AN ALTERNATIVE TO HIGH SCHOOL TRACKING WITH AN OPPORTUNITY FOR
STUDENT PERSONAL GROWTH: THE INDEPENDENT ENGLISH HONORS PROJECT
AT COOPER HIGH SCHOOL

Ira S. Pernick

A DISSERTATION

in

Educational and Organizational 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:

___________________________
Alex Posecznick, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Education

Dean, Graduate School of Education:

___________________________
Pamela L. Grossman, Dean and Professor

Dissertation Committee:

Alex Posecznick, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Education

Chris Pupik-Dean, Lecturer

Diane Waff, Practice Professor of Education
AN ALTERNATIVE TO HIGH SCHOOL TRACKING WITH AN OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENT PERSONAL GROWTH: THE INDEPENDENT ENGLISH HONORS PROJECT AT COOPER HIGH SCHOOL

COPYRIGHT

2017

Ira S. Pernick

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/
Dedication

I could have never even dreamed of accomplishing this work without the love and support of my parents, Norman and Bryna Pernick. They have believed in me and my goals, no matter how outlandish, forever and have even encouraged them regardless of how farfetched they seemed. That my parents continue to sacrifice for their child provide a remarkable example for me about what it means to be a parent. Losing my mother in the months before I completed my work has been devastating. She was a tireless cheerleader for me and each day begins and ends with thoughts of her.

My children, Sam and Molly, have also inspired me throughout this process. They may not know how much they drive me to be a better person, a better student and a better father. They have unknowingly made sacrifices during my work that included my physical and mental absence from moments of their childhood. I hope they understand that I truly believe in the value of learning and the recognition that none of us are ever really done learning.
Acknowledgements

First, I want to thank the Mid-Career Program and the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. I have stated multiple times that I am grateful for the risk they took admitting me to this program and I can only hope to make the program proud with my continued work. I especially want to thank my mentor Alex Posecznick for his patience and guidance throughout this process. My dissertation has come to life as a direct result of your tutelage and thorough approach to your work.

Second, I want to thank the participants in my study and their willingness to speak so openly about a complex program within our school. Student and teacher insight has helped me gain a deeper understanding of the English Honors Project and place it within the proper context of educational issues at play in our school and beyond. Thank you as well to the school district for supporting me during this work and creating the space necessary for me to pursue my work.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge two people who have truly made this work possible. Julie Torres for being a good friend, wonderful colleague and for walking into my office one day suggesting we go to the Mid Career Open House together. Also, Dr. Garner Bass, my oldest and dearest friend, for showing me the way through this process and making me a believer in myself. Thirty years ago no one who knew us would have believed we could reach this level of prestige. I am so glad we have done this together.
ABSTRACT

AN ALTERNATIVE TO HIGH SCHOOL TRACKING WITH AN OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENT PERSONAL GROWTH: THE INDEPENDENT ENGLISH HONORS PROJECT AT COOPER HIGH SCHOOL

Ira Pernick
Alex Posecznick

Rather than offering honors courses in English, Cooper High School (CHS) provides students in grades 9 and 10 with an opportunity to pursue an Independent English Honors Project (EHP) as a means of earning Honors credit on their high school transcript. While most schools utilize a more traditional Honors class system that often identifies students as early as 3rd grade, the lack of Honors courses in English leads directly to English classes that are heterogeneously grouped. Cooper High School’s atypical approach to Honors English instruction, controversial among some CHS parents, raise important questions about the potential value of independent student work and the benefits, if any, of heterogeneous instruction. This model of Honors instruction, unlike other subject areas within CHS, is also a cause of great consternation for many within the community and district.

This qualitative study, based on interviews and focus groups with students and teachers, seeks to better understand the perceptions of the EHP and its place at CHS. The study also addresses how students and teachers experience/perceive the EHP, those who choose to undertake it (or do not), and the heterogeneously grouped English classes that come with it. This study examined both those
presently engaged in the EHP, and reflections of older students on their past experiences with it. Additionally, this study reveals student and teacher perceptions of smartness, the often challenging influence of parents and the value of being an Honors student at CHS. Although understandably complex, the core findings of this study are that students benefit academically and socially from their participation in the English Honors Project and that, despite the EHP’s limitations, it lays foundation for addressing issues associated with tracking, an important issue for the CHS community and district.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement ........................................................................................................ iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract .......................................................................................................................... v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables .................................................................................................................. ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Illustrations ...................................................................................................... x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background and Context ................................................................................................. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE ....................................................................................... 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review .......................................................................................................... 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative Pedagogy and the Development of Self-Regulation and Self-Efficacy ........ 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracking ......................................................................................................................... 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterogeneous Student Grouping .................................................................................... 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology and Research Design .................................................................................. 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups: Students .................................................................................................. 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Criteria and Selection .................................................................................. 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Protocol and Data Collection .................................................................... 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeline ........................................................................................................................... 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis .................................................................................................................. 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group: English Teachers ...................................................................................... 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Criteria and Selection .................................................................................. 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Protocol and Data Collection .................................................................... 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeline ........................................................................................................................... 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis .................................................................................................................. 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings ............................................................................................................................ 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Independent English Honors Project ........................................................................ 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History and Introduction to the Honors Project ............................................................ 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits of the Honors Project ....................................................................................... 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-Student Relationships ....................................................................................... 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completers: How others view those who complete the EHP ........................................... 71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Completers: How others view those who do not complete the EHP ....................... 78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing to Undertake the EHP ..................................................................................... 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterogeneous English Classes in Grade 9 .................................................................... 92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

vii
Heterogeneous Classes ............................................................................................................ 92
Heterogeneous Classes vs. Homogeneous Classes .............................................................. 107
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................ 117
The EHP and Its Role In English Classes ............................................................................ 121
School Culture ...................................................................................................................... 122
Implications for Practice and Change .............................................................................. 123
Heterogeneous Classes ........................................................................................................ 125
Implications for Practice and Change .............................................................................. 126
Smartness and Race ............................................................................................................ 128
Implications for Practice and Change .............................................................................. 129
Appendix 1: Informed Consent .......................................................................................... 131
Appendix 2: Focus Group Protocol .................................................................................... 135
Appendix 3: Student Focus Group Participants ............................................................... 139
Appendix 4: List of Teacher Focus Group Participants ...................................................... 140
Appendix 5: English Honors Program Contract and Calendar ......................................... 141
Appendix 6: Letter to parents ........................................................................................... 144
Appendix 7: Sample Student Honors Project I ................................................................. 145
Appendix 8: Sample Student Honors Project II ............................................................... 168
References .......................................................................................................................... 207
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.  Demographic Distribution Honors and Advanced Placement Courses 2014-2015 ......................................................... 8

Table 2.  Demographic Breakdown Cooper High School and English Honors Project 9th Grade 2015-2016 ......................................................... 56
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 1. Conceptual Framework .................................................................................. 1
INTRODUCTION

At Cooper High School, students are given the option of completing an independent project in English each semester to earn honors credit in their English class. Cooper High School does not offer Honors English courses, making successful completion of the independent project the only way for students to receive an Honors designation on their transcript and have their grade in English weighted as if they are in traditional honors courses.

The project is open to all students in grades 9-11. The majority of students, however, who opt to undertake and complete the project are in grade 9. I am researching the following questions as they relate to 9th grade student experiences:

1. In what ways does the existence of the Independent English Honors Project impact student and English teacher perceptions of student academic abilities?

2. How do students (including those completing, having previously completed and who did not attempt the English Honors Project) differentially experience heterogeneous classes in English?

Data for this study was collected during the 2015-2016 school year where student experiences with the Honors Project in grade 9 were examined. Five focus groups of students were assembled, three from grade 9 and two from grade 11. The groups consisted of students who were either currently engaged in the Honors Project or had completed the Honors Project while in 9th grade. A focus group
consisting of English teachers was also included in the study. These teachers had all worked with students that had previously completed the Honors Project. Students in the focus groups described their methods for completing the work associated with the Honors Project. Their descriptions revealed an understanding of how to best utilize their time to achieve their goals, which included sacrificing opportunities to participate in other activities, how they came to attempt the honors project, which included identifying positive influences, and the relationships they developed with their teacher mentors. The student/teacher relationship, along with being viewed as an honors student, revealed positive impacts for students working on the English Honors Project (EHP) in terms of social status and in their potential when approaching challenging school-work in the future. Students not completing the EHP, while potentially just as academically capable as their EHP classmates, reflect differing experiences leading to questions about the role the EHP plays on social justice issues at play at CHS. These findings, coupled with research about independent projects, heterogeneous classes, and student identity in school, including the impact on student self-regulation and self-efficacy can provide new insights into the value of the Honors Project at Cooper.

The presence of the Honors Project at CHS allows the school to offer only heterogeneously grouped English classes in grades 9 and 10. These classes, or perhaps the absence of typical honors classes, become topics for yearly resistance from some parents who insist that their child, an Honors Project completer, is being diserved. As this study focuses on the independent Projects of honors students

---

1 While Honors Projects are offered in grades 9-11, an Advanced Placement course in grade 11 eliminates the heterogeneity of English classes.
who are simultaneously enrolled in heterogeneous classes, this research focuses on
the honor's student experience while in a class populated by a wide range of
learners, it draws from and contributes to the research that either supports or
disputes the value of heterogeneous classes. Data from CHS was also collected
about the experiences of students who did not participate in the Honors Project as
they are in the same English classes as the students who did complete the Honors
project. The research on heterogeneously grouped classes often cites both the
positive and negative outcomes of all the students in the class. Including students
from both subgroups provided clearer insights into the overall value of these classes
at Cooper High School.

Based upon the existing literature, my research, and my 19 years of
professional experience as a public high school administrator I have been persuaded
that preserving both heterogeneous classes and the independent project are
desirable both academically and socially. However, I believe that this study will
provide valuable insight into this debate within the Cooper context,\textsuperscript{2} and findings
related to: the positive, and highly sought after, teacher/student relationship
developed through the EHP, the challenges non-EHP students face when in English
classes that have unequal distributions of honors and non-honors students and the
problematic nature of the process for creating heterogeneous classes in English
which often leads to an overlap of the EHP into English classes where it is not
intended to be will be drawn upon for making decisions about the format of honors
offerings at Cooper.

\textsuperscript{2} Honor's Student is defined as students who self-select their participation in the English Honors Project.
Finally, my research also includes data gathered around the participation rates of underrepresented student populations in the Honors Project. The project, currently open to any student interested in pursuing it, has no defined limit of student participation as honors classes often do. Coupled with all 9th grade students in heterogeneously grouped classes the project, ideally, exposes all students to more rigorous curriculum. Examining the demographic data of the 9th grade English classes and the Honors Project completers, along with interviews of students and teachers who participate in the Honors Project, has provided more insight into how students from different ethnic backgrounds gain access to rigorous curriculum.

Ultimately this study, once intended to research only the benefits of the EHP as a means of confronting parent and community groups vehemently opposed to it, uncovered a variety of positive and negative features of the EHP and the heterogeneous classes it creates. This study carves out the challenges that await CHS as it continues to grow and also shines appropriate light on the aspects of the EHP and Cooper High School that are worth preserving.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Cooper High School is a comprehensive high school located in an affluent suburb of a large North Eastern city. The school houses 1602 students in grades 9 – 12 with 135 professional staff members. The school is routinely recognized nationally as one of the finest public high schools in the country.

---

3 Cooper has been ranked as one of the top high schools in the country by ranking organizations Newsweek, The Daily Beast and Niche.com.
is largely white, represented by 65% of the overall population, there are also significant populations represented in other racial categories: 12.3% Asian, 20.2% Hispanic, and 2.6% African-American. An even closer look at the demographics of the school reveals a growing population of students receiving free or reduced lunch, currently 13%, and an expanding population of students from Latin American countries that do not speak English, currently 103 students4.

The school maintains a rich and varied academic program including many Advanced Placement and honors level courses along with elective programs designed to meet the wide range of interests of its students. The programs, with the exception of a few, are all racially disproportionate when compared to the school. Programs like Research, Advanced Placement and Honors courses are populated almost exclusively by white and Asian students, while elective courses like Automotive Technology and Family and Consumer Science are largely Hispanic and African-American. Currently the Advanced Placement courses in 11th grade and 12th grade English are 93% and 85% white and Asian combined respectively.5 The school’s inability to get all their programs to resemble the complete student demographics presents a problem especially when looking at the most advanced academic courses CHS offers. The chart below illustrates the disproportionality that exists at Cooper in many of their advanced courses.6

4 Student population data gathered from October 13, 2015
5 Data is as of October 5, 2015
6 Notable in the chart are courses AP Spanish Language and Algebra 2 Trig. AP Spanish Language is a course designed for native Spanish speaking students and the only upper level course Cooper offers. Additionally, Algebra 2 Trig is not an upper level course. It is the third year in a three-year sequence of mathematics instruction for high school students in NYS. It is, however, not a graduation requirement leading underperforming students to off-track math electives.
Another complication for the school is the imbalance in parental involvement. The more affluent parents are, by far, more involved than any other parent subset which also breaks down along racial lines. That they are involved is not in and of itself the problem. The amount of time they require from staff and administration is in sharp contrast to the rest of the parents, which makes it difficult to provide all students with the same services. The more active parents also play a
larger role in the academic progress of their children. These parents are often well educated themselves and understand the complex nature of large public high schools. They exert influence over their children and place them, if possible, on advanced tracks early in their academic careers.

One group of parents in particular has been actively advocating for the elimination of the Honors Project in favor of traditional honors classes in English. They assert that their children miss out on the honors experience and, do not receive instruction at the academic level appropriate for them. The parents, as a result, persist in lobbying the central administration to implement change.

As a Principal it is important that I examine the different programs offered at my school. Further, it is incumbent on me to remain open minded to the possibility that programs do not serve the purpose they are designed for. This study has helped me gather concrete evidence about the Honors Project and has provided me with a more honest assessment of the EHP and its impact on students and the school community. This, more textured understanding of the nuances of the EHP, has already helped determine if it remains a part of the Cooper High School Program. The Honors Project as it is currently constructed has the potential to offer opportunities for a more diverse grouping of students. The independent nature of the project means that it is not bound by traditional class size limits. Furthermore, the open enrollment of the Honors Project allows students to challenge themselves without the fear of earning a poor grade for a class. The project is complex and represents work completed at an advanced level, yet given its structure allowing
students to attempt and not complete without penalty, it is not as high stakes as an honors course.

Lastly, the Honors Project provides students with an opportunity to pursue independent work and develop their own methods for approaching it along with the opportunity to examine those methods if they prove ineffective. The pursuit of independent work will help students as they progress through high school and into college. In addition, the structure of the Honors Project challenges the school to find new methods of connecting students and teachers. Utilizing technology to connect students virtually enables CHS to step, gently, into the world of on-line instruction, further exposing students to skills that will likely benefit them throughout their academic careers well beyond CHS. These are the reasons that, as a Principal, I have thus far supported the English Honors Project. My findings in areas like CHS school culture, social capital for students and the importance of student access to teachers provides me with more evidence through which I can make sounder decisions about the Honors Project and CHS as a whole.

RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE

The English Honors Project at Cooper High School functions as an alternative to traditional Honors classes and is the only way for students to earn Honors credit in English. The project allows Cooper to maintain English classes that are heterogeneously grouped and untracked. English is the only academic subject area at Cooper that maintains heterogeneous classes. Other academic subject areas at
Cooper employ honors courses in addition to courses for students performing at average or below average academic levels. In those areas, the demographics are racially disproportionate from the school in that the vast majority of students in the honors classes are either white or Asian. “Ability grouping is perceived to perpetuate social class and racial inequalities because lower class and minority students are disproportionately represented in the lower tracks” (Slavin, 1990).

Cooper High School is, likely, not dissimilar from other high performing public high schools around the country with diverse student populations while maintaining advanced courses that lack diversity. While most understand the heterogeneous nature of some elective area courses and physical education, it is the heterogeneous programming of English, a core academic subject, at Cooper that underscores a long standing debate about the value of heterogeneous groupings at all. The heterogeneity debate is often drawn along academic benefit lines; those opposed believe mixed ability classes move at a slower place and inhibit growth for gifted and talented students, while supporters believe that underachieving students will benefit socially, emotionally and academically from working with their higher achieving peers. Equally as important to the academic issues that heterogeneous classes raise are the social justice issue it unearths. With largely disproportionate student populations in advanced classes, including the Honors Project, English classes are the only academic classes where students from a multitude of racial and ethnic backgrounds coexist. Gathering evidence about the student and teacher experience in heterogeneous English classes has helped shed light on both the
academic and social justice parts of this debate.

While The Honors Project can produce a significant impact on the classroom structure that exists at Cooper, it also can have a profound impact on the students participating in it. The independent nature of the project allows students to work in a structure that is significantly different from a traditional classroom. In a traditional classroom, students receive feedback from teachers regularly. Conversely, students working on the Honors Project need to be self-motivated and self-directed. “Students who own their learning can go beyond simply following teacher directions. They are more likely to complete complex assignments, solve problems that require persistence, and create original or novel work of high quality.” (Conley and French, 2014) Through the ownership of their own learning, students can set learning goals for themselves, learn how to achieve these goals and set more advanced goals after (Conley and French, 2014).

Helping students develop their own self confidence and providing them with a practical opportunity to experience independent success can produce students that are more motivated and better prepared to tackle the more challenging environment that college will likely present to them. While student motivation is a frequently debated topic at Cooper it should not preclude the school from encouraging all students to engage in the project. The reasons why students choose to engage in the project are not nearly as important as what they can gain from it. Often teachers express frustration that 9th grade students completing the Honors Project are only doing so for the weighted grade or because their parents are forcing
them to do so. First, gathering data around student experience has helped the school get a more accurate picture of why students choose to engage in the project. Second, while some may believe that parental involvement has a negative influence on students there is evidence to support that parent’s academic goals for their children do positively influence students with their own goal setting (Zimmerman, Bandura and Martinez-Pons, 1992).

Schools, however, need to be cognizant of which students are participating in the independent projects to ensure that all demographic groups are represented. Students who are from disenfranchised groups are less likely to seek out honors opportunities and are also likely to struggle with self-efficacy (Slavin, 1990). Keeping student groups segregated by performance level can have negative effects on students who lack privilege, and therefore choose not to seek out opportunities to advance (Demerath, Lynch, and Davidson, 2008; Hatt, 2011). It is worth noting that the Honors Project, like the Honors classes in CHS, also suffers from disproportionate student participation. In the 2014-2015 school year only 6.5% of all 9th grade students completing the Honors Project were Hispanic. All the remaining students were either white or Asian.

While the Honors Project is an independent project, parents, students and teachers have expressed an interest in finding ways to connect students working on projects around similar themes or authors. Connecting students in non-traditional learning environments presents a challenge to the school and creates a unique opportunity for the school to consider new types of technology as a solution like
Google Classroom. While the use of technology to connect high performing students from remote areas of the world has been studied (Ng and Nicholas, 2010), similar technology use to connect students from the same suburban school could provide new insights into the field. Connecting the students completing the Honors Project on-line can have positive social outcomes for students who sometimes have difficulty navigating the social media aspects of technology. In addition, the technology use can create valuable flexibility for students who are often over scheduled, allowing them to complete tasks outside of school hours (Periathiruvadi and Rinn, 2012).

Independent projects for high achieving students have been lauded for their ability to help students improve their own academic identity and self-efficacy, their relationship to their school, to become college-ready and connect students with geographic barriers to other students like themselves (Conley and French, 2014; Zimmerman, Bandura and Martinez-Pons, 1992; Bandura, 1993; Ng and Nicholas, 2010). The English Honors Project at Cooper is similar expect for the geographic barriers. In addition, the Cooper project aims to provide students with the opportunity to advance themselves academically while still allowing the school to meet its goal of heterogeneous student groupings in English. The opportunity to provide a potential means for other suburban schools to reduce or eliminate tracking, subsequently removing disproportionality from academic programs is important to the field and can improve the lives of children.
LITERATURE REVIEW

For the purpose of this project, I have chosen to examine the existing literature related to Honors Projects as alternatives to honors classes in high school in the following areas: the development of student identity through transformative pedagogy that may help students improve their self regulation and self efficacy, tracking, heterogeneous student grouping and social justice. Heterogeneously grouped classes do not merely create a different means of grouping students for class, but also exposes students from all segments of the Cooper student population to each other and eliminates, theoretically, the labeling of students as smart or otherwise which is often a by product of traditional tracking programs. These topics, that function well on their own as a group of unrelated silos, also lean on each other as a result of the EHP producing a cascading effect reaching far beyond the academic issues that may have been the only intended target when it was created. The study of the EHP becomes a study of academic equity, student social identity and the potential impact the EHP can have on students and a school community.

The diagram below illustrates the inter-related connectivity of each of the topics that my research underscores. The Honors Projects themselves create the heterogeneously grouped English classes at Cooper, which reduces tracking in English in grades 9 and 10. Heterogeneous classes expose all its students, regardless of academic ability or social class, to the same curriculum which, the research shows, is a social justice issue as students from under-represented
populations are often exposed to different curriculum from their higher performing classmates. At Cooper this means that all students are exposed to the same texts in

Illustration 1. Conceptual Framework

English classes coupled with an expectation that all students will benefit from that exposure. Offering perceived weaker students less complex texts limits their academic opportunities, reinforces stereotypical ideas about smartness and race and widens the achievement gap. Further, all students in English classes are given the opportunity to engage in the Honors Project, an exercise that promotes
transformative pedagogy and may help students develop a more positive identity as a student and improve their own self-regulation skills and self-efficacy. Illustrated in my review of the literature, transformative pedagogy as it relates to self-regulation and self-efficacy are also social justice issues. Students who are not challenged academically and provided supportive, collaborative educational environments are both not encouraged to see themselves as connected to their schools, and more likely to repeat any negative cycles they are already in academically speaking. The effects of the heterogeneous classes and the reduction in tracking are likely to promote a more positive school climate by keeping students of divergent skills and backgrounds together in classes longer.

Implicit within the context of this study, one that seeks to examine student and teacher perceptions of student academic abilities along with how students and teachers experience heterogeneous English classes, is the underlying concept of social reproduction within schools. It would be impossible to examine student and teacher perceptions of academic abilities without also addressing the traditional roles social class plays throughout society. While schools are often thought of as the great equalizer when it comes to the disruption of the status quo related to the traditional roles frequently acted out in society according to socio-economic status, many social reproduction theorists see schools as participants in maintaining social class status through complicated organizational structures and providing more educational opportunity to the children of wealthier people. Such considerations are critical when examining any honors programs or options.
Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976) argue that schools mirror social class structure that exists in the working world with students of different classes being prepared to assume the roles consistent with their social stature. They further argue that schools in working class neighborhoods have more rules for students to follow, consistent with what their jobs are most likely to be, while suburban schools frequently are designed with more educational options for students befitting the social class often associated with suburbanites. Finally, Bowles and Gintis claim that suburban schools utilize tracking systems to ensure that different social classes even within the same school are kept separate and on the track most closely related to their social class (MacLeod, 2008).

Bourdieu (1977) asserts that schools are structured to reward the cultural capital often associated with the upper class. Students from wealthy backgrounds are more likely to speak a language that schools find ways to reward through academic performance. Bourdieu would likely argue that curriculum is also designed to favor students who already have a particular cultural competence that allows them to navigate school with greater success than their classmates from working class families. Bourdieu further believes that these values are deeply embedded into school cultures and, as a result, barely detectable, but are reinforced by schools and the students within them. The students themselves tend to establish personal goals that are consistent with their social class status, thus reproducing the social class structure that has long been established (MacLeod, 2008).

Unlike Bowles, Gintis and Bourdieu, philosopher Henry Giroux (1983) who
acknowledges that there are structures in place that are designed to keep the
traditional social order intact, also believes that humans are players that are capable
of resisting those forces including in schools. Giroux believes that the theories about
maintaining the social order, while theoretically sound, are too rigid in practice and
create a notion that people are unable to work against what the social class
expectations might be. Some students from non-traditional social classes are able to
experience success despite their lack of cultural competence or rich history of
familial success. To Giroux it is these students that prove that even reproductive
theories have limits that can be tested by individuals and likely by purposeful
organizations as well. Giroux argues that examining student resistance to school as
it relates to students working against the traditional ideology of academic success,
and not simply resisting school rules, would provide fascinating material for how
students have managed, in some cases, to alter their own trajectory despite their
own social class (MacLeod, 2008).

Throughout this study it will be important to think of the school, and the
professionals within it, as well intentioned educators hoping to do what is best for
students. That the school and the structures within it also play a part in
reproducing the social order, even if unintentional, should not be surprising after a
cursory introduction to social reproduction theory. Using these theories as a lens
through which to view the other literature studied for this research: the
development of student identity through transformative pedagogy may help
students improve their self-regulation and self-efficacy, tracking, heterogeneous
student grouping and social justice, undoubtedly a pattern will develop that makes it appear as if the school is indeed a conscious actor in the replication of the social order in schools. However, like Giroux, I believe that we are also best able to challenge and resist these forces if we are able to understand them.

TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-REGULATION AND SELF-EFFICACY

“Transformative pedagogy refers to teaching that fosters collaborative learning and empowers students to think creatively and critically.” (Harrell-Levy and Kerpelman, 2010). Creating a classroom environment that engages students beyond any information provided by the teacher helps students form their own identities in school. Relationships that form between teachers and students can help students form a positive identity leading to greater confidence in school. Teachers who create a positive classroom environment that allows for student expression encourages students to feel valued and can lead to positive identity formation, more positive behaviors in school including a sense of belonging and a greater likelihood that students report enjoying school (Ibid, 2010).

Transformative learning is seen as an activity for both teachers and students and is centered on the development of personal relationships between the two. Teachers who create a genuine learning environment that includes an openness on their part and a commitment to also learn from students may help shape student perspectives about learning in general (Donnell, 2007). Included in transformative
pedagogy are aspects of relational trust between teacher and student that can help students develop a stronger sense of self in terms of achievement in school. Moving away from rigid curriculum often allows teachers to gain greater insight to their students creating a truer sharing environment that allows for both teacher and student to learn about the other (Hollingsworth, Dybdahl and Minarik, 1993). While the studies cited about transformative pedagogy and relational knowledge were conducted in, and refer generally to, urban education due to a perception that urban education is more connected to rigid curricular models, there are applications to suburban school environments as well. Schools with a history of high academic achievement often have classrooms highlighted by traditional instructional models focused on reproducing the historic academic success. While students often behave properly and are generally compliant it does not mean that they all maintain a positive view of their school or of themselves as students. Independent work that is not tied to rigid curricula can provide teacher and student an opportunity to develop a stronger relationship that is less dominated by the typical power dynamic of the classroom. Encouraging teachers to create learning opportunities that allow for social interactions between students and teachers can yield positive results for students and reduce any class or race divides that might already exist in the school. Further, traditional classroom structures often provide students with a rigid roadmap for the completion of assignments that provide too rich a reward for correct answers and limit the opportunities students have to create their own models for completing their work, finding the failures in their models and creating
new ones until they experience success.

Self-regulation has been defined as a students’ ability to take ownership over their own learning in a proactive rather than reactive way. In their 2008 meta-analysis of studies related to self-regulation strategies and their impact on primary and young secondary students, Dignath and Buttner determined that young secondary students (generally speaking students in grade 10) responded well when having to apply strategies to their schoolwork. Their research does not necessarily support the direct teaching of metacognitive strategies, but instead found a benefit to providing students feedback about their selected strategies when focusing on a project or problem (2008). While there is still a need to expand research in self-regulation and how teachers can help students foster their own, it does appear that positive levels of self-regulation can lead to increased levels of student motivation. Developing more opportunities for students to be responsible for their learning methods and problem solving techniques may help students develop their self-regulation strategies. Transformative educational environments that value student input and empowers student ideas about the curriculum can lead to improved student self-regulation as students begin to feel more in control of their own learning (Harrell-Levy and Kerpelman, 2010).

Students encouraged to self-regulate their learning can, over time, develop their self-efficacy as well. Self-efficacy, the appraisal of one’s own ability to successfully complete a task, is based on a number of factors including previous successes, comparisons with one’s peers and encouragement from parents or
teachers. Students with high levels of self-efficacy, regardless of cognitive ability, are more likely to be highly motivated when confronted with a problem to solve. In their study of 89 students from junior and senior high school levels Bouffard-Bouchard, Prent and Larivee concluded that students, even when aware of their own cognitive abilities, may perform unevenly if they lack a high level of self-efficacy (1991). Students with low levels of self-efficacy are more likely to lack motivation, use time poorly and lack confidence. Creating opportunities for students to develop their sense of efficacy will benefit learners as they progress through school.

Honors projects, in general, require a sense of purpose and motivation from students in a different way than honors courses do. While the tasks associated with each are similar, the Honors Project has far less guidance from the teacher resulting in a level of independence on the part of the student that is unique to the rest of the high school experience. The opportunity to collaboratively create a topic to study with their teacher allows for learning to take place in both the teacher and student fostering an opportunity for both to develop a meaningful relationship that is less characterized by the typical teacher-student power structure. This independence requires students to make purposeful decisions about how to manage their workload while also being critical of their own work. According to researchers Conley and French (2014), independent work can be a powerful indicator of college readiness as it pushes beyond content knowledge to evaluate student ability to “be successful in a wide range of learning environments such as large classes and online courses where they have less interaction with the instructor.” (Ibid, 2014)
Furthermore, students with a desire to succeed, identify challenges, and address their own learning issues can overcome weaknesses in English and math.

Students pursuing the Honors Project have a high degree of motivation to achieve a particular goal. The designation of the project as “honors” provides students with something to attain beyond completing the work associated with the project for a less defined benefit. Students, once setting the overall goals of earning honors credit, then set other, smaller goals that function as checkpoints for students to internally monitor their own progress. Helping students establish the smaller, distal, goals by meeting periodically with students working independently, for example, helps students develop their own beliefs that they can succeed, thus making it easier for students to set new goals and improve their own perceived self-efficacy (Conley and French, 2014).

Independent work requires students to self-regulate and take ownership of their own time and work. Zimmerman and Bandura, in their 1994 study of the impact of self-regulation on writing achievement on 95 university freshman, found that students struggle most when having to self-regulate when other, more attractive, options exist (1994). These findings indicate that students have difficulty sustaining their own effort as compared to their effort when in class. Schools and teachers need to find multiple methods of creating independent work that students find engaging and that is not merely work typically devoted to class time that has been moved outside the classroom setting. The work should be meaningful from both a curricular and social standpoint. Further, the work should lead the student to
greater understand of the self and, potentially, change the way they see themselves within the world (Donnell, 2007). Adding the extra component of additional value for the successful completion of the independent work as with the Honors Project can also provide an additional reason for students to exert energy and stay focused on their independent work. Helping students develop their self-regulation can help them develop their perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) and enhance their beliefs in their own ability to succeed.

