood high school, which has a reputation, according to students, as a place “where you can say goodbye to your future” (Haliegh, Fieldnotes, 3/9/16).

I argue, in Chapter 4, that when students make comments such as “I don’t care,” it is a form of resistance and protection. In Chapter 5, Mr. Barnes describes these kinds of comments as an illustration of students “lacking internal motivation.” This mentality is an example of symbolic violence— in which students are blamed and their position in society is misrecognized as “natural” (Bourdieu, 2001). The power and consequences of symbolic violence in this example are that instead of recognizing the problems of the system and inequality, students are positioned as needing to “care more” or “work harder” (e.g., Theoharis, 2009).\(^{18}\)

In the next section, I focus on Nyeisha, a bright fourth grader whose life at Baker School revolves around perceptions of her as “bad” and a “problem.” Baker, in its attempts to control students and police behavior, does not foster an environment in which students are encouraged to learn, and as the descriptions of Nyeisha’s schooling experiences illustrate, the singular focus on controlling behavior does not equate with less chaos and more rule following. Bianca, Jalayla, Rashanna, and Renee frequently discuss how students might be more committed to following rules if they felt respected and if

\(^{18}\) Theoharis (2009) states, “Part of the appeal of believing that urban students do not care about education is that the responsibility for change lies with them and not the rest of the nation” (p. 110).
their input had been sought. Students’ experiences are largely discounted at Baker, and one goal of this section is to bring these to the forefront.

The Student Experience of a Culture of Control: Nyeisha

Nyeisha is a fourth grader with a great smile. I meet Nyeisha for the first time in the following fieldnote when Ms. Smith introduces me to Nyeisha and negatively describes Nyeisha to me in front of Nyeisha. This is a common experience for Nyeisha, in which adults speak about her, in front of her, in largely negative terms. Not surprisingly, Nyeisha is angered and embarrassed by this, and classroom situations tend to escalate in which Nyeisha gets into more trouble for talking back to Ms. Smith. Ms. Smith, as noted in Chapter 5, has a habit of blaming parents, including Nyeisha’s mother for “not parenting,” yet Ms. Smith largely takes out her frustration on students. In the following fieldnote, Ms. Smith appears to have low expectations about Nyeisha, including expecting that Nyeisha will always arrive late to school. When Ms. Smith makes these kind of negative comments to Nyeisha, Nyeisha shuts down and characterizes Ms. Smith and fellow students as “messing with” her.

Ms. Smith says to me in front of Nyeisha: “This is Nyeisha. She has a lot of attention seeking behaviors.” Ms. Smith, Nyeisha, and I are standing at the back of the classroom by the door. Nyeisha has been standing here for about 30 minutes while Ms. Smith has been teaching and asking Nyeisha multiple times to sit down. I say hello to Nyeisha and ask her what is going on. She states, “Nothing. Everyone is messing with me.” I ask if she did anything, and Nyeisha smiles an impish grin and says, “No.” She laughs a little as she says this. I ask her, “Ms. Smith just said you exhibit lot of attention seeking behaviors. Do you want attention?” Nyeisha declares, “Yes.” I ask, “Do you think you could get attention for positive behaviors instead of negative?” Again, she responds, “Yes!” I tell her, “I will be here first thing tomorrow morning. I will stop by and check on you, and I would like to hear from Ms. Smith that you had a good rest of the afternoon.” Ms. Smith, who has been walking around but overheard some of our conversation, asks, “What time are you coming, Ms. Nicole?” I state, “About
9:30.” Ms. Smith responds, “Well, that is when Nyeisha gets here. She arrives between 9:30 and 10 every day.” I ask, “What time does school start?” Nyeisha says, “8?” Ms. Smith states, “School starts at 8:30.” Nyeisha responds, “I thought it was 8:45.” Ms. Smith: “She is never on time, never in uniform, never has homework, and that is not all on you.” She is referring to Nyeisha. Ms. Smith shakes her head in frustration and says directly to Nyeisha, “You didn’t get to meet Ms. Nicole before because you didn’t go on the fieldtrip. You probably won’t get to go to the winter wonderland, and it was so nice last year.” Ms. Smith smiles at me as she says this, like she really means it. “You need $50 in Baker Cash in order to participate. Do you have any Baker Cash?” Nyeisha responds, “I have about $10.” (Fieldnotes, 11/30/15)

The relationship between Ms. Smith and Nyeisha is clearly not positive. Ms. Smith discusses Nyeisha in terms of what she does “wrong” (e.g., coming late to school, seeking attention) and what Nyeisha does not have (e.g., Baker Cash). Baker Cash is a part of a behavior incentive program at the school in which students get slips of paper, called Baker Cash, which students can use to “purchase” rewards, including school supplies or candy.

In the following fieldnote, which is one of Nyeisha’s more positive classroom experiences that I observed, Nyeisha is having a “good week.” Consistent with the hidden curriculum of control articulated in Chapter 4, a good week entails that Nyeisha is not “acting out,” that she is complying with what is asked of her, and she is listening to Ms. Smith. During this week, Ms. Smith and other adults acknowledge that there is “improvement in her behavior.” Thus, a good week for Nyeisha means that she does not disrupt class, argue with peers, or talk back to her teacher; it is not linked to what she learns or how she does in school. In the following fieldnote, Nyeisha is excited to get to work immediately on a math problem. However, Ms. Smith, who expects absolute compliance, demands that students follow certain procedures before they begin working on the problem. When the time comes that students are able to start answering the math
problem, Nyeisha has lost interest and starts drawing on her paper, but because Nyeisha is not disrupting class, this is not a problem. Nyeisha also talks about how she is proud and excited that she has gotten a lot of Baker Cash.

The class is working on math, and there is a word problem on the dry erase easel in the front center of the classroom. I read the problem, and it takes me a few times to figure out exactly what it is asking. The problem is about eggs, cartons, and crates, and the question wants to know the total number of cartons of eggs that the woman sells. She sells them in a set of two. Ms. Smith gave each student a piece of white copy paper where there is a place for them to copy the problem in a box and then a place below the problem to show their work. Ms. Smith is repeatedly telling the students to copy the problem and this takes a while. Writing it, as much as I can gather from this lesson, is a part of the PSSA test, as Ms. Smith communicates to the students that writing the problem neatly is how they get one point out of a total of four points on these types of questions on the PSSA. She then states, “Put your pencils down. PUT YOUR PENCILS DOWN. Let’s read the problem.” Ms. Smith reads the word problem out loud.

Nyeisha is excited about the problem as soon as she writes it down. After writing the word problem, Nyeisha started drawing boxes, I think to represent the cartons and then to ultimately count the number of cartons. Nyeisha lost her momentum when Ms. Smith yells out again, “PUT YOUR PENCILS DOWN. You can’t pay attention if you are writing.” They are not allowed to write until they have orally determined all of the key words in the question such as “each” “set” the “total number of things” while Ms. Smith puts boxes or underlines these words. Ms. Smith then starts hollering several times to the whole class, “Get out your notebooks. Get out your notebooks.” She then asks, “Why do we need our notebooks?” No one answers. Ms. Smith states, “We did a problem very similar to this yesterday, and I want you to look back to see the steps we followed.” Students look around to find their notebooks. While they are doing this, Ms. Smith makes comments about students that are organized and not organized. She now states, “Ok. Now you can do this on your own. You should look back in your notebook to see how we did the last problem.”

Nyeisha has a hard time paying attention during the whole class activity of telling Ms. Smith what words to circle or underline. Now that the class is supposed to work independently, Nyeisha appears unable to focus and is no longer working on the problem. She is doodling in her notebook. Ms. Alexis, the ISS [In School Suspension] teacher, walks in and brings a black bag from the corner store and gives it to Nyeisha. Ms. Alexis says to Nyeisha, “This is your lunch. Your mom brought it, and there is a dollar in there for you. Are you doing good?” “Yes” Nyeisha responds. Ms. Alexis fills out a slip and gives it to Nyeisha. Nyeisha turns to me, “She gave me Baker Cash!” Ms. Alexis asks Ms. Smith in front of the entire class, “Improvement?” Ms. Smith responds, “Yes.” Nyeisha starts to count her Baker cash, which are slips of paper in different
amounts that students can “spend” for rewards, such as an ice cream. She pulls out a zip lock baggie, and unrolls and then counts all of her cash. Ms. Smith says to Nyeisha, “I’ll put that away for you.” She is referring to the black corner store bag that Ms. Alexis gave her with her lunch. Nyeisha says to Ms. Smith, “There is a dollar in there for me.” Ms. Smith assures her, “I’ll make sure it is in your backpack.” Nyeisha is excited that her mother gave her a dollar. Nyeisha says to me, “I’m going to buy me some water and chips after school, wait I don’t need chips, I am going to get some water and something else.” I say, “It looks like you have had a good week.” Nyeisha exclaims, “Yes! Look at all my Baker Cash! Plus, I’m not bad. There are no bad kids.” This phrase is one I have heard from a couple of students, including Kiandra. Nyeisha continues, “Today my mom is going shopping. She is going to buy me a uniform.” It is almost time for the fourth graders to go to lunch, and I am going to head upstairs to an 8th grade class. I tell Nyeisha that I will come by at the end of the day to say goodbye to her.

(Fieldnotes, 12/4/15)

As Chapter 5 describes, Ms. Smith does not have chaos in her class and is able to instruct largely because of her rigid control. At the end of the previous fieldnote, Nyeisha, who is not “on task” but is excited about all of her Baker Cash states, “I’m not bad. There are no bad kids.” Nyeisha has internalized that many adults in the school think that she is bad and treat her as though she is bad; however, in this example, Nyeisha seems to be pushing back against these deficit orientations that surround her. In many regards, Nyeisha is struggling to be considered good, and it appears as the perceptions of her as “bad” are difficult to overcome.

Days in which Nyeisha does not get in trouble are infrequent. In contrast to the previous fieldnote in which Nyeisha appeared happy, excited, and proud, Nyeisha tends to appear to be upset or frustrated. She sits by herself and does not frequently engage with peers in positive ways. As the following fieldnote describes, Nyeisha is not allowed to sit with other students because Ms. Smith believes that Nyeisha will disrupt them and the rest of the class. Because order is the primary goal, Nyeisha must be separated from her peers. In the many hours I have spent with Nyeisha at school and after school, I
cannot name one student that she would consider a friend. As described in Chapter 5, Mr. James believes that the rest of the students in Ms. Smith’s class do not like Nyeisha because Ms. Smith does not like Nyeisha. Ms. Smith admits being frustrated with Nyeisha, and a common refrain she makes about Nyeisha is, “I have had enough.” This kind of giving up on students, and then blaming them for the implications of this abnegation of responsibility, is the norm and not the exception at Baker.

The following fieldnote also illustrates the many complexities and challenges that students and teachers face. For example, getting a substitute teacher to come to Baker is rare, and there are additional students in Ms. Smith’s class because a teacher is absent. In the subsequent fieldnote excerpt, Ms. Smith tells Nyeisha that she is “sick of her.” Ms. Smith frequently makes these kinds of comments to and about Nyeisha, and Nyeisha tends to respond with a shoulder shrug followed by commenting, “I don’t care.” However, it is clear that these comments really upset and hurt Nyeisha, and in turn, Nyeisha starts to act out her feelings. At the end of this particular day, Ms. Smith calls Nyeisha’s mother, which makes Nyeisha even more angry. As this fieldnote highlights, Ms. Smith’s perception of Nyeisha as a “problem student” influences how Nyeisha appears to get in trouble no matter what she does. Nyeisha does not embody a habitus of fierceness in the same way Rashanna does; however, Nyeisha talks back to Ms. Smith, bangs on her desk, and disregards Ms. Smith’s directions as a means of pushing back when she believes Ms. Smith is “messing with her.” These particular actions are examples of the micro-resistance strategies discussed in Chapter 4.

Marshall says, “Hi Ms. Nicole” as I walk into Ms. Smith’ room. I smile and say hello to him. Marshall’s desk, along with Ireena, Nyeisha, and Damien’s desks, sits apart from the rest of the students whose desks are put together in
groups of four. This is because, according to Ms. Smith, they cannot work well with others. Nyeisha smiles and waves at me as soon as I walk in. Someone whispers to Ms. Smith, whose back is turned, “Ms. Nicole is here.” All of the fourth grade students take turns saying, “Hi, Ms. Nicole.” I say hello to Ms. Smith. She tells me that there are extra students in the class today because Ms. Glenn, one of the three fourth grade teachers, is absent today. Sometimes when teachers are absent, their students will be divided up between other teachers for the day. These students are expected to work quietly on a packet of independent work. I ask Ms. Smith, “How are you feeling?” “Oh. I’m fine,” she says. “That’s not why I was absent on Friday afternoon.” I state, “The students told me you were sick. Did you get our card?” Ms. Smith smiles and exclaims, “That was you! I do have a cold, but I am fine. How were the kids?” “They were really good,” I say. Ms. Smith comments, “That is what I heard. I can’t believe I got a sub. Everyone is like, ‘who do you know downtown’ that you got a sub.”

The class is a bit noisier than usual. Students are supposed to be copying their homework. It is close to the end of the day, and students seem excited. Students keep calling my name to show me scores they got on a recent quiz. There are a lot of 80s, 90s, and 100s. The quiz was on fact and opinion. When they call me over, they show me their half sheet of notebook paper that lists eight questions. There is a capital “C” next to each correct answer. There is a “X” next to incorrect answers. I walk around from student to student as they are excited to show me their quizzes. Lashaya calls me over to show me her quiz. “I got a 10. I’m supposed to be one of the smart ones.” Lashaya says, “I have spelling problems.” Ms. Smith responds, “It is not the spelling I am worried about. It is about the sentences. They don’t make any sense, and it scares me. Take home these quizzes and show your parents. Everyone clear and clean your desks!” On the back of the half sheet of notebook paper are five sentences. Most of the grades that I see are much lower. Comments are written on the paper, including “Read your work” or “Your sentences don’t make any sense.”

Nyeisha is crossing out the Xs and making them Cs. She turned her quiz into a 100. Ms. Smith yells, “Nyeisha. Stop banging your book on your desk.” She says to me, “She is trying to get your attention.” Ms. Smith then says to Nyeisha: “Nyeisha, Ms. Nicole doesn’t want to see you banging your book on your desk. I’m so sick of you, Nyeisha. No homework.” Then to me, Ms. Smith says, “I gave her extra time, over the weekend, nothing.” Ms. Smith now addresses to whole class: “I am so sick of her. Lashaya, you are taking too long [to clean her desk].” Nyeisha is visibly upset and says to Ms. Smith, “Leave me alone.” I say smile and say hello to Nyeisha and tell her that I will come sit with her in a minute. Ms. Smith asks the class, “Who is my passer?” The students tell her who is the passer, and then Ms. Smith picks three students. Ms. Smith appears agitated. She is yelling at students who seem to not be doing anything wrong. She is saying things like, “Sit down.” “Hurry up and pack your bag.” “I told you to sit down.” “I’m so sick of you.” She gives whole class a detention for tomorrow. A few minutes later, Ms. Smith states that the class now has two detentions. A few
minutes later, the class now has three detentions. This means that the class will eat lunch in Ms. Smith’s room for the next three days. There are a few groans, but it does not appear to change the students’ behavior.

Ms. Smith asks, “Who didn’t copy the words for homework?” Most students raise their hands. Ms. Smith says, “Ok. I will write them.” I say, “Ms. Smith, do you want me to write them for you?” Ms. Smith, “Yes. Let me find them.” She flips through a book. “Ok. Here you are.” I write 8 words on the board. It is not exactly clear to me or to the students what they are supposed to do with these words, but I believe they are supposed to look up their definitions.

Ms. Smith yells, “Nyeisha. I have had enough. I’m going to call your mom.” Ms. Smith takes out her personal cell phone while she keeps yelling at Nyeisha. Nyeisha responds adamantly, “NO!” “Yes. I have had enough. Your mom said if she had to come up here again, you were going to be in trouble.” Nyeisha tells Ms. Smith, “I didn’t do nothing.” Ms. Smith says to me, “Ms. Nicole, you can tell Nyeisha’s mom what she did.” I don’t say anything, and I hope she does not actually ask me to tell anything to Nyeisha’s mother because I have no idea what Nyeisha did. Ms. Smith says into the phone, “Hello. This is Ms. Smith. I am calling to talk to you about Nyeisha’s behavior. Please call me back.”

Ms. Smith goes and sits down at the table at the front of the room where her lap top is. She starts filling out the students’ behavior charts. These charts are a monthly calendar. At the top of the paper there are numbers, which list behaviors such as “Talking back. No homework. Disrupting class.” On each day of the calendar, students either get a smiley face for good behavior or a number or numbers to signify what negative behaviors students exhibited that day. Ms. Smith calls students up for them to give her their chart to fill out. The class is still pretty noisy, and Ms. Smith occasionally looks up from the behavior charts and hollers at a student to sit down. She then says, “Girls at tables 1 and 2 get your things.” No one moves. She then says, “Girls at table 4. That’s you. Get your things.” A student tells her, “We are table 3.” Ms. Smith says, “Table 3.”

Nyeisha is standing up making noises and is really angry because Ms. Smith called her mother. I whisper to Nyeisha that she should sit down because I don’t want her to get in any more trouble. Nyeisha exclaims, “No. She shouldn’t have called my mom. I didn’t do nothing. She called my mom for nothing.”