Zimmerman, Bandura and Martinez-Pons (1992) examined self-motivation in students as a direct indicator of academic attainment. In their study Zimmerman, Bandura and Martinez-Pons also attempt to gauge the impact of parental goals on students. “Parental goals might be expected to have a similar impact on children’s goals. Although parental aspirations for children have been found to affect children’s achievement the influences of parental goal setting have received little attention to date. From a social cognitive perspective, students’ personal goal setting is influenced jointly by their self-beliefs of efficacy and the goals their parents set for them” (Zimmerman, Bandura and Martinez-Pons, 1992). Anecdotally, we at Cooper have seen the influence that parents can have on the goal setting of their children when it comes to academic pursuits. The combination of parental academic goals setting and the students’ own belief in their ability to succeed more likely lead to the successful completion of the Honors Project. The Zimmerman, Bandura and Martinez-Pons study attempts to quantitatively measure the impact of parental goals, among other external influences, on student
completion of a project in a social studies class. They found that while both parents and their children rely on past academic performance to set goals, students also use their self-efficacy beliefs to set academic goals (Zimmerman, et. al., 1992). While this study provides interesting data on the relationship between parents goals and the goals of their children it does not indicate parental level of education or socio-economic status, both of which could influence parental goal setting. Additionally, the study was conducted with 102 students from two schools in the same city with similar student populations. A similar study in a vastly different community with different academic expectations could produce varying results. Parental goal setting alone is not a powerful enough force to create academic attainment for their children. Schools like Cooper with academically involved parents often seek to mitigate the influence of parents when, based on this study, it seems that both school and parents should be working together on developing student self-efficacy beliefs instead. Helping students set appropriate and independent academic goals, like those in the Honors Projects, can help students become more self-reliant and build their own self-efficacy beliefs about themselves (Zimmerman, et. al., 1992).

For the Honors Project to be successful students must be motivated to attempt and complete it. The “honors” aspect alone can only provide one powerful impetus for students. The meetings students have with their teachers either alone or in small groups throughout the life of the project function as transformational opportunities for students because of the relationship they often develop with their teachers which can often be difficult in the larger class sizes of a typical high school.
classroom (Harrell-Levy and Kerpelman, 2010). Other ways to further motivate students through other areas of interest can attract more students to the project. A study by Ng and Nicholas (2010) examined the progressive pedagogy of online learning and high performing high school students. Their research indicates that a fairly large percentage of the students studied showed the perseverance necessary to complete independent learning tasks. While Ng and Nicholas studied 10 14-year-old students in Australia, Malaysia and the United Kingdom, their findings indicate that highly motivated students will engage and complete online projects. Their study is significant because it suggests that online projects that are related to areas of student interest have a greater likelihood of being completed and students express greater satisfaction in their own work. Teachers working with students in the Honors Project have begun to utilize virtual classroom models like Google Classroom to further engage their students outside of the confines of the school day. This model provides students an opportunity to work with other EHP students and their teacher mentor in an arena of comfort for many high school students. This study indicates, like Conley and French (2014), that students will demonstrate the independence and perseverance necessary to take ownership of their own learning. Ng and Nicholas speculate that the reasonably good rate of completion of tasks in this study could be the appeal of the topics under study – these are topical and relates directly to the students’ lives. While it is reasonable to argue that students will engage in independent work that is of personal interest to them, it is also worth noting that independent work like Honors Projects can be created around student
interest in ways that whole class assignments cannot.

Finally, school structure can also impact self-regulation and perceived self-efficacy. Annegret Staiger (2004) conducted an 18-month ethnography of an urban high school with a magnet school placed within it. The existence of the magnet school created great disproportionality between white and non-white students which the school allowed to continue. The impact on the students, however, is of the greatest interest for this study. While there were students who succeeded academically in the non-magnet classes, many did not. Non-white students frequently performed poorly in class. This phenomenon, of performing poorly in class despite a skill level that would indicate otherwise, can be attributed, at least in part, to the students own view of themselves in the school and by association the world. While self-efficacy is not named directly by Staiger the connection is obvious. Schools, like Cooper High School, that knowingly or not maintain programs that become the domain of one ethnicity impact the way the other students see themselves. Students will not value themselves and fail to develop a true sense of being able to accomplish great things. So, while schools can be purposeful in the development of self-efficacy and self-regulation in students, schools can also tear both apart.

**TRACKING**

Tracking is an organizational tool used by many school systems to segregate their students by academic ability. Schools employing this system are theoretically
able to focus on students at the both the top and bottom with regards to academic ability ensuring that all students benefit from their schooling. School systems often begin charting student academic performance in elementary school. While the system allows for focused support and enrichment for students it also creates separation between students and the curriculum they are exposed to making it difficult, if not impossible, to move tracks. Schools that create opportunities for all students to experience advanced curriculum allow students to move, even temporarily, off their track.

Tracking systems are organized through cultural concepts of what it means to be smart. Smart students, for example, are placed in the upper track while students who are not smart are placed in the lower track. The majority of students, those of average smartness, are placed in the middle track. The cultural conceptions for smartness are rigidly defined and often leave no space for students from diverse cultures creating limited opportunities for students from cultures outside the dominant school culture (Sternberg, 2007). Further, schools develop tracks based on mostly traditional models of smartness that include: standardized test scores, report card grades, advanced vocabulary and positive attention from teachers. As these models are developed and maintained throughout schooling all students within a school develop an identity of whom they are as a student. Students outside the top tracks are often minorities in terms of race or social class which helps preserve the social structures already in place (Hatt, 2007). The result of tracking often leads to high schools becoming divided by race or social class effectively
forming multiple schools within one single school creating school experiences that are starkly opposed to each other. The segregation of students coupled with the inability of students to move tracks keeps students locked in place for the duration of their schooling experience reinforcing social class and racial boundaries that have existed for decades.

In a qualitative study by Merrilee Finley (1984) she provides a glimpse of how schools contribute to the reproduction of the social order by engaging in a tracking system. Despite the dated nature of her study Finley’s work provides an excellent parallel to life at CHS. Finley examines the development of the tracking system in English at a good suburban high school and its impact on the students and the teachers who find ways to avoid teaching the bottom tracks (Finley, 1984). The study provides interesting insight into how a school can be seen as “good” when looking solely through the lens of the honors and advanced tracks and the teachers associated with those classes. The experience with the bottom tracks is vastly different as the students and teachers who teach those courses are not provided the same positive experience and both, students and teachers, are seen vastly differently by the school community, as well as, from within their own department (Finley, 1984). The example Finley provides is not all that dissimilar from Cooper High School where, despite and except for the English Honors Project, stratification of students and staff exists. The school is celebrated for the achievements of the highest performing students while many of the remaining students exist in relative anonymity. Further, tracks as described by Finley are often not permeable by
students on the lower track even if they experience tremendous success. Coupling tracks with the disproportionality that already exists at Cooper often creates the effect of having more than one high school operating in the same building.

Gamoran (1992) chose to study how students from five Midwestern communities were assigned to English honors classes as the students moved from middle school to high school. He noted that while each of the districts had somewhat different practices that all relied in some way on standardized test scores and teacher recommendation, some communities allowed parents a voice in the process by giving the parents the ability to waive their child in to the honors level course even if the other requirements were not met; a similar process to the one in place at CHS. Gamoran chose to study English honors courses because of the social capital associated with the curriculum in those courses which tended to spend more time studying the classics and grammar thereby providing those students with access to curriculum that allows for social mobility in ways other tracks do not. Further, Gamoran expressed concern about parent ability to waive children into honors courses because of the apparent socio-economic differences between parents choosing this option and parents who did not. Cooper High School also allows parents to waive their students into the most challenging courses leading to speculation by teachers and administrators about the involvement of parents in students selecting to pursue the honors option. The parental influence at Cooper makes it difficult to determine whether a student pursues the project because of

---

7 Parents waiving students into Advanced Placement or Honors courses at Cooper complete a form that enables the school to chart progress. The Honors Project includes a parent and student contract, but does indicate the influence of parent impact, if any.
their own self-interest or to satisfy the wishes of their parent. Not knowing the reasons why students fail to complete the project makes it difficult for us to make necessary adjustments to meet the ever-changing needs of the student body. Parents that are too influential over the academic pathways of their children can have a negative effect on their child, as illustrated by Gamoran and also, unintentionally, on our program. The honors option, unlike honors classes, can accommodate a much larger number of students in the hopes of mitigating the socio-economic factors that are often seen in honors courses.

A 1998 study by Oakes and Wells chronicles 10 high schools that de-tracked their schools in an attempt to provide rigorous learning opportunities for all students. All the schools chose somewhat different routes to attempt to achieve their goals, but most started by eliminating the lowest track courses. Some created honors options for students seeking enrichment opportunities while others still incorporated extra supports for students having academic difficulties. The authors, however, provide a cautionary note to schools seeking a similar path for its students:

“Most of the educators we studied changed their practices in the belief that colleagues, families, and students would happily support reform that enhanced the achievement of students previously in the low track, without harming – and perhaps even enriching – the experiences of students who would otherwise be in high tracks. Yet they quickly learned that their challenges were compounded by formidable cultural and political obstacles. They ran headlong into deeply held beliefs and ideologies about intelligence, racial differences, social stratification, and privilege. Conventional conceptions of intelligence, ability, and giftedness combined with the local community culture and politics around race and social class to fuel enormous resistance” (Oakes and Wells, 1998).
The challenges described by Oakes and Wells only serve as a reminder that tracking, like other aspects of society, exists as more than an educational debate. Students often adopt the perceived traits of the tracks they are in regardless of the quality of the work they are exposed to or are producing. Students, and staff, often associate track placement with smartness which can have detrimental effects on students of all age ranges. “The practice of smartness is also tied to notions of academic identity that I define as the ways we come to understand ourselves within and in relation to the institution of schooling and how this identity shapes our own self-perceptions of efficacy, ability, and success in relation to academic potential, performance and achievement” (Hatt, 2007).

In her one year ethnography of a kindergarten class in the southeastern United States Hatt found that “…smartness signified not only a cultural practice of social control but a process of ascribing social power along lines of class and race.” (Hatt, 2007) While her study took place in kindergarten the constructs created around smartness continue as students move through school levels. Students relegated to the lower tracks do not see themselves as smart and, therefore, are not seen as smart by their teachers perpetuating a cycle that is both familiar and difficult to break.

Tracking, while sensible as a system of organizing students, impacts students on levels far greater than the academic levels they are designed to address. That tracking systems are frequently in place as early as Kindergarten makes it very difficult for students to move themselves or advocate for themselves as they get
older. The self-selecting nature of the Honors Project allows students to choose to participate without asking an entire system to change, which as Oakes and Wells discovered can be a far more challenging task. Tracking in schools, therefore, always has important implications for thinking about how social reproduction operates. However, even when these tasks are achieved and classes are made more heterogeneous, new sets of challenges may also be faced.

HETEROGEOUS STUDENT GROUPING

Heterogeneous classes are those that include students from a wide range of academic abilities and with different degrees of preparation, in ways advanced, homogeneous classes do not. It is worth noting again that homogeneous classes are not merely organized by academic ability, but also by race and socio-economic lines as well. Heterogeneous classes are typically found in elective areas such as physical education and art and less typically in core academic areas such as math or science. Cooper High School is no different with the exception of English in grades 9 and 10. Heterogeneously grouped classes pose interesting challenges for teachers as they prepare their curriculum in a manner digestible for a wide range of diverse students. It is the potential benefit for students, however, that garners the most attention.

As previously stated, providing all students with the opportunity to complete Honors Projects allows for the maintaining of heterogeneously grouped classes in English in grades 9 and 10. The traditional argument against heterogeneous classes is that high performing students are unfairly penalized by having to be in classes
with lower achieving weaker students thus inhibiting the growth of the high
achiever.

Researchers Kulik and Kulik (1982) examined the academic impact of ability
groupings at the secondary school level and found some evidence that high
performing students score higher on standardized exams when grouped with
similar students. The same study noted that average and lower achieving groups
showed zero effect when grouped differently. The authors also looked at any
differences in student enjoyment of class when grouped by ability. Their data
indicated that students enjoy class more when they are homogeneously grouped.
Other studies found that student success in class is not solely connected to ability
grouping.

Ruth Ekstrom (1961) conducted a review of different homogeneous
groupings at various schools and determined that definitive results for either
argument were inconclusive. In many of the studies she reviewed teachers were
told to teach the same curriculum to all of their classes and to not adapt their
teaching styles. Ekstrom observed that in all cases for there to be success teachers
had to adapt their curriculum and their pedagogy (Ekstrom, 1961). Merely adopting
a student grouping philosophy is not enough to ensure student success on any level.
It seems that too often educators attempt to integrate a practice without first
providing for teacher training so both students and their teachers experience
success. Still, there remains debate about the effectiveness of homogeneous and
heterogeneous classes as if simply creating the student groupings is enough to
impact student learning (Slavin, 1990).

While Ekstrom’s research may be dated her findings still hold relevance. Ben-Ari and Kedem-Friedrich (2000) assert that teachers need to fundamentally change the way they teach for students to experience success in the heterogeneous classroom model. They claim that teachers should structure classroom time to increase the amount of student-to-student contact, reducing the amount of time students are reliant on the teacher. The benefit in this model is the diversity of ideas that students with varied academic skills bring to a discussion. Further, they posit that the frequently held belief that students benefit academically in homogeneous classes is not accurate. They assert that high performing students in homogeneous classes remain high performing and that the only sub-group to suffer is low performing students (Ben-Ari & Kedem-Friedrich, 2000).

Villatte, Hugon and de Leonardis (2011) also explore the way gifted high school students in heterogeneous classes evaluate their own self-concept. The study expands the idea of heterogeneous classes as a means to achieve something more than academic achievement alone. Gifted students may, for example, have a high self-concept when it comes to academic attainment, but struggle with their ability to communicate with classmates. The value of heterogeneous classes is therefore underscored not only in academic attainment, but across other important values for individual students. The self-concept of gifted students remains high when they consider their own giftedness even if they do not achieve at the academic level expected of them. But, it is the social-emotional self-concept of this sub-group of
students that heterogeneous classes can help address (Villatte, Hugon, de Leonardis, 2011).

Another study conducted by Slavin (1990) analyzed the achievement effects of ability grouping in secondary schools in 29 different school settings. Each school used variations of the more traditional ability grouping formats (i.e. tracking). After completing the analysis of all 29 schools the researcher found no significant evidence to support the commonly held notion that high performing students will attain greater success in homogeneously grouped class (Slavin, 1990). Slavin notes that the debate around student grouping has waged on for decades, but that some of the anecdotal complaints about the inequity of homogeneous grouping for the lower performing groups are hard to substantiate.

While the debate about the academic benefits of heterogeneous classes may provide uncertain results, it is the social impact of heterogeneous classes that needs to be considered. Students in homogeneous classes at the bottom end of academic ability like remedial courses experience school differently, lack agency, and have low levels of self-efficacy. In a four-year ethnography of a Midwestern city high school Peter Demerath (2008) and his team examined the different identities students developed while attending the school and the role the school played in their development. In their findings, the authors reveal school policies and practices that reward high academic achievement differently than they do low achievers. For example, the authors found practices of grade inflation, particularly in Advanced Placement classes, along with a host of traditions dedicated
to honor the success of their best students. One practice was to categorize all students with a GPA over 4.0 as valedictorian even when that number exceeded 40 students (Demerath et. al., 2008). The reasons schools establish these sorts of practices are complex and, undoubtedly, reflect the values of the community they reside in, it remains important to examine the impact on students outside of the high achieving student sub-group. While high achieving students credit themselves for their success, low achievers often describe the school culture as problematic and a contributor to their lack of success.

Much of the Demareth (2008) study is related to the way middle class students and their parents have learned to negotiate school as a means of attaining the highest GPA to get into the best colleges. But there is a sub-text related to what the rest of students are able to negotiate. While middle and upper class students use high school for their own personal, and private good (Labaree, 1997), other students have not been able to do the same. This difference only magnifies the gap that exists between students from different socio-economic groups. Schools, like the one Demareth studied, create policies that meet the demands of one group of students, but not companion policies for the other students. Furthermore, by segregating the different populations through ability grouping practices schools neglect to expose under-represented students to the strategies employed by their more advantaged classmates.

Over the years the arguments in favor of heterogeneous class groupings have stretched beyond academic opportunities to include social class, race and ethnicity.
Creating academic opportunities in multiple formats for all students remains a significant challenge for traditional schools. The more school leaders come to understand the potential impacts of school structure on students, at multiple levels, the more likely studies like this one can help inform programmatic changes.

**METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

In this section I describe the methodological approach used for gathering the information necessary to answer my research questions:

1. In what ways does the existence of the Independent English Honors Project impact student and English teacher perceptions of student academic abilities?

2. How do students, completing, having previously completed or who did not attempt the English Honors Project, differentially experience heterogeneous classes in English?

In pursuit of these questions, I have chosen to examine the experiences students at Cooper High School have had while working on and after completing the English Honors Project in grade 9. While their experiences with the project, especially how they constructed their own use of time to complete the assignments, are important, this research also studies how they experienced the heterogeneously grouped English class they were in as a result of the project option. Further, the

---

8 Students at Cooper are heterogeneously grouped for English in grades 9 and 10 because of the existence of the English Honors Project. Students maintain the option to pursue successful completion of the project to earn honors credit for their English class.
study explores why students choose not to participate in the project in Grade 9. This group of students may provide alternative notions about the Honors Project, its perceived value and a more balanced view of the Honors Project as a viable alternative to honors instruction. Finally, I am interested in how teachers experience both student approach to the Honors Project in grade 9, and how English classes in grades 9 and 10 are impacted as a result of the heterogeneous grouping of students.

For years teachers, administrators and parents at Cooper have disagreed about the value of the project in lieu of more traditional honors classes. The ongoing dispute is almost always framed as an academic issue and rarely includes additional benefits to students like self-regulation and self-efficacy improvements. Reducing the arguments to one of academics is certainly more digestible as self-regulation and self-efficacy are more difficult concepts to find evidence of. Additionally, by arguing only about academics removes philosophical disagreements about tracking from the discussion which makes all conversation about the Honors Project more palatable. No one, however, has spoken directly to students about their experiences with the project while engaged in the work or in reflecting back on the project to assess its actual value to the students’ academic experience. In addition, students choosing not to participate have, similarly, never been asked about their own choices and the impact, if any, their decision has had on their academic experience. My goal, through the data collected in this study, is to support the decision-making process at Cooper to help determine if the Honors
Project can be a suitable alternative to traditional honors classes.

To gather data for my study I convened 6 different focus groups that included 2 focus groups of current 9th grade students, 3 focus groups of current 11th grade students, and a focus group of English teachers who all have experience with both the Honors Project and teaching heterogeneously grouped English classes. Of the grade level focus groups in grades 9 and 11, 4 included students who were either currently engaged in the project or completed the project while in grade 9. The other focus group was comprised of students who did not participate in the Honors Project. While my plan also called for focus groups of students currently in grade 9 who chose not to complete the project, I was unable to convene that focus group.

Fully aware of my role as principal of Cooper High School, I chose to use focus groups rather than interviews. My plan for using focus groups was to encourage conversation among the students and teachers around their shared experiences of engaging or not engaging in the Honors Project and English class. The conversations reduced student stress and gave each member time to consider responses while other focus group members spoke. Meeting individually with the students could have easily made students feel uncomfortable or intimidated as often students meet with the principal for less than optimum reasons. Understanding that students may try to answer my questions as positively as possible I chose my students carefully in the hopes of gaining truthful answers that advanced my work. Students were selected purposefully in collaboration with an assistant principal and the chairperson of the English department. Efforts were made to avoid selecting
participants who have parents who have been vocally in support or against the Honors Project to reduce any threat of politicizing the study. This method of selection allowed me to gather information about a very particular set of experiences that other types of selection would not provide (Maxwell, 2013). In addition, I attempted to populate the student focus groups with students from a wide variety of teachers. While I did not ask students any questions directly about their teachers I was aware that the experience in each class was likely somewhat different and might account, in part, for a students’ decisions to participate in the project or not. While no questions about teachers were asked, I also expected students to share anecdotes that, while potentially informative to school practice, are not part of the data being collected for my research questions.

While it was acknowledged that students in grades 10 and 12 could have also completed Honors Projects in grade 9 they were not ideal students for this study. This particular focus group required students to reflect back on their experience and express the value, if any, the project had on them as students. It was anticipated that students in grade 10 would not have had sufficient time to engage in the reflective process as they would have been less than one year removed from the project at the time the focus group was convened. Additionally, students in grade 12 were not considered for this study largely because of the time of year it was conducted. The spring of grade 12 is generally a time when graduating seniors are busy preparing for many exciting rites of passage and may have been disinterested in participating.
All fifteen members of the English department were invited to participate in the focus group with the teachers. Over the years each department member has worked with students on the Honors Project and taught grade 9 English. Teachers were assured of de-identification throughout the process and were offered the opportunity to elaborate on any responses provided during the focus group. Additionally, teachers were reminded that they could leave the study at any time and that they were not required to answer any or all questions. Like the students, teachers were provided with an informed consent form before participation.

In an attempt to find a location for focus groups that helped students relax I avoided using spaces such as my office and conference room (Maxwell, 2013). I planned on using the Writing Center located near the library at Cooper High School. The center is a supportive environment that students use for assistance with writing projects including the Honors Project. When open it is staffed largely by other students with teachers available for support if requested. Given the unusual nature of my role, Principal as researcher, it was important for me to find a location that more closely resembled other rooms students are comfortable in. Few of the students selected are likely to have ever been in my office much less the conference room, which could easily create a negative distraction and alter responses. Lastly, the Writing Center is a room that is easily closed for the focus groups without having to displace other students or teachers.

The focus groups themselves were conducted during the regular school day as many students in the school maintain very busy extra-curricular lives. Every
effort was made to schedule focus groups during common free periods. This particular scheduling effort made it necessary to identify more than five candidates for each focus group.

I conducted the grade 9 focus groups first. The data collected during this session helped inform questions for the grade 11 groups. It was possible that the grade 11 students could have had trouble remembering different aspects of the choices they made regarding their decision to pursue the Honors Project or not, especially if they are taking a more global view upon reflection. Sharing some of the comments of students who were currently engaging in or had recently chosen not to engage in the project may have helped them recall, in more specificity, their own experiences.

**FOCUS GROUPS: STUDENTS**

Student focus groups were convened in the following order: current 9th grade students engaged in the Honors Project, current 11th grade students who completed an Honors Project in grade 9 and current 11th grade students who did not complete an Honors Project in grade 9. Students engaged in the project currently or in the past made for ideal subjects as their responses relate directly to questions about their chosen methods for completing the work. Students engaged with the project have also experienced varying degrees of parental pressure to complete the project by parents or siblings potentially revealing a lack of self-efficacy as it relates to independent work, yet they were able to articulate their approach to the project. Additionally, these students were also, like all students, in heterogeneous English
classes. Their insight as students in class who also work with their teachers outside of class can provide an interesting look inside the heterogeneous classroom experience. Such points of view include describing how the class is divided into groups, if at all, and if they feel challenged by the pace of the class.

Students who did not complete the Honors Project in grade 9 offered a different viewpoint about their choices as it related to project participation, their own experiences with parents or siblings and, perhaps most importantly, how the project existed in their English class in spite of the intentional design to keep the project and class separate.

**Participant Criteria and Selection**

Each student population, students engaged in the project and those who did not, were organized into focus groups of 5 students each. Initially all the students currently working on the project were invited to be part of the focus group. After gathering signed informed consents from students and parents I worked with the English Department Chairperson to select students to ensure that the students selected worked with a wide variety of English teachers. This same process was followed for students currently in grade 11 who had completed the project, while 11th grade students who did not complete a project were provided information about the focus group in their English class ensuring that all students had the opportunity to participate. Given my interest in the experiences of students both with the Honors Project and in their English classes gathering students from different teachers enriched my data collection and the conversation around the
table during the focus group. The use of well-selected focus groups encouraged conversation among the group as opposed to the potential for brief responses from interviews (Maxwell, 2013). With the right prompts teenagers talk and, hopefully, forget that the Principal is leading the group. Information about all student participants can be found in Appendix 3.

**Focus Group Protocol and Data Collection**

The protocol for this, and all, focus groups were divided into two distinct sets of questions: one set about the Honors Project and the other about English classroom experience as it relates to heterogeneous grouping (see Appendix 2). Understanding the limitations on student time, focus groups were not longer than 60 minutes and were recorded for transcription purposes.

Convening focus groups of students as the principal of the school can be problematic. Understanding my own role and the authority it comes with allowed me to take several precautions to avoid any risks of students reacting to me instead of the questions. First, I sought a location for the focus groups that was more likely to make students comfortable like a classroom instead of my office. Second, I reviewed my focus group questions with an assistant principal to ensure the questions were not leading students in a particular direction. Third, I reminded students that I would conceal their identity and that transcripts will not be shared with anyone. While I did not ask students directly about their teachers I anticipated that, during the course of conversation, student feelings and opinions would emerge. Reminding students that I would protect their identity encouraged
students to speak freely. Lastly, I reminded all student participants that they were not required to answer any of the questions and that they could remove themselves from the study at any time without concern of repercussions. Ideally these steps lead to relaxed discussion that existed among the students around the table.

Based on the design of my study I have been able to identify several threats to its validity as it relates to data collection. One potential threat is the number of students participating in each focus group. Two validity threats exist here. First, with five students in each of the two focus groups it could be argued that there has not been enough data collected to reach any conclusion. (Maxwell, 2013) Second, with so few students participating selection of students becomes significantly more important. Convening multiple focus groups, thereby including more students should increase the amount of data collected and minimize the influence of any one student.

Given the time constraints and scope of this study I was only able to convene five student focus groups. It is likely that any number of student participants, short of all the students, could be met with the same question in terms of the amount of data collected. As a result of my awareness of this particular validity threat I did not select students by myself. I included the grade level Assistant Principal and the English Department Chairperson in the selection process. Our collective knowledge of the students allowed us to eliminate any potential conflicts that existed between focus group participants that might limit student responses. Furthermore, the value of the focus groups was realized through their design to promote honest...
conversation, which outweighed these constraints and limitations.

**Timeline**

Once I received approval from both my dissertation committee and the IRB I commenced gathering students for my focus groups. I planned to conduct each focus group on a different day for no longer than 60 minutes. Focus groups were selected and scheduled by early April 2016. Focus groups were conducted and completed by the end of May 2016.

**Data Analysis**

Once the data was collected and transcribed I began the process of coding. During the coding process I thoroughly read each transcript several times looking for student comments that included, but were not limited to:

- Their experience with the Honors Project.
- How they chose to participate in the Honors Project.
- Their methods of approach to the work within the Honors Project.
- Their English class experiences.
- How their Honors Project work is connected to their English class if at all.

I wrote research memos as themes became apparent, as well as, when collected data provided an unanticipated outcome.

Throughout this process I became more aware of my own biases about the Honors Project and what I hoped the outcome of the study to be. I have been a defender of the project over the years making it easy for anyone to believe that I
would determine the outcome before conducting the research. I have taken steps to mitigate my own positionality in this process. First, I changed my point of view from leader to researcher. Second, I went to the English teachers to obtain their own views while making sure to limit exposure of my own. Third, I have shared with all constituencies that I am conducting this research and that I am committed to sharing the results regardless of what it may reveal. My goal was to conduct this research and then work with other constituencies to determine what it means for the school.

It is worth noting that prior to all focus groups I had also met with the Superintendent of Schools and the appropriate members of the teacher’s bargaining unit to allay any concerns related to my role and teacher or student participation. While there is currently no formal IRB process for staff research in the school district these meetings functioned as such.

**FOCUS GROUP: ENGLISH TEACHERS**

All fifteen members of the English department were invited to participate in the focus group with the teachers. Over the years each department member has worked with students on the Honors Project and taught grade 9 English. Their own perceptions of the Honors Project, why they continue to devote their time to the project and the impact the project has on their English classes offered a unique view of the project and its value to students.

In addition, teachers were able to offer some comparative reflections of student work between students who have completed the project and those who
haven't (Samples of completed Honors Projects can be found in Appendix 7 and 8). Those insights coupled with their insight into how they structure their classes shed further light onto issues related to both student self-regulation and the perceived value of heterogeneous classes in English.

Teachers were assured of de-identification throughout the process and were offered the opportunity to elaborate on any responses provided during the focus group. Like the students, teachers were provided with an informed consent form before participation.

**Participant Criteria and Selection**

All the teachers in the English department were invited to participate in this focus group. Each teacher has, at some point in their career, participated in the English Honors Project in Grade 9 and taught heterogeneously grouped English classes. They had the opportunity to self-select themselves in or out of the focus group. This group had to meet after school to allow for extra time as it was probable the focus group would last longer than 60 minutes. Some teachers had personal conflicts that could not be re-scheduled that did not permit them to participate. Teachers were reminded that participation was not mandatory and that they could discontinue their participation at any time. Information about teacher participants can be found in Appendix 4.

**Focus Group Protocol and Data Collection**

This, and all, focus groups were divided into two distinct sets of questions:
one about the Honors Project and the other about English classroom experience as it relates to heterogeneous grouping (see Appendix page 54). Understanding the limitations on teacher’s time, focus groups were not be longer than 90 minutes and were recorded for transcription purposes.

Convening focus groups of faculty members as the principal of the school can be problematic. Understanding my own role and the authority it comes with allowed me to take several precautions to avoid any risks of faculty reacting to me instead of the questions. First, I sought a location for the focus groups that was more likely to make faculty members comfortable like a classroom instead of my office. Second, I reviewed my focus group questions with an assistant principal to ensure the questions were not leading participants in a particular direction. Third, I reminded members their identities would be concealed and that the transcripts would not be shared with anyone. Fourth, I reminded all participants that they were not required to answer any of the questions and that they could remove themselves from the study at any time without concern of repercussions. Ideally these steps lead to relaxed discussions that existed among the faculty members around the table.

By inviting all department members to participate in the focus group I eliminated any threats to the validity of this portion of the study. Faculty members self-selected themselves into the focus group.

Timeline

Once I have received approval from both my dissertation committee and the
IRB I commenced gathering the teachers for this focus groups. I conducted this focus group after the school day and for no longer than 90 minutes. This focus group was selected and scheduled by early April 2016. The focus groups was conducted and completed by the end of May 2016.

**Data Analysis**

Once the data was collected and transcribed I began the process of coding. During the coding process I thoroughly read each transcript several times looking for faculty comments that included, but were not limited to:

- Their experiences with the Honors Project.
- How they perceive student participation decisions.
- Student work design.
- Comparisons between student work of completers and non-completers.
- Their English class experiences.
- How their Honors Project work is connected to their English class if at all.

I wrote research memos as themes become apparent, as well as, when collected data provided an unanticipated outcome.

Throughout this process I have become more aware of my own biases about the Honors Project and what I hope the outcome of the study to be. I have been a defender of the project over the years making it easy for anyone to believe that I would determine the outcome before conducting the research. I have taken steps to mitigate my own positionality in this process. First, I changed my point of view from...
leader to researcher. Second, I went to the English teachers to obtain their own views while making sure to limit exposure of my own. Third, I have shared with all constituencies that I am conducting this research and that I am committed to sharing the results regardless of what it may reveal. My goal is to complete this research and then work with other constituencies to determine what it means for the school.

It is worth noting that prior to all focus groups I met with the Superintendent of Schools and the appropriate members of the teacher’s bargaining unit to allay any concerns related to my role and teacher or student participation. While there is currently no formal IRB process for staff research in the school district these meetings will function as such.

FINDINGS

THE INDEPENDENT ENGLISH HONORS PROJECT

History and Introduction to the Honors Project

The Independent English Honors Project was created as an effort to maintain the heterogeneous classes that already existed in English and, for a time, in other departments throughout Cooper High School. It is unclear when the project was created and none of the teacher participants could identify the original authors, still the project is seen positively by teachers and students alike as an important part of life at Cooper High School for high performing students. In this section I will provide a brief overview of the project and what little of the history exists about its
For some the Honors Project is indicative of the values of Cooper High School including the focus on student choice. Many within Cooper and throughout the community praise the many curricular options students have to choose from. In English, for example, there are a wide range of courses that students can choose from.

"As a school, we value choice and freedom and we give students a lot of choices in what they take, and what they learn, and I think this project reflects that choice that we give them, and we value their decisions, and we encourage it, and I think it really reflects exactly what we promote."

Ms. Parker

While students do have many choices in terms of the courses they take including the choice to pursue the Honors Project in English, there is a consistent tension within the school about the value of choice. As encountered by Oakes and Wells, providing open access to higher level curriculum for students can be fraught with challenges from virtually all school constituencies (1998). Some faculty, for example, express concern about students who, they believe, are not qualified to take higher level courses including the Honors Project. Penetrating firmly established tracks is difficult work that can create uneasiness throughout a school and, for a time, damage school culture.

Others question who exactly is making the choices for students. Gamoran encountered questions about the role parents played in waiving their children in to upper level courses creating consternation from many within the school (1992). While there also remains the persistent question about whether students who want
to see themselves as high performing students have any choice at all especially when they enter high school and are introduced to the English Honors Project. Students who want to be perceived by their classmates and by their teachers as strong students almost always engage in the honors project with some preparing for it long before they enter Cooper High School because of older siblings who have also completed the project. Students frequently determine what it means to be perceived as smart early on in their lives as part of the social constructs built around them that include how school systems operate. Students feel the value associated with that perception and make choices to remain a part of a select group (Hatt, 2012).

Others do not see the project in philosophical terms, instead valuing the opportunity students have to explore their own learning outside of the rigid confines of classrooms.

"It's just a different experience than the classroom, and it also allows them to experience this literature outside of the classroom instead of two chapters at a time, uh, in a larger group. They get to read at home and at least sit with their thoughts and their reactions in a different way than they get to in the classroom." Ms. Jones

Students are formally introduced to the Honors Project early in the school year in grade 9 in their English class as an opportunity to earn Honors credit on their transcript, a designation many students covet. With the exception of a few very selective Honors classes in Math and Science, there are no other avenues for students to earn honors credit in grade 9 leading many to the Honors Project in English.
Some students revealed that they first heard of the project from their 8th grade English teachers having completed research projects during class in middle school. Those teachers prepared their students for the transition to Cooper High School.

“...my 8th grade teacher, we had done, like, a big research project in that class and then she was like, 'Oh, in high school, there’s, like, two honors projects you could do, the one for social studies and the one for English, and since you guys all did this, you guys should look into doing those.' And I think that that was one of the main driving forces." 9th Grade EHP Completer

Some other students indicate they knew of the project from older siblings.

The project is one of only a few ways for Cooper High School students to separate themselves from their classmates as serious, academically motivated, high school students. As a result the project attracts a large number of students in the 9th grade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Breakdown</th>
<th>Cooper High School and English Honors Project 9th Grade 2015-2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooper - 1601</td>
<td>1036 (65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHP - 100</td>
<td>80 (80%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Demographic Breakdown Cooper High School and English Honors Project 9th Grade 2015-2016

Interested Honors Project students are given a packet explaining the project including timelines for project component due dates (see appendix 5) to bring home to their parents. Both student and parent must agree to the project in order for students to commence their work. Students select project themes and readings from a pre-determined set of topics that varies slightly depending on their teacher.
Students then meet with their teacher periodically to discuss the readings and their own progress throughout the year individually or in small groups depending on the number of students engaging in the project for each teacher. English teachers are offered flexibility about how and when they work with their students in an effort to help them use their time most efficiently. While developing a relationship with teachers outside of class is frequently cited by teachers and students as a highlight of the project some students acknowledge the connection is not always ideal. Still, those students almost always persevere and complete their work.

After each assignment students are provided feedback from their teacher and make the appropriate revisions. Students who meet each of the established benchmarks successfully submit a final version of the project that is ungraded to earn their credit. The adjustment to their transcript is reflected in the name of the course which is changed to read “Honors”, and in the weight assigned to their course grade. The course grade itself is based on the work students completed during their regular English class.

English teachers receive no remuneration for the extra work that keeps the Honors Project in existence. As the number of students, especially in grade 9, attempting the project has increased over the years efforts have been made to allow teachers to streamline the Honors Project and find new methods to conference with students using, in some cases, technology like Google Classroom to manage an ever increasing number of students.

The Honors Project attracts students in grade 9 who plan to pursue the most
competitive academic track Cooper High School has to offer. Student motivations and influences are hotly debated by teachers and students often with sharp judgments attached. In this section I plan to address the role the EHP plays in the perceptions of student academic abilities.

**Benefits of the Honors Project**

The Independent English Honors Project is completed by almost 25% of the freshman class each year. Students, those who participated in the project and those who did not, as well as teachers have wide ranging views on the benefits of the project. The benefits identified by all groups range from the mundane (increased grade point average) to social advancement to the academic. While opinions vary each participant group can clearly identify why the project is valuable. Embedded within this section are a variety of different responses that connect to: the student as a consumer of GPA points (Labaree, 1997), student as beneficiary of a unique relationship formed with their teacher mentor (Harrell-Levy & Kerpelman, 2010), student views of themselves as smart as part of the Cooper structure (Staiger, 2004), and teacher views on pedagogical methods for heterogeneous classes (Ben-Ari & Kedem-Friedrich, 2000).

**Students**

The commonly held belief is that students, especially in 9th grade, choose to participate in the English Honors Project because of the weight attached to the student’s GPA upon successful completion (English course grades receive an
additional weight and get recorded as Honors on transcripts for students who complete the project). While students acknowledge that they are aware of the GPA boost, and that for some that is a motivator, they are also able to articulate other benefits of the project that they hadn't previously anticipated.

“I mean, it really helps you to learn how to budget your time, because first semester I kind of didn’t budget my time and I ended up doing both Honors Projects in a weekend. I would, I wrote 27 pages in a weekend. Don’t recommend doing that.” 9th grade EHP Completer

Of course students also vary when it comes to identifying the benefits of the project. Some see it as an opportunity to learn how to budget their time, although many sight that as a personal failure, while others appreciate the exposure and opportunity to read and write more.

“I think just, like, you’re reading more, you’re practicing writing essays more. I think that’s just a benefit overall because second half of the year we didn’t write as much as we, I normally did in an English class, and then doing the Honors Project, like, it kept me going, kept me reading, kept me writing.” 9th grade EHP Completer

Students in 11th grade reflecting back on their 9th grade honors project experience seem more comfortable with acknowledging the GPA increase as a motivator, while also aware that other benefits exist for them that current 9th grade students can’t possibly know just yet.

“I think for me it was definitely more of, like, myself, like, seeing the plan in the future, like, ‘This is what I want to do to, like, get the GPA benefits and also just complete the project.’ And then my parents, I just kind of told them after I’d already made the decision.” 11th grade EHP Completer

Students citing their GPA along with Honors credit on their transcripts as a motivation to complete the Honors Project also begin to highlight the importance of
being seen as a high performing student at Cooper High School. The structure of Cooper High School allows for very few opportunities for students who view themselves as high academic achievers. Grade 9 students have only two Honors programs, in math and in science, that serve students who were advanced in grades 7 and 8 leaving other children the English Honors Project as a means of improving their GPA and earning the social capital they desire from classmates and teachers.

“The only thing for me that was pushing me to do, like, whatever I could to continue was that it was going to improve my grade, it was going to give me the honors credit.” 11th grade EHP Completer

Still, other students found benefits to the project that helped them in within their English class that could be perceived as unfair advantages.

“I knew how to read Shakespeare, because Shakespeare when you’re reading the beginning, like, it’s a little bit rough, but then you get used to the, get used to the language, but when we started reading Romeo and Juliet, I already was used to it, so I didn’t have to get used to it again. So that benefits us during class…” 9th grade EHP Completer

It is these, likely, unintended benefits preparing students for difficult upcoming work in English class while their non-English Honors Project participants, presumably the lower achieving students, do not get that preview. Further, small nods throughout class between teacher and student may be structurally sensible for the teacher, but can have potentially harmful effects on EHP completers and non-completers alike.

“She [the teacher] would favor them more. She would ... If we were going over a passage, she’d take their [students completing an HP] opinion more into perspective than another student’s.” 9th Grade EHP Completer

The student quoted above is reflecting back on her 10th grade English class
experience from a unique vantage point. Having completed an EHP in grade 9, she chose to not participate in grade 10. Still, because of her experience and her knowledge of other students completing the project she was familiar with what could be interpreted as the coded language of English class. Other instances exist, however, that can potentially divide an English class and embarrass students.

Other students cited moments in class when the teacher would openly speak directly to EHP participants or hand papers back during other moments in class. Unlike the earlier student, with her unique insight, these students describe moments that brought them attention that they may not have wanted. EHP students clearly enjoy the relationship they develop with their teacher through the EHP and the privilege of being able to enter otherwise adult only school spaces like teacher offices, but they do not like being singled out. Like most teenagers they want to fit in with their classmates whether they are completing an Honors Project or not.

“He [the teacher] would walk around and hand them out [student EHP papers], because they way that our classroom was set up, it was in a fishbowl, so he would, like go around, and if he knew you were doing the Honors Project he would give you the paper, and if he didn’t, like, if you weren’t he wouldn’t give you the paper.” 9th Grade EHP Student

One of the perceived benefits of the English Honors Project is the heterogeneous English classes they produce, yet episodes that describe class environments that identify completers and, by process of elimination, non-completers create a separation in class that could potentially further divide students based on their academic achievement.

“Well, he [the teacher] would often say, “Wait, who’s doing the Honors Project?” And we would have to raise our hands.” 9th Grade EHP Student
Within the comments student participants made about the benefits of the EHP the beginnings of student and teacher perceptions are formed. Students each have their own reasons for pursuing the project with some, undoubtedly, choosing to engage for the GPA increase alone. It is the unanticipated and often unwelcome benefit of extra teacher attention that reveals the way academic ability is valued at Cooper High School. The students, quite easily, can identify moments where teachers allowed the relative privacy of the EHP to seep into the classroom creating a separation between those who do the project and those who don’t. The teachers, however, speak of the benefits of the project in far more romantic terms.

*English Teachers*

English teachers articulated the perceived benefits of the Honors Project for their students without hesitation. While the teachers were well aware of the GPA boost students receive upon completion and the motivation that might provide for students as they begin the project itself, they recognized the many benefits for students as they progress through the project itself.

"...they're learning something about themselves in addition to learning about more characters and more plots. They're learning about what they're capable of, and they're also learning perhaps about their own limitations, too." Mr. Abbot

For many teachers the Honors Project represented an opportunity for students to learn about themselves in addition to the plotlines they confronted in the additional texts they read.

"I don’t want to say to take on a teacher role, but their educating-they’re responsible for- they’re educating themselves, and I think that’s an important life lesson. I mean, beyond these walls, at some point, it's
important for them to acquire that curiosity for learning, and that they are their own teachers, and they're leading the way for themselves." Ms. Jones

The notion, as expressed by Ms. Jones, that students needed to develop their own curiosity for learning exposed both an immeasurable possibility and ignored an educational culture, at Cooper and elsewhere, of education as a commodity to acquire and collect in stark opposition to learning for the sake of intellectual curiosity. Further, wanting students to become curious for their own learning is also likely vastly different from the way some teachers view their own learning. It is, perhaps, this romantic view of the English Honors Project that creates additional tension when teachers begin to question student motivation.

"The ownership- they don't own their writing. It's what the teacher wanted, and it's so confusing because this teacher wants this and this teacher wants this, so that's a very easy way not to take responsibility for their own ideas and how they express them. When they go through, when they successfully complete an honors project, they are forced to ask questions like, "Am I happy with what I've done and what I've written and what I think and have I expressed myself clearly?" And they have to separate themselves from what the teacher wants, which is a very easy way to deflect responsibility." Mr. Abbot

Again, a teacher espoused an optimistic view of what the Honors Project can promote for students. While the project has become more formulaic over the years to diminish the vast differences between teacher preferences, different teachers still maintain personal requirements for the students they are working with.

"...it's a good way for a kid to challenge him or herself without being part of a class that he might feel intimidated being a part of." Ms. Wilson

Interestingly some teachers cited maturity and confidence building ahead of
academic benefits when thinking about the project itself. Within the teachers view of the benefits of the project is what could also be interpreted as a negative view of the students themselves. Teachers see the project as something larger than a means of building writing or reading skills, yet it is the power of the project that will help students develop the characteristics teachers cite as valuable: responsibility, confidence, and intellectual curiosity. These characteristics are valuable for all students raising questions about how the school goes about providing all students with the opportunity to develop on many levels as opposed to only the students working on the EHP. Perhaps it is this view of the project, that it is more valuable than the credit it yields for students, that leads some teachers to negative thoughts related to how or why students get involved with the project in the first place.

Of greatest concern relating to teacher perceptions of students are the attributes teachers ascribe to EHP students beyond the academic. Viewing the EHP as a doorway to maturity and responsibility presents a divide in the way teachers potentially perceive students not completing the EHP. While the teachers lament the commitment of some students or question their involvement with the project at all, EHP students are still viewed as a whole group and not subdivided in terms of perception. Teachers who maintain a positive view of their EHP students, especially in terms of being academically gifted in ways other students aren’t, cannot prevent those feelings from entering into the classroom impacting the way students are treated by teachers and, possibly, impacting the way texts are chosen for the class at all.
From a social reproduction perspective the features described by Bourdieu (1977) related to cultural competence and the language spoken by the elite already begin to appear. While the EHP is an opportunity for all students, understanding the intricacies of engaging in it are more complex and require familiarity with school at a deeper level. Students from a more privileged background are more likely to understand not just what their GPA is, but also how to improve upon it and the potential future benefits a higher GPA could yield. Merely opening up a program like the EHP to all students is not enough to account for the gaps that appear along social class lines and often keep students from lower social classes at a disadvantage.

**Teacher-Student Relationships**

One benefit of the project identified by student completers and teachers alike is the bond often formed between students and their teachers from working closely together throughout the year. Looking more closely at this relationship underscores the value of the project in ways that was likely unintended and unanticipated by its creators and by the students who choose to complete the project. Students seem to clearly understand the value of the relationships they form with their teachers and revel in this particular benefit. This benefit is consistent with other programs throughout high schools that seemingly reward students for being considered smart (Demerath, 2008). While these relationships have the ability to truly shape the way students feel about themselves it is unclear if teachers grasp the value or impact of these relationships (Donnell, 2007).
For 9th grade students the Honors Project provided an opportunity for students to get to know their teachers in ways they hadn’t before. The project provided them with insight into their teachers as educators and also as people in ways traditional classroom experiences do not afford. Further, the conversations student and teacher shared were, mostly, of an academic nature a vastly different experience from what other students experience with private conversations with teachers. That this experience coincides so closely with the start of their high school careers sets the stage for more positive interactions with other teachers throughout high school.

Some students sought insight into their teachers’ practices through the one on one visits with their teacher:

“First semester, I found that my teacher would have one-on-one meetings with us to discuss the Honors Project, and I thought that especially in the beginning of the year, it helped me get to know her better and how she graded.” 9th Grade EHP Student

While others understood that visiting their teacher was an expected part of the project, but were unaware, until after meeting, what they would be gaining from it:

“I had to go to my teacher, and it was just me and my teacher kind of talking a little bit about it.” 9th Grade EHP Student

These new experiences for students, having private conversations about different aspects of a text, represented an entirely new mode of communicating with teachers. Students often associate private conversations with teachers as negative
and many English Honors Project students have, likely, never had a private conversation with their teacher at all.

“With Romeo and Juliet, since we were able to talk about it with our teacher, uh, despite it being very similar in the oddity of it, it was a much more enjoyable experience.” 9th Grade EHP Student

11th grade students who completed an Honors Project in grade 9 reflected back similarly about their experiences with their 9th grade English teachers and the benefits those visits yielded.

“I feel like it’s a good icebreaker just to, like....I think that was the first time I ever, like, was in an office, and I think ... Yeah, just like a good icebreaker.” 9th Grade EHP Completer

Some students found teachers they could talk to about any number of issues, academic or otherwise, long after they worked together in grade 9:

“...having a teacher to go to, like, if I ever, like, needed, like, advice, really needed help with something, like, that was good.” 9th Grade EHP Completer

While others felt increased confidence in English class because of the more personal relationship developed between student and teacher:

“I didn’t feel like [teacher name] favored me, but I definitely felt like we had a stronger relationship than she ... And she, like, respect ... Maybe respected me more than, like, some of the other kids just because I knew her and spoke to her out of class.” 9th Grade EHP Completer

Students enjoy the personal relationships they develop with their teachers along with the special feeling associated with being able to enter teacher offices, something other students do not typically engage in. To be clear, teacher offices are open to all students with students encouraged throughout the school to take advantage of free time to meet with their teachers for additional academic support.
Still, many students never take advantage of that opportunity. The Honors Project mandates students visit the teacher office allowing them to defer any anxiety students might have about crossing over into a part of the school often seen as forbidden in other schools. Freely entering teacher offices and maintaining a friendly relationship with teachers brings social capital for those students, at least in academic circles. For students in grade 9 with no Advanced Placement courses to take and only a few other Honors options building this relationship provides them with the academic credibility many of them seek.

Students did not universally praise the relationships they had with their teachers for the project. Still, understanding the expectations of the project helped them overcome any concerns connected to the lack of connection they felt between themselves and a teacher. In those circumstances the privilege of entering the English department office outweighed any discomfort the student might have with their teacher. It is likely that this experience provides students with a benefit far beyond their 9th grade English experiences.

The relationships that often develop between EHP students and their teachers was found to be a benefit of the EHP for students. That those relationships, however, often bleed into the classroom can create a difference in the way EHP and non-EHP students are treated creating tension between honors and non-honors students regardless of the reasons either chose their pathways. It is in this regard that the benefits associated with the EHP can be measured through an increase in student GPA and improved writing skills and immeasurable through the positive
attention granted EHP students both in and out of class. Again it is the change in the way teachers view EHP students that likely carries over into the way those same students are treated in the classroom. The subtle ways teachers treat EHP students differently may not even be recognized by the teachers themselves and are certainly not meant to be a means of dividing their classes, yet they do change the way different students experience their English classes.

*English Teachers*

English teachers spoke speak of the relationship between student and teacher differently than students. Teachers viewed this relationship as yet another benefit for students as both academic and growth opportunities.

"Students mature and develop inner confidence. There's something invaluable about talking things through with your teacher, and struggling through challenges one on one. I mean, if there’s something magical and wonderful about that, and it really helps kids mature." Ms. Allen

Teachers did not discuss their own growth or challenges when working individually with students. Teachers quite often speak of the challenges different classes pose for them from an instructional standpoint. For this study, it appeared that teachers see their meetings with their EHP students as the same and not as opportunities to grow professionally. While teachers spoke fondly of the meetings they get to have with their students, the benefits associated with those meetings seemed to be strictly one way by maintaining the teacher to student relationship.

"I think some of them learn not to take criticism personally. I think they develop their ability to take feedback and criticism and not see it as a condemnation, but rather just as a motive, you know, developing, you know, and growing." Mr. White
Teachers, like Mr. White, spoke of their students as if they are all the same in terms of receiving feedback and criticism instead of also addressing his own ability to develop a variety of ways to address students based on their differences. Further, his conflating of feedback with criticism is cause for concern about the potential inconsistencies within individual teacher practices related to the EHP.

Other teachers expressed their views of students not completing the EHP in more coded language. The teacher quoted below uses the phrase, “other kids” as code for the students choosing not to engage in the EHP. These “other kids” are frequently students of color in Cooper or students not connected to academic culture within Cooper. Additionally, the teacher referenced class size in English classes, a common refrain for English teachers that often is cited as a benefit of the project – smaller student groups to work with.

“One of the things that I ask myself a lot, um, you know, doing the honors project and doing it, is, what would it be like to do an honors project with some of these other kids? I look at them and I wonder about that. I really do. I feel like if they were you know, in smaller settings, I’d get more of a sense.” Ms. Blank

The teacher quoted below cited the developing relationship between teacher and students who drop the project. That she referenced students feeling the need to apologize for dropping is indicative of the power structure that is maintained between teacher and student even within the unique environment of the EHP. This teacher, and perhaps others, do not view students who drop the EHP as a professional failure, but as a student choice that does not require teacher reflection. While neither students nor teachers shared specific reasons for dropping the EHP it
did appear that many possible reasons existed.

“I just wanted to say even the kids who drop the project, the growth that they experience and the relationship that at some point they had, there’s always a level of- they want to apologize for dropping, because they feel they owe the teacher something, and they don’t.” Ms. Walker

Providing students with a forum that allowed for their development as students academically and socially is certainly a benefit of the project. It is unclear if the project or its component requirements lead students to maturing in any way beyond the recognition, for some, that they want the credit associated with the EHP. Still, the feeling that English teachers are playing a role in the lives of students beyond learning may be overstating their own perceived impact on students.

“Communicating with the teacher and learning how to advocate for themselves when there are problems and issues is very important in terms of them maturing.” Ms. Smith

Once again it is the notion that the individual meetings between student and teacher maintain the directional power structure that already exists in classrooms with the teacher delivering feedback instead of a discussion about the text that might be one of equal parts teacher and student that does not paint the EHP in the different light that many perceive it to be. Maintaining a perception that the meetings are for the sole benefit of the students, teachers need not challenge themselves to work at the development of the relationship that students cite as important to them. Teachers traditionally work at differentiating instructional practices in the classroom in an attempt to meet the various learning needs of all of their students. It is of interest that teachers do not seem to apply those same ideas to the meetings they have with their EHP students leading to the appearance of the
perception of sameness among the EHP students despite the frequently cited
differences between EHP students by teachers. The disappearance of judgment of
EHP students can be viewed as an example of bias in favor of EHP students and the
perception that they are all smart.

Additionally, it appeared that the teacher participants are unaware of the
currency the private meetings with students carry. Perhaps, if teachers had a
deeper understanding of the personal, social value of their relationships with
students they would reduce the in-class comments about the Honors Project that
have potentially negative impact on non-Honors Project students.

It is in this area that perceptions of student academic abilities and how
students differentially experience English class collide. Students enjoy the private
meetings they have with their teachers to discuss the EHP. That students continue
to reap the rewards of the EHP in their English class through subtle and not so
subtle behavior in class leads to a truly different classroom experience for all
students. Two aspects related to reproduction theory emerge in this section. First,
the actions associated with the EHP: meeting with teachers privately and entering
teacher offices are consistent with the theories espoused by Bowles and Gintis
(1976) and the grooming of students from the upper class to assume positions of
leadership in their lives long after high school. Training students to be comfortable
speaking with authority figures and not fear them will help students prepare for
those same roles later in life. Thus, the fact that certain students are systematically
left out of this opportunity is of great importance. Second, Bourdieu (1977) would
likely identify the seemingly private language spoken at meetings between teacher and student about something called “honors” and the increased familiarity that is likely on display in English class as another example of distinction that benefits students who arrive in school with an understanding of this language (MacLeod, 2008). The EHP may just provide more forms of traditional cultural capital.

Completers: How others view those who complete the EHP

Participation in the Honors Project, like membership into other extra-curricular activities in schools, comes with more than academic credit. Student participants also benefit socially by the way they view each other and the way their teachers view them as well. The EHP allows the social order of Cooper High School to remain intact as do other tracking programs (Finley, 1984). In this section, and the one that follows, we get a clearer view of the way smartness is viewed at Cooper and how consistent that is with other research in that area (Hatt, 2012).

Students

Unlike more traditional high schools, Cooper High School has a social structure that empowers students taking advanced courses including participating in the English Honors Project. There is a long history of high academic achievement at Cooper that provides students with positive attention from students and teachers alike. It is this social capital that is first observed by students together in English class where the social structure can often be on display.

Some students referenced the idea of caring about an honors class or about
their education at all. Many will defend, and encourage, the option students at Cooper have to choose their courses, especially as it relates to the Honors Project, yet most participants still speak critically about students they perceive to be taking courses simply for the credit it provides.

“There are definitely people that might take Honors classes just to say, 'Oh yeah I'm in an Honors class,' and then not actually care, but I feel like the people who take Honors aren't just ... Like, they'll all say 'I'm going to be in this Honors class and to do this work.' Like, you kind of know what’s coming at you...” 9th Grade EHP Non-Completer

Other students seemed aware of the pressures that exist within Cooper High School and in the community at large to push for academic success, which often translates to mean that students earn a high GPA. Most significant when setting a goal of earning a high GPA is the value placed on the grade as opposed to the value placed on the learning.

“There's a lot of push, I feel like. A lot of it is internal definitely, and I feel like there is also, from just the school environment and the culture.” 9th Grade EHP Completer

Some students saw the connection from the pressure that exists in and out of the school for academic success and the personal sacrifices students need to make as early as the start of 9th grade to meet those expectations. The student quoted below articulates expectations that extend far beyond a high GPA providing a glimpse into a world that, for some students, is filled with pressure to exceed expectations in all areas forcing them into uncomfortable decisions.

“I personally think that that goes back to what I was saying about the tremendous pressure of, like, expectations and everything for, like, how you were saying, like, smart people, like, it’s, it's huge, and I personally feel like ideally we're living in a world where people can choose to go where their interests lie, but that’s not ... Like you, we were all talking
about having the edge GPA-wise and, like, being well-rounded, being good at everything. It's a reality of what we have to do if we want to meet expectations, both set by ourselves and outside, and I think that that's like, like you were saying, like, choosing for a year to do some really hard material when you haven't done it before and you're a freshman, in all these different areas, is a big choice.” 9th Grade EHP Completer

The students’ assertion about their reality as it related to making decisions as 9th grade students to commit to extra work paints a picture of high-achieving students being limited in their options rather than having more options as one may be more comfortable imagining. Students felt hemmed in by the various forces around them especially if they aspire to be a top student when it comes to overall GPA.

“I feel like a lot of us are, like, very, probably all of us are, like, extremely (laughs) focused on, like, doing well and being successful and all of that.” 9th Grade EHP Completer

The student quoted above chose a more positive view about dealing with pressure, yet there is still a vagueness around what honors students are actually focused on being successful at. The implication was that honors students do not direct their focus in any one area, but rather experience pressure to be successful at all things related to school.

The student quoted below highlights, perhaps, the most honest assessment of the culture at Cooper High School. That students cited this separation despite the presence of the heterogeneous English classes may indicate a failure on the part of the school to reduce the judgment of students by students or it indicates that school culture within large, comprehensive high schools is always full of separations that
are felt by students. Lastly, it did suggest a value placed on perceived smartness that students impose on each other, possibly driven by who is participating in the honors project.

“There’s such a separation in this school, I think between the kids who are smart and the kids who are not smart.” 9th Grade EHP Completer

Students, especially those not completing the Honors Project, are prepared for the judgment that comes from classmates. While there are students who appear to be genuinely interested in becoming a top student, there are many that are simply amassing GPA points and the positive attention that comes with it.

Students not completing the EHP also perceive negativity from their teachers as well. Students were unable to provide concrete examples of the judgments they perceive from teachers leading to a conclusion that non-honors students learn to view themselves negatively projecting that negativity onto their teachers.

“But like, and if you’re in a non-Honors course teachers aren’t going to expect as much from you as their Honors course.” 9th Grade EHP Non-Completer

The student quoted below likely has no real insight into the preferences of their teachers. It is likely that non-EHP students have felt out of place or negatively judged by their teachers long before entering high school. Maintaining a consistently negative view of themselves as a student coupled with an understanding of what the Cooper culture values can create a personal conflict for students who are not high performers.

“There’s some teachers that like, clearly prefer their Honors classes over their normal classes.” 9th Grade EHP Non-Completer
The student below spoke about their experience in English class where the academic differences between students are likely on the greatest display. Again, these student perceptions were built over many years as a student in the same school district as opposed to being manufactured in only a few months of being in English class together. That the student uses the word “discriminate” underscores how palpable negative perceptions are felt.

“But, faculty sometimes. It’s not on purpose. They don’t mean to discriminate, obviously.” 9th Grade EHP Non-Completer

Interestingly the student below removed themselves from the group of students described, but still portrays a starkly negative view of students who are not honors level students.

“They probably enjoy it because the kids will understand things easier and it will take less time to understand it.” 9th Grade EHP Non-Completer

The culture of Cooper High School and its value placed on high academic achievement is not the sole responsibility of the English department, yet the hope of creating classes that include all students regardless of academic ability without judgment seems to not exist. It is possible that the lack of a consistent model throughout Cooper prevents the heterogeneous English classes from having its desired outcome with students. Also possible is the changing goals of students and their parents who hope to amass high GPA’s and collect honors and AP courses which has led to increasing student participation in almost all areas. While awareness of the changing values of this student generation is important, the teachers appear either unaware or disinterested in this change other than to
express concern over the role parents play in student participation. Beyond the concerns about how students arrive at the project teachers do not seem concerned once students have begun the work.

*English Teachers*

Teachers often spoke of students engaged in the EHP in different ways than they do other students. Complaints about student motivation did not exist in this area as they appear confined to questions about how students get involved and not connected to what students do once they have arrived.

"It's important that a fourteen, fifteen year old, student, child, sits down with an adult in a one on one setting, or perhaps even three on three, four on four, (laughter) and is, you know, in the position where they can engage in an intelligent manor. It’s formal, yet more relaxed than usual with that adult, um, and have to, you know, just do certain social things which they may not often have to do. Engage, speak, look at adult in the face." Ms. Wilson

Some teachers viewed the students who engage with the EHP as more serious students who will be making course decisions later in their high school careers in a more personal and deliberate fashion than many other students who stick with standard boilerplate course programming.

"I also think it reflects the courses we teach, because when you were focusing on freshman, but then fast forward two years later, they’re choosing electives that speak to them, um, and their personalities and their interests, and so I think that the honors program reflects on that-on the school, and that philosophy as well that we’re generating independent, individually minded thinkers who know how to navigate their way through high school, even before they get to college." Ms. Best

It is this view of the EHP student as a consumer of their own education as opposed to their non-EHP classmates that is the first articulation of a significant
difference between completers and non-completers.

The teacher quoted below highlighted both the project and the students who are the top students within the project in grade 9. While the project offers the brightest students an opportunity to shine, it also appears that the structure of English classes inhibits those same students from emerging in the same way. Providing top students with an opportunity to stand out is an important attribute of the honors project that does not appear as important for the students who may not be at the top.