Ms. Smith calls Kristen up to her table and asks for her behavior chart. Kristen says, “I don’t know where it is at.” Ms. Smith corrects her, “I don’t know where it is. Not where it is at. That is Philadelphia.” Ms. Smith asks again, “Where is your behavior chart?” Kristen says, “I don’t know where it is at.” Ms. Smith says, “No at. I don’t know where it is. Bring it tomorrow, Ok?” Kristen says she will.

Nyeisha motions me to come over to her desk. I walk over to Nyeisha, who is now sitting in her desk. She shows me a paper that has 100% written on the top. I then look closely, and I see that the paper said, “0/12.” Nyeisha changed all of the Xs to Cs, and she scribbled out the “0/12” and wrote “100%.” Nyeisha asks, “What does 0/12 mean?” She laughs before I have a chance to answer. I ask her, “Why did you change it?” Nyeisha just smiles and laughs. I ask, “Don’t you want
to learn from the problems that you got wrong so that you can do better next
time?” Nyeisha nods and returns to her paper and begins erasing all of the
scribbles that she made on her paper. Nyeisha and I talk quietly for a few
minutes, but since Nyeisha keeps getting yelled at, I don’t want her to get in more
trouble, so I tell her that we should both probably be quiet.

Ms. Smith calls Ireena to come to the table with her behavior chart. Ms.
Smith says, “You know Ireena, she thinks she is so grown. You see how she is
acting toward me right now.” Ireena smiles and rocks back and forth. Ms. Smith
says to me, “You see that.” She says to Ireena, “You are smart.” She says to me,
“She is smart, and is very neat and organized, but she rushes through her work.
But she talks back to adults. She also doesn’t admit that she does anything
wrong.” Ms. Smith asks Ireena, “Do you talk back to adults?” Ireena replies,
“No.” Ms. Smith states, “See. I had to talk to her mom about that, didn’t I,
Ireena?” Ireena says, “You didn’t put anything for Thursday and Friday.” She is
referring to days from last week on her behavior chart. Ms. Smith tells her, “You
were a mess those days, so I did you a favor by not writing anything. You could
say, ‘Thank you, Ms. Smith.’” Ireena doesn’t say anything and walks away. She
appears to be upset. Ms. Smith says, “She has an attitude with adults, but her
mom believes Ireena when Ireena says she didn’t do anything, so I had a talk with
her mom.” Ms. Smith whispers quietly to me, “Her mom is really young. Ireena is
an only child. Her mom is really young.” She sighs and shakes her head.

In the previous fieldnote, my confusion as to why Ms. Smith called Nyeisha’s
mother illustrates how Nyeisha’s reputation and Ms. Smith’s perception of Nyeisha as a
“problem student” influences how it is difficult for Nyeisha to not get into trouble no
matter what she does. Furthermore, the fieldnote is yet another example of the
disparaging ways that Ms. Smith talks to and about students and parents. Ms. Smith is
rooted in a deficit understanding of the community (Gorski, 2011; Valencia, 2010). The
way that Ms. Smith corrects Kristen’s speech can be seen of an example of her trying to
educate students about the culture of power (e.g., Delpit, 1995); however, Ms. Smith
appears to lack a funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005; Moll, 2000) approach about
her students and the community, meaning that she does not celebrate their strengths and
different forms of capital and is thus not able to be as transformative as she would like.
Ms. Smith, as described in Chapter 5, expects complete deference from students, and students like Ireena, who Ms. Smith states is smart, gets in trouble because she pushes back against Ms. Smith’s authority. Ms. Smith thinks that Nyeisha is smart, but she believes that Nyeisha is “too far gone” primarily because of her lack of parenting. I became an unofficial mentor to Nyeisha. Her mother, Ms. Crawford, often asks me about how things are going for Nyeisha. For example, Ms. Crawford asks, “Do you be checking up on her [Nyeisha] when she is in the classroom?” I tell her, “Yes. I check in on her.” She states, “Ok. Good. Because her and her teacher don’t see eye to eye. I don’t know what the problem is, but they don’t get along” (Fieldnotes, 1/12/16). A few weeks after this conversation, I see Ms. Smith and Nyeisha in the behavior support room (BSR) with Ms. Johnson along with the director of the BSR program, Ms. Hill. They are having a conference because Ms. Crawford filed a report stating that Ms. Smith “gripped up” Nyeisha. Ms. Smith says, “You’re lying,” Nyeisha says, “You gripped me.” Ms. Smith says, “You’re lying.” Ms. Hill leans in and tells Nyeisha, “Well, if we go – if you go where we’re sending you, they’re going to do a lot more than just grip you up.” Ms. Smith says, “I’m sick of it” (Fieldnotes, 1/29/16).

Ms. Crawford asked me to help Nyeisha get into the after school program, and I told her I would do what I can. I asked Mr. James, the director of the after school program, if Nyeisha could participate, and he was wary because of her reputation as a “problem student.” I encouraged Mr. James to give Nyeisha a chance. I tell him that Nyeisha frequently pushes limits, but I believe that all children do this. I say that Nyeisha just gets in more trouble, but not because I think her behavior is especially bad. When a spot opened up for Nyeisha in the after school program, Mr. James asks me jokingly if he
should list me as her guardian. Ms. Smith tried to lobby Mr. James to not allow Nyeisha to participate because “she can’t act right.” This is an example of how Ms. Smith has such a deficit view of Nyeisha that she does not think that Nyeisha “deserves” to participate in anything remotely positive. Ms. Crawford knows that Ms. Smith would not help to get Nyeisha into the after school program and so Ms. Crawford activates social capital through her relationship with me (e.g., Yosso, 2005) to try and get Nyeisha into the program.

As described the previous chapter, Nyeisha and her siblings are frequently late to school. Nyeisha is one of six and soon to be seven children. During parent teacher conferences, Ms. Smith tells Ms. Crawford that Nyeisha’s lateness is a problem. Ms. Crawford responds by saying, “I am so sick of hearing about how they are late. I wash my hands. I wash my hands. This is enough.” Ms. Crawford asks Nyeisha, “Do you make yourself late, or do I make you late?” Nyeisha responds, “I make myself late.” Ms. Crawford continues, “I might get up at 7:45 or 8:00, and I might roll back asleep, but they need to get their things ready. She and her sister stay up until 10:00 or 11:00 playing” (Fieldnotes, 2/24/16). Ms. Crawford parentifies her children by expecting Nyeisha, age ten, and Nadira, age eight, to assume responsibility for getting themselves and their younger brother, age six, to school. Ms. Crawford has reached out to the school for help on multiple occasions, and many adults at the school acknowledge that Nyeisha needs additional support, resources, and attention. However, the school and the broader social sectors are not able to support the Crawford family, and instead, the family is deficitized. Furthermore, teachers, as discussed earlier in this chapter, are exhausted and facing many competing priorities. In the following fieldnote, the two administrators of the after school program...
program talk about how Nyeisha’s issues can be difficult and that staff do not have enough training.

I ask Mr. James how Nyeisha is doing. He states, “She is ok. She has been picking on a second grader, and I mean really picking on her. The second grader came to me again and told me she was really scared. Nyeisha was getting in her face and yelling at her. And making her really scared.” I ask, “Why is she doing that?” Mr. James says, “I don’t know. Nyeisha has a life of instability, and it has impacted the way she operates in school. You can just look at her and tell that she is less groomed than the other kids. She doesn’t look well taken care. There are little trauma signs.” I ask, “What are those?” Another after school administrator states, “She doesn’t look you in the eyes, for example. She also appears to be in a flight or fight mode all the time.” James tells me, “I’m not going to kick her out, but after school can’t handle 20 kids with issues. One or two. The staff don’t have enough training. Nyeisha needs lots of one on one.” (Fieldnotes, 3/21/16)

Teachers and other staff at the school tend to focus on putting out fires and dealing with day to day issues. They acknowledge that Nyeisha needs support, yet they have a hard time giving her that support. A lack of resources for the school also is important to note here, as there is one counselor for the entire school who, as described previously, is burnt out and overwhelmed given her unrealistic and unsustainable workload. Teachers often deal with Nyeisha and other students by sending them out of the classroom. This is perhaps a way of deescalating a potentially problematic situation; however, it also reinforces the hidden curriculum of control in which schooling at Baker is about controlling behavior. The two subsequent fieldnotes highlight the rhythm of school life for Nyeisha, which includes coming late to school, getting removed from class, coming back to class, getting yelled at, and then getting removed from class again.