“There’s some that will stand out, and when I will read their essays, what stands out is their ability to analyze at a much higher level than let’s say, what might be expected in an ordinary classroom, so I think the cream ... What’s positive about that is you see cream really rise to the top and I might see that they have certain insights that somehow don’t appear in the classroom in the mix with everyone else, and they have the opportunity to stand out more in my mind as a student.” Ms. Best

Students who participate in the project are encouraged to direct their own learning and create their own questions for the project. While self-directed learning is a positive outcome of the project it is certainly not universal of every participant as indicated by teachers in other sections. Still, it continues the divide between the instruction and opportunities EHP students are offered from what is offered in English class, an indication, perhaps, that all students are not encouraged to be self-directed in their own learning.

“They get to drive the project. They get to say, this is the idea that I want to pursue, and this is how I want to pursue it. I’m going to come up with my own questions.” Mr. White

English class instruction can include opportunities for students to develop
their own ideas and their own questions about particular texts. The HP certainly provides students with another, more detailed, opportunity to analyze texts and direct their studies in very personal directions. That teachers are not speaking similarly about all their students highlights how the EHP students are perceived by teachers and, potentially, to how students experience English class altogether.

In this section students and teachers discussed the pressures often associated with being an honors student at Cooper as well as the separation between honors and non-honors students. Students gaining experience dealing with the pressures of success while still experiencing the social benefits of that same success are being prepared for life with similar rewards. Students completing the EHP may indeed experience academic pressure, but the rewards far beyond their GPA increase relate to reproduction theory. Students not completing the EHP undoubtedly experience pressure but without the reward making the pressure only negative with no hope of improving circumstances, a role commonly populated by those from lower social class standing (MacLeod, 2008).

**Non-Completers: How others view those who do not complete the EHP**

Students who choose to not participate in the Honors Project also deal with judgment from classmates and teachers. While most students and teachers understand that there exists many reasons students choose this pathway, there remains a negative undercurrent about how serious these students are about their own education. There is a significant difference in the way individuals and groups are thought of. While teachers might speak of any one non-EHP student as smart,
the group of non-EHP students ultimately remains labeled as students who are not honors students and are, thus, not smart. Students labeled in this fashion have difficulty with their own academic self-worth (Villatte, Hugon, de Leonardis, 2011) and the social order within the school is maintained through the rigid definitions associated with students: honors student or non-honors student creating what can be interpreted as two different schools (Staiger, 2004).

Students

Some students who did not participate in the EHP in grade 9 identify the complexity of the work and being able to be self-directed as a reason not to participate. While there are certainly students who would struggle maintaining a self-directed calendar, even EHP completers talked about their own failures at attempting to create and follow their own schedules, there are undoubtedly many reasons students choose not to participate. Even students who made that choice, however, are reluctant to provide other possible reasons and instead resort to drawing a line between participating and not that is more easily understood and often includes a negative view of themselves.

“So you have to be able to follow your own, and like read on your own, and do the work on your own. That’s hard for some.” 9th Grade EHP Non-Completer

Other students saw themselves as high performing students even though they did not complete an EHP in grade 9. The student struggled, even two years later, to see herself as part of a group of students who either simply lack interest, had other responsibilities, or were engaged in other complex work. While she
included the other students at the table during the focus group in her statement, it does belie a fear of being lumped into a category of non-participants that may permeate the culture of the school.

“Well, I think you could definitely, like, guess who the people who are [completing the project] but when it comes to people who aren’t it’s not, it’s not like, very, like, black-and-white. I don’t think. I think, ‘cause I know that, like, ‘cause a lot of people would expect, like, people like us to do it in 9th grade.” 9th Grade EHP Non-Completer

Still other students see non-completers as fearful of participating in class and concerned about not being taken seriously by their peers or their teachers. The implications are often that there is a simple divide between those who complete and those who do not, as if that is the line that separates students in terms of smartness. It is not all that different from the line drawn by teachers as well. Curiously again this student, a non-completer in grade 9, chose not to include himself in his comment.

“I mean, the people who aren’t as engaged [Non-Completers] might be intimidated by the people who are engaged [Completer] and they might think that they have great ideas, but you don’t and that you, like, whatever you say is going to sound stupid.” 9th Grade EHP Non-Completer

While there appears to be no formal indictors in English classes of who is completing an EHP and who is not, subtle indicators do exist. Regardless, students do know that some of their classmates are completing a project and they are also aware of their own work along with the status afforded to academically motivated students at Cooper.

“You can tell, like, when someone ... When someone kind of, um, thinks lower of you because you don’t take AP classes. It’s very easy to tell what people think that way and what people don’t.” 9th Grade EHP Non-
Completer

With no Advanced Placement courses available to 9th grade students only a few options remain for students who want to separate themselves from their peers academically speaking. While having found their own path through high school, in many cases, students who do not engage in the EHP or subsequent Advanced Placement opportunities often maintain a negative academic view of themselves. Further, students often ascribe traits to their teachers without having any knowledge of teacher preference when it comes to course selection. Statements like the one below are again indicative of the negative academic view some students walk around Cooper High School with.

“And, also teaching the same thing over and over again because nobody understands it probably gets frustrating at some point.” 9th Grade EHP Non-Completer

The negative perceptions non-EHP students maintained of themselves as it relates to the HP is not surprising. That those same perceptions seep into English classes is, however, more troubling. Teachers speak differently about how non-EHP students are viewed focusing almost exclusively on the reasons some students chose not to engage at all.

English Teachers

English teachers maintained a more pragmatic view of the students that do not attempt an EHP in grade 9. In fact, it appeared that their view of Non-EHP students speaks more to students who do attempt the project and their parents who, in the view of some of the teachers, drive their children in the first place. In
general, teachers try not to stigmatize the students who choose not to engage in the EHP in grade 9. Nevertheless, judgments about students do emerge.

"Or, they're healthy students who have a realistic expectation of what they can handle during the semester, and I think their parents are healthy normal parents who aren’t pushing their kids..." Ms. Blank

Speaking about 9th grade students who choose not to engage in the EHP, the teacher quoted above described both the student and their parent as “healthy” implying that many other students attempting the project may be overestimating their own ability. It would not be surprising that some students simply choose not to attempt the project and for a wide range of reasons. The need, by the teacher above, to find a way to compliment non-participants may speak of a more negative view the non-participant than the teacher is willing to share.

The same phenomenon appeared again with the teacher quoted below who initially states what may be obvious about non-EHP students. The teacher also felt the need to immediately further qualify their response to include an alternate possibility that is less judgmental.

“A student who hasn’t had success in English prior, is one of the first students, and then I think also students who feel like they have a lot on their plate.” Ms. Allen

The teacher quoted below speaks of the transition to high school highlighting the academic differences that some students immediately confront upon arrival to 9th grade. Here again is a negative view presented, in this case, about the academic integrity of the lower grades and the possible false sense of academic ability created for students.

“I think that’s a really- a real life awakening for them to realize that...”
they can’t accomplish everything and be perfect at everything, despite what they thought all through elementary school and middle school, that they were you know.” Ms. Jones

One teacher chose, when describing EHP non-completers, to focus on students who are strong students while avoiding commenting on weaker students at all. While there is undoubtedly a subset of qualified students choosing not to participate or complete the project it is likely that the larger group of students are not strong English students.

“But there are students, strong English students who for whatever reason, have not chosen to do an honors project.” Ms. Allen

Another teacher participant offered perhaps the most honest view of students who do not complete the EHP in grade 9. While this view is, likely, their honest view of non-completers it is also filled with negative judgment about students who do not complete the project in 9th grade.

“I don’t think there is an impact. I think there- they don't care, usually.” Ms. Walker

The consistently negative view of students who either do not complete or participate at all in the EHP by English teachers underscores the strong cultural divide that exists within Cooper High School. Viewing students as: not caring about their academic work or having a false sense of their own ability the result of success in the lower grades or simply being the product of healthy parents who do not push their children diminishes the value the same teachers placed on student choice earlier and prevents the teachers from seeing other possible factors for student non-participation. Furthermore, the negative perception of non-EHP students grants
positive perceptions to the HP students despite teacher recognition that many students pursue the project for the GPA increase alone. Both powerful perceptions enter the classroom creating vastly different experiences for students depending on their HP status.

Looking through the lens of social reproduction theory it isn’t surprising that students not engaged in the project would be seen in a negative light. Maintaining the social order is a critical attribute of reproduction theory and in this way schools can be agents of maintaining the status quo. Other emerging themes from this section that connect to reproduction theory are the role parents play in the choices their children make and the views some non-EHP participants maintain of themselves despite the subtle messaging about from others around the school.

Reproduction theorists would likely understand the role parents play in encouraging their children to participate in the EHP. First, parents often speak the language of academic success with some understanding of the immeasurable benefits the EHP has for students. Additionally, parents have great self-interest when it comes to maintaining the social order especially when many of the parents mentioned by teachers are from wealthier backgrounds.

Students who speak of themselves as capable despite their lack of participation may be exercising their own resistance to status quo at Cooper High School. Social reproduction theorist Henry Giroux (1983) believes that while schools are built with structures in place that maintain the social order that there are students who are able to work against their traditional, social class based roles
and rise above. It is perhaps in this area, students expressing their own smartness, that we get our first glimpse of what that resistance could look like (MacLeod, 2008).

Choosing to Undertake the EHP

Much is made at Cooper about how students get introduced to the Honors Project and who influences in making a decision about participation. While all participants, students and teachers, believe the project is a positive experience there are differing views about the roles parents, siblings and other teachers play in the decision making process of students who choose to engage in the project. That is there is discussion at all about how students get to the project is curious, that the divide between students and teachers about who is most influential in that decision is even more interesting. For teachers the resistance against perceived parent influence is likely connected to control over the EHP program and control over the social constructs already in place within the school. Still, while there are certainly times parents push their children too hard much evidence exists about the positive role parents play in encouraging their children (Zimmerman, Bandura & Martinez-Pons, 1992).

Students

Students cited a variety of different influences when discussing how they came to work on the English Honors Project. The students did not harbor any resentment toward any of the influencers, instead offering a rather straight forward,
non-judgmental, history of their introduction to the project.

Some students cited their parents as major influencers, as predicted by teachers, even to the point of limiting conversation about the EHP as a choice. Parents play a strong role throughout Cooper when determining course and activity selection so it is not surprising that they appear as choice makers here as well. Still, the students do not include an emotional aspect to their descriptions as the teachers sometimes do.

“...my parents actually came to me first about it and kinda said, like, "You should be doing this." Like, and they supported me and, and they, they wanted me to do it. And so it was kind of easier, like, on my side, just 'cause it was something that, like, they kind of expected me to do.”
9th Grade EHP Student

Still, other students indicated that it was them who introduced their parents to the project. In most of these cases the student participants had no older siblings who had been previously exposed to the project and the culture of the school.

“I don’t think my parents really knew what it was at all, but I came home and I, like, told them about it. When I heard about it, I told them about it, and they just were like, "Okay, cool. You could do it."
9th Grade EHP Student

Other students included a mix of adult influencers as impactful in their decision making. The notion that important adults in the lives of students, teachers and parents, can have enormous impacts on students is not surprising. Discussions about identifying talented students capable of the project are often had within the English department, similar to discussions in other departments about recommending students for more challenging academic courses.

“I feel like it was kind of, not expected of me, but I had turned in a couple of, you know, papers, and my, uh, English teacher was like, “This is
something that would be for you.” And, you know, my parents pushed me into it and stuff, so I think that it was kind of handed to me, and not that I wasn’t given a choice, but I was m-, expected to complete this.” 9th Grade EHP Completer

Of course some students identified themselves as the decision maker based on what they knew about life at Cooper. It is not likely that highly motivated students have no other influencers, but instead they see themselves as the driving force behind their decision making. It is these students that often reap great rewards from project participation because they are viewed as self-motivated and hard-working particularly by teachers.

“In ninth grade, I really wanted to push myself, and I wanted to take everything that I could. And, like ... And I ended up completing it, but it was kind of difficult as a ninth grader, but I did it freshman year ... I mean, first semester. And I don’t know. I wanted to challenge myself. That’s why I decided to take it.” 9th Grade EHP Completer

Students identified a more robust group of influencers than teachers imagine to exist. Student’s practical approach to identifying their influencers reveals not a lack of critical judgment, but instead an understanding that they may have been influenced by many different people during their decision making process. The teachers asserted a much different view of the role influencers played in student choices. They divided EHP students into only a few groups: those who have genuine interest in English and those with aggressive parents. This view of how students came to the EHP is far removed from the positive aspects of the project teachers articulated earlier in the study.

English Teachers

Often the teachers involved in the focus group relied on what their
experiences have taught them. Some teachers seemed more likely to assign parental influence for those students who are reluctant or struggling with the work; that is, in negative circumstances. This exacerbates a tension between the teacher and the students in need of support. Unlike the students, the teachers seem unaware that parents always play a role even with students who are highly motivated. After all, to begin working on an Honors Project parents must, like the students, sign an agreement.

"I think we have two types of students that generally opt in. One type of student is generally interested in English. Wants to read more, enjoys reading, and to pay back on something that was just said, all ready has a good sense of how to talk to adults and generally value that type of conversation. The other type, is in all honesty, driven by the honors credit, pushed by their parents, or has some kind of expectation placed on them that this is what they should do." Ms. Walker

Other teachers in the focus group more plainly cited parental influence as the reason students engage in the project at all. The teacher quoted below, however, espouses a negative view of the role parent’s play and a rather trivial view of the project itself reducing it “reading plays”. It is the perceived role of parents as negative influences that is in contrast to the stated benefits of the project at all. This view of parents, however, is consistent with the more common school wide view of parents as outsiders who are most likely to be intruders as opposed to partners who support and encourage their children to exert maximum effort as their students enter high school.

“Honestly, I really think 95% of these students are doing it because their parents told them to do it. Let’s be real. Who wants extra work? They’re in ninth grade. And I’m not saying they don’t like it, there are some kids who really enjoy reading plays and they end up liking it.” Ms. Wilson
Teachers did not cite parental influence when it comes to students that they perceive to be honors students. Students perceived as qualified honors students, an undefined smaller percentage of the overall population, might experience parental influence while not being viewed as a hindrance. Instead they reserved their sharpest criticism of parents for students they perceive as unqualified students engaged in the EHP. The teacher quoted below describes the conflicts she is, sometimes, made a part of by students who are not traditional honors students. It is likely that other students argue with their parents about participation in the EHP or other advanced courses as they may have other interests. Either teachers are unaware of those conflicts or they accept those as ordinary parent-child conflicts.

“And I say, don’t call me into your fight with your mom. I hate that. Right? You’re making me now part of your fight, so maybe, if there is a benefit in that situation, which is negative, it’s learning how to talk to your parent to say, "I can't do this. I don't want to do this. I can't handle it." Ms. Smith

As we have seen earlier, teachers often romanticized the project and how students choose to be associated with it. While there are, undoubtedly, students deeply interested in English they too are aware and enjoy the GPA increase and, often, have parents who encourage their children to be top students at Cooper High School. The lines drawn by the teacher’s quoted above indicates a further, smaller, division in terms of status. While a line already divides students working on the project from those who do not, another line exists based on how some teachers imagine the students who choose to participate at all. It is possible that similar lines
exist in Advanced Placement and Honors courses within Cooper High School as social hierarchies are established.

A few teacher focus group participants less consumed with the role parents play in the influencing of students see themselves in a more positive light especially for students who seem unaware of their own potential. While many of the teachers see parents as influencers that produce great pressure on their children, they do not see themselves in the same light.

"I will often ask a student, especially a freshman, if I recognize that they're doing very well in the regular classroom, and they're not doing an honors project, it strikes me as odd. I'll realize it, and I'll ask them, and say, "Why aren't you doing an honors project?" So, I don't know - I don't think the answer to that question matters, I think what matters is because the honors project exists, I can say to a kid who perhaps otherwise under estimated himself or herself, why aren't you doing an honors project? Then they, therefore, straight up look at me like, why-why aren't I? I didn't know that people saw me in that light, and maybe I should do that next time around." Ms. Wilson

Teachers as positive influencers for students serve as a reminder for a benefit of the heterogeneous class model in sharp contrast to the more traditional honors classes. Too often, in traditional models, students in advanced classes move forward in subsequent years into the next advanced class while students in non-advanced classes rarely have the opportunity to change tracks from year to year. The honors project model allows teachers, as described by the teacher above, to encourage students to challenge themselves in the following school year.

While teachers are willing to acknowledge a small subset of highly motivated students who are their own decision makers, they view most of the honors project students as being influenced by others or motivated by less than
pure objectives. Given the agreed upon perception of the EHP as a positive experience for students, it is interesting that teachers have any negative judgments about student participation at all. Finally, the teachers’ general view of parents as negative illustrates another potential undercurrent within the culture of Cooper High School. Some parent groups have been critical of the EHP over the years advocating for more traditional honors classes instead. It is likely that the parents critical of the project have led to more generalized criticism of parents by teachers throughout Cooper. It may therefore be possible that teachers would be less critical of parental involvement if parent groups were less vocal about their dissatisfaction with the EHP.

As stated earlier parental involvement from a social reproduction viewpoint makes sense as the complaints about parents are associated with parents encouraging students to participate in the EHP. Within the culture of Cooper EHP participants are almost all white and from wealthier families interested in protecting their own status. While teachers speak openly about encouraging capable students to pursue the EHP they clearly do not see themselves as part of the resistance to the reproduction of the social order in the way Giroux might imagine (MacLeod, 2008). Teachers could use their energies to find ways to welcome students from other social classes into the EHP instead of focusing on parents making understandable choices for their children.
HETEROGENEOUS ENGLISH CLASSES IN GRADE 9

Heterogeneous Classes

The Independent English Honors Project allows heterogeneous classes in English to continue at Cooper High School despite some pressure to change that practice. While the project is seen by almost all as positive, heterogeneous classes are not met with the same enthusiasm or sense of purpose by participants in this study.

The heterogeneous English classes at Cooper High are not systematically created, but instead the outcome of many other programming decisions made by teachers, students and guidance counselors. The classes are purposely heterogeneous just not formulaic meaning that English classes can have different numbers of students identified as honors or non-honors track in other subjects. English classes are often placed in student programs last because of the flexibility within English sections as opposed to other subjects with multiple, more traditional, options. The lack of a predictive model where students are programmed with purpose likely results in great challenges for teachers and students alike as they prepare for English. The many potential outcomes as it relates to the balance of honors and non-honors students in any one English class may create additional difficulties for teachers as they prepare for class. It is also possible that the variable structure of students in English classes also has an impact on the social structure of the school itself especially as it relates to the way students view each other and themselves. Teacher inability to predict the breakdown of honors and non-honors
students in their English classes at the start of the year is what likely leads to the lack of differentiated teaching styles for the heterogeneous classes despite research that suggests the importance of different pedagogical approaches for mixed ability groups classes (Ekstrom, 1961; Ben-Ari and Kedem-Friedrich, 2000).

Pros

Students

Students seemed accepting of the lack of English honors classes at Cooper High School. As with most programs throughout the school, students rarely make recommendations that would require dramatic programmatic changes. Still, students had have opinions about their English classes and share freely when asked. Students do not generally identify the positive aspects of heterogeneous classes, instead focusing mostly on the structure of their classes as they relate to the honors project.

Teachers are, by design, supposed to announce the honors project to students during English class in an effort to ensure that all students receive as close to the same message as possible. After those announcements are made teachers are expected to leave discussion of the project for the private individual or small group meetings they have with their mentees. Over the years teachers have become more creative, in some cases, when communicating with their honors project students often using different types of technology as a replacement for announcements in class.

“My teacher never, like, mentioned, really, of it in class, ever, any information that we needed and was put on our classroom site, or
website. And I felt like my teacher kept a good job of making the two divided, so no one really felt like, "Ugh, they're talking about that again?" Like, no one felt like that. And anything that we had a question about that popped into our minds, we would, like, go up to her and ask. I think that's just ... If someone in my class said something, it's not a big deal, but like I don't think that anyone felt left out about it.” 9th Grade EHP Student

The quote from the student above is, obviously, an honors project student who may lack some perspective especially how honors project comments impact non-honors project students. Often, neither students nor teachers understand the impact that in class language has on students positively or negatively.

Other students focused on the programmatic aspects of the honors project. Attempting and dropping the honors project has no impact on student schedules as opposed to dropping honors courses which require multiple layers of mid-year transitions for students and can often create additional program changes due to class availability.

“I think it’s a lot more difficult to drop an Honors class and go into a regular English class, that, like, you might be reading a different book in, then to drop the Honors Project and still be in, like, your same class.” 9th Grade EHP Student

Some students, even 9th grade students, seem to have a good understanding of the potential value of heterogeneously grouped English classes. It is likely that the student, quoted below, was also influenced by the teacher they had and how that teacher structured their class.

“And I think that you absolutely get a totally, totally different view when you have a diverse class as opposed to a class full of the same kids. So it’s absolutely beneficial to look at things in a new way.” 9th Grade EHP Completer
It is important to note the choice of language when speaking about the difference between honors classes and heterogeneous classes and the use of the phrase “same kids” in honors classes. While the student is attempting to make a positive statement it is still one loaded with judgment about non-honors students that seems to permeate the culture of Cooper High School.

Non-English Honors Project students have somewhat consistent views, when compared to their honors project classmates, about heterogeneous English classes as they reflect back on their 9th grade experiences. Their reflections also reveal some of the tensions that exist throughout Cooper High when it comes to the academic competitive nature of the school, the pressure that many students experience to succeed at high academic levels and the separation between honors and non-honors students. It is abundantly clear that students are aware of the differences between English classes and the other, more traditionally designed, academic classes.

The student quoted below hinted at one of the ongoing challenges at Cooper: the way students get characterized as honors or non-honors students. While the honors project is optional for all students and the reasons students choose not to do it are abundant, students still run the risk of being labeled, of being judged negatively even when they believe they are capable of performing at higher academic levels. Like the honors project students, some non-honors students also site the class as moving too slowly as if course content was suited for lower performing students.

“Thinking back, you know, I used to be kind of angry, you know,
that I had to, like, sit in a class that I thought was slow and I wanted to go faster and it would frustrate me. Especially in the English classes. And I remember thinking, um, "Oh, like, this is so annoying. I want to be with students who I feel like are at my level." But then on the other hand, that can be pressuring and that can be hard and you may not even perform as well as you wanted to, or not as well as everyone else.”

9th Grade EHP Non-Completer

Other non-honors students spoke of the sameness that exists in the tracked academic areas. The perceptions of the students as it relates to the lack of difference between students in other academic class tracks is, likely, a part of the school and even district culture that gets taught to students early and reinforced as students move through grade levels. Even two years removed from grade 9 and with a great deal more school experience students have seemed to not be able to move past the notion that students on the same academic track are the same. The presence of the heterogeneous English classes, even when viewed positively, may only reveal more of the division that exists at Cooper when it comes to academic performance.

“In all the other subjects, courses are divided, like, basically any other course you take in this school, like whether it be history or science or math, like, there's different levels. But it's ... And so you're, if you're, like, in the higher levels of all those courses you sit with the same students and if you're in the lower level you sit will all the same students. So I think having an English class with lots of diversity, it allows you to, like, meet different people, or, like, even just hear other people's opinions that you probably wouldn't have heard.”

9th Grade EHP Non-Completer

Other student commented about their own experiences in their English class in 9th grade underscore the impermeable nature of honors tracks in general. The English classes at Cooper, while intended to be heterogeneously populated, are programmed by the student information system and without a guiding philosophy.
Often students in advanced academic tracks find themselves in the same English classes due to the programmatic strain impacted by the advanced courses themselves. With fewer sections of many advanced courses, the result of teacher recommendations and student requests, as opposed to the many English sections makes it possible for non-honors students to find themselves in the minority in their English class leading to exposure to classmates they may never see again unless they attempt to jump to the advanced track.

“My English class was an interesting place in 9th grade and there were a lot of kids that I haven’t ever seen again, simply just because I take different courses than they do.” 9th Grade EHP Non-Completer

Beyond meeting different classmates and listening to a wider range of voices during their class it did not seem that students have an awareness about the educational benefits of heterogeneous classes. It is certainly clear that non-honors students do not see themselves as the educational beneficiaries of the heterogeneous class model. There is a sense that student participants see English classes as easier in part because they perceive class to be moving at a slower pace. While other students report positive experiences in class they do not necessarily see English class structure as anything more than an oddity.

*English Teachers*

Teachers have a more difficult time defining the positive aspects of the heterogeneous grouping of students at least as it relates to the core academic beliefs most often associated with heterogeneous grouping proponents.

The teacher quoted below, while acknowledging the wider variety of
students in the class, saw a benefit in the class as a means of getting non-honors students to attempt the honors project the following year, as if the class was strictly a vehicle for the project instead of the converse.

"So the heterogeneous grouping gives us a more authentic group of kids to teach, to work with, and they really do help each other, and the honors project kids sometimes encourage those other kids who are not doing it to do it the following year or the following semester, or ... There's a lot of encouragement there." Ms. Walker

Other teachers identified the challenges of the heterogeneous classes especially with the additional students in Cooper classrooms due to other external factors. The teacher quoted below also seems to be speaking to attempts at differentiating instruction without the proper pedagogical terminology. Again, though, it seemed that the benefit of the class structure is for the non-honors students who can be helped by the honors students when need be. It appears that the honors students derived no benefit from the class structure from the teacher perspective.

"I think that now with heterogeneous grouping we have twenty nine students in the class. Twenty nine, and twenty nine different levels of ability, and sometimes we move a little bit faster, and sometimes we move a little bit slower, and the kids at the top frequently benefit from what we would teach to the bottom, quote, unquote, they (non-EHP students) benefit because maybe sometimes we're so high up that they lose the basics, and vice versa." Ms. Parker

Teachers continually expressed the structure of English classes as an opportunity for their non-honors students, and while well-intentioned, are unable to define the benefit for honors students in most cases. This again revealed a lack of a unified purpose of the heterogeneous classes along with a lack of understanding.
about both the how and why the program exists at all.

“I would also just say that within the framework of you know, differentiated heterogeneous classroom, there is room for the non honors student to excel and go beyond.” Mr. White

Further imbedded within the teacher comments is the notion that non-honors students need to be helped or challenged or pushed beyond their academic limits. While on some levels comments of that nature may appear positive, they are loaded with judgment about the non-honors student and how the structure of English classes can help them become more diligent learners. This theme, the notion that non-honors students need to be helped, emerges in a number of different areas throughout.

“But at the same time, what you just said made me think of the fact with the heterogeneous mixing, we are stretching students.” Ms. Blank

Not all teachers expressed any difficulty at understanding how the honors project impacts the class structure at Cooper. While teachers, in general, have difficulty defining exactly how they structure their own classes to meet the needs of a wide range of learners, and even more seemingly cannot delineate any benefits for honors students in heterogeneous classes, most teachers refer to this model as one they enjoy and would not change.

“I just think I love having heterogeneous grouping in my class. I think that shapes the way I teach. You know, it's such a treat. That's how I view it. I view it as a treat to have mixed abilities in my class, and so honor's projects are my avenue to that kind of teaching.” Ms. Allen

Positive feelings about the class structure nonetheless still reveal the lack of a clear set of beliefs related to the heterogeneous English class model and is of some
concern for the future of the honors project program. With pressure to convert to a more traditional honors class model it is vital for a cohesive understanding of the value of the heterogeneous class model. In almost all cases the parents complaining are parents of EHP students leaving the non-EHP students to fend for themselves. The steady perception of English as lacking academic rigor is problematic. Still, there is the appearance of optimism for non-honors students who can, at least, benefit from being in core academic classes with their honors level classmates.

Cons

Students

Student comments about their experiences in English class often came loaded with judgment about how concerned non-honors students are about their own learning and reveal more of the additional benefits granted to honors students by their teachers. Some students seemed to harbor resentment towards classmates they perceive to not care about their own learning, a sentiment reserved for non-honors students exclusively. The perception that all honors students care about their grades and the quality of their work is again revealed as something that permeates the culture at Cooper High.

The student quoted below seemed to lament the opportunity granted by their teacher to be able to use books read during the honors project for the class midterm. Even if that opportunity was only known to the honors project students within the class it seems that the student recognizes it as an unfair advantage. Of more concern is the advantage afforded to honors students in a class specifically
designed to level the playing field instead of further tilting it toward honors students.

“It’s not like we would talk about them, like, sometimes, like, the people that were doing it, like, raise our hand, and or kind of make connections to it. Or like, before the midterm, she, like my teacher said we could use the books we read for the Honors Projects, so that might’ve made, like, some people ... Like they had, like, less options to choose from, like for their project.” 9th Grade EHP Student

Some honors project students seemed convinced that students taking honors classes or, at least, completing an honors project must care about their work in stark contrast to non-honors students who, at best, are non-contributors to class, but also make up a group of students who simply don’t care about their own learning. The ongoing categorization of students by students may be a byproduct of conflicting class structures throughout the school that include honors and advanced courses alongside the heterogeneous English classes.

“In English, there are, there are people that, there are maybe five or six people that really talk, a few people that aren’t interested, and um, quite a few people that just don’t really care.” 9th Grade EHP Student

The student quoted below has chosen even stronger language to describe their classmates that are non-honors students, even describing classmates as “those people” as if they are completely different from each other despite being in the same grade, from the same community and in the same class. For many of the honors project completers their 9th grade English class is the first time they have been in a core academic course with, at least, a close representation of all the students in their grade level since elementary school before “academically advanced” students were segregated from other students.
"I don’t want to generalize like the whole class, ’cause I definitely were people in my class who didn’t care, who weren’t paying attention, who’d show up late, who’d get bad grades and, like, not understand why they were doing bad. And, like, I understand some people don’t get it, and, like, they sometimes need like the extra, you know, help with it, but it didn’t seem like many of those people were going in to get it, and that they were paying attention in class." 9th Grade EHP Student

Non-honors students expressed some amount of frustration about the structure of the English classes, but fall short of placing blame on students and do not spend time labeling students as those who care and those who don’t. Students, like the one quoted below, instead placed their criticism on their teachers who seem to lack a unified approach to the teaching of heterogeneous student populations and, as a result, change the pitch of their class often in an attempt to meet the wide-ranging skills of their students.

“In English class you have like a wide spectrum of, like, students, like, people who are in Honors classes and people aren’t in Honors classes. So I think, like, the teachers have to cater to, like, the middle and they have to, like, teach a little lower for the Honors kids and a little higher for the non-Honors kids.” 9th Grade EHP Non-Completer

The criticism articulated by the students about the unfair advantages afforded to honors project students, or the way they evaluate each other as caring or not about their own education or about the way teachers structure their classes in an attempt to aim at the various populations of students in their class may be more indicative of the consistent lack of programmatic vision for the teaching of heterogeneous classes. It is likely that these are close to the comments about English class that make it home to parents that leads to the consistent backlash against the honors project program in favor of a much easier understood and
A traditional model of honors English classes.

**English Teachers**

English teachers made every attempt to frame all their responses about heterogeneous English classes as positive. The teachers spent almost no time praising the structure of the class or identifying how they prepare for their wide ranging student populations. Some consistent areas of comments do continue to emerge. The contributions honors project students make in English class and the, seemingly, serendipitous nature of those contributions stated as an added value to English classes appears a number of times. Other consistent themes include the school wide lack of purposeful planning when it comes to the creation of the English classes and the lack of a unified belief system when it comes to the teaching of heterogeneous classes.