As I approach Ms. Smith’s classroom, I hear her shouting, “I am tired. I am sick of it.” Her door is open, which is not typical. I walk in. The class says, “Hello, Ms. Nicole.” I smile and say hello. I immediately look around for Nyeisha because she was not at school yesterday. I see her standing in front of her desk, which is at the front of the classroom by Ms. Smith’s desk. Ms. Smith gives me a small smile and asks, “Can you do me a big favor?” I say, “Sure.” She asks,
“Can you take Nyeisha and walk with her and talk to her?” “Of course,” I say. “She was late. She missed theme. I don’t have time for this. She is disrupting the class. Can you take her and talk to her?” “No problem,” I tell Ms. Smith. Nyeisha walks into the hallway with me, she has a stack of papers in one hand and what she calls a pencil case in the other. It looks like a glasses case.

I ask Nyeisha, “What’s going on?” Nyeisha says, “She is steamming on me the minute I walk in. I was organizing my desk, and she doesn’t want us to have messy desks, and she kept yelling at me and telling me to sit down and then she told me to get out that she needed a break from me.” Nyeisha is playing with her pencil case. There is a pair of glasses in there, lipstick, lip gloss, and mascara. Nyeisha’s hair is done, and she is dressed nicely in a clean white button down shirt with a scalloped collar and light denim jeans. I say, “Let’s take a walk.”

I ask her, “Why weren’t you at school yesterday?” “I was at the dentist.” I look at her slightly skeptically. She laughs a little bit. Nyeisha says, ”Really I was. I have a cavity. My note is at home. I forgot to bring it.” I ask, “How come someone saw you walking in the street?” Nyeisha says, “I was talking my little brother to school because my sister couldn’t take him.” “Why not?” I ask. “She is suspended.” “Why? What grade is she in?” Nyeisha says, “second grade. She is always acting bad and getting in trouble.”

Nyeisha and I are now standing in front of an open classroom. Nyeisha starts to walk in because this is where she says she goes sometimes to take a break from Ms. Smith. Nyeisha says, “I need to go in here because Ms. Smith said I need to take a break.” There are two Black men, one larger set, and one Black female with braided hair whom I have seen before. Nyeisha and I walk in. The adults look at us skeptically, and I say, “Nyeisha said she is supposed to come in here to take a break.”

Nyeisha says, “Ms. Smith was yelling at me and telling me she is tired of me and that I need to leave.” The young, heavy set Black man says to me, with a smile of disbelief, “She is not lying.” Ms. Hill, the director of the behavior support team at the school, “Why? You should not be missing instruction Nyeisha?” We walk over to her desk, and I briefly introduce myself to her, “Hello. I’m Nicole. I’m a graduate student at Penn researching for my dissertation. I am often in Ms. Smith’s classroom, and I have worked with Nyeisha before, and Ms. Smith asked if I would take her out. She said that she was late and that she was disrupting class.” Ms. Hill says, “It is nice to meet you Nicole. I am a Penn alumna, from the school of social work and policy, many years ago.” She then asks Nyeisha, “Were you late?” Nyeisha says she was, and Ms. Hill tells her, “Your hair looks nice.” I also say that Nyeisha’s hair looks nice. Nyeisha smiles. Ms. Hill says to me, “She is late a lot, and as a child, that is not her fault.” She asks Nyeisha, “Can I tell her?” Nyeisha nods affirmatively. Ms. Hill says, “Sometimes they are late because they have to wash things out in the morning and wait for them to dry. It takes a long time to get all of the children ready. Sometimes Nyeisha leaves without them so that she can get here on time, don’t you?” Nyeisha nods and says, “She just starts yelling at me and telling me to hurry up and that she is sick of it. And I didn’t want my desk to be messy, and she
always tells us to not have messy desks.” Ms. Hill says to me, “The problem is, and I have talked to Ms. Smith about this, is it is not that Nyeisha is late. It is that Ms. Smith yells this in front of the whole class, who is there on time, and they turn to look at Nyeisha, and she gets embarrassed. Then that embarrassment turns to anger. Ms. Smith goes on and on about how she is always late and how she disrupts the class. I think we need to get the mother in here. Maybe since your sister is suspended, your mother will come up and we can talk to her. Nyeisha is a good kid and a smart kid, and she has to overcome people telling me that she is bad.” I say, “I know that she is a good kid. She is very smart. That is why I am working with her. I also know what it is like to have negative expectations about you, and it is hard.” Nyeisha looks at me and smiles. “I know that you can show people that you are good because you are.” Ms. Hill says, “I don’t want you in here long, Nyeisha. You need to be in class.” Nyeisha is putting on lip gloss and playing with her pencil case.

I suggest, “Why don’t we take a few minutes and read the passage Ms. Smith gave you and then we will go back to class?” Nyeisha smiles and says, “OK.” Ms. Hill says, “I think this” pointing to the pencil case “is going to cause distractions. Why don’t I keep it until after lunch?” Nyeisha takes her glasses out of the case, and we head to a table to sit down. She keeps trying to clean her glasses by wiping them with her fingers, and then I get a tissue and ask, “Can I try?” She hands them to me. I wipe them off with a tissue, and say, “Sometimes when you use your fingers it can make more smudge marks on them.” I try on the glasses, and they look clear to me. Nyeisha puts on them, “Thank you!” She smiles a really big smile.

We start reading a story together. It is test prep worksheet that says “4th grade ELA [English Language Arts]” at the bottom. Nyeisha wants to take turns reading. She reads a sentence and then I read a sentence. We read the passage, and then it says to answer the questions, but there are no questions. I say, “Now is probably a good time to head back to class so that we can get the questions.” Nyeisha agrees, “Ok. I need my glasses case.” I remind her, “Ms. Hill said she is going to keep it until after lunch.” Nyeisha responds, “But I need to put my glasses in it.” “Maybe you can take the makeup out and put the glasses in,” I suggest. Ms. Hill walks back in, and I ask her if Nyeisha can have her case. Ms. Hill says to Nyeisha, “I told you I am keeping it until after lunch.” Nyeisha protests, “I need it.” Ms. Hill takes out the makeup and hands the empty case to Nyeisha. Nyeisha asks, “Can I at least have my clear lip gloss? It is clear.” Ms. Hill hands Nyeisha only the empty glasses case, and Nyeisha and I walk back toward her classroom. It is just around the corner. When we get to the classroom, Nyeisha starts stalling. She says, “I don’t want to go in. Will you sit next to me?” I tell her, “Yes. I can’t stay that long because I have to go to work.” “Don’t you work here?” Nyeisha asks. “Yes. I do research here, but I have other work too.” Nyeisha and I walk in, and Ms. Smith is sitting on Nyeisha’s desk. We have to walk around the room because Nyeisha wants to walk a certain way. I sit down next to Nyeisha, and the class is answering oral questions that Ms. Smith is asking about the passage Nyeisha and I just read. I whisper to her, “You know the
answer to these. You should raise your hand.” Ms. Smith calls on Nyeisha to answer a few questions, and Nyeisha has a huge smile on her face and appears very excited when she gets the correct answer. Students tend to TAG their answers, as Ms. Smith instructs them to do. TAG stands for turning the question into a statement, answering the question, and giving examples. Ms. Smith yells at one student, “What are you doing? Why are you doing that? I am so sick of it!” The student is reaching in his desk.

Ms. Smith then pulls up a few of the questions onto the projector. It is the teachers’ edition because the answer is marked next to the question with an asterisk. The students start telling Ms. Smith this, but she doesn’t realize it quite yet. They are going over the question verbally, and she says, “This is really deep stuff. The goal of the PSSA is to trick you. It is really hard.” The reason why she explains the answer to the class doesn’t make sense. I chime in, in a casual way, and say, “It is confusing. I think it is B because A is only about one part of the sentence, C is only about one part of the sentence, and B is about all three aspects so that must be why it is the correct answer.” Ms. Smith states, “Oh you are right.” I say, “It is confusing.” Ms. Smith says, “Yes. It is very confusing. Now we are going to read the textual evidence question.” She says to me, “They aren’t going to do well on this because this is their first time taking it.” Ms. Smith reads the question aloud. “We are going to answer it, but not today. I hope it is better than the last one we did because that was a hot mess.” They read the question and then Ms. Smith says, “Ok. Because we didn’t have a prep today we are going to play some games.” “YAY!” The students respond.

Ms. Smith gets out fact and opinion, main idea, and other bingo games. While the students are arranging their desks into groups, she says to me, “Nyeisha missed theme. Am I supposed to re-teach it to her? I didn’t sign up for this. It is so sad. She just needs so much help and attention. I didn’t sing up for that. I signed up to teach not be a mother and a social worker. In my charter school, it wasn’t like that. I don’t think I am going to be doing this much longer.” I tell Ms. Smith that Ms. Hill said that she is going to try to bring in Nyeisha’s mother. Ms. Smith shakes her head. “We have talked to her ten times. You know what she says. She says, ‘I’m pregnant. I have 6 kids.’ I just didn’t sign up for this. Thank you, though. She needs a lot of attention.” I say, “Anytime. I am happy to work with Nyeisha. I will be back on Friday.”