The quote below exemplifies the programming challenge, and thusly, the planning challenge teachers face when the class is not evenly distributed. Of course, the teacher needs to make some pedagogical decisions when such a large percentage of students are working on the honors project in the same classroom. Yet, it is the assumption that non-honors project students were interested in the outside texts that is of greatest concern. First, it is unlikely that the teacher actually knows the level of interest of the students who are not familiar with the text being discussed. Second, this provides another example of the teacher ceding control of her classroom to the students completing the honors project, another advantage for honors students located within a space where advantages should not exist.
"So for example, last semester, two thirds of my class was working on the ninth grade honors project, and reading [inaudible name of text], and they continuously brought in that information to the general class because it was relevant that the other kids who were not reading those books were interested in them." Ms. Sally

Teachers provided other justifications for their actions in class especially when it comes to allowing discussion involving honors projects in English class. Questions emerged about the involvement of the honors project, a project that is designed to be completed in addition to the work in English class, and not in class at all. Teacher and student comments frequently included allusions to the inclusion of the honors project readings in English class raising concerns about the actual purpose of the heterogeneous English classes and if teachers understand the philosophical arguments in favor of them. The teacher comment below spoke to what might happen after allowing honors project texts to be discussed during English class. That the teachers discuss this as an unknown quantity, but still makes an effort to describe it as both positive and a benefit to the non-honors project student, belies the lack of a true plan for the structure of the class and fails to acknowledge the potential negative impact a class that includes private conversation with only a segment of the students, that happens to be divided along honors project lines, can have on non-honors project students. Furthermore, it is conversations like the one described below and elsewhere that also reinforce the social status honors students enjoy as compared to their non-honors student classmates.

"The unknown quantity like you were saying that, um, if a student who's doing honors project is talking about how- what you're doing in the classroom relates to the book they're reading outside of it, the student
Even when not introducing the texts being read outside of class during the honors project, teachers were filled with assumptions about the quality of contribution honors project students make. Honors project students are frequently equated as higher performing students even when teachers speculate openly about student motivation for engaging in the project or other advanced courses. Once they have arrived in class all honors project students, regardless of their perceived motivations, receive the same benefit and are considered high performing. Teachers assume that honors project students raise the level of discourse in the class and that all students benefit from the increase without any explanation as to how all students derive that benefit. Further, teachers make these student contributions appear incidental and not attributable to their own plan or classroom management structure.

“Even if they’re not talking about what they’re reading on an honors project, but the level of conversation is just that bit higher, and everyone benefits from that, and I think even those, the higher level kids benefit from being in us... like, a real situation, where there’s just a whole bunch of different ways of thinking about things and how people can succeed on different levels, and the conversation comes up that way. So, I think that’s you know, really benefits everybody, and I- I agree that it’s like a- a treat for myself, as a teacher, and that’s how I would prefer it to be.”

Ms. Best

When discussing classroom structure and the grouping of students teachers still found a host of qualifiers to describe both honors and non-honors students. It is easy to get a sense that honors and non-honors students only work together under
very unique circumstances which include a non-honors student who still comes with great ability. Again, there appears to be no clear pedagogical approach to the heterogeneous class structure as teachers consistently fail to be able to articulate how to manage students of varying academic ability. Of greater concern is the consistent discussion of class as a series of opinions students offer about a given text and not a definitive curriculum aimed at expanding student skills.

“But they’re strengths and weakness, too. So, like you might have a nice quiet honors kid who is maybe a diligent reader and writer but maybe doesn’t have much of a personality and you put them with maybe less of a strong student but who has a great personality and has a great ability to think and have an opinion about a book.” Mr. White

The comment below does highlight some of the optimism that teachers have for the heterogeneous model of English class. It is possible for non-honors students to perform at high academic levels especially when grouped with their honors project classmates. Problematically and consistently teachers fail to articulate just how to structure class for all their students. Optimism for student performance and, by association, the class model is vital for the program to be successful, yet without clear goals and a fine understanding of the pedagogical benefits of heterogeneous classes could help lead to the demise of the program.

“I would also just say that within the framework of you know, differentiated heterogeneous classroom, there is room for the non-honors student to excel and go beyond.” Ms. Jones

Once again the focus, in terms of benefits for students, lay with the non-honors student and their ability to excel in the heterogeneous model of class. Of greater concern is the divide between honors and non-honors students which often
is created by class and race. EHP students appear to have more control during English class and are certainly given more freedom when it comes to class comments and determining class direction. It does appear that teachers are unaware of these important data pieces and the impact that might have on student performance and perceptions of themselves.

An analysis of the heterogeneous English classes at Cooper raises several concerns related to social reproduction. Foremost is the notion that heterogeneous classes are intended to be classes where all students are on equal footing and learning together. It appears that the classes at Cooper are differently structured with students very much aware of who is an honors student and who is not. With so much open discussion about the roles students play within the school the classroom again becomes a place where social status gets reinforced as students fall into their traditional roles almost always based on social class. The openly negative views of non-participants also helps reinforce views often associated with people from lower social classes by those from the upper class. Once students believe that they are less capable of success they will stop seeking opportunities to advance and truly prepare themselves for the professional roles currently occupied by other members of their social class (MacLeod, 2008). Teachers, therefore, may need to be better prepared to use this space to more actively challenge the status quo.

**Heterogeneous Classes vs. Homogeneous Classes**

When confronted with the choice between heterogeneous classes and the more traditional homogeneous honors class both student and teacher participants
have interesting views. Those views reveal plenty about how students perceive
themselves, their classmates and honors classes. Students are accustomed to the
honors class model and, in many cases, have a difficult time understanding the
benefits of the honors project model. Teachers, when given the choice between the
two models, have difficulty praising the honors project model. They also are
reluctant to imagine a model different than the one, most of the participants, have
taught in exclusively. The teachers also believed that class size, having risen at
Cooper High over the past few years, makes the bigger difference when comparing
the two models. Furthermore, the teachers did not appear familiar with the
philosophy most often associated with heterogeneous grouping as it relates to
student progress in: academics, social and emotional growth, or their own self-
confidence (Slavin, 1990; Kulik & Kulik, 1982; Demareth, 2008).

Students

Most of the student participants are grateful for having an honors English
program of any sort at all. Still, their focus is on the students around them and the
lack of commitment they perceive in non-honors students. Others reflect on the
pressure that frequently exists in honors classes and see the honors project as a
break from the consistent fast pace of honors classes. In most all circumstances
student participants see themselves as qualified students regardless of if they
completed a project in grade 9 or not.

The student quoted below completed an honors project in grade 10. While
likely not prepared to make the choice on their own in grade 9 to engage in the extra
work that comes with the honors project, the student did not question their academic ability at all. Not all students are prepared to make the decision to engage in the honors project and are far more comfortable allowing other adults: teachers, guidance counselors and parents to select class opportunities for her. All other honors models at Cooper, and at most other traditional high schools, do not involve a great deal of student choice, but instead allow students to be placed into programs. After placement students can merely comply and complete the work assigned to them.

“I do wish there was an Honors English class. I know, um, one of the reasons I was motivated to do it was because I know that I’m good at English and I like English, and I knew that I should and could be able to get, you know, Honors English credit. Because I felt like that was the level that I was at. So I think that it’s, um, really great that we do at least have an Honors English Program, but I think it would be better if we had a class.” 9th Grade EHP Non-Completer

Some students reflecting back on their grade 9 experiences were able to see the value of taking class with a wide variety of learners. The student below recognized the consistent pace that honors classes often bring with it as opposed to the options that exist within the honors project. This student was also careful to place themselves academically in the middle and not be critical of classmates. Their assessment of other honors classes is one often heard throughout the halls of Cooper High with expectations set extremely high by teachers. Honors classes are frequently marked with a great deal of reading and homework leading to many discussions about the value of homework and concerns about student anxiety.

“I think it would be good to have a class, but I also like that it’s a project because, I don’t know, just thinking about being in an Honors class just gives me a different vibe. It makes me, like, think, "Oh this entire year is
going to be difficult and, like, the whole course is going to be honors, honors, honors." But, like, doing a project ... It's kind of a side note and having regular English with, like, people who aren't my level or people who are above my level and being able to do an Honors Project with other people who are passionate about English, kind of gives me more perspective, so I like how it is." 9th Grade EHP Non-Completer

Other students are free to be more critical of their classmates in English class.

There was an assumption that all honors students are both serious and engaged in their own education while non-honors students are the opposite. The criticisms of students are not consistent and frequently divide between honors and non-honors project completers. In the following quotes there is a marked difference between the honors project completer and the non-completers. The honors student critically evaluates the other students in their class while the non-completers speak of the pressure of the honors environment and the temptation to not participate in class for fear of being seen as unintelligent by others. What is consistent is the preference for honors and non-honors classes instead of the honors project model.

“I'm not saying that everyone in my class has to be in an Honors class. I'm just saying that the kids in those classes tend to participate more and tend to actually want to learn, so I'd rather be in a class with those type of kids. But, I mean, I wouldn't be, like, I would care if the person, like, which classes they're taking. I just would rather be in a class with someone who's actually engaged in the conversation and not on their phone.” 9th Grade EHP Student

The preference for a traditional honors class model is not surprising given the structure of the other courses at Cooper High. The culture at Cooper that rewards high academic achievers undoubtedly increases the pressure students feel regardless of the actual academic abilities. Students who have not been in honors classes throughout middle school or selected for the advanced programs in
elementary school likely adopt the personas of average students and come to believe that they are not as capable as many of their classmates.

“Oh, like, why don’t you talk in class?” And, you know, they say, “You know, I feel stupid. Like, I don’t think I have anything good to contribute to the conversation.” And, um, I do think in that case it would be beneficial to separate, um, the groups of people. But, also, you know, being in an Honors class is very pressuring. And there’s really a lot of pressure on each student and it feels kind of competitive.” 9th Grade EHP Non-Completer

“Also, like, sometimes when you’re in the non-Honors course, like, you tend to feel bad about yourself because you’re not as good as some other kids.” 9th Grade EHP Non-Completer

“I mean, the people who aren’t as engaged might be intimidated by the people who are engaged and they might think that they have great ideas, but you don’t and that you, like, whatever you say is going to sound stupid. So I feel like if there is a non-Honors class, it will allow people to bring out their thoughts more because they’re in the same environment as other people who feel the same way, I guess.” 9th Grade EHP Non-Completer

The students quoted above have clearly conflated ideas around student engagement and smartness with being in an honors class. The assumptions made about EHP students: that they are smart, willing classroom contributors, and committed to their own education in ways other students are not are likely born from the attention granted district wide to high academic achievers. Of additional concern is the way the non-EHP students feel about themselves and the lack of credit they give each other as intelligent and worthy of being listened to in class. It is these feelings, that teachers may be unaware of, that challenge the heterogeneous class model and require school-wide attention.

Other students were split about the structure of the project as opposed to the
more familiar structure of honors classes. Students, perhaps high performing ones more than others, are conditioned to perform as instructed by their teachers. The honors project, rather purposefully, challenges the traditional structure and requires students to work independently. The benefit of encouraging students to become more self-efficacious is rather underappreciated by students and parents alike. In the highly competitive world of Cooper High School the preference for most is to benefit from educational aspects that are measured, evaluated and recorded by scores. Learning to balance ones time and work independently does not appear on a transcript or help a student gain college acceptance. Still, this particular benefit is not lost on all students.

“I think that having a structure and, and knowing what to do, and knowing what’s assigned, and knowing all these different aspects, like, I think that would be good for me and other students, in addition, you know.” 9th Grade EHP Student

“So, I’m kind of glad it’s not class because if it was a class it’d be more structured, and a whole part of the project is learning how to deal without the structure of a class and do more, do more sophisticated work, like you might do in the future.” 9th Grade EHP Student

Perhaps most telling when it comes to student preference between honors class or honors project is the notion that honors classes are, in fact, easier for students. The project is confounding to students and parents alike in that it pulls students away from the teacher driven model of school that they have been embedded in for virtually all of their school lives. Challenging students to think and act beyond the consistent comfort of the classroom is an intended benefit of the project and, likely, part of the project that is articulated most ineffectively to parents
by teachers.

“I think an honors class is easier for students.” 9th Grade EHP Completer

The heterogeneous English class model is significantly different within a district that is, in virtually all other academic areas, highly traditional in its approach to teaching advanced students. Students, high performing and not, have been conditioned throughout their school careers to do as instructed and not question the model. Students are challenged in English not only by the pace of the class as identified by some, but also by the presence of students with differing academic abilities who are also from more diverse backgrounds. This new challenge can make students yearn for the more familiar environments in all circumstances providing an even steeper challenge when it comes to attempting to change school culture.

*English Teachers*

When comparing the two different honors models teachers spend little time lauding the heterogeneous classes. At the same time they have little interest in the more traditional honors class model, in fact some doubt they would change their teaching practices if the school were to change. Teachers’ general refusal to address the benefits of either model highlights a lack of true philosophical belief as it relates to heterogeneous grouping of students. While there is no call for a change teachers do express concern over the size of their English classes and the strongly held belief that honors classes are best when they are small and a concern for the stigma associated with dropping honors classes, something the honors project eliminates to
some degree. In most cases it seems that, like the students, the teachers are comfortable working in the current model compliantly.

Teachers highlight the individual attention they are able to provide to students working on the independent honors project. That attention has diminished over the years as the number of students engaging in the project has increased leading teachers to find more creative ways to meet with all their honors project students. In some instances teachers meet with groups of students together to discuss a particular text and writing challenges students may be having. That the students participating in the honors project are considered honors students makes comments about smaller class size problematic. It might be true that all students would benefit from smaller class size, yet it is the focus on smaller class size for honors students that seem of greatest import.

The teacher quoted below seems to imply that small class size and the honors project are equivalent despite the vast list of benefits associated with the honors project and heterogeneous classes created by teachers earlier. Again, it is the failure to acknowledge the potential benefits of smaller class size for all students that is of greatest concern. The second quote similarly relates small honors project groups of students that teachers sometimes bring together with small honors classes. The quote indicates that by allowing teachers to streamline the honors project process and create groups of students to meet with that we have unintentionally waded into the waters of honors classes.

“All of the things that they benefit from in an honors project are the things that they benefit in a smaller class setting. If you have, when I first started here, smaller classes, there was a lot of that individual
attention.” Ms. Allen

“It’s a fact. Smaller honors- is the same thing. A smaller honors group.”

Other teachers spent time considering the impact a potential change to honors classes would have on them as teachers. In the two quotes below the teachers are split when considering differences in their approach to pedagogy with one expecting to learn much from the difference in class population and the other anticipating no change to their practice at all. Once again, these comments underscore what appears to be a lack of consideration about pedagogy that is driven by student population and educational theory as opposed to one’s own personal, preferential practices.

"So, I think for me, a learning experience of how I would approach the class would be if I had a homogeneous grouping, I would learn a lot more of, "oh, I can’t expect this. I shouldn't do this." I think that would be my learning experience if we changed.” Ms. Walker

“Well, I often think about, what if we had honors classes? Would I teach my course differently? And I can't imagine I would. I feel like what I'm doing is really good, it would just maybe be different.” Ms. Smith

Participants cite other concerns related to the potential impact of changing to a more traditional model. One teacher worries about the impact on students who would choose to drop from an honors class and the negative stigma associated with dropping. While that concern might have some validity it disregards the remaining programs in the school that all allow for students to drop from honors classes if they choose and cope with any negative attention that comes with that. Additionally, with the current model many teachers use to meet with their honors project students that includes meeting in small groups that simulate, in some teachers
opinions, honors classes, there is no way for a student to drop without classmates noticing.

“In the same way that there might be if you took an English honors class, but then you had to drop it. That would be ... Then, there might be more of a stigma to that.”

Support for the current program is tepid at best without explanation as to why this model is appropriate, beneficial or supporting of students. The notion, asserted by the teacher quoted below, that English is naturally suited to heterogeneous classes lacks a depth of understanding about the multiple purposes heterogeneous classes serve for students. It is understandable that English teachers see their subject as fundamentally different from other academic areas, yet there appears to be an assumption in this quote about the academic nature of English instruction when compared to math or science.

“It wouldn’t come up, and I think English lends itself to that heterogeneous grouping where maybe like a math class or a science class gets a different animal. It wouldn’t work as well.” Ms. Parker

There are some teachers who believe that the presence of the honors project has a negative impact on the AP English classes that exist for students in grades 11 and 12. In more traditional subjects students are programmed forward and, with the exception of students who waive into advanced classes, predicting the numbers of students who will take the advanced classes is easier. Further, as stated earlier, students are most likely to go to the classes they are programmed for. Without the traditional model in English students truly need to choose to enroll in the AP classes leading, possibly, to lower enrollment.

“I have a class of second semester seniors who I think seventy five
percent of them could have easily been in AP English."

Ms. Jones

Undoubtedly the English program affords students a great deal more choices than other, more traditionally aligned, subject areas. It is possible that the myriad of choices has reduced the number of students requesting AP classes in English. It is also likely that a change to a more traditional honors class model in English would lead to higher numbers in Advanced Placement classes. Still, if the department wanted to increase the AP course numbers they could devise a multitude of plans designed to effectively populate the class. It is also possible that with heterogeneous classes in English all students could, in a more perfect system, see themselves as AP students and register for the class.

The comments regarding class models, heterogeneous or homogeneous, are consistent with reproduction theorists. Students favor, in some cases, homogeneous classes in part because that model keeps the social classes separate. Adding the asserted belief that honors classes are “easier” than other classes speaks to other advantages conferred on honors students that help maintain the social order. Again teachers seem to miss an opportunity to use their heterogeneous classes as a means of resistance in the Giroux (1983) model by taking advantage of having students of all social classes in the same room.

CONCLUSION

The English Honors Project at Cooper High School is an interesting phenomenon on a number of levels. That the program exists in an academic area
surrounded by more traditionally organized academic programs in a highly successful suburban high school is truly unique. The opportunities the project creates for students and for the school are also unique and plentiful. Students of all ability levels do have the opportunity to attempt this project to earn an honors credit on their transcript and, in some cases, be considered an honors student for the first time in their academic lives. The school, through the work of the English department, can work to undo at least some of the damage done by tracked academic programs that begin as early as third grade and separate students by race and social class. The EHP can potentially change suburban school culture and set a standard for other similar schools located throughout the many neighboring communities. However, while the project has great potential it is not prepared to realize it in its current form.

The data collected from both students and teachers reveals the relationship between teacher and student as a key benefit of the project. While all acknowledge the academic credit earned by completing the project, it is the personal connection between student and teacher that often develops during the project between that provides students with social capital, which in turn, may set the stage for the way students interact with adults for the remainder of their academic lives. That relationship, while developed during the EHP, also clearly carries into English class in a variety of ways leading to, in some cases, unfair academic advantages for students who, presumably, are already somewhat privileged. This particular finding coupled with the breakdown of students completing the project in 9th grade by race
leads to a more troubling conclusion.

Because of its structure and seemingly limitless potential, the EHP can breakdown racial, socio-economic and social reproduction lines through access to honors curriculum, but it does not. In some respects the EHP amplifies the educational disparities that exist between different student groups at Cooper reinforcing the traditional social class roles that exist in and out of the school setting. Looking beyond the grade 9 completion data to the unseen benefits that some students described leads to the conclusion that the EHP allows for tracking to exist despite attempt to mitigate it. That only some students receive the unseen benefits teachers often provide EHP students creates a social justice issue for Cooper as it is Hispanic students that are almost always absent from the EHP.

The heterogeneous English classes created as a result of the EHP do have the ability of providing equal access for all Cooper students to the same English curriculum. The data collected, however, reveals that for a variety of reasons the classes are unable to accomplish their laudable goal. Cooper lacks the defined purpose necessary for expanded success with heterogeneous classes to be effective. Too many variables impact how the classes are created leading to great imbalances within the English classes regarding the number of honors and non-honors students. Cooper students would greatly benefit from a more strategic approach in an attempt to create a predictable balance of students within English classes. Once created, professional development for all English teachers on teaching heterogeneous classes, including visiting other high schools that have made strides
toward the elimination of tracking, can lead to vast improvements within the English program.

Lastly, students completing the EHP in grade 9 care about the honors credit they receive. While students reflecting back on their experience are able to articulate many other benefits the credit they receive is ever present. It is not surprising that students, especially those with privilege, seek to collect honors credit for their own purpose. The reasons for student participation, while important to the teachers, are less important when compared to what the project can provide to the school as a whole. Researchers like Walter Feinberg (2012), Gene Glass and A. G. Rud (2012) also continue to explore the delicate balance between private interests and public benefit at a time when public schools are being pulled in the direction of individual benefit over public good. A more deliberate approach to the project and to English classes by the school can mitigate the influence of those only interested in their personal gain and keep the project focused on the potential benefits for the entire student body and the community itself. Further, it would benefit students if the teachers acknowledged an awareness of the great disparities that exist at Cooper and within the EHP. Understanding that too many aspects of the EHP and the heterogeneous English classes may act to reproduce traditional social class roles may help teachers see themselves as change agents and work to find empowering methods of including all students.

The EHP at Cooper High School should remain as part of the academic program. While there is work to be done, eliminating the project in favor of
traditional honors classes will further a class divide that already exists. While the project is imperfect and is in need of attention and direction, it has the potential to breakdown many of the barriers facing minority students at Cooper and beyond.

Conducting this study as both a researcher and a practitioner leaves me considering the impact of my findings in two distinctly different areas: practitioner and researcher. The following are areas recommended for further study in both.

**THE EHP AND ITS ROLE IN ENGLISH CLASSES**

The EHP was created to help maintain the heterogeneous model for English classes while still providing advanced students an opportunity to challenge themselves academically and increase their GPA. As intended the project is to be separate from the class apart from the grade designation on student transcript at the end of the project. Still, students report additional benefits like: reading Shakespeare for the EHP before reading it in class, distributing papers during English class time, and creating the perception that teachers rely too heavily on EHP participants in class for answers to questions. Undoubtedly some of these extra benefits exist as efficiencies for teachers as they cope with larger numbers of students pursuing the EHP. Still, the school would benefit from researching the potential impact on students from allowing the EHP to become a fixture in English class. Of particular interest is the potential impact on students once their involvement in or out of the EHP is revealed to their classmates. It is in this way that social reproduction exists within the English classes of Cooper High School. Theorists like Bowles and Gintis would identify these practices as those consistent
with those that reinforce social standing and prepare students for their likely roles after high school (MacLeod, 2008). If English is to be a place where smartness, as determined by the number of advanced classes a student takes, is not a factor does that concept get negated and limit the benefit of the heterogeneous classes altogether. Cooper High School should therefore immediately work with English teachers to remove the EHP from English classes in every way possible.

**SCHOOL CULTURE**

There is clearly a cultural impact at Cooper that provides students who take upper level courses with social capital not afforded other students. Even students who have demonstrated great ability in music, art, athletics or other areas seem to enjoy that capital in limited areas around the school while high academic achievers are known throughout. The EHP seems to impact school culture as students enjoy the relationships they establish with their teacher mentors. Further study to determine how all students can potentially benefit from the development of these important and powerful relationships is strongly encouraged. While Cooper teachers make themselves available throughout the day everyday for students to seek support of any kind the EHP requires students to visit which alleviates the stress other students might feel when going to see teachers privately even if that visit can yield social capital for students and a positive self-concept as a result of a positive relationship with a teacher. Creating opportunities for students to connect with teachers without requiring those who may benefit the most from those connections to meet with teachers is a tacit approval of continuing a practice that
routinely benefits students with long familial histories of success in school.

**Implications for Practice and Change**

The heterogeneous classes at Cooper High School have a clear impact on the culture of the school based on the student responses throughout the study. The educational philosophy most often cited when implementing a heterogeneous approach to class structure are designed to have an impact beyond the walls of the classroom and into the culture of the school. Providing all students with access to the same curriculum reduces the segregation of students by race or class that continues to exist around the country even as new accountability standards have been introduced throughout the nation. Researchers Davis, Bhatt and Schwarz (2015) have continued to study the existence of segregation in schools as a result of the new competition between schools hoping to keep their overall grades high. Programs like the EHP at Cooper can directly address segregation through the programming of their English classes. It is unclear, however, if Cooper High School has chosen to implement its heterogeneous model with a clear understanding of purpose or impact on the school. While other suburban high schools may not utilize heterogeneous classes it is obvious that they employ some sort of class structure. It is possible that, like Cooper, other similar schools do not have a clear philosophical understanding of why they employ that structure or a clear set of goals connected to what they hope to accomplish within their school. While there is some research on suburban high schools as it relates to tracking and heterogeneous groupings this segment of schools does not appear the most often studied for a variety of reasons.
Communities that maintain some level of racial diversity, but have only a small subgroup of students that live below the poverty line are likely to have long histories of academic success like Cooper does. These schools, with their remarkable consistency, can resist change as there is often no impetus to do so from any constituency. Consistent success does not seem to attract many researchers regardless of what might exist within a school culture after only a cursory examination. Like its urban counterparts, suburban schools are likely to also help maintain class and race norms by limiting opportunity for students of color. Further research into the impact of heterogeneous classes on how students perceive themselves and their classmates may bring more clarity to the value of heterogeneous classes on school culture and student perception in suburban high schools. Finding school partners already engaged in the work of de-tracking especially as it relates to English instruction would also be wise for both English teachers and school administration. Schools like El Cerrito High School in El Cerrito, California have been invested in this work for a few decades with success in the classroom and in the overall culture of the school (Cone, 1992). While easy for students, teachers and schools to feel isolated there are schools making strides that can become wonderful models for this important work.

I suggest that the English Department at Cooper work to develop a guiding philosophy about the purpose of the EHP beyond providing students with a means to earn honors credit. Establishing a clear philosophy will give the department a lens through which they can evaluate their work as it relates to school culture and
social reproduction. Additionally, English teachers need to remove EHP identifiers from English classes immediately because of the negative impact those identifiers have on student morale and, quite possibly, reproduce the social order. This change in practice is, likely, the least technical in nature, but can possibly yield immediate changes in the way students experience English class which can have an impact on school culture. It is worth noting that removing identifiers from class may also impact student self-efficacy and self-regulation. By providing a classroom environment that no longer divides students into two very distinct groups students can experience more confidence in class improve their own beliefs about what they can accomplish.

**HETEROGENEOUS CLASSES**

While the school asserts that English classes are heterogeneously populated there is no formula used in the formation of the classes to ensure any sort of balance, which in turn leads teachers into vastly different classes each semester. Connecting the philosophy behind the benefit of heterogeneous classes to our school practice may lead to increased pedagogical focus for teachers. While finding a clear definition for “heterogeneously grouped classes” was not possible in the scope of this study, I do believe schools utilizing the heterogeneous model should identify a standard to meet; imbalanced heterogeneity in either direction is undesirable. Classes that are close to balanced can lead teachers to a more collaborative approach for their pedagogical choices, increase discourse among colleagues and reduce the potential dominance of the “honors” students in any one
class. There are whole school implications involved here as Cooper High School should determine the value of the heterogeneous model within English, determine if the model should be replicated in other parts of the school and, if deemed important, should be programmed at the start of the scheduling process rather than the end. Understanding the impact heterogeneous grouping can have on individual students and on school culture as a whole may help the faculty of Cooper arrive at a single philosophical approach. Running a school like Cooper with multiple student tracking structures is misleading and confusing to many school constituencies and leaves teachers unable, in some instances, to answer questions about the value of maintaining the structure at all. Teachers and school administrators should explore schools that have resolved some of these complex issues to arrive at a more cohesive approach to school design and instruction. The consistently disproportionate academic performance of students based on race should make this a critical issue for Cooper High School. That the underperforming populations are also associated with lower social class status likely makes this issue less urgent.

**Implications for Practice and Change**

Cooper’s attempt to run heterogeneous English classes would likely benefit from a clearer understanding of what heterogeneous means to Cooper and an articulated set of goals for the school and students. Researching other heterogeneous programs, particularly in suburban settings, would either provide some focus for Cooper or reveal a deeper, institutional issue as they relate to heterogeneous programs in general. While my study was not strictly about the
impact of heterogeneous classes it did highlight some of the ancillary issues that emerged as a result of the heterogeneous model. It is clear that merely creating heterogeneous classes does not eliminate issues related to social reproduction as has been evidenced throughout my findings. Further study about the benefit of heterogeneous classes is still needed in all areas including heterogeneous instruction within suburban school settings. It is likely that given the vast differences between school programs; Cooper’s heterogeneous English classes within a more traditionally designed homogeneous academic program for example may make it difficult to study school programs side by side. In order to build on efforts at de-tracking and better teaching in heterogeneous settings, we can also draw on a broad literature that describes these efforts. This work can include the overcoming of challenges described by Bellanca and Swartz (1993) and Hesson (2010), and better understanding the impact on different kinds of students (Session 2012, Culpepper 2012, Salcheggar 2016).

It is first suggested that the administration revisit the way it programs students for English classes to produce a purposeful balance of students within English classes. The current programming model has English programmed last into a student schedule because of the interchangeable nature of English courses by grade when compared to the more rigid courses in math or science. While this model suits the school it does not support English teachers or students as they attempt to find their place in class. Once a new approach to programming designed to create balance classes the school can focus on providing professional
development for English teachers on the teaching of heterogeneous classes. Finding opportunities for teachers to expand their professional knowledge and practice will help improve opportunities for students and have a positive impact on the school community.

SMARTNESS AND RACE

The data collected about EHP students at Cooper indicates that the vast majority of students attempting and completing the project are white. This data is very similar to the data complied about students who take AP courses in Cooper High School and create, at times, a school within a school by keeping students not just separated by academic ability, but by default also apart by race and class. Many within Cooper site the EHP as the place where students can break free of the traditional tracks of most schools and attempt a more rigorous curriculum. While that assertion is, in theory, true it is not true in practice. It would appear that the culture of smartness that exists within Cooper is as rigid as it likely is in other similar schools despite the presence of the EHP. Findings of this nature are consistent with other studies about the ways in which schools, instead of breaking with traditional social class structure, reproduce them (MacLeod, 2008). The entrance of discussion about the EHP into English classes may contribute to the lack of students taking risks or there may be other factors at play. Investigating the impact of the EHP to determine if it is indeed having the impact teachers and the community would like it to. If the EHP maintains the same data as the traditional advanced programs do than it may no longer need to be a part of the school.
As a researcher there also exists topics worthy of future study that aligns with current, existing research.

**Implications for Practice and Change**

Cooper High School’s data set for advanced class enrollment and the EHP reveal that the vast majority of students are white or Asian. Those numbers are not surprising given the similar trend that exists around the country. Schools like Cooper with its heterogeneous student grouping in English have an opportunity to change those trends without a massive overhaul of its program. The data from this study revealed more about how students perceive themselves in terms of being smart and how those perceptions can be easily driven by student experiences in class. While race and class divisions exist in Cooper other issues as it relates to perceptions of smartness also exist. Students not participating in the EHP at Cooper often lack confidence in their own smartness regardless of their race or class status. Again, there are many other schools like Cooper with a racial and class divide, and also other divides in terms of smartness that are determined solely by which students get advanced in their academic subjects. Further research into how smartness, race and class are conflated can help schools design programs that attempt to undo some of these perceptions that often permeate culture far beyond school.

The administration at Cooper High School has already been engaged in the elimination of courses in multiple subject areas that have taken students off track as compared to their classmates. Those courses were almost always populated by
minority students and reinforced social reproduction constructs. As a result, there has been an increase in students from a broader background, including non-native English speakers, in more rigorous classes. These changes have created new challenges for teachers and for the school as there is a new call for professional development in a number of areas. While the changes haven’t reached saturation levels yet they have been noticed by many and, by continuing this trend, can have a positive impact on the way students perceive themselves and school culture.

Further, given the increasing number of Spanish speaking families in the community Cooper has made a deliberate effort to increase the number of Spanish speaking faculty and has made a regular practice out of translating documents, phone class and other communications with students and families. What was once received with resistance has quickly changed into an expectation when it comes to translations as the idea of creating a more welcoming environment for all students and families.

Both these changes can impact frequently held beliefs for students and the school about smartness as it relates to race. Clearing a path for all students to be exposed to rigorous curriculum will help students improve their own self-concept and help the school recognize that all students can achieve at high levels. It is expected that the school will continue to adjust to its expanding student population and need to provide faculty with additional professional development to ensure that teachers develop the skills required to support all their students.
APPENDIX 1: INFORMED CONSENT

Ira Pernick
516-767-5804

Research Study: The Potential Impact of the Independent English Honors Project in Grade 9 on Student Self-Regulation and Self-Efficacy.

Research Questions:

1. In what ways does the experience of the Independent English Honors Project impact student self-regulation and self-efficacy?
2. How do students, completing or having previously completed the English Honors Project, differentially experience heterogeneous classes in English?

Informed Consent Statement

Purpose of the study:
As you may know, I am in a doctoral program at the University of Pennsylvania. As part of my dissertation, I am conducting focus groups of students and teachers to understand the student experience with the English Honors Project and heterogeneously grouped English classes.

What will I be asked to do?
Your participation in this research would be completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without fear of any consequences. As a participant, your involvement would consist of participating in one focus group consisting of up to 5 students. The focus groups will last between 30-60 minutes and will be audio taped by me. While unlikely, I may want to conduct follow up focus groups. I am respectful of your time, and therefore, will work around your schedule as needed.

Voluntary Participation:
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to, and there will be no penalty or impact on our work or personal relationship as a result. If you decide that you want to participate now but change your mind later, just let me know and you can stop participating at any time. If you have questions or want to talk more about the study before deciding whether or not to participate, please call or e-mail (ipernick@portnet.org) anytime. If you choose to participate, I’ll ask you and your parent to sign two copies of this consent form, one for you to keep and one for me to have for my records.
Confidentiality
Any notes and audio-recordings of focus groups will be stored on my personal laptop or I Phone, both of which are password-protected. I will be transcribing the recorded data through the use of an app. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the study to keep student names as confidential as possible. Once my dissertation is completed and approved, all recorded data will be destroyed.

How will I benefit from the study?
Your participation could help me and the administrative team here at school gain a better understanding of the English Honors Project from the perspective of students. The English Honors Project is a frequently contested option for students. Having a student perspective will help clarify many of the issues raised by other constituencies.

What are the risks and inconveniences to participating in the study?
There are minimal risks for participating as there are no experimental procedures involved. However, there may be some minor disruption to your class schedule and a bit of additional demand on your time. Some questions could potentially make you feel uncomfortable as they might stimulate memories from the past or feel intrusive. Should that occur, you reserve the right to skip answering a question, ask to revisit the question at a later time. Your identity will be masked in this study, as well as any other potentially identifiable information, so it is highly unlikely that you could be identified in my dissertation.

When you sign this document, you are agreeing to participate in this research study as described. If you choose to participate, please sign and return one copy of this form to me via district mail. I’ve included an envelope for this purpose. If you choose not to participate, there is no need to reply; you may simply discard this document. Thank you for your consideration!

Please print your name: __________________________________________________________

_______________________________________  _______________
Parent Signature Date

_______________________________________ _______________
Student Signature Date
Ira Pernick  
516-767-5804

Research Study: The Potential Impact of the Independent English Honors Project in Grade 9 on Student Self-Regulation and Self-Efficacy.

Research Questions:

1. In what ways does the experience of the Independent English Honors Project impact student self-regulation and self-efficacy?
2. How do students, completing or having previously completed the English Honors Project, differentially experience heterogeneous classes in English?

Informed Consent Statement

Purpose of the study:
As you may know, I am in a doctoral program at the University of Pennsylvania. As part of my dissertation, I am conducting focus groups of students and teachers to understand the student experience with the English Honors Project and heterogeneously grouped English classes.

What will I be asked to do?  
Your participation in this research would be completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without fear of any consequences. As a participant, your involvement would consist of participating in one focus group consisting of up to 16 teachers. The focus groups will last between 1-2 hours and will be audio taped by me. While unlikely, I may want to conduct follow up focus groups. I am respectful of your time, and therefore, will work around your schedule as needed.

Voluntary Participation:
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to, and there will be no penalty or impact on our work or personal relationship as a result. If you decide that you want to participate now but change your mind later, just let me know and you can stop participating at any time. If you have questions or want to talk more about the study before deciding whether or not to participate, please call or e-mail (ipernick@portnet.org) anytime. If you choose to participate, I’ll ask you to sign two copies of this consent form, one for you to keep and one for me to have for my records.

Confidentiality
Any notes and audio-recordings of focus groups will be stored on my personal laptop or I Phone, both of which are password-protected. I will be transcribing the
recorded data through the use of an app. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the study to keep participant names as confidential as possible. Once my dissertation is completed and approved, all recorded data will be destroyed.

**How will I benefit from the study?**
Your participation could help me and the administrative team here at school gain a better understanding of the English Honors Project from the perspective of students and teachers. The English Honors Project is a frequently contested option for students. Having teacher perspective will help clarify many of the issues raised by other constituencies.

**What are the risks and inconveniences to participating in the study?**
There are minimal risks for participating as there are no experimental procedures involved. However, there may be some minor disruption to your class schedule and a bit of additional demand on your time. Some questions could potentially make you feel uncomfortable as they might stimulate memories from the past or feel intrusive. Should that occur, you reserve the right to skip answering a question, ask to revisit the question at a later time. Your identity will be masked in this study, as well as any other potentially identifiable information, so it is highly unlikely that you could be identified in my dissertation.

*When you sign this document, you are agreeing to participate in this research study as described. If you choose to participate, please sign and return one copy of this form to me via district mail. I’ve included an envelope for this purpose. If you choose not to participate, there is no need to reply; you may simply discard this document. Thank you for your consideration!*

Please print your name: ________________________________

_______________________________________  ___________
Teacher Signature Date
APPENDIX 2: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

I will be conducting six student focus groups each with 5 students. The first two groups will consist of 5 students currently in grade 9 who are engaged in the Honors Project. The third group will consist of 5 students currently in grade 9 who are not engaged in the Honors Project. The fourth and fifth focus groups will consist of 5 students currently in grade 11 who completed Honors Projects in grade 9. The sixth focus group will consist of current 11th grade students who did not complete an Honors Project in grade 9. Two sets of questions will be developed. One, will be focused on the Honors Project and the other on their experience in their English classes.

Grade 9 Focus Group Questions Students Completing the Honors Project: Honors Projects

1. How did you decide to pursue the English Honors project?
2. What factors did you consider before signing the agreement?
3. Describe your process for completing your Honors Project work in a timely fashion. What considerations, if any, did you make when considering the other activities you are engaged in outside or inside school?
4. How has your approach to the Honors Project impacted, if at all, the way you complete your assignments in your other classes?
5. How does the workload for the Honors Project compare to what you thought it would be?
6. What are the benefits, if any, of pursuing the Honors Project?
7. Is there anything you would like to add about your experience with the English Honors project?

Grade 9 Focus Group Questions Students Completing the Honors Project: English Class

1. As you likely know PDS does not have Honors English classes. How, if at all, has that impacted your English class experience? Please explain.
2. Often teachers will have students work in groups during class, does that happen in your English class? And, does it happen more or less frequently then in math or science class?
3. If you work in groups in English class, do you typically work with other students completing an Honors Project?
4. How, if at all, has working with other students impacted your educational experience? Please explain.
Grade 9 Focus Group Questions Students Not Completing the Honors Project: Honors Projects

1. Why did you choose not to pursue the English Honors project? What role did other commitments other than school play in your decision?
2. If you are engaged with another commitment outside of school how do you balance that activity with your school work and your own free time?
3. Describe your process for completing your school work in a timely fashion. How do you approach homework or studying for an exam?
4. What are the benefits, if any, of pursuing the Honors Project?
5. Is there anything you would like to add about your decision not to pursue the English Honors project?

Grade 9 Focus Group Questions Students Not Completing the Honors Project: English Class

1. As you likely know PDS does not have Honors English classes. How, if at all, has that impacted your English class experience? Please explain.
2. Often teachers will have students work in groups during class, does that happen in your English class? And, does it happen more or less frequently then in math or science class?
3. If you work in groups in English class, do you typically work with other students not completing an Honors Project?
4. How, if at all, has working with other students impacted your educational experience? Please explain.

Grade 11 Focus Group Questions Students who Completed an Honors Project in Grade 9: Honors Projects

1. How did you decide to pursue the English Honors project?
2. What factors did you consider before signing the agreement?
3. How difficult was it to sustain your effort to complete the project?
4. Describe your process for completing your Honors Project work in a timely fashion. What considerations, if any, did you make when considering the other activities you are engaged in outside or inside school?
5. How did your approach to the Honors Project impact the way you approached your work in your other classes?
6. What are the benefits of the Honors Project?
7. What is the value of the Honors Project?
8. Is there anything you would like to add about your experience with the English Honors project?
Grade 11 Focus Group Questions Students who Completed an Honors Project in Grade 9: English Class

1. As you likely know PDS does not have Honors English classes. What was the impact of the Honors Project on your English class in grade 9? Please provide examples.
2. Often teachers will have students work in groups during class, did that happen in your English class? And, did it happen more or less frequently then in math or science class?
3. How does not having Honors English classes impact your English classes now?
4. If you work in groups in English class, do you typically work with other students completing an Honors Project?
5. How, if at all, has working with other students impacted your educational experience? Please explain.

Grade 11 Focus Group Questions Students who did not Complete an Honors Project in Grade 9: Honors Projects

1. Why did you choose not to pursue the English Honors Project in Grade 9? What role did other commitments other than school play in your decision?
2. If you were engaged with another commitment outside of school how did you balance that activity with your school work and your own free time?
3. Describe your process for completing your school work in a timely fashion. How did you approach homework or studying for an exam?
4. What are the benefits, if any, of pursuing the Honors Project?
5. Is there anything you would like to add about your decision not to pursue the English Honors Project in Grade 9?

Grade 11 Focus Group Questions Students who did not Complete an Honors Project in Grade 9: English Class

1. As you likely know PDS does not have Honors English classes. What was the impact of the Honors Project on your English class in grade 9? Please provide examples.
2. Often teachers will have students work in groups during class, did that happen in your English class? And, did it happen more or less frequently then in math or science class?
3. How does not having Honors English classes impact your English classes now?
4. If you work in groups in English class, do you typically work with other students completing an Honors Project?
5. How, if at all, has working with other students impacted your educational experience? Please explain.
I will also be conducting a focus group with members of the English department. I will invite all 15 members of the department to participate in the focus group. I will be asking questions about the Honors Project and about their experience teaching heterogeneous English classes.

Teacher Focus Group: Honors Projects

1. Why does PDS have Honors Projects?
2. Describe some of your experiences with students completing Honors Projects over the years. Please be specific.
3. What, if any, are the benefits of the Honors Projects for students?
4. How have students planned to keep up with the workload of the Honors Projects? Please be specific.
5. Is there anything you would like to add about your experience with the English Honors project?

Teacher Focus Group: English Class

1. As you likely know PDS does not offer Honors English classes. How, if at all, has that impacted your practice as teachers?
2. What considerations do you make, if any, as you prepare for your English classes?
3. Describe the impact the heterogeneous classes in English has on students completing the Honors Project. On students not completing the Honors Project.
4. Are there benefits to heterogeneously grouping students in English class? If so, what are they?
5. Do you have any other comments about the heterogeneous grouping of students for English class?
## APPENDIX 3: STUDENT FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student #</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade at Time of Study</th>
<th>9th Grade Project</th>
<th>11th Grade Project</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Siblings in CHS</th>
<th>Home ZIP Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>112</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>115</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>w</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>116</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>w</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>117</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>w</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>118</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>w</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>119</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>w</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>w</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>121</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>w</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>122</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>w</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>123</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>w</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>w</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11050</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX 4: LIST OF TEACHER FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Yrs XP</th>
<th>Yrs at CHS</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Parker</td>
<td>10 Grade Teacher</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Abbot</td>
<td>9th Grade Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Jones</td>
<td>Dept. Chairperson</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Wilson</td>
<td>10th Grade Teacher</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Blank</td>
<td>12th Grade Teacher</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. White</td>
<td>9 and 11 Grade Teacher</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Walker</td>
<td>9th Grade Teacher</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Allen</td>
<td>12th Grade teacher</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Sally</td>
<td>Reading Teacher</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Best</td>
<td>9 and 10th Grade teacher</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Smith</td>
<td>9th Grade Teacher</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 5: ENGLISH HONORS PROGRAM CONTRACT AND CALENDAR

English Honors Program – Grades 9 and 10

Honors Option Contract: (Initial each line)

_____ I understand that the Honors Program is a full-year commitment to work with my first and second semester English teachers. Each semester, I will read and annotate two literary texts and discuss these texts with my mentor during regularly scheduled conferences. In order to prepare, I will complete reading responses that reflect care and insight. It is my responsibility to schedule and attend these meetings.

_____ I will write analytical responses that effectively address the concerns of each text. I will demonstrate my commitment to the writing process by drafting, revising, seeking feedback, and editing each of my responses. I will also visit the Writing Center to workshop portfolio pieces before submitting them to my mentor.

_____ I will create a portfolio (15-20 pages) that clearly demonstrates my growth as a reader and writer. The exact nature of my project will be generated after discussion with my mentors.

_____ My completed project will contain a reflection that will explain the contents of my portfolio pieces, describe the choices I made, and reflect on my process as a writer/thinker.

_____ I will adhere to the code of ethics for academic honesty and integrity. To this end, I will avoid taking reading shortcuts by reading online summaries (SparkNotes, etc.). Additionally, I will submit original work to www.turnitin.com.

_____ If I complete all parts of the project in a timely manner, and produce work that meets the criteria of the Honors Program, I will receive honors credit that will be reflected on my transcript for both semesters. I understand that failure to maintain any of the requirements of the project will result in my being dropped from the program. All issues are subject to Honors Committee review.

Name (print clearly) ______________________________

Student’s Signature _____________________________ Date___________

141
Honors Project Calendar

SEMESTER ONE

Week of October 5 – 9  Required meeting with mentor to discuss project ideas and readings.

Friday, October 16th

Deadline for submission of contract signature page. Proposals will not be accepted after this deadline.

Week of November 9 – 13  First required meeting with mentor.

Discussion of first book with annotations and reading responses.

Week of November 16 – 20  Writing assignment for first book DUE.

Week of December 14 – 18  Second required meeting with mentor.

Discussion of second book with annotations and reading responses.

Week of January 4 – 8  Writing assignment for second book DUE.

Week of January 11 – 15  Final required meeting and evaluation of progress with first semester mentor.

SEMESTER TWO

Week of February 8 – 12  Required meeting with mentor to review first semester work and discuss project ideas and readings.

Week of March 7 – 11  First required meeting with mentor.

Discussion of third book with annotations and reading responses.

Week of March 14 – 18  Writing assignment for third book DUE.

Week of April 11 – 15  Second required meeting with mentor.

Discussion of fourth book with annotations and reading responses.

Week of April 18 – 22  Writing assignment for fourth book DUE.

Thursday, May 23rd  Final meeting to discuss project reflection.

Portfolio DUE.

Additional meetings may be scheduled at the mentor’s discretion (this includes scheduled conferences, online discussion groups, and responses submitted to www.turnitin.com, etc.). Failure to meet all deadlines and requirements will result in being dropped from the program.
APPENDIX 6: LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Parent,

The English Department offers ninth and tenth grade students the opportunity to earn honors credit by completing an Honors Project each year. The Honors Program requires students to read and write independently and to meet regularly with their teachers in order to ensure their growth and success in the program.

Any student who is doing superior work in English may elect to participate in the Honors Program. Students wishing to pursue honors work should obtain a project packet and follow all procedures therein, including having a contract signed by a parent or guardian, and following a calendar of required meetings. In addition, students must also adhere to the schedule set up with their teachers for completing each part of the project in a timely manner. At the end of the first semester, student work will be evaluated, and students in good standing will be granted approval for the completion of the year-long project. Parents will be notified if any required steps have not been met, and a student may be asked to terminate a project for being remiss in following the stated requirements.

Please note that the completion of the project does not result in automatic granting of Honors credit. The project must meet the conditions of the approved contract and be accepted by both the mentors and the chairperson. The mentoring experience and additional literature enrichment, combined with the problem-solving and critical thinking skills required to complete the project, provide an opportunity for students to challenge themselves and to grow intellectually. Granting of the honors credit reflects the entire experience.

The specific demands of the program, including a calendar for each semester, are outlined on our department website. Please acknowledge your acceptance of your child’s contract by signing it.

We wish your son/daughter success in this program.
Rationale

The topic of my project is the negative aspects of human nature, ranging from sexism to the nature of following to over prioritizing family. This was a common theme that I immediately noticed in each book. I was drawn to this topic because I’ve always been fascinated in the parts of human nature that we don’t like to reveal. In literature, people are normally painted as beautiful, near-perfect creatures. Although all characters in all books do have flaws, they are not normally brought to light in the way that they are in All My Sons, 12 Angry Men, and A Midsummer Night’s Dream. What makes these plays unique is that they provide the reader the opportunity to look deeper into who they are and to really think about what defines them. The flaws that can be seen in these plays are fairly easy to notice, but it’s difficult to notice in all of us, as many of us do have
these traits. Furthermore, the main conflict in each of these plays can be traced back to one flaw in one or more characters.

I chose to respond to the texts in the way that I did because it’s not very often that I find something that connects the books so well and relates to me. Moreover, I identify as a feminist, and if I see a book with as much sexism and objectification as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, I’m naturally going to respond to it. I knew that if there was something that I had that much of a response to, it would probably be the best thing for me to write about. *12 Angry Men* was not at all about the case or its verdict, but rather how the jurors interacted and their thought processes when making the decision. This was my favorite book of the three, as it really had me thinking about what makes humans act the way they do and how they make decisions. Seeing how much of an impact the jurors had on each other in their decision making really stuck with me and caused me to think about whether I depend on others’ opinions to form my own. I found *All My Sons* pretty hard to get through until the end. What captivated me was the way that I perceived Joe after learning of his wrongdoings. At first, I saw him as a malicious murderer, but after thinking more about why he acted the way he did, I realized that he was just an average man, and many would do the same if they were in his position. He had good intentions, but his thought process wasn’t ideal. This was the only book of the three in which a redeeming quality turned into a tragic flaw, and Joe was punished more than anyone else in the other books. The longest reading logs for all three plays was about these aspects of human nature and were the most interesting to me, so it was a no-brainer to choose that as my essay topic.

As I was working on the project, the part that came most naturally to me was the
reading logs. I already had all of those thoughts running through my head, and writing them down helped me to think deeper and keep the thoughts flowing. It also helped me tremendously in writing my essay, as I already had many of my ideas written down. The most challenging part was reading Shakespeare for the first time. It was hard to get used to the language that he uses, but as I read more I started to better understand his writing style. The copy that I had of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* was “No Fear Shakespeare”, which I really needed in the beginning, but I found that as I got further in the book, I needed the translations less and less. I would say that a strength of my written project was the connections I made both within each book and between them. I was able to find small details within each book that connected to the theme, such as the ninth juror’s line when he first voted “not guilty”. I also found an interesting way to connect the three plays. In a play set in ancient Athens, a play set in post World War II in a small Midwestern town, and a play set in a small courtroom in the 1950s, I found a central theme that not only connected the plays, but fascinated me. One of the weaknesses of my project was my that I initially put in my opinions. In the reading logs I was able to input my opinions and it was much less formal. When I took my ideas from my reading logs and incorporated them into my essay I included some of my opinions, which were unnecessary. The only other piece of writing that I’ve written that I could compare this to is my first semester honors project. Although these were both English honors projects, they were very different. Coming up with a central theme for my English honors project last semester was more straightforward, as they were all coming of age novels. Rather than doing reading logs on my own, we had discussions in which we were given questions to respond to. Towards the beginning of this project, I was focused more on the plots of the
plays than analyzing the details. However as the project progressed, I started to dig deeper and make more connections. Upon deeper reflection, I saw that the behaviors that the characters exhibited in all three works seemed to represent universal characteristics that are found throughout all levels of society. A major obstacle that I faced during this project that I still wish to overcome is how hard I was on myself. I would try to figure out exactly what I was doing and how I would do it before I even started, and if I couldn’t figure out what to write or do, I would get frustrated and not write until I had it figured out. Writing is a process, and sometimes you have to move on and go back to something you’re currently struggling with later. Most of the time, you just need to start writing and get the thoughts flowing, but I was very intimidated by a blank page. I am still developing my voice as a writer. It is hard for me to determine my style of writing because most of my assignments dictate the way that I am supposed to write. I am still a work in progress and as I challenge myself creatively, I am hopeful that a clear, strong voice will emerge.

One strategy that I used to unblock my writing was to bounce ideas off of my older sister. She is a senior and an excellent writer so I trusted her to help me talk through the points that I was trying to get across. It gave me confidence in my ability as a writer to see that she had similar struggles and was able to push past them to successfully convey her thoughts to a reader.

This project shows that I have the ability to think outside of the box. I don’t think that I chose the obvious route of writing a different essay about each book. By delving into the human nature and flaws of the characters across all of the stories, I found a way to show their common threads and the influence that it had on their actions as well as on the
people around them. I have learned how to analyze books better than I thought that I could. Furthermore, I challenged myself by learning how to read Shakespeare, and I am excited to read more of his works. While I still have quite a lot to learn about the writing process, I think that this assignment has helped me grow in many ways and I am proud of my efforts.

A Breakdown of Sexism in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

Throughout history, males have often been seen as superior to females. Men are historically power hungry and often dominate over the socially inferior females. This is depicted in Shakespeare’s plays, as society during his time was extremely sexist. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is a comedy about a tangle of lovers that is complicated further by some mischievous fairies. Within the play, there are three dominant male characters: Theseus, the duke of Athens, Oberon, the fairy king, and Egeus, an overbearing father. The root of all of the conflicts in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is the sexism of the dominant male
characters and their need for power.

At the point in time that the play was written, women were considered property. The play starts off with a duke and a duchess discussing their upcoming wedding. Theseus and Hippolyta both seem excited about getting married, but it is quickly revealed that Theseus “won her” in war, and she does not have much say in the matter when it comes to their marriage. He says to her, “Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword and won thy love doing thee injuries” (1.1.16-17). Because he wants to marry her, they are getting married and that’s that. This setup shows the dominance that the men have over the women in this play. The two do not play a major role in the play, but they serve as an example of a relationship that people look up to in which the female is subordinate. Although Theseus is very imperious in his relationship and he feels the need to assert his command and strength as duke, it is clear that deep down he has a heart, and his morals greatly impact the results of the play. Towards the beginning, Theseus states that he would allow Hermia the option of living a life of nunnery rather than being executed should she not marry Demetrius. In doing so, although he still greatly limits her, he is putting some power back in her hands and acknowledging that he somewhat values her life. In addition, towards the end, when the jumble sorts itself out, he encourages Hermia to marry Lysander and Helena to marry Demetrius despite Egeus’ refutations. After finding the four of them in the woods and finding out what happened, he says, “Egeus, I will overbear your will. For in the temple by and by with us these couples shall eternally be knit” (4.1.177-179). Despite his flaws, he realizes his mistake and that by defying them and fighting for herself, Hermia had given herself the right to marry Lysander. This suggests that perhaps deep down he knew Hermia’s ability to take control of her own life from the beginning, but he knew that because she is a woman, it is her father’s job to decide what she can and cannot do, and it was difficult for him to go against the ways of society. It appears that Theseus is fighting an internal battle, as he does not want to be so harsh towards Hermia, but he knows that it is expected of him in his role as duke.

Although Theseus is one of the most powerful characters in the play, the main cause of conflict in the play is Egeus. In Act 1, Scene 1, Egeus comes to Theseus to say that even though his daughter Hermia loves Lysander and the love is requited, he wants her to marry Demetrius. Egeus even ordered that Hermia should be executed should she not follow his orders. Although Theseus and Hermia both agree that

150
Lysander is a better suitor, Theseus refuses to allow her to marry Lysander, as Egeus has total authority over who she marries. Theseus even states, “To you your father should be as a god… one to whom you are but as a form in wax, by him imprinted and within his power to leave the figure or disfigure it” (1.1.47-51). This quote shows how unbalanced their relationship is. Simply because he is Hermia’s father, Egeus should be regarded as a god by her, and he has the right to kill her if she disobeys his orders. Furthermore, the main reason that Egeus is so against the idea of his daughter marrying Lysander is that he fears that if they do marry, Lysander will encourage her to stand her own ground and not simply obey everything she is told to do, thereby stripping him of his power. This speaks volumes about what it meant to be a woman. For Hermia to have independence would mean that the male and female roles would be off-kilter. He would lose his ability to control her, and she would make decisions for herself, which frightens him. He seems to care not about love and happiness for Hermia, but rather about winning and having leverage over her. Even at the end, Demetrius no longer loved her and Theseus told Hermia to marry Lysander, and yet he still insisted that she marries Demetrius. He argues to Demetrius, “[Hermia and Lysander] would have stol’n away, they would, Demetrius, thereby to have defeated you and me, you of your wife and me of my consent, of my consent that she should be your wife” (4.1.154-157). This further demonstrates his selfishness and wish to have authority over everyone and everything, and he assumes that Demetrius wants the same for himself, whereas Demetrius only wants to be with his true love. The fact that Egeus assumes every other man is a sexist megalomaniac shows that he does not see anything wrong in the way he treats Hermia and that perhaps this behavior was accepted.

Despite never coming into direct contact with Hermia, Oberon’s influence and domination is undeniable. Although he has a powerful and strong-willed female counterpart, Titania, he has a god-like role. He has control over everything that the characters say, do, and feel without their knowledge. His ruthlessness and craving for sovereignty shapes the entire dynamic of the play. Throughout the story, Oberon and Titania fight over who gets custody of an orphaned Indian boy. This may not seem significant, but it is about more than just the child. Because Titania is so fierce and she is in charge of so much, Oberon feels threatened by her. He says to Puck, “I’ll to my queen and beg her Indian boy; and then I will her charmed eye release from monster’s view, and all things shall be peace” (3.2.375-377). Oberon would not
feel the need to take such extreme measures just to have something over Titania if he did not feel threatened by her. Just the fact that he wants to take the boy from her illustrates this, but his method of doing so speaks volumes. He does not feel able to approach her in her normal state to gain possession of the boy; to do so, he feels the need to put her under a potion so that she has less will and will give up the boy more easily. Furthermore, he says that he will “beg” for the boy. Begging is a sign of inferiority, and the fact that he has to beg her for anything shows that perhaps she has more power over him than he would like to admit. Titania wants the child out of the kindness in her heart, but he just wants the child so that he will have him and she will not. She states her reason for wanting to have the boy in her possession by saying, “...[his mother], being mortal, of that boy did die; and for her sake do I rear up her boy, and for her sake I will not part with him” (2.1.135-137), whereas Oberon just says that he wants the boy to be his “henchman” (2.1.121).

He wants as much supremacy and possession over her as possible, and he feels that the boy gets in the way of that. Additionally, having a henchman increases his power over those around him. His relationship with Titania goes past being threatened by her, as at times, he seems to want her to suffer. While squeezing the potion onto Titania’s eyelids, he says, “What thou seest when thou dost wake, do it for thy true love take... wake when some vile thing is near.” (2.2.33-40). In this quote, it is revealed that he does not just want Titania to be distracted so he can take the boy, but he wants to watch her fall in love with something revolting. In addition to using his power to take a boy and gain power, he wants to entertain himself by interfering with someone else’s emotions. His god-like capabilities, we soon learn, are used for both good and evil. While manipulating Titania, he sees a conflict that he feels compelled to resolve--the web of lovers. His meddling brings out both his redeeming qualities and his malevolent side. His pity for Helena brings out his sensitivity, as he decides to take action and help her when she is otherwise helpless. His good intentions are clear when he says to Puck, “Take thou some of [the flower] and seek through this grove: A sweet Athenian lady is in love with a disdainful youth. Anoint his eyes. But do it when the next thing he espies may be the lady” (2.1.246-250). However, he knows that he is messing with something that he should not be by making people fall in love unnaturally. In addition, his trust in Puck as his right hand man shows that perhaps he is more mischievous and conniving than he lets on. If he wanted to use his powers
just for good, then he would not trust Puck and give him jobs to do. He has more authority than he knows how to handle, and he makes irresponsible choices purely for entertainment purposes.

Overall, the plans of all these men backfire on them. Theseus and Egeus underestimate the difference that one woman can make. Despite their efforts to have complete control, Hermia defied them by running away with Lysander to elope. She took charge of her own fate, rather than acting as the stereotypical impotent woman, and in that way she was centuries ahead of her time. In the wise words of Lord Acton, “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” This theme was present throughout the play. In a patriarchal world, these men feel entitled to take advantage of the power they are immediately granted as males, as well as any additional authority they have. By doing so, each of these men makes mistakes that end up being corrected eventually, and the only men who end up getting what they truly want are those who are not misogynistic, Lysander and Demetrius. The women who were brave enough to go against the grain fought for what they believed in and ended up happily ever after.

Human Nature Revealed

No matter how much we strive for perfection, no human could ever reach this goal. Although some people hide it better than others, everyone has flaws that are difficult to change. Sometimes these traits go unrecognized until it is too late, and sometimes they are recognized but never changed. All My Sons by Arthur Miller and 12 Angry Men by Reginald Rose both expose that there are several aspects of human nature that no one wants to reveal, and the times of difficulty are likely to bring out these negative sides, whether we like it or not.