I bend down and talk to Nyeisha. Nyeisha says, “Don’t leave.” I tell her that I’ll be back on Friday. “I wish you worked here. You told Ms. Hill that you come three days a week.” I say, “I was here yesterday, today, and then I will be back on Friday.” Nyeisha counts on her fingers and says, “Oh.” I ask her if she is excited to play BINGO, and she says that she is. I state, “I will see you on Friday. I hope you have a great day!” Ms. Smith is hollering at the class about how they are getting into groups. “Who wants to start with main idea? You will all rotate to main idea.” I wave good bye. The class says, “Goodbye, Ms. Nicole.”

(Fieldnotes, 1/6/16)
In a previous fieldnote, I document how Nyeisha says, “There are no bad kids.” Nyeisha is trying to resist the negative way in which a majority of the adults at the school characterize her. Ms. Hill understands the struggle it may take for Nyeisha to get to school in the morning and celebrates that as a positive, something that very few other adults do. Ms. Smith considers Nyeisha along the lines of how Nygreen (2013) describes “these kids” to include ones who “need discipline” and are generally “deficient, deviant, and difficult” (p. 27). Nyeisha, like all students, wants to be recognized and considered “good.” She is so proud and excited when she is called on to answer a question to which she knows the answer. Ms. Smith, who is clearly struggling and exhausted in this example, considers student misbehavior a personal affront and does not care how her comments might hurt students. She is able to show empathy for some students, like when she told me that Rashed’s mother “is a junkie,” and she seemed very concerned for Rashed. However, Ms. Smith does not consider Rashed a behavior problem. Ms. Smith has little regard for what Nyeisha experiences at home even though Ms. Smith repeatedly discusses Nyeisha’s home life as “so sad.” Because Ms. Smith, and the school, focuses so much on controlling behavior, it appears that there is nothing Nyeisha can do to get rid of her label as “bad” and “disruptive.” She is one of “those” kids (Nygreen, 2013). Nyeisha is struggling for her humanity in and out of Baker, and she is also struggling for a childhood. Because of her parent-like responsibilities at home and the joyless schooling experiences, Nyeisha has not gotten to be able to be a child.

According to Nyeisha, she is often “kicked out” of Ms. Smith’s class. Ms. Smith would describe the situation as Nyeisha needing to leave or take a break in another classroom. Gwen, Nyeisha’s school-based behavior support case worker, believes that
Nyeisha is removed from class too frequently. In the subsequent fieldnote, Nyeisha is taking a break in another teacher’s class. Again, the rhythms of schooling for Nyeisha involve a cycle of being yelled at, “kicked out,” and yelled at again.

I walk up to the second floor, and I see Gwen, Nyeisha’s behavior support case worker. She tells me that Nyeisha was kicked out of Ms. Smith’s room three times yesterday. Gwen says, “She is across the hallway in Ms. Myers room now.” “What happened?” “Same thing as usual. I don’t think she should be in there. That is sixth grade.” I tell her, “I’m going to go and say hello to her.”

I walk across the room to Ms. Myers class. She is the math prep teacher. I recognize a few of the sixth grade girls, who are in lacrosse. They smile and wave at me and ask, “Are you coming to Lacrosse today?” I tell them that I am. One student says, “I’m not, I can’t stand coach Lewis.” Another girl says, “I’ll be there.” After a few minutes, Ms. Myers notices that I am there, and I ask if it is ok if I say hello to Nyeisha. She says, “She is over there in the corner. You can sit on the chair, and Nyeisha can sit on the stool.” “Thanks.” I walk over to Nyeisha, and she is quietly reading a book in a light beige arm chair. It is soft and clean, but old. Nyeisha is in the reading corner. There is a magazine rack with Oprah, Women’s Day, Country Living, and a few other magazines on it. There are two windows and books displayed on the window ledges. There are also two bar stools in the reading corner. I kneel down so that I am eye level with Nyeisha and say hello. She smiles a really big smile. I ask, “How are you?” Nyeisha says, “Good.” “Why are you in here?” Nyeisha tells me, “She kicked me out.” I ask why, and Nyeisha says, “Because I wasn’t paying attention.” I ask, “Why?” Nyeisha, “Because I was mad.” “At her?” “No.” I ask Nyeisha, “What made you mad?” She states, “I don’t know. I was just mad in general.” I also ask, “Did you get kicked out yesterday too?” Nyeisha says, “Yes. I was being disruptive.” She says it like destructive, so I ask her, “Were you being disruptive or destructive? Nyeisha is not sure what I mean. I ask, “Were you making noise and not paying attention, which is disruptive, or were you destroying things, which is destructive?” Nyeisha answers, “Disruptive” She still says it like destructive. “I was making noises and calling out to people.” I ask her why, and Nyeisha tells me, “I be getting mad.”

As we are talking, Nyeisha has starting taking all of the books out of a crate on the floor and is organizing them to put them in order of height and making sure that they all face the same way. Nyeisha explains, “I am going to go to a partial placement.” I inquire, “What does that mean?” Nyeisha says, “It means I am going to go somewhere where they give you help.” “What kind of help?” Nyeisha responds, “I don’t know, but they help you with your behavior.” I can tell that Nyeisha does not want to talk anymore, so I ask her, “Would you like to read a book with me?” She smiles and says, “Yes. Which one?” I tell her, “Up to you.” Nyeisha looks through the books, and picks one. I forget the title, as I was not familiar with it, but it was something about “Two bedtime stories.” We
take turns reading a page. We were about halfway through the book, and the class starts to dismiss, and I get called away. I suggest that she finish the book, and that she can fill me in on the ending later today. She nods and keeps reading. (Fieldnotes, 3/9/16)

As Nyeisha states, she is angry, and taking a close look at Nyeisha’s daily experiences, it is not hard to understand why she feels that way. It is important to remember that Nyeisha is ten years old. She is responsible for getting four younger siblings dressed in the morning and taking two of them to school. As soon as she gets to school, she is yelled at, and as the day goes on, Nyeisha often gets in more and more trouble. Schooling for Nyeisha often turns into a series of frustrating, embarrassing, and dehumanizing events. However, Nyeisha navigates her daily schooling experiences with resiliency, which I discuss in the concluding section of this chapter.

**Symbolic Violence and the Invisibility of Macro Structures**

Jalayla: I just want a life that I always dreamed of. That I always wanted as a little kid. Basically a nice house, a family, a good career...I just want to have a nice future. Something that [I] know that they [parents] could be proud of me of doing and not being like some people uneducated, and not with a real bright future. Basically I just want to make my parents proud of me and what I do and the choices I make basically. That's mainly what my goals are and my future is.

Nicole: Do you feel like you know what to do in order to get that?
Jalayla: Yeah. Stay in school, don't drop out, control my anger, because I know how angry I can be when certain people say something. Just how to control my anger and everything basically. (Interview, 5/4/16)

Teachers and students are clearly struggling, and neither are adequately supported. From the disproportionate lack of resources, test-based curricula, endless exams that a majority of students do not pass to the isolated teachers who lack of quality
materials and professional development, it appears as though urban, public schools are designed to fail. Students, especially those in middle school, are aware of this. They recognize that they are given less, that the school is not “good,” and that their chances for educational success are bleak, yet many students, as evidenced in the conversation with Jalayla at the beginning of this section, believe that if they stay in school they will “make it.” The daily affirmation (Image 3) contends that students “can be anything” and “do anything” so long as they “listen” and are “wise” they “will survive” and reinforces a focus on individual responsibility. This is articulated in the affirmation’s first two lines: “If it is to be It is up to me.” Furthermore, referencing a necessity for a habitus of fierceness, the affirmation states, “If I am weak I am beat.”

Image 4. Posters in the auditorium
Students, parents, and teachers (especially in the media) are blamed for the “failure” of public schools, despite the lack of resources and supports described in the beginning of this chapter. The macro-structural processes, which are largely invisible, conspire against students such that students are blamed for their social location. Baker is filled with posters and murals containing aspirational messages. For example, in the auditorium, which many students are in daily as they wait for their bus, students see “Education = Opportunity” (see Image 4) on the wall. While many students recognize that they are given less and that the school is not “good,” they still believe that if they “stay in school” they will “make it.” In this regard, students blame themselves if they are not successful despite the way that the system is rigged to not support them. Symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2001) is misrecognition of inequality, hidden curricula, and the culture of power as “natural.” Symbolic violence occurs when individuals are blamed and blame themselves for their social location (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009). That is, individuals’ place in society is misrecognized as natural and earned despite the broader macro, social, and political forces and in this case the specific disinvestment in urban public schools and their surrounding communities. Thus, students at Baker and schools similar to it are taught to believe that education equals opportunity, yet the education students receive is not equitable.

Students, like Jalayla, recognize how their education is inequitable, as she describes how other schools (“Jersey Schools” as she says) have “better stuff” and “nice[r] things” than their school. Despite recognizing this on one level, the

---

19 Jalayla states, “Jersey people, Jersey people, Jersey people, some of them. I'm not going to say all of them, but some of them. Some teachers they compare our school to
internalization of meritocracy and individualism (e.g., Bourdieu, 1998; Lareau, 2011) influences how students and the rest of society misrecognize social inequalities as natural, meaning that students are blamed and blame themselves if they do not achieve social mobility. Part of the transformative possibilities of teaching (e.g., Johnson, 1995; Nieto, 2008) discussed in Chapter 2 involves acknowledging this symbolic violence and the invisibility of structural processes. In addition, part of the transformative possibilities of teaching also includes recognizing the resilient way that teachers and students navigate the stressful environment of Baker School.

**Navigating a Deficit Default with Resiliency**

In this section, I build on to the concept Rashanna introduced about how outside forces impact the school. Similar to the way Rashanna describes the local community, Officer Perry, the security guard, states, “The power and prestige of this neighborhood is drugs and violence” (Fieldnotes, 4/28/16). Officer Perry and Ms. Johnson, the counselor, state that young men in the community are allured by the instant gratification and quick money of selling drugs (Fieldnotes, 4/22/16). As early as fifth or sixth grade, according to Rashanna, some students get pulled into gangs and life on the streets. Danielle, a grandparent and long time community resident, talks about students who come to school “smelling like a weed factory” (Interview, 6/21/16). Without realistic job prospects,
selling drugs becomes a viable option for many students, and some seventh and eighth
graders are already involved in selling drugs. It is common knowledge among students
and adults which students are selling drugs and those who are on drugs. Students, even
those in the younger grades, are aware of the prevalence violence and drugs in their
community. Lashaya, a fourth grader, casually tells me, “My uncle was flinging his
money around thinking he all that. He got shot. In the head. He flung his money around.
He just got shot two weeks ago. They found him in a dumpster by the rec center. It was
on the news” (Fieldnotes, 5/27/16). Two of Lashaya’s fourth grade classmates tell me
that people “be selling drugs and other bad things at the Chinese store” near their housing
complex (Fieldnotes, 6/7/16). As Renee says in the previous chapter, she and other
students want teachers to understand “it is hard.”

It is common knowledge among students that life in the local community is
“hard.” Two sisters, a third grader and a fourth grader, talk about how they are ready to
move out of the housing complex they live in. The fourth grader, Aleah, states, “There is,
mocking, shooting, and stabbing. Someone tried to shoot my mom because they got into
an argument.” Her sister chimes in, “There is a park and we can't even play there because
people are smoking, drinking, and playing cards, and I have asthma so I can’t be there.”
Aleah adds, “I have allergies. We are moving out of [name of the housing complex].
There is too much drama there. We have lived there for six years. We are leaving because
we don't have a bed because we were getting bit up so we had to throw it away”
(Fieldnotes, 6/14/16). There is a large bed bug problem in the community and at the
school, and many classrooms have bed bugs, including Ms. Smith’s and Mr. Crowley’s
rooms. Students are frequently sent home letters that state, “A bed bug was found in your
child’s classroom.” Students frequently received letters addressed to their parents stating that “a bed bug was found in your child’s classroom.” These letters provide a website for parents to refer to for how to eliminate bed bugs. Haleigh, Bianca, and Jalayla rushed to find me as soon as they got their first letter. They were outraged and brought an extra copy of the letter for me. Ms. Smith describes bringing her own bug spray and spraying the room herself after school on a weekly basis.

Students, like teachers, are also operating in a survival mode. Rashanna explains why she says she doesn’t care, “I feel like most of the people who tell me that don’t go to this school. They don't know how it actually is here and like not even the teachers understand.” Part of students’ survival includes the micro resistance strategies introduced in Chapter 4, which include cutting class and stating that they do not care. Nyeisha, like Rashanna, adopts the coping strategy of stating she does not care. However, students like Nyeisha and Rashanna are primarily waiting for adults to show them that they care, as positive relationships between students and teachers are one of the most important aspects of student achievement and well-being (Kuriloff et al., in press; Stevenson, 2014, p. 122; Raider-Roth, 2005).

Students believe that many teachers do not understand what life is like for them, but they acknowledge that some teachers do, including Ms. Jenkins and Ms. Johnson. Ms. Johnson, reflecting on the school and students’ experiences states, “School is the best part of the day for kids. They get two full meals. They have friends, and teachers who supposedly care” (Fieldnotes, 6/14/16). However, instead of being transformative and nurturing, school is an additional place of stress. Although many teachers state that school is the best part of the day for many students, it is important to note that many
teachers are in survival mode. They either are unaware or forget the way that students internalize and navigate the deficit default of the school as well as the stressful and toxic environment (e.g., Paulle, 2013). The physical environment of the school is dirty and falling apart, as the eighth graders describe in the beginning of this chapter. Basic tasks that should be taken care of immediately, are often ignored. For example, as the following fieldnote describes, that Ms. Smith and her students have been waiting for vomit to be cleaned up for over an hour.

*Today when I walk in, Ms. Smith tells me to be careful. There is throw up on the floor. She asks a student to go to the office to tell them there is still throw up on the floor. Ms. Smith states, “Jasmine was so sick. She just had her head down. I knew something was wrong.” Ms. Smith states that Jasmine threw up as soon as school started, and the throw up has been there for over an hour. Jasmine is in the classroom with her head down waiting for her mother to come and pick her up.* (Fieldnotes, 2/16/16)

Both students and teachers contend with these dehumanizing conditions that physically include vomit and vermin as well as include significant physiological stress, yet students and teachers come back daily. Rashanna would not be considered successful by middle class standards of working toward social mobility. However, she is certainly resilient. At age ten, Nyeisha takes care of herself and four younger siblings. Her resiliency, however, is not acknowledged. She is labeled as “difficult” and “a problem.”

Students and teachers cope with their environment at Baker School. Some of their coping mechanisms have negative unintended consequences, such as when teachers deficitize students and parents, or when students employ micro resistance strategies of cutting class that can ultimately hurt their chances of getting into a “better” high school. It is important to situate these coping mechanisms within the systemic racism and disinvestment of such schools (e.g., Anyon, 1997, 2005). Furthermore, acknowledging
the daily struggle for humanity that both teachers and students at Baker and similar schools experience is a part of attempting to make schools like Baker more humanizing.

Focusing on the contextual, lived experiences of individuals can help to shift the narrative from deficit-focused to more resource-focused. Students and teachers are resilient. John, a colleague who was the counselor at the school I taught at for many years, told me “Every child that goes to school here is resilient. To come back to this place day after day, to go through what many of them go through before they even get here is resilient. These are the most resilient kids I have ever met.” I always thought about John’s comment as a teacher, although I do not think I could fully understand it when I was a new teacher struggling and in survival mode myself. It is now, in my role as a researcher, that I can better appreciate what John meant. What helps me to see the resiliency of students is that I have spent hundreds of hours listening to them, sitting in class with them, having lunch with them, and going on trips with them without having the pressures of being a teacher. I have also developed an understanding of the many external pressures in the community and how this directly impacts schooling experiences as this chapter overviews. Teachers, too, are resilient. They are psychically and emotionally exhausted and face many challenging situations with limited pay, recognition, and support. Instead of creating an environment in which teachers and students are poised against each other in a culture of control, it is important to recognize how teachers and students are both dehumanized in this schooling context.
Summary

This chapter underscores the symbolic violence that occurs as students internalize the deficit default that surrounds individuals at Baker School. Despite the systemic lack of resources and disinvestment in inner-city public schools like Baker, the individuals within them are blamed and thought about as “unmotivated” and “undeserving” of a better, more equitable education. Teachers and students at Baker are struggling for their humanity. The teachers are overworked and overwhelmed. Students, as the examples of Rashanna and Nyeisha illustrate, are also struggling. Baker School is about survival, and the individuals connected to it are dehumanized and left behind.
CHAPTER 7: Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, it is clear that schooling at Baker is dehumanizing and demoralizing for a majority of students, teachers, staff, and parents/family members. Everyone is struggling for their humanity, especially the students and teachers. If the United States is committed to educational equity, policy makers, scholars, and citizens should be concerned about the inequities and intergenerational harm being enacted at schools like Baker. In this concluding chapter, I describe specific recommendations and implications for theory, future research, and practice based on this study. Specifically, this research suggests a need for future research studies that contextually examine the social reproduction of schooling and the necessity for scholars, practitioners, and citizens to acknowledge that the education at schools like Baker is neither equitable nor does it provide students with opportunities for social mobility. Once this is acknowledged, it necessitates that policy makers fund schools like Baker so that they can provide students with an equitable education. This research also suggests implications for practitioners to reframe and learn from student behavior as well as to design curricula and lessons that engage students and respect their experiences. Additional implications include considering ways to democratize schooling, including thinking about opportunities to genuinely include student voice in schools as well as opportunities for future research related to involving the local community and parents. Finally, I close this chapter by revisiting the concept of student resiliency and suggesting ways practitioners can adopt a resource orientation toward students.
Education Does Not Equal Opportunity

As the data describe, Baker School is chaotic. Teachers’ and school staff’s attempts to lessen the chaos result in deficitizing students and their families. Narratives of students as “out of control” and “unmotivated” and parents as “uninvolved and apathetic” are pervasive. The ideology becomes that students do not have structure and consequences at home and thus the school must provide students with this in droves. However, despite what I have described as the culture of control at Baker, it is still a chaotic environment in which compliance becomes a proxy for being a good student and being perceived as “teachable” and ultimately for success. This is another example of the hidden curriculum of social reproduction (Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 1976) because the type of schooling that students experience at Baker prepares students to follow rules and complete mundane tasks. However, the political economy has changed and the manual labor and factory jobs that schools socialize low-income students to be prepared for (Bowles & Gintis, 1976) no longer exist. Thus, students at Baker are exposed to low quality instruction in a dehumanizing environment for jobs that do not exist.