In All My Sons, Joe found himself in an extremely difficult position between saving his family or saving an unknown amount of pilots. His familiarity with earning money for his family and lack of experience with killing twenty one pilots played a role in his decision, as he could not fathom the idea that selling the cracked cylinder heads could cause several deaths. This blinded him and made his situation much harder. Joe’s background also played a role. He is uneducated, meaning he needs to do more to be secure with money. He has also struggled with destitution in the past. In an argument with Kate, he said, “I spoiled the both of you. I should’ve put [Chris] out when he was ten like I was put out, and make him earn

153
his own keep” (76). Ever since he had to start making money of his own when he was 10, he has been very concerned with the process of making money, and he had to do whatever it took to make money when he was younger. He fears the idea of going back to those times when he could barely make enough to survive, and he would do anything to prevent that, especially considering that he now has a family to take care of. He said to Kate, “I could live on a quarter a day myself, but I got a family” (77). Joe is a family man. His love for his family has always been his top priority, and he is willing to go to the ends of the earth for them. When he found himself in a situation that required him to try to value potential lives of pilots over his family’s wellbeing, he was stuck. His endless love for his family made him unable to look past them for anyone else. When Chris found out what really happened, Joe said, “Chris… Chris, I did it for you, it was a chance and I took it for you” (70). This quote shows Joe’s exact thought process that day. He knew in the back of his mind that it was probably not the best idea to sell the cylinders, but he did it with Chris (and the rest of his family) in mind. He knew that not selling them would have a direct effect on the people close to him, but it was hard for him to judge what selling them would do, if it would do anything at all. His weak spot for his family left him narrow minded, and it had a major influence on a decision he would regret for the rest of his life.

After one small decision had one big effect, the deaths of several pilots, Joe had to face the consequences. Twenty one men were left dead because of him. Everyone around him called him a killer. His coworker was sent to jail. His one action started off innocent and quickly spiraled out of control. He told Chris, “It was too late. The paper, it was all over the front page, twenty-one went down, it was too late. They came with handcuffs into the shop, what could I do?” (70). Once Joe made the one wrong move, it followed him for the rest of his life. He lied to the court during his trial and was acquitted, but that was not the end of that. He had to lie constantly to himself and those around him and say he was not guilty, though he knew he was, while his former best friend was wasting away in a jail cell. Worst of all, he had to lie to his son so that they could still have a relationship and Chris wouldn’t see him as a monster. Instead of helping them out like he had intended, Joe put a permanent wedge in his family. His wife was in an unhealthy state of denial for three years about Larry’s death because of what he did, and those are three years no one could get back. She was convinced that, “[Larry]’s alive, because if he’s dead, [Joe] killed
him” (68). The reader knows this not to be true, as Larry had never flown that type of plane. However, although Joe did not literally kill Larry, he did “kill him” in a figurative sense. Joe killed twenty one men. These men could have been anyone. They were fighting for the same cause as Larry, some of them were probably around the same age as him, and they all shared similar experiences, and just like that, because of one mistake, their lives were over. Joe killed twenty one Larrys. Kate feels that if Larry is dead, Joe at least had a small part in killing him because he contributed to an environment filled with war and death. Because of this, she was in a state of denial about his death, which worsened her family relationships. Chris kept himself at a distance from her because of her unhealthy frame of mind and disapproval of his engagement to Annie. Joe’s irresponsible decision to sell the cylinder heads knowing that they were cracked and the resulting deaths of twenty one innocent soldiers is also what drove Larry to kill himself. This was his worst nightmare. Ironically, a sacrifice he made for his family’s wellbeing ended up being the thing to cause his son’s suicide. This put him over the edge and led to his own suicide. Larry’s letter provided a completely new perspective for Joe. Instead of valuing family so far above everything and everyone else, he should realize that everyone should be treated equal. The lives of those twenty one pilots mattered no less than the lives of his family. He should have treated them as if they were all his sons, because in a sense, they were. He was responsible for their safety, and he let them down. In Larry’s letter to Annie, he said, “Every day three or four men never come back and [Joe] just sits there doing business” (83). Joe fails to appreciate the sacrifice that all of the soldiers are making and how many of them lose their lives because of it. He’s in his own little bubble, which consists only of his family and his business. Larry puts a different perspective on his decision by highlighting the cost of war and the way that Joe ignored it for the sake of doing business. By making one irreversible mistake and putting his family so high above everyone else, he drove Larry to kill himself and tore apart his family. Joe was the glue that held his family together, and by prioritizing it, he damaged it forever.

Like Joe, Kate was also blinded by her love for her family. She cared so much about Larry that she refused to believe he was dead even though it was obvious to everyone else. She held onto him every day for years until she saw definitive proof that he was gone. It got to such an extreme point that Annie had to say, “You made Chris feel guilty with me. Whether you wanted to or not, you’ve crippled him in front of
me. I’d like you to tell him that Larry is dead and that you know it” (78). Kate also stuck by her husband when he was at his lowest point. She knew that he killed twenty one men and that he lied about it daily, and she supported him through it. She, too, lied and made sacrifices on his behalf despite knowing that it was wrong. Anyone else would have left him or at least done something to make him pay for what he did, but she supported him no matter what. Her love for her family was a tragic flaw in her case as well. She was able to look past the fact that Joe killed twenty one men in the blink of an eye, but she could not bear the unlikely chance that he could have killed Larry so much so that it took over her life. She lived every day in fear that she would find out that Larry was dead because she did not want to even consider the possibility of Joe killing him. It is understandable that she would be heartbroken if that were the case, but why should it make that much of a difference when she knows that he killed twenty one pilots? She does not realize that all lives are of equal value, and it is harder for her to see what is wrong if it does not directly affect her family.

In 12 Angry Men, the jurors are facing a very difficult and major decision that could result in the untimely death of an impoverished teen. Many jurors feel very strongly about wanting to convict the boy, but the jury was split on their decision for hours. Clearly, in a situation like this, there is bound to be a lot of tension. Rose illustrates this not only with the characters’ discussions, but also with symbolism using the room’s temperature. Throughout the beginning of the play, the jurors complain nonstop about the overwhelming heat. Heat is known to make people uncomfortable, irritable, and on edge, and tense situations could be described as “heated”. As a storm passes, the room cools down, and the jurors do as well. They are finally comfortable again and are not distracted by the heat. This is when they are able to come to a unanimous decision, and most of the tension is gone. On the other hand, a different type of tension grows. When it is hot, bright, and sunny, it represents clarity. At this time, all of the jurors except one seem to be very sure of their choice, and they are hopeful that they will reach a verdict soon. It seems obvious that the boy is guilty, and the jurors expect to agree on this and go about the rest of their day. However, as time passes, everything becomes less clear. Nobody knows what to think. This coincides with the storm outside. Clear becomes unclear, light becomes dark. It is harder to see what is right in front of you. This is similar to how the jurors feel. They have heard many points from both sides, and what they
were once certain of becomes more and more questionable.

It’s human nature to want to be part of the crowd and not stand alone, but that also means that people can be easily swayed if the overall dynamic changes. This theme is seen throughout 12 Angry Men. Originally, eleven of the twelve jurors voted that the boy was guilty, leaving only the eighth juror to defend him. Surely, not all eleven men could have been entirely convinced of his guilt, seeing as a few were very quick to change their vote. When someone has just a little bit of uncertainty but see that ten other men are confident in their decision, they are likely to just go along with it rather than fight it and dig deep into every detail in order to find a definite answer. It is a common misconception that something must be right if everyone agrees, and it is a trap that many fall into, including the jurors in this play. All it took was for one juror to stand up and voice his opinion and uncertainty, and it made it ten times easier to take his side and disagree with the majority. After he briefly explained why he was unsure, it did not take long for him to sway the ninth juror and change his vote. This was still very difficult for him to do, but unlike the eighth juror, he was afraid of being judged. He did not want to make waves, so he tried to please everyone by saying, “The boy is probably guilty. But I want to hear more” (28). In doing so, he was not disagreeing with anyone and was still, in a sense, following. He was not strong or confident enough to take a stand on his own. Once the first person flipped, it became increasingly easy to switch sides. First of all, seeing more and more people go against someone’s ideas inevitably makes them question their own opinions. Furthermore, if someone agreed with the unpopular side but was not willing to change their vote before, it was not nearly as intimidating to do so later when they were not as outnumbered. Thus, there was a domino effect until the jury was split 8-4 at the end of Act 1. This was a turning point in the play; it was when the “not guilty” side really started gaining momentum. Although the eighth juror’s points grew weaker in the second act, he changed more people’s minds. This is because the men started to see that he was gaining support and people were switching to his side rapidly. Someone in this position cannot help but think that there must be a good reason for them to switch, and they would at least strongly consider switching too. Another layer is that it began to look like the “not guilty” side would prevail, and those who did not have a strong opinion either way were more likely to choose the side that they felt would “win”. This can be seen with the seventh juror, who stated that he only changed his vote because he wanted it to be over with. He
stated, “I’m a little sick of this whole thing already. All this yakkin’ us nowhere so I’m going to break it up here. I’m changing my vote to ‘not guilty’” (62). This conveys the popular opinion in the room that everyone would eventually side with the eighth juror and vote “not guilty”. The seventh juror was the only one to voice it so bluntly, but that in no way means that no one else felt that way. In fact, jurors discussed multiple times that they thought the verdict would end up being “not guilty”, and that was probably a factor for many jurors as it got closer to the end. Once it got down to only a few people left that thought the boy was guilty, they gave up rather quickly. They saw that the tides had turned and that they would now have to argue with a majority of the men against them. The way that the jurors followed one another in their opinions caused them to nearly convict the boy, but it also undoubtedly played a major role in his acquittal.

The other main human flaw seen in 12 Angry Men is bias. Whether they realize it or not, a few of the jurors, namely the 10th and the 12th, hold bias against the defendant, thereby clouding their judgment. This is seen both as prejudice and bias based on personal involvement. The 10th juror has an outspoken prejudice against lower class people living in the slums. He claims that they were born to be violent and born to be liars, and this was one of his main, if not his main, arguments. Among the many rude, unjust comments he made, he said, “... they are- wild animals. They’re against us, they hate us, they want to destroy us... if we don’t smack them down whenever we can, then they are gonna own us” (65). This quote implies that he wants to convict the defendant to get back at the entire group of people, not because he feels that he is guilty. Although his prejudice was the most obvious, he was not the only one that felt this way. Besides the most extreme remarks he made about “those people”, the jurors did not do much to refute most of his offensive comments. This means that what he said likely affected the way that some jurors viewed the case. In addition to prejudice, one juror held a bias based on his past experiences. The 3rd juror repeatedly compared the defendant to his own son, with whom he has a broken relationship. This unjust connection that he made distorted his view. He knew that he and his son did not have a healthy relationship and that his son had some violent and/or questionable tendencies, so why wouldn’t the boy be the same? Why wouldn’t he be guilty? In fact, this comparison influenced his opinions of the case so much so that all it took for him to vote “not guilty” was for the 8th juror to say, “It’s not your boy. He’s someone else”
Once he finally addressed the elephant in the room, the 3rd juror immediately changed his vote. The way that Rose went about showing these biases was fascinating. Some people are more aware of their biases than others, and some are more understanding and willing to look past them to do what is right, while others are reluctant.

Both *All My Sons* and *12 Angry Men* address human flaws that we hate to discuss. Miller and Rose recognize that in order to have a realistic story with realistic characters, it is necessary to show all sides of human nature and not just sugarcoat it. Humans are often glorified, as admitting that someone has a flaw reveals that many other people do as well, and people do not like to question their integrity. By creating relatable, easily replaceable characters, the authors made their ideas about human nature much more approachable. We all know a Joe, a 10th juror, a 3rd juror, and a follower, and perhaps we are any or all of the above. Both plays illustrated how these negative qualities impact our daily lives, as well as the lives of those around us. Although people generally try to hide their flaws from the outside world, it’s the difficult positions and times of uncertainty where they are tested the most and brought out into their true light.

**Reading Logs**

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Act 1, scene 1:

While reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the idea of the role of women kept popping into my head. At this point in time, women were considered property. Since Hermia is Egeus's daughter, he has the right to decide who she marries. Although both Hermia and Theseus agree that Lysander is the better suitor, Theseus refuses to allow her to marry anyone but Demetrius, as he if the one that Egeus chose for her. Theseus even states, "To you your father should be a god,... one to whom you are but as a form in wax, by
him imprinted and within his power to leave the figure or disfigure it" (1.1.48-52). This quote strongly shows unbalanced the power is. Simply because he's Hermia's father, Egeus should be regarded as a god and has the right to destroy/kill her shall she disobey his orders. Furthermore, the main reason Egeus doesn't allow black daughter to marry Lysander is because he believes that if they do marry, he will "turn her obedience into stubborn harshness" (1.1.38-39). However, despite the fact that women are granted no power or freedom, Hermia remains strong-willed and decides to go against her father's orders in order to marry Lysander. A strong, independent female character is far from what one would imagine in a Shakespeare play. She doesn't rely on men, as she claims that she'd rather be single her entire life than marry a man she doesn't love. Hermia is centuries ahead of her time. The root of all the conflicts in the play is the sexism of the characters, and none of them realize that a single woman has the power to change everything.

Act 1, Scene 2:

Act 1, Scene 2 is seemingly drastically different from scene 1; however, the subplot draws parallels to the main plot of the play. I believe that Shakespeare is showing these ridiculous, bumbling men who confuse their words and think they'd be executed if the man playing the lion roars too scarily to bring out the comedy in the rest of the play. Seeing these foolish men reminds the reader not to take the play too seriously and brings to light that the main characters are just as foolish. Without this silly subplot, the comedy aspect of the play would be much less obvious and the whole dynamic would change. A future problem is also foreshadowed in this scene. The cast members are rehearsing their play at the same time and place as where Hermia and Lysander are meeting to run away. This poses an issue, as it can foil their plans of eloping.

Act 2, Scene 1:

It is clear that Helena is hopelessly, desperately in love with Demetrius, no matter how repulsed he is by her. She even said she’d be honored to be killed by him, which he might resort to should she continue to relentlessly chase after him. At one point, she says to Demetrius, “I am your spaniel. And, Demetrius, the more you beat me, I will fawn on you. Use me but as your spaniel--spurn me, strike me, neglect me, lose me. Only give me leave, unworthy as I am, to follow you” (2.1.203-207). As if this situation isn’t messy
enough, Oberon and Puck are planning to interfere by using the flower’s juice to make him fall in love with her. This is an extremely risky decision, and even if it works out as planned, it can’t possibly have a good outcome for those involved. True love can’t be forced, and trying to force it wouldn’t be fair to Demetrius or to Helena. Helena would finally get what she wanted, but only because Demetrius would be forced to “love” her. Demetrius’ life would be changed entirely. He had fallen for Hermia, and because of a potion, he’d have to be with Helena, someone he isn’t supposed to love. Furthermore, there’s no guarantee that the first person he’ll see is Helena. No matter who he sees first, it’s sure to further complicate the web of lovers. Especially since Oberon left the job up to Puck, a mischievous prankster, it’s impossible to tell what he’s going to do with the potion.

Act 2, Scene 2:
Throughout the first two acts of the play, Helena has constantly been comparing herself to Hermia and thinking of herself as unlovable. She is deeply in love with Demetrius, but Demetrius has no interest in her and instead loves her best friend, Hermia. Helena finds herself incredibly insecure and can’t help but compare herself to Hermia, who is beautiful and has two suitors. So far, she has had countless monologues about how Demetrius would never love her and how she’ll never be as pretty as Hermia. However, in this scene, Lysander wakes up and declares his love for her. All she’s ever wanted is for someone to love her and choose her over Hermia. Ironically, once this finally happens, it just upsets her and brings out her insecurity. She says, “Wherefore was I to this keen mockery born? When at your hands did I deserve this scorn? Is ‘t not enough, young man, that I did never, no, nor ever look from Demetrius’ eye, but you flout my insufficiency” (2.2.123-128)? In a moment when Lysander was sincerely and kindly telling her about his love for her and saying she’s far superior to Hermia, albeit under a spell, she immediately assumes that he’s teasing her.

Act 3, Scene 1:
I’ve never read Shakespeare before, nor have I read any comedies, and I expected his work to be much more serious. Between that the men involved in the play being so goofy that they want a cast member to play the moonlight and Puck turning Bottom’s head into that of an ass, this scene is quite outlandish. I was taken aback by the wit and the humor that Shakespeare presents in the play, especially considering the fact
that many find Shakespeare to be boring, such as when Bottom kept unintentionally mentioning the word “ass” and the idea that the person Titania falls in love with is Bottom, right after he is given a donkey’s head in place of his own. Titania’s love for Bottom is extremely well thought out and well executed, as not only does it provide humor, but it shows how strong the love potion truly is, and it further complicates the plot by intertwining more relationships. I think that squirting the juice into so many people’s eyes can only result in future conflicts, and I’m excited to see the story unfold.

Act 3, Scene 2:
In this scene, Shakespeare’s mockery of young love grew clearer than ever. His mockery was shown through how quickly the characters’ emotions changed and how childish they were acting. Lysander, for example, was deeply in love with Hermia so much so that he was ready to elope, but in the blink of an eye, he was referring to her as a poison and saying to her, “Why seek’st thou me? Could not this make thee know, the hate I bear thee made me leave thee so” (3.2.189-190)? On the other hand, Demetrius was constantly repulsed by Helena, and a mere few hours later, he was making lifelong promises to her. Furthermore, this love has brought out the immaturity in all of the main characters. Helena and Hermia were best friends, but in this scene, they accuse each other and have petty fights over things neither of them can control. I’m sure that if Helena stopped for a moment before making yet another remark about Hermia’s height, she’d realize how juvenile her actions were. Helena even ranted about the value of their friendship and how they should respect each other, but she was very hypocritical, as she was acting practically the same way as Hermia. Demetrius and Lysander, instead of handling their issue like men, were also acting extremely childish and decided to duel and taunt each other. The climax of the play did a great job of conveying a central theme; love is known to bring out the best in people, but it can also bring out the worst.

Act 4:
Act 4 has allowed me to have a better understanding of the dominant male figures, Egeus, Theseus, and Oberon, and their relationships with their female counterparts. I think it’s interesting that these characters don’t have very major roles, which allows us to better understand the female characters, Hermia and Helena. Egeus is Hermia’s father, so one would think that he wants the best for her, but in reality, he wants
to make decisions for her that will make his own life better. It becomes evident when he says to Demetrius, “[Hermia and Lysander] would have stol’n away, they would; Demetrius, thereby to have defeated you and me, you of your wife and me of my consent, of my consent that she should be your wife” (4.1.154-156) that he only cares about winning and having power, rather than his daughter’s love and happiness. He was even willing to execute her if it meant that he could assert his power and authority. Theseus, although sexist and cruel in the beginning, is now encouraging Hermia to marry Lysander and Helena to marry Demetrius. He seems to be more sensible now, although his sensibility compared to Egeus has always been clear. In Act 1, Theseus gave Hermia the option of becoming a nun rather than death, and he gave her time to decide. His relationship with Hippolyta appears to be perfect, but in actuality, she is just property that he won through war, and she is obligated to marry him. Oberon’s role is more significant, however. He plays a godlike role, as he has full control over what the other characters do and feel. This also contributes to the sexism and underlying idea of power and authority throughout the play. He isn’t just immediately granted power, though. His conflict with Titania is about more than just a child. She wants to raise the boy so that he could have a mother to raise him, but he just wants possession of the child so that he has him and she doesn’t. But Titania remained firm and strong-willed and refused to give him up. Oberon isn’t used to a situation where a woman can get in the way of what he wants, and he has to manipulate her by putting her under a potion in order to gain possession of the boy. Despite his ruthlessness and craving for absolute power, Oberon shows glimpses of kindness. He empathized for Helena and gave Demetrius the potion so he’d love her, and he also pitied Titania and reversed the potion as soon as she handed over the Indian boy. Although these men are sexist and demeaning, there is more to them than meets the eye.

All My Sons

Act 1:

I find it fascinating the way that Miller developed the plot in Act 1. Rather than starting with background information and building from there, the reader is left to try to figure out what happened in the beginning of the play. He was very strategic in the way that he developed the story. As soon as the reader finally has time to swallow everything that happened, something new and major is revealed, even if it’s something
from the past, allowing the plot to thicken without being overwhelming. I also find that as more is revealed, my opinions on different characters and matters change. For example, when I found out that Chris wanted to marry Annie, I thought that he was insane. I couldn’t comprehend how either of them could do such a thing. While it is still a bit strange to me, I’m beginning to see both sides of the story. I realized that they really do love each other and that Annie needs someone to love to escape from the tragedy in her life. Much of the conversation that she has with people centers around her supposedly dead lover or her imprisoned father. If Miller weren’t so precise in the way that he allows the story to unfold, I wouldn’t gain nearly as much from reading the play.

Act 2:

Act 2 keeps the reader on their toes till the very end. There is a constant back-and-forth going on about whether or not Joe is guilty. In the beginning, Sue pulls Annie aside to tell her that everyone in town knows that Joe is guilty. This immediately raised a read flag by planting a seed in the reader’s head. Furthermore, Joe and Chris told Annie that everyone in town respects him and has forgotten about the incident, meaning that they blatantly lied to her. Joe then tells Annie that he could set George up with his lawyer friends and offers Steve a job. This can be seen one of two ways. Either he’s innocent and he really just wants to mend the relationship between the two families before the wedding, or he’s guilty and he wants the Deevers on his side. Next, George comes and makes everything more confusing. He tells Steve’s side of the story, which is extremely plausible, and makes very valid points that point to Joe being guilty. It also makes his point much stronger when you consider that at first he turned his back on his father and believed him to be the guilty one. Then, when Kate comes along, it completely changes the dynamic. She treats George like a son, and he begins to feel at home. Once Joe comes, too, he explains to George that he’s innocent, and he seems to convince him and the audience. For a moment, it’s as if they’re one big, happy family. However, the reader begins to realize that the Kellers are acting a little too friendly, that perhaps they’re hiding something. Then the bomb drops. Kate slips up, claiming that Joe “hasn’t been laid up in fifteen years” (65), when he was supposed to have been terribly sick and unable to go to work the day that they sold the cracked cylinders. At this point, George, and the reader, is convinced that Joe is guilty. George leaves, and now that the cat is out of the bag, Kate fully confesses. She says, “[Larry’s] alive, darling, because if he’s
dead, [Joe] killed him” (68). Joe now admits to knowingly shipping defective cylinders, causing the reader and Chris to erupt in anger. As more of the story pieces itself together, the audience shares many opinions, suspicions, and emotions with the characters, specifically Chris, George, and Annie, thereby connecting them to the play.

Act 3:

Act 3 was the shortest act, but it was by far the heaviest. At the beginning of the act, Joe is seen as a malicious, self-centered monster, but the more we read, the more we realize that Joe is just a regular guy. Joes is, in fact, your average Joe. Chris, Joe, and Jim all reference that as horrible as it sounds, money is what makes the world go ‘round. It can give someone motive to do something that they would never otherwise even consider doing. Sure, Joe had an inkl.ing that the cylinders might possibly malfunction when he sold them, but he didn’t think that anything was likely to happen, and at that point, money for his business and his family was in his best interest. So he did what many other men would do in his position-he sold them anyway. From this perspective, you can’t really blame Joe for the twisted ways of society. Joe could effectively be anyone in the capitalist world in which we live. Conversely, the twenty one men that were killed as a result could have been anyone. This is described in the quote for which the play was named. “Sure, [Larry] was my son. But I think to him they were all my sons. And I guess they were, I guess they were” (83). In this moment, Joe finally realizes the point that Larry killed himself to make. The main reason that Kate couldn’t accept the fact that Larry was dead is that understandably, she couldn’t handle the fact that Joe may have killed him. However, she was perfectly fine dealing with the fact that he killed twenty one others. Just like how Joe could be replaced with anyone else, these twenty one men could be anyone. Similar to the thousands upon thousands of others who fought in the war, they were all willing to sacrifice everything for their country. They all had lives back home and families to return to. So the question remains: what makes these men different than any other? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. These men could be replaced a million times over. They were all, in some way, Joe’s sons. Once Joe finally realized this, he couldn’t live with himself anymore. In a mere eleven pages, Miller provided a different perspective and gave the reader an outlook that some never gain in an entire lifetime.
12 Angry Men

Act 1: Act 1 shows that everything isn’t always as simple as it may seem at a first glance. In the play, Reginald Rose makes the reader feel like one of the jurors. At first, we’re presented with the main facts of the case, and we believe that the boy undoubtedly killed his father. However, as you look deeper and hear the points that the eighth juror is making, you may or may not change your mind, like the eleven other jurors. It also helps that Rose never names the jurors, meaning that they could hypothetically be anyone. Although the boy may appear to be guilty, the eighth juror takes under consideration that the defense attorney didn’t really do his/her job, so he’s taking on that role in addition to being a juror. I fully believed that the defendant was guilty when I first heard the facts, but the points that the jurors make leave me questioning my opinion. The eighth juror has disproved a witness’s reliability, shown that there were other similar knives to the murder weapon, and explained how many parts to the story don’t add up, and in doing so, he’s already flipped three jurors. I feel as though I’m part of the debate when I’m reading. I catch on to different points as some of the other characters do and form my own opinions. Rose has left me utterly intrigued as to what the verdict will be and what is yet to be uncovered.

Act 2:

Act 2 was about overcoming your personal biases in order to do what it right. Whether they realize it or not, a few of the jurors hold bias against the defendant, and it clouds their judgement, in addition to not allowing them to open their minds to hear what the opposite side has to say. This bias is seen in the form of prejudice and personal connections. The tenth juror is clearly prejudiced against lower class people, and he uses it as his main reason for voting guilty. He says things throughout the book like, “...they are- wild animals. They’re against us, they hate us, they want to destroy us... if we don’t smack them down whenever we can, then they are gonna own us” (65). Although he was the most outspoken about it, other jurors felt the same way to a degree. For the most part, a majority of the jurors didn’t refute what he had to say about those who grew up in the slums. In addition, the third juror constantly compared the defendant to his own son, who he has a broken relationship with, thus distorting his view of the case. In fact, all it took for him to change his mind was for the eighth juror to say, “It’s not your boy. He’s somebody else” (73). Once he finally mentioned and cleared the elephant in the room, the third juror changed his vote to “not
“guilty” rather quickly. Something else that I took interest in while reading *Twelve Angry Men* was how the play highlights the following nature of humans. Of the eleven men that originally voted “guilty”, at least a few of them must have had a little bit of uncertainty, or else they wouldn’t have changed their minds so easily. But it was so easy to sit back and agree with ten men rather than dig deep into every detail until you reach a definite decision. It only took one man to go against the grain and forever change a boy’s life—the eighth juror. He was willing to have faith in his opinion despite the eleven men telling him that he was wrong. Once he shared some points, the ninth juror voted “not guilty”. That definitely took guts, but he didn’t really take a stand; he pleased both sides by saying, “The boy is probably guilty. But I want to hear more” (28). This flip encouraged others to flip, leading to the jury being split 8-4 by the end of Act 1. This is when the “not guilty” side really gained momentum. Even though the eighth juror’s points grew weaker in the second act, the others knew that there were people supporting him and that people were rapidly switching to his side, making it much easier to switch along with them. It was starting to look like the “not guilty” side would prevail, so many joined them, including the seventh juror, who only switched sides because he wanted it to be over with, unlike the eighth juror who fought for a cause. When it got down to the final few, they stopped trying and just gave up. The way that the jurors followed one another led them to almost convicting the boy, but it also caused them to change their minds in the end.

**Works Cited**

The Glass Menagerie: Living in the Past

A person who dwells too much on the past often has trouble functioning in the real world. He or she may be caught in an illusion and this may make it difficult to move on with life and accept reality. *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams is a play about the relationships that exist between a controlling mother, Amanda, her extremely shy and dysfunctional daughter, Laura, and her son, Tom, who is trying to break away from this unhappy family. These characters all face difficult situations and in response, they avoid reality. All three main characters in *The Glass Menagerie* are caught in the
past and therefore live in fantasy worlds unable to move on in the real world. Amanda Wingfield has been abandoned by her husband and she has devoted her life to taking care of her daughter. Despite the fact that her husband left her many years ago, he remains a constant presence in the Wingfield household. Tom describes that there is a “larger-than-life-size photograph over the mantel. This is our father who left us a long time ago” (5). Amanda not only doesn’t show anger towards her husband, but she even refers to him in a positive light. For example, she tells Laura that she should develop charm, noting that “One thing your father had plenty of - was charm!” (18). This seems like an oddly positive reaction to a husband who has abandoned her. Rather than facing her difficult circumstances, she pretends that they don’t exist. Amanda also shows that she is stuck in the past by frequently mentioning the gentlemen callers she had when she was younger to her children. She says to Tom, “My callers were gentlemen-all! Among my callers were some of the most prominent young planters of Mississippi Delta-planters and sons of planters!” (8). When talking about this subject, the stage directions describe that “Her eyes lift, her face glows, her voice becomes rich and elegiac” (9). She enjoys reminiscing about her life as a young girl because she thinks of this time as her glory days. Perhaps she embellishes when describing her past in order to cope with the bleakness of her present life. Amanda also uses Laura as a way to avoid facing reality. She encourages Laura to find a man not only because she is worried about Laura’s future, but also as a way for her to experience the excitement of dating once again. She would never get involved with a man because she has not yet accepted that her husband has left her. However, she is quite excited to entertain a potential suitor for Laura. When she is getting ready for a visit from Jim, who they believe might be interested in dating Laura,
Amanda spends much time preparing and fixing up the house. She puts on a dress that she wore when she was much younger, saying “I wore it on Sundays for my gentlemen callers! I had it on the day I met your father…” (53). Wearing a dress from her youth, Amanda seems to be acting as though the gentleman caller is paying a visit to her rather than her daughter.

Laura is handicapped and has always been painfully shy and unconfident. She is an adult who lives with her mother and is incapable of supporting herself or managing in public. She drops out of business school because it is too difficult for her to manage and then can’t face admitting that she did so to her mother. When Amanda eventually finds out, Laura explains to her that instead of going to school she was taking walks in the park. Rather than being productive, she was wandering alone and avoiding the real world. She has no way of supporting herself but she would rather avoid interactions in public than plan for the future. Laura’s interactions with Amanda seem somewhat childish. This may be a result of her being haunted by the embarrassment she faced when she was in school. She tells Jim that she remembers coming late to chorus every day since she had trouble going up the stairs because of her lame leg. She recalls that she “had to go clumping all the way up the aisle with everyone watching!” (75). Laura has not moved on from these disturbing memories and this in part prevents her from growing up. Rather than facing the real world, she has created a fantasy world of glass figurines that brings her joy and to which she devotes much of her time. Tom explains to Amanda that Laura “lives in a world of her own- a world of glass ornaments… She plays old phonograph records and- that’s about all” (48). These activities are Laura’s escape from the real world. Since she is not growing up, she is unable to function independently.
This play is a memory play that reflects Tom’s memories of the life he lived with Amanda and Laura. At the end of the play, he describes how he finally escapes from his family, leaving home to travel and follow his dreams of being a writer. He feels trapped in his home since he is expected to support his family and he does not like his job. While living with his mother and sister, he tries to escape reality by going to the movies every night. He is conflicted because while he is unhappy in his life, he feels sorry for Laura and Amanda and he feels responsible for them. However, for a long time, instead of taking action, he stays put, fleeing when he can to the fantasy of the movies. Even after he leaves them, although he has physically escaped, he is unable to move on with his life and follow his dreams since he dwells on the past and is overcome by guilt. This is clear at the end of the play when he explains that he was never able to settle down in one place. He constantly saw or heard things that reminded him of home. For example, he tells the audience “I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. The window is filled with pieces of colored glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors…Then all of a sudden my sister touches my shoulder” (97). The very fact that Tom is narrating this play, telling his family’s story, shows that he has not moved on from the past. Similar to the way that dwelling on the past has a negative effect on Amanda and Laura, it makes Tom unable to settle down and make the most of his life.