This study suggests future empirical and theoretical studies that specifically research the social reproduction of schools and contextually examine these issues with a focus on potential changes. The way in which current studies tend focus on cultural reproduction, while important, underplays the ways in which schools specifically contribute to reproducing social inequality. Understandably, scholars and educators want to make room for individual agency; however, I argue that framing schooling along these terms only further contributes to individualistic arguments that blame students for not “working hard enough.” Although this may be a hard message for individualistic
Americans to believe, education does not equal opportunity at schools like Baker. Accepting this, both theoretically and in practice, can potentially help to improve schools like Baker.

In addition to the theoretical and scholarly implications related to the social reproductive nature of schooling at Baker, there are also important implications for practitioners, including implications for the ways that teachers engage with and conceptualize student behavior and resistance as well as implications for teachers’ pedagogical practices. Students at Baker resist the dehumanizing schooling environment in which learning is forfeited for behavioral control. The students, through what I have termed micro resistance strategies, push back against this culture of control and dominance. Rather than attend classes that primarily consists of “copying of notes,” as Chapter 4 describes, students cut class, volunteer to help in the main office, see if any of their former teachers need help, or play games in the hallway with their peers. Students also resist, respond to, and navigate the environment of Baker by cultivating a habitus of fierceness. Ultimately, students do not believe that the school and/or the teachers will protect them, and they demonstrate a habitus of fierceness so that other people (peers and/or teachers) will not “mess” with them and so that they are not perceived as weak. While this habitus sometimes involves violence, it also demonstrates resilient and adaptive problem solving, which are necessary skills for their environment in and out of school. It is also a way in which students cope with and protect themselves when they feel threatened. Reframing these types of behaviors is an important implication for practitioners at Baker and schools like it. This is part of adopting a resource orientation
toward students, and additional staff training will be necessary to help practitioners cultivate this stance.

It is important to note that student resistance strategies at Baker also contribute to social reproduction (Willis, 1977). For example, a habitus of fierceness does not align with middle class values that schools reinforce (e.g., Lareau, 2011) and is therefore rejected and punished. Students, in extreme situations are suspended or expelled from school. In other situations, younger students are often sent to another classroom, as the examples of Nyeisha illustrate. Many older students cut class, as Rashanna’s examples describe. In all of these scenarios, student behavior is being controlled, and despite the boring instruction and dehumanizing environment, students are continuously blamed and deficitized in a culture of symbolic violence. Again, it becomes crucial to learn from student resistance rather than continuously punish it (Toshalis, 2015).

An additional implication related to the ways that schools like Baker reproduce social inequity is related to issues of systemic inequality. Policy makers at local, state, and national levels should give schools such as Baker more, not less, funding. As Chapters 6 describes, the lack of basic educational resources such as personnel and instruction materials impacts everyone at Baker. When educators take on multiple roles because of insufficient personnel, they become increasingly stressed and overwhelmed. This stress, as Chapter 5 discusses, contributes to the survival mode mentality that many educators at Baker experience and perpetuates the deficit default ideology toward students and parents. The deficit default has significant implications for students at Baker, especially as students internalize these negative descriptions of themselves. It is important to note that these types of issues are systemic and reflect the disinvestment of
high-poverty schools and communities (Anyon, 1997, 2005). As such, a crucial component to address these systemic inequalities is funding schools like Baker equitably. Opponents to this state that education funding has increased in the United States without a parallel increase in student achievement (Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009). However, this dissertation research clearly articulates the way in which education funding is not distributed equally. Thus, reforming the ways that education is funded in this country so that all schools are equitably funded is a crucial step toward improving public education in urban, high-poverty schools.

**Democratizing Schools**

Students and teachers engage in power struggles for control at Baker. Ultimately, the teacher tends to retain power in these situations. These power struggles foster strained relationships between students and teachers, and these relationships are generally acknowledged as especially important in students’ experiences of schooling and achievement (e.g., Raider-Roth, 2005). A way to make schools more humanizing for both students and teachers is to democratize them in which teachers can share power (Bounous, 2001; Johnson, 1995) with students. Aspects of this can include that teachers incorporate students’ opinions, provide genuine opportunities for student decision-making about norms and curricula, and develop lessons that reflect an understanding of students’ experiences. A specific way that some schools have done this is by incorporating youth participatory action research (YPAR) to have students research student-determined issues with the goal of improving their school. This type of research
has transformed student and teacher relationships from hierarchical to collaborative and in turn has positive impacts on students’ sense of self efficacy (Carl et al., 2015).

During my fieldwork at Baker, students frequently told me that I am the only person who asks what they think. I saw this reflected in the teachers’ and staff’s reactions when I ate lunch with the students or described my research to them. Shifting the paradigm from hierarchical to collaborative may seem like a leap for a school like Baker because of the chaotic environment; however, it is clear that the culture of control is not working. Thus, I suggest that systematically involving student voice in school decisions in authentic ways (i.e., having students vote on the school colors, which happened at Baker, is not what I am referring to) is one way to democratize schooling practices and to genuinely include students in school reform. This type of student voice involves shifting the paradigm so that student voices are respected and appreciated. Additional research would then be necessary to determine the extent to which these types of initiatives influence the culture of control at Baker and schools like it.

An additional way to engage students is for practitioners to think critically about what their resistance might mean and to involve students in these conversations. Thus, training staff about alternative conceptions of student resistance is a way to understand students’ experiences and learn from, instead of control, their behavior. This could also address the deficit ways that teachers view students and help students to feel cared about at school. Furthermore, initiating dialogue between students and teachers is a way for schools to let students know that they value students’ perspectives and is a way for students and teachers to develop more positive relationships.
Another aspect of democratizing schools involves thinking differently about ways to engage the community. Baker is considered a “community school.” However, aside from having that designation, there is little to no authentic interaction occurring with the community. When these interactions do occur, such as when local university students volunteer at Baker, these exchanges primarily benefit the individual student and the university. It is also important to note that this type of engagement does not involve the local community surrounding Baker. As discussed in Chapter 5, Danielle states, “Maybe we have to get more community things going on here at the school, where the community is.” Significantly more research about the community schools initiatives in general, as they are growing in popularity, is needed and specifically in relationship to schools like Baker so that these initiatives can truly benefit the community and are not just overseen by external organizations and/or just done “for show.” Future research related to this at Baker would involve taking an inventory of the organizations that partner with the school and studying what these organizations contribute to the school as well as the extent to which they are located in or connected to the local neighborhood would be a first step. An additional research component would include involving members of the community in a participatory study to determine what they think community involvement should look like at Baker and then ultimately designing an action plan to implement their research-based recommendations.

In addition to considering the local community, this study suggests that future research is needed about ways that schools and policies can think about engaging parents. Instead of blaming urban parents when they do behave like middle class suburban parents (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lareau & Schumar, 1996), schools and districts should re-think
what parental involve could look like and, most importantly, include parents in the reform and design processes. This research study highlights how parents at Baker are struggling with multiple, complex issues. Ms. Crawford, for example, states on multiple occasions that she is struggling and needs help. However, the school environment disparages and blames Ms. Crawford and expressly situates her as “the problem.” When the education system has been unsuccessful for parents, like Ms. Crawford who tells her daughter, “I want more for you, NyNy,” a new set of questions regarding parents at Baker emerges, including what does it mean to engage parents in this environment and what would parental involvement ideally look like at Baker? My research suggests a future study that uses participatory and ethnographic methods to research the kinds of questions Danielle brought up in Chapter 5, such as "What would help you to help your child?" or "What would help you?" Asking these questions is a preliminary first step in demonstrating to parents that the school cares about them and is invested in building a non-deficit oriented relationship with parents and to taking a different, more participatory approach to thinking about these issues.

Furthermore, this research suggests a need for increased dialogue between parents and school personnel not just to increase parental engagement in school but primarily to help develop mutual understanding. If increased parental involvement is the goal, the negative way in which parents are blamed at Baker does not appear to be making strides toward achieving that end. Humanizing parents and recognizing the way that the system has failed them, is an important part of stopping the cycle of the deficit default at Baker. It will also help develop a dialogue between the school and the parents that situates parents as a resource and a partner instead of a problem.
Students’ Resiliency and Resources

This dissertation centralizes students’ experiences of schooling and by doing so makes way for a new line of inquiry that places student voice and perspective at the forefront of studies about urban schooling. This research highlights and personalizes the way that the rhythms of schooling at Baker revolve around control and behavior instead of learning and engagement. Contextualizing these experiences in the examples of Nyeisha and Rashanna as well as Renee, Bianca, and Jalayla help to humanize these students’ experiences. For example, the rhythms of schooling for Nyeisha involve being responsible for getting herself and her younger siblings to school, getting yelled at for being late, arguing with her teacher, being “kicked out” of class, coming back to class, and getting yelled at again. This cycle of schooling for Nyeisha, while demoralizing, also highlights Nyeisha’s amazing resiliency by returning to school everyday. In addition, Nyeisha resiliently navigates her home life and takes on additional responsibilities at a young age.

Practitioners can especially learn from these examples about ways to view students’ experiences from a recourse or funds of knowledge (e.g., Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, 2000) approach. One example of the funds of knowledge that many students at Baker have includes the way students take on additional responsibilities at home by caring for younger siblings or fending for themselves. Thus, instead of infantilizing and deficitizing students, schools like Baker could solicit their opinions and provide them opportunities to take on leadership and make important decisions in the school. In this way, it is possible that the power struggles between students and teachers would become less frequent and would pave the way for better and potentially
transformative relationships between students and teachers. To this end, professional development for teachers and other staff members about ways to take a resource as opposed to a deficit orientation toward students and families would be a necessary first step for practitioners.

Another component of a resource orientation that does not blame and deficitize students and families includes that researchers and practitioners acknowledge the invisible macro forces that impact schools like Baker. One of these forces is systemic racism and the ways that individuals at Baker respond to racial stress (Stevenson, 2014). Schools are designed by and for middle-class White people, and when Black students, parents, and teachers navigate these institutions they experience institutionalized racial stress. At racially homogeneous schools like Baker, issues of racism are often dismissed or ignored because the student body and majority of the staff are Black. However, racial interactions and racial stress are enacted and experienced constantly at Baker when adults and students internalize the hidden curriculum of control that messages that Black, brown, and poor students need to be controlled. In addition, Ms. Smith’s behavior toward her students, her insistence that they “get it,” and the comments she makes revolve around issues of racialized stress. For example, Ms. Smith states, “I just don’t know what to do about the lack of achievement. I don’t know if it is us,” Ms. Smith points to her skin as she says this, “or economics. I’m thinking it is economics. I just don’t know.” This dissertation suggests that additional research in racially homogeneous environments is necessary to better understand this stress and how it impacts individuals, such as Ms. Smith and her students, and the entire institution of schooling. Extensive training for staff in the concepts of racial literacy and racial stress (see Stevenson, 2014) would also be
necessary to help teachers like Ms. Smith better cope with racial stress and think about more positive, resource-oriented ways to engage with students, parents, and fellow teachers. These training sessions would ideally also be offered to the local community as a way to highlight these important issues to a broader audience and also as another way to continue engaging parents and the community.

In conclusion, ignoring the ways that schools contribute to social reproduction gives power to the deficit default ideology that occurs at Baker and schools like it. Believing that students are not motivated and do not care makes students instead of society responsible for their social location (Theoharis, 2009). Thus, it is necessary to flip that narrative so that the blame and responsibility does not focus on students. In addition to reframing the narrative, it is our responsibility to improve schools like Baker. Students and parents have faith in schooling, even though it has not yet proven to deserve that faith. For example, in the following excerpt, Bianca discusses her future dreams:

I had a dream that I finished school, and I went to college and my mom was proud of me, but I didn't stay at college, I didn't live there. I just went there and came home. And I had a dream that I had got myself a car, a job, and I was successful and I had this big house. I bought my mom all this stuff. I had a dream. (Interview, 5/11/16)

To make these dreams a reality, we owe students like Bianca, Rashanna, Jalayla, Renee, and Nyeisha an opportunity for an equitable education. Otherwise, the narrative will fall back to blaming students for “not making it.” Even in this dehumanizing place, it is a testament to student resiliency that they maintain aspirations to what they believe that school can do for them. It is my sincere hope that this research can help make schools like Baker more equitable and humane places for students, teachers, and parents.
## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

**Table A. School District of Philadelphia PSSA Results, 2015**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number Tested</th>
<th>Level 1 (Below Basic)</th>
<th>Level 2 (Basic)</th>
<th>Level 3 (Proficient)</th>
<th>Level 4 (Advanced)</th>
<th>Levels 3+4 (Proficient + Advanced)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>3 to 8</td>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>56235</td>
<td>16122 29%</td>
<td>21908 39%</td>
<td>14990 27%</td>
<td>3215 6%</td>
<td>18205 32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>3 to 8</td>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>56418</td>
<td>32001 57%</td>
<td>14848 26%</td>
<td>7168 13%</td>
<td>2401 4%</td>
<td>9569 17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>4 &amp; 8</td>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>18786</td>
<td>1831 42%</td>
<td>3979 21%</td>
<td>5143 27%</td>
<td>1833 10%</td>
<td>6976 37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>3 to 8</td>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>6337</td>
<td>730 12%</td>
<td>1736 27%</td>
<td>2583 41%</td>
<td>1288 20%</td>
<td>3871 61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>3 to 8</td>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>49898</td>
<td>15392 31%</td>
<td>20172 40%</td>
<td>12407 25%</td>
<td>1927 4%</td>
<td>14334 29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>4 &amp; 8</td>
<td>Not Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>6360</td>
<td>1918 30%</td>
<td>1847 29%</td>
<td>1618 25%</td>
<td>977 15%</td>
<td>2595 41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>3 to 8</td>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>50058</td>
<td>30083 60%</td>
<td>13001 26%</td>
<td>5550 11%</td>
<td>1424 3%</td>
<td>6974 14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>4 &amp; 8</td>
<td>Not Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>2232</td>
<td>506 23%</td>
<td>378 17%</td>
<td>746 33%</td>
<td>602 27%</td>
<td>1348 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>4 &amp; 8</td>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>16554</td>
<td>7325 44%</td>
<td>3601 22%</td>
<td>4397 27%</td>
<td>1231 7%</td>
<td>5628 34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data come from the School District of Philadelphia publically available data
Appendix B

Description of Researcher Memos

The following memos are examples of the types of memos composed throughout the data collection and analysis processes. These memos were written as internal sense-making documents and shared with critical friends to initiate dialogic engagement (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). These individuals include my advisor and dissertation chair, other members of my dissertation committee, members of a research inquiry group, and fellow doctoral students.

- Researcher identity/positionality memos (Maxwell, 2013; Ravitch & Carl, 2016) that documented specific aspects of my identity and positionality in relation to the research. Aspects I focused on include my experiences as a teacher, as a researcher, my own socializing experiences as a student and child, and site-based relationships. I discussed how these are related to research processes and learnings.

- Fieldwork and data collection memos that reflected on my experiences in the field, impressions about the research setting, changes to research design and research questions, preliminary codes and themes, and other site-based learnings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

- Vignette memos based on fieldnotes and interview data and that reflected on various facets of my design and analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

- Formative data analysis memos that documented initial understandings and solicited feedback from inquiry group members.

- Precoding and coding memos (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) that documented the analytical coding processes. Topics addressed include reactivity, whether codes are emic, etic, or a combination, how theory does or does not align with codes, next steps, and lingering questions.

- Thematic memos (Maxwell, 2013) that explain emerging themes throughout the research process, excerpts of data that support these themes, data that serve as disconfirming evidence, and reflections about the data and themes.

- Theoretical analysis memos that reflect on my arguments in relationship to existing theory. These memos also included emblematic data excerpts and discussed them in relationship to theory.
REFERENCES


Auerbach, S. (2002). "Why do they give the good classes to some and not to others?" Latino parent narratives of struggle in a college access program. *Teachers College Record, 104*(7), 1369-1392.


Carl, N. M. (2014). Reacting to the script: Teach For America teachers’ experiences with scripted curricula. *Teacher Education Quarterly.*


Reardon, S. F. (2011) The widening academic achievement gap between the rich and poor: New evidence and possible explanations. Retrieved from