The characters in *The Glass Menagerie* each have different reasons for dwelling on the past. In Amanda’s case, she enjoys remembering when she was young, and she is avoiding facing the fact that her husband has abandoned her. In Laura and Tom’s cases, they are haunted by their pasts. However, living in the past prevents each of these characters from leading productive lives and moving on. They escape to fantasy worlds
and avoid the truth in order to cope with their various difficult circumstances. Amanda, Laura and Tom live in worlds of illusion, making them unable to accomplish things, grow up or follow their dreams.

*All My Sons:* The Problems of Living in a State of Denial

People respond to the death of a family member in different ways. In many cases it creates a state of denial. In *All My Sons* by Arthur Miller, Larry disappears during World War II and his body is never found. His family is unsure of how he died which is unsettling for them and makes it difficult to find closure. His mother, Kate, wants to believe that he is still alive, while his brother, Chris, has a more realistic perspective on Larry’s death. Joe, Larry’s father, had been accused of selling defective airplane parts during the war which resulted in the death of twenty-one men. While Larry never appears in the play, he is an important character who has a great impact on the others. Losing Larry puts Kate in a state of denial, and causes Chris to have a new perspective on the impact of Joe’s crime.

Since Larry’s body was never found and there is initially no firm proof that he died, Kate chooses to believe that he is still alive. Whenever anyone refers to his death, she gets angry and denies it. For example, in Act I, Chris tells Kate that he is no longer waiting for Larry to come back. When Chris asks her why she cannot accept the truth that he is gone, she says it is “Because certain things have to be, and certain things can never be. Like the sun has to rise, it has to be. That’s why there is God. Otherwise anything can happen. But there’s God, so certain things can never happen” (28). Kate has a need for order in her life and she wants to believe that there is a God who regulates
things so that the world makes sense. She can’t imagine the possibility of her son being
death, so she has decided not to believe it. Kate shows her tendency to deny problematic
ideas when Ann brings up the possibility that the defective plane parts that were sold by
her father and Joe during the war were the cause of Larry’s death. Kate responds to this
by saying “As long as you’re here, Annie, I want to ask you never to say that again” (31).
She has made the connection between her son’s death and the defective parts produced by
her husband’s company. However, it is too painful for her to think about, so she chooses
not to believe it and instead to continue to think that Larry is alive. As she says to Chris,
“Your brother’s alive, darling, because if he’s dead, your father killed him. Do you
understand me now? As long as you live, that boy is alive. God does not let a son be
killed by his father” (68). This shows her willful manipulation of the facts and her desire
to control the situation. Although Kate’s goal is to make the difficult situation easier for
herself, ironically, she instead creates further tension within the family. Her denial
especially angers Chris because he wants to marry Ann, Larry’s fiancée, and he cannot
get Kate’s approval until she accepts Larry’s death.

Chris reacts to Larry’s death in a different manner than his mother since he is able
to accept that Larry is gone. However, Larry’s death makes it more difficult for Chris to
accept the fact of his father’s crime. Although it seems that Chris truly does know that
his father did sell defective plane parts, he can’t admit this to himself. As Kate says, “I
always had the feeling that in the back of his head, Chris … almost knew. I didn’t think
it would be such a shock” (74). He indicates that he knew when he tells his father he
doesn’t want the name of his father’s business to be changed to include his name because
he doesn’t want to be connected to his father’s crime. While in some sense Chris
recognized what his father had done, he had trouble admitting it to himself partly because after losing a brother in war, he can’t imagine that his father was responsible for inflicting this pain on many other families. The immorality of his father’s actions is made all the worse to him because of the pain he feels as a result of Larry’s death and the death of his comrades in the war. He experienced losing men he cared about and he can’t imagine that his father might be responsible for soldiers’ deaths, especially if it was for the purpose of saving his business. For Chris, Larry’s death sheds light on the severity of his father’s crime and forces him to break with Joe once and for all.

The characters’ reactions to the tree planted in honor of Larry in the Keller’s yard demonstrate the way that Kate and Chris have dealt differently with Larry’s death. For Kate, it is a painful reminder of Larry’s absence. When it is destroyed one night during a storm, she says, “We should never have planted that tree. I said so in the first place; It was too soon to plant a tree for him” (20). Kate is in denial of Larry’s death. After the storm, Chris cuts down the remains of the tree which symbolizes his desire for his family to move on from Larry’s death. Since Larry has given him a new perspective on his father’s crime, he doesn’t want his family to always be talking about it, or his mother to be suggesting that he is alive. The tree serves as a constant reminder of Larry for both Chris and Kate. His death continues to tear the family apart since they are dealing with it in different ways.

Even though Larry never appears in the play *All My Sons*, he is a presence that drives the plot and causes the characters to either choose to face reality or avoid it. Kate has trouble facing her son’s death. She associates his death with her husband’s crime, making it even more difficult to face. Chris, on the other hand, accepts the fact of his
brother’s death but it puts him in a state of denial with regards to his father’s guilt since he has now experienced the death of a family member in war. Both Kate’s and Chris’s denials end up creating conflict rather than helping them face a painful reality.

*Twelve Angry Men – Newspaper Articles*

Biases in the Jury Room Affect Deliberations in Murder Trial

On a very hot summer afternoon in 1957, twelve jurors gathered in the jury room of a New York Court of Law to discuss whether or not an 18 year old boy who has been accused of murdering his father was guilty.

Before starting the deliberations, the jurors chatted and it became clear that each of these men was from a different background and that, for many of them, their preconceived ideas were going to affect their decisions.

The jurors began by conducting an initial vote to see where they all stood, and at that time it appeared that all them except for the eighth juror believed the boy was guilty. The plan among the other eleven jurors became to try to convince the eighth juror to change his opinion.

Each juror explained their beliefs and why they thought the boy was guilty, and many brought in their personal stories. The third juror based his opinion off of the difficult relationship he had with his own son.

“When he was sixteen we had a battle. He hit me in the face. He’s big, y’know. I haven’t seen him in two years. Rotten kid. You work your heart out…” he said.

The tenth juror’s opinions were affected by his preconceived ideas about kids who grow up in slums. He assumed that the boy must be guilty because of his underprivileged
background. “Listen. I’ve lived among ‘em all my life. You can’t believe a word they say. I mean, they’re born liars” said the tenth juror in reference to people from slums.

Instead of the other jurors convincing the eighth juror of the boy’s guilt, the opposite occurred. The eighth juror began to slowly change the opinions of the other jurors.

Despite their biased views on the case, the eighth juror was able to put doubt in the others’ minds by questioning much of the evidence, especially the witnesses’ recounts of what happened the night of the murder. One witness was in an apartment one floor below the apartment in which the boy was thought to have murdered his father. This witness claimed that he heard the boy scream, “I’m going to kill you”, then heard a crash, and went to his apartment door where he saw the boy running down the stairs.

The eighth juror pointed out that train tracks are right outside the apartment building and that a train had passed by at the time the murder occurred. The man probably would not have been able to hear the boy yell over the noise of the train.

The eighth juror also brought up the fact that this witness was old and unable to walk quickly. He thought it seemed unlikely that he would have been able to make it to the door in time to see the boy running down the stairs.

Another witness was a woman across the street who claimed to have seen the murder occur through her window and the windows of the train. The eighth juror questioned whether the woman had her glasses on and would have been able to see clearly.

Although the eighth juror was unsure of the boy’s innocence, he wanted to examine the evidence against him before rendering a guilty verdict which would result in
his death. Through questioning much of what occurred in the trial, he was slowly able to persuade the other jurors that the evidence was faulty, despite their biases.

The first two jurors to change their minds were the ninth and the fifth. The ninth was easily persuaded because he could relate to the witness who lived below the boy. He understood why he might have said that he heard what happened and saw the boy running down the stairs even when this was not the full truth.

The ninth juror thought that since this man was older he probably wanted to feel important by saying he saw something that he didn’t actually see. “I think I know him better than anyone here. This is a quiet, frightened, insignificant old man who has been nothing all his life, who has never had recognition, his name in newspapers… That’s a very sad thing to be nothing. A man like this needs to be recognized, to be listened to, to be quoted just once” he said. Since he could relate to this man, he could understand the motivation for him to be an inaccurate witness.

The fifth juror grew up in a slum as well and was offended by the tenth juror’s prejudiced remarks. He had his own experiences in mind as well when he changed his mind.

Eventually, all of the jurors had enough doubt of the boy’s guilt after having discussed the case in great detail and they all changed their votes to “not guilty”. They were able to separate the case from their personal lives and vote based on the facts.

Growing Up in the Slums Gives Insight in Jury Room

When John Baker was young, he never imagined that his knowledge of switchblades would one day come in handy in a New York jury room. Baker grew up in
a poor neighborhood in upper Manhattan. “I used to play in a backyard that was filled with garbage. Maybe it still smells on me”, he said.

When Baker was picked to sit on a jury for a murder trial of a young man from a similar neighborhood who was accused of killing his father, he brought his familiarity of this upbringing with him to the case. Today, Baker works at a hospital in a low income area where he interacts on a daily basis with people like the defendant.

Younger than many of the other jurors, Baker initially didn’t speak up much during the deliberations. He felt pressured to go along with the majority and was intimidated at first to voice his opinions.

Baker was eventually motivated to assert himself when the biases of the other jurors began to anger him. The fact that many of them made assumptions about the defendant based on his poverty bothered him and he felt the need to correct these biases. When one of the other jurors called poor people “trash”, the Baker was offended. “I nurse that trash in Harlem Hospital six nights a week”, he said.

Baker was one of the first to change his vote to not guilty. “I began to question whether or not the witnesses’ recounts of the murder were valid. I realized that I had become unsure of the boy’s guilt; I felt that there was reasonable doubt”, he said.

Throughout the deliberations, Baker was especially angered by the fact that many of the jurors were basing their opinions merely on the fact that the boy is from a slum. “This was just ignorance. There are plenty of innocent kids that grow up in slums”, he said. The fact that he himself grew up in a slum allowed him to challenge the other jurors’ assumptions about people from these backgrounds.

Baker played a key role in influencing the other jurors to find the defendant not
guilty. When the jurors examined the knife that was the murder weapon, he told them of
his familiarity with these weapons. “I have seen too many of them. On my stoop. In my
backyard. In the lot across the street. Switch knives came with the neighborhood where I
lived”, he said.

The fatal stab wound was downward but the defendant was seven inches shorter
than his father, a fact that Baker focused on. He knew that that the boy would have
stabbed in an underhanded manner, and that it was unlikely that he would have stabbed in
a downward direction. By sharing the knowledge about weapons and fighting that Baker
gained from growing up in the slums, he was able to sway several of the other jurors into
changing their votes to not guilty.

Fairness of Jury System Put to the Test in Murder Case

The jury’s deliberations over the guilt or innocence of the young man accused of
killing his father serves as an example of the way the American justice system operates
and whether or not it results in justice being done. The fairness of the jury system is not
clear cut and the deliberations of these jurors showed both its strengths and its
weaknesses. However, despite its imperfections, the system often works quite well.

All twelve jurors on a recent murder trial were from different backgrounds and
represented a cross-section of society. For example, the eleventh juror was an immigrant,
the fifth juror was from a slum, the fourth juror was a stockbroker, and the ninth juror
was an elderly man. The diversity of the jury ensures that there are a variety of opinions
and that no one bias is dominant.

The principle that the jury can only find a person guilty if his guilt has been
proven beyond a reasonable doubt was also demonstrated in these deliberations. The eighth juror voted that the boy was not guilty but he explained that he didn’t necessarily believe in the boy’s innocence. In fact, he was unsure of whether the boy had in fact committed the crime but could not say that he definitely had because of inconsistencies in the witnesses’ testimonies. After sharing many of the doubts he had about the case, he was slowly able to persuade all the jurors to vote that the boy was innocent by making them question the validity of the evidence against him.

Many of the jurors who eventually voted that the defendant was innocent were unsure of whether he was, but since they had reasonable doubt about his guilt, they were obliged to vote this way. This is a fair way for the jury to make their decision since it decreases the likelihood of an innocent man being punished for a crime he did not commit.

Another central part of the American jury system is that all the jurors must come to an agreement in order to convict a person of a crime. This improves the system because this is another way to prevent people who are innocent from being unjustly punished.

The requirement that the jury be unanimous was demonstrated in the jury room in this case since originally eleven of the twelve jurors voted that the defendant was guilty and only one juror disagreed. As a result of this rule, the defendant was not found guilty early on in the deliberations even though that was what the majority of the jurors initially believed. They were forced to continue to examine the evidence and eventually they arrived at a different verdict.

Although the jury system is just overall, there are some imperfections. There are
always biases that affect the way the jurors view a case. In this particular case, many of the jurors voted that the boy was guilty partially based on the fact that he is from a slum. However, biases are unavoidable and the best we can hope for is that people try not to let their prejudices influence their decisions in the jury room.

It is also easy to question what might have happened if someone else had been chosen instead of the eighth juror who questioned the strength of the evidence against the defendant from the outset. Without someone willing to do so, it seems likely that the boy would have been found guilty.

Unfortunately, there is no perfect way to run a jury system since humans are imperfect and therefore will not always be able to be objective and make the correct decisions. Overall, the American jury system is the best solution for finding whether someone is guilty or innocent. It is a just process and this was demonstrated in the case of the young man who was accused of killing his father.

The Glass Menagerie- Reading Logs

Reading Log 1:

In The Glass Menagerie, there seems to be a large emphasis on the fact that the play is going to be unrealistic. In Scene One Tom explains to the audience that since this play is a flashback, it will be less accurate. He says “…Memory takes a lot of poetic license. It omits some details; others are exaggerated, according to the emotional value of the articles it touches, for memory is seated predominantly in the heart” (3). He is trying to explain that although changes will be made to the story, the truth will still be able to come through to the audience, and may even have a stronger emotional appeal as a result of these changes. As the play progresses, it becomes evident that the play is not
intended to have a realistic feel. For example, on page 6, Amanda and Laura are eating with imaginary utensils. In addition, a screen is being used throughout the play on which pictures or words are shown. These slides might make the play feel less realistic by drawing the attention of the audience members. I think Tennessee Williams is more focused on getting across a certain point or evoking emotion rather than making the play feel real. Certain exaggerations or omission of details and the use of the screen will help the play to achieve this goal. He later tells the audience that he is giving you “truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion” (4). He is explaining that his goal is not to trick the audience but rather to convey the truth in a more pleasant way that will enhance the story.

Reading Log 2:

In Scene Two, Amanda comes home after finding out that Laura stopped attending business school. She had been pretending to go for the past six weeks and Amanda was lecturing her and being very dramatic. While speaking to Laura, Amanda consistently includes herself while explaining the consequences of Laura’s actions by using words such as “we” and “our”. For example, she states “So what are we going to do with our lives? Stay home and watch the parades go by? Amuse ourselves with the glass menagerie, darling?” (15-16). By referring to Laura’s life as both of their lives she is showing that she does not think of her as an individual. This may make Laura feel like her mother doesn’t think she is capable of taking care of herself. It is unhealthy for a child to feel that they don’t have their own identity. Each person is separate from those around them and should make decisions based on their own feelings and what would benefit them. In addition, it is putting a lot of pressure on her since Amanda is showing
that she feels she is also affected by Laura’s decisions. Laura must have gotten this sense in the past since she pretended to go to business school for a while rather than explaining to her mother that it makes her nervous and she does not enjoy it. While Amanda cares about Laura and genuinely wants the best for her, she is not handling the situation in a helpful way. Rather than making Laura feel bad about herself, she should encourage her to try different things that may improve her future or reassure her that things will be ok, she is. Through the way that she responds to Amanda, it is clear that she is quite intimidated by her. For example, in the stage direction it says “Laura twists her hands nervously” (16). While Amanda is trying her best to improve her daughter’s future, she is not helping the situation by making her feel nervous around her.

Reading log 3:

In the same way that Amanda is upset about Laura’s decision to stop attending business school because she views this as joint decision that affects her as well, she also has expectations that Tom will consult her about decisions he makes. While she considers him an individual since he is more functional than Laura, she still has an expectation that he make his life revolve around the family. In Scene Three, she has an argument with Tom that shows this. In the beginning of their conversation he gets angry at her for returning his book that she does not approve of to the library. Tom is an adult that should be able to make his own decisions such as what he reads and she is treating him like a child by not allowing him to do this. As the argument progresses, Amanda expresses her anger at him for staying up late on nights before he has work and drinking. She asks him “what right do you have to jeopardize your job? Jeopardize the security of
us all?” (23). She thinks that he is being selfish and instead of explaining how he is hurting himself she is expressing her concern for herself and Laura. In Amanda’s mind it is Tom’s responsibility to take care of the family and she is not considering whether he enjoys his job. From his point of view he is sacrificing all of his desires for the family. He hates his job and would have left already if he did what he wants to do. One reason that Amanda seems to have a tendency to place so much pressure on her kids might be because her husband left her. She thinks of it as Tom’s responsibility to fill in for his father.

While Amanda is being somewhat inconsiderate of the way Tom feels, I can also sympathize with her. At one point she says she isn’t asking his to be more responsible for her, but for Laura who isn’t going to be able to support herself after Amanda dies. Amanda has good intentions and wants what is best for her children. She is also probably fearful that she will be abandoned again by Tom as she was by her husband.

Reading Log 4

Amanda, Laura and Tom are all caught in the past and unable to accept reality. Amanda is often talking about the many gentlemen callers that she had when she was young. She often tells her children about all the different men that liked her. She describes them as if she is reading from a script and explains that they were all important people. For example, one became vice president of the Delta’s Planters Bank. After listing the many different men she says “But–I picked your father!”(9). The fact that she often repeats this story shows that she is stuck in the past and trying to impress her children. In addition, there is a large picture of her husband hanging in the Wingfield home. This seems somewhat odd because he left them many years ago and has not
visited since then. Amanda is still sad that her husband left her and has not accepted it and moved on. Another thing that shows that she is caught up in her past was the way she behaves when Jim is over. She wears a dress from when she was young and tries very hard to impress him. While she is doing this to help Laura find someone to marry, she is also may be excited about this event since she misses having her own gentlemen callers. When Jim is there, she acts somewhat childish and flirtatious.

Laura is also living in a fantasy world and avoiding reality. She dropped out of business school and has no desire to date or find a job. She spends most of her time attending to her glass menagerie. In addition, when she is nervous, she has a habit of playing her father’s music on a Victrola. She feels abandoned by her father. Since she is painfully shy she is unable to interact with people besides Tom and Amanda. Laura also often thinks about memories from high school. She shows her mother a boy in the year book that she used to like, and she also recalls embarrassing experiences such as coming late to a class everyday as a result of her disability. She cringes when thinking about the class staring at her as she made her way to the back of the room.

This play is a memory that is told from the point of view of Tom. By recalling the past, he is showing that he has not yet moved on and he is haunted by the guilt that he feels. At the end of the play he has left home. He sees glass perfume bottles that remind him of Laura and imagines that she is there. It seems that although he escapes, he is unable to write and travel like he was hoping to do. His guilt is too overwhelming and although he physically escapes home, he still feels trapped.

Reading Log 5:

185
There are many symbols throughout this play many of which help the audience to understand certain characters or the way they feel. In Scene 4, Tom describes a magic trick he saw in which the man was nailed into the coffin and was able to escape without removing one nail. Tom feels trapped and his “coffin” are his responsibilities towards Amanda and Laura. Tom has many dreams of writing, and traveling and his unhappy with his current job at a warehouse. He explains to Laura that he was impressed by the magicians ability to escape the coffin since “it don’t take much intelligence to get yourself into a nailed-up coffin... But who in hell ever got himself out of one without removing one nail?” (27). This shows that Tom himself his struggling to escape and fulfill his dreams without creating a mess, being on bad terms with his family or feeling guilty. Tom hopes to be like the magician and have the courage to escape home regardless of the responsibilities that he may feel he has towards Laura since she is unable to take care of herself.

Another symbol in this play is Laura’s glass menagerie which resembles her. They are very fragile like she is and they resemble her sensitivity. They also show that she is living in a fantasy world and avoiding reality since she devotes so much of her time to them. More specifically, the unicorn glass figure represents her because it is unique. It is the only unicorn amongst many horses. When the horn breaks off of it, Laura tells Jim that it is good for the unicorn because now it can fit in and no longer feels freakish. This shows that Laura feels out of place or peculiar since she is so different from everyone else. She is disabled and this might have contributed to her extreme shyness and lack of confidence. Jim notices her lack of confidence and tries to explain to her that everyone has their insecurities and while she may feel like she like she is different, she is
living in “A world full of common people” (81). He thinks it is important for her to think more highly of herself.

Jim’s old nickname for Laura is “blue roses” which can also be a symbol for her character. Similarly to the glass unicorn, it symbolizes that she is unusual. She is odd and this often causes her to separate herself from the rest of the world. This name is also associated with her affection for Jim and her fantasy of being with him since it is the nickname he used for her in high school.

Reading Log 6:

Abandonment plays a large part in this play and occurs to a few characters. One example is that Amanda’s husband left leaving each of them in tough situations. Amanda is unable to move on and is very sad that he left which is evident from the fact that she still has a picture of him hanging in her house. Mr. Wingfield leaving also leaves Tom in a difficult position since he now feels obligated to take his father’s place in supporting the rest of the family. Amanda views it as Tom’s responsibility to provide for her and Laura. Laura is also affected by him leaving since a feeling of abandonment only makes her painful shyness and low self-esteem worse.

Jim also abandons Laura after giving her the wrong idea. When he is invited for dinner at the Wingfield house he wants to boost Laura’s self-confidence. He talks to her about how she should start thinking more highly of herself and is very kind to her. She has been fantasizing about this for years and is so happy that he is there and being very nice that she begins to lose some of her shyness and come out of her shell. He brings out the best in her and even tells her that her disability is hardly noticeable. As the night
progresses Jim asks her to dance with him and when she says she does not know how he 
insists on teaching her. He compliments her dancing and her glass collection and 
eventually he kisses her. After this, he realizes that he is giving her the wrong idea he 
quickly explains that he is in love with another girl. This leaves Laura devastated since 
he had led her to believe that he liked her and she had been dreaming about this for so 
long.

Another abandonment that occurs is Tom leaving Laura and Amanda. In this case 
the audience only witnesses the effect this has on Tom. Toms is overwhelmed with guilt 
and is unable to fulfill the things that he hoped to after escaping. While the audience 
does not see what happens to Amanda and Laura, one can imagine that they were 
devastated. They have already experienced abandonment so many times and Tom was 
someone who was very close to them. They now do not have anyone to support them and 
must find a way to provide for themselves. Tom also did not leave on a good note. He 
ran away after being lectured by his mother about being selfish.

Reading Log 7:

In Tom’s opening monologue he says “I am the narrator of the play, and also a 
character in it. The other characters are my mother, Amanda, my sister, Laura, and a 
gentleman caller who appears in the final scenes. He is the most realistic character in the 
play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from. 
But since I have a poet’s weakness for symbols, I am using this character also as a 
symbol; he is the long-delayed but always expected something that we live for” (5). At 
the end of the play it becomes clear what Tom was referring to. Jim, the gentleman 
caller, had an effect on all three characters. He is considered to be the most realistic
character because he has a plan for his future. He is engaged and taking classes in public speaking. He feels that lacking this skill has been holding him back and is what sets him apart from more successful people.

Shortly after Jim’s visit, Tom leaves home to follow his dreams. It is possible that Jim gave him the realization that there will never be a time that feels right to leave his family. He is now sure that he is unhappy at his job and needs to escape his family responsibilities in order to travel and write. Amanda is also affected by Jim’s visit. At the end of scene seven the audience sees a new side of her that was brought out by her encounter with Jim. As she makes a comforting speech to Laura “her silliness is gone and she has dignity and tragic beauty” (96). Rather than scolding Laura as she has done in the past, she is sympathizing with her.

Jim has a strong effect on Laura as well. He is the first person to tell her that her quirkiness is not negative. He convinces her that everyone is different and that she should accept herself. In the end however, she is left devastated when she finds out that he is engaged.
All My Sons Reading Logs

Reading Log 1:

The characters in *All My Sons* face Larry’s death in different ways. Since his body was never found and there is no proof that he died, Kate wants to believe that he is still alive. Whenever people say that he is dead she gets angry and denies it. For example, in Act I, Chris and Ann tell her that they are no longer waiting for Larry to come back. This makes Kate angry. When Chris asks her why she cannot accept the truth, she says “[b]ecause certain things have to be, and certain things can never be. Like the sun has to rise, it has to be. That’s why there is God. Otherwise anything can happen. But there’s God, so certain things can never happen” (28). Kate has a need for order in her life and she wants to believe that there is a God that regulates things. She can’t imagine the possibility of her son being dead so she has decided not to believe it. Kate shows her tendency to deny difficult ideas again when Ann brings up the possibility that her father’s defective plane parts which he sold during the war might be the cause of Larry’s death. Kate responds to this idea by saying “As long as you’re here, Annie, I want to ask you never to say that again” (31). She can’t comprehend the possibility of her son’s death being a result of defective parts from her husband’s company.

In contrast, Chris is more realistic and has accepted Larry’s death. He doesn’t like that his mother is still bringing up the possibility that he is alive. Chris wants to move on and when Ann arrives, he gets annoyed by the fact that the only topic of conversation is about Larry. He feels guilty being with Ann when his family still hasn’t moved on from Larry’s death since Ann was once engaged to Larry. In the beginning of
Act II, Chris is cutting down the remains of the tree that was planted in honor of Larry. This symbolizes his desire for his family to accept Larry’s death so that they can move on.

Reading Log 2:

Joe believes that the only responsibility he has is to his family. He doesn’t recognize that he also has an obligation to the rest of society. During World War II, he sold defective plane parts in order to keep his business profitable. These planes ended up killing twenty-one men but in Joe’s eyes, he did what was necessary to keep his business running and support his family. According to him, this is what’s most important. Joe justifies what he did by thinking of it as a selfless act that he did for his two sons. He says, “I could live on a quarter a day by myself, but I got a family” (77). His wife tries to explain to him that there is something larger than family but Joe can’t comprehend this idea. Eventually he reads a letter that his son Larry wrote in which he says that he is going to commit suicide because he has heard what his father had done. Larry writes, “Everyday three or four men never come back and he sits back there doing business” (83). After reading this letter, Joe finally begins to understand that he has responsibility towards all of society. He says in reference to Larry, “Sure, he was my son. But I think to him they were all my sons. And I guess they were” (83). He is referring to the twenty-one men who died as a result of his negligence and acknowledging that he had ignored his obligation towards them.

In contrast, Chris understands that every person has an obligation towards his fellow man. While he was fighting in the war, he saw all the soldiers acting selflessly and it gave him an understanding of the importance of responsibility to others. Chris
explains, “I got an idea-watching them go down. Everything was being destroyed, see, but it seemed to me that one new thing was made. A kind of... responsibility. Man for man” (35-36). He has an appreciation how meaningful it is for everyone to think of themselves as a part of the larger picture, rather than just part of a smaller family. Chris feels that the business world has taken away the greater significance of the war and he is critical of the way businessmen make decisions based only on practicality. He thinks “[t]he whole thing to them was a kind of a-bus accident” (36).

Reading Log 3:

Guilt plays an important role in this play. Joe feels guilty about having sold defective plane parts which resulted in the death of twenty-one men. He also feels guilty that Steve is the one in jail when really it was him who initiated the shipment of these plane parts. The audience can see this guilt when he defends Steve when talking to Ann. He says to her, “The man was a fool but don’t make a murderer out of him...you gotta appreciate what was doin’ in that shop in the war...It was a madhouse...I mean just try to see it human, see it human” (32). Although he is talking about Steve, he is really defending his actions and trying to make himself feel better about what he did. Joe also tells George to tell Steve that there is a job waiting for him when he comes out of jail. He says this for multiple reasons. It makes him look less suspicious, but he also feels guilty that Steve has been suffering for years in jail while he is a free man.

Chris is another character who feels guilty. He was in command of a company during the war, and most of his man died for each other. He explains to Ann, “I felt wrong to be alive, to open the bank-book, to drive the new car, to see the new
refrigerator. I mean you can take those things out of war, but when you drive that car you’ve got to know it came out of the love a man can have for a man” (36). Chris feels guilty that he was the one who survived when so many selfless men died, and as a result he is hesitant to enjoy life. He also feels guilty that he has had doubts about his father’s innocence and yet he hasn’t spoken up about these doubts. These fears are shown when he says he doesn’t want his name added to his father’s company’s name.

Reading Log 4:

Being stuck in the past and refusing to accept reality are themes that are prevalent in both *The Glass Menagerie* and *All My Sons*. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Amanda has not quite accepted that her husband has left her. She keeps a photograph of him on the wall and she talks about him as if he hadn’t left. It is a difficult reality to face so she chooses to pretend it didn’t happen. Similarly, Kate in *All My Sons* hasn’t accepted that her son Larry died in war. His body was never found nor is there any physical evidence of his death so Kate still has hope that he is alive. Other characters, including Chris and Larry’s girlfriend, Ann, love and miss Larry, but they understand that he isn’t coming back so they are ready to move on.

Both these plays also share the common theme of responsibility. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom wants to leave home and travel but he takes a while to do so because he feels that he has a responsibility towards his sister, Laura, and his mother, Amanda. Eventually, when he does leave, he is unable to be happy because he is haunted by the family he has left behind. He feels like he has failed to fulfill his responsibility to them. In *All My Sons*, Joe values responsibility towards family and places this above all else. The play raises the question of whether one’s responsibility extends beyond one’s
immediate family to the rest of society. Larry and Chris both believe that their father was wrong to only think about his obligations towards his family. Joe’s sons are idealistic characters who thought that their father needed to act morally, thinking about others and not only about doing what was best for his family and business.

Reading Log 5:

Larry is a presence in the play despite the fact that he never actually appears. He is spoken about by various characters and he drives the plot in some ways. He even speaks indirectly through his letter at the end of the play. He is compared to Chris throughout the play. While Chris is depicted as an idealist, Larry takes this to a new level. When Larry hears of his father’s crime, he assumes he is guilty and because he can’t live knowing his father acted so immorally, he kills himself. Chris has also doubts about his father’s innocence but he tries to convince himself that his father is telling the truth. He continues to hesitantly accept money from his father’s business but it is clear that he feels guilty doing so. In addition, throughout the play, Joe says that Larry was the more practical child, but this does not seem to be true after the audience hears what Larry wrote in his letter.

Larry has an effect on other characters as well. Kate becomes superstitious in an attempt to search for evidence that Larry is alive. Ann, Larry’s fiancée, is also affected by Larry’s death. She knows the circumstances of Larry’s death throughout the play. She had been unable to date other men after his death but seems oddly eager to date Chris. It also seems strange that she would be fine with Joe becoming her father-in-law given the fact that he is in part responsible for her father being in jail. One possibility is that she misses Larry and marrying Chris would be one way to stay
connected with the family. She may also feel close to Chris since they have both experienced similar situations. Both of their fathers have committed crimes and they have both lost a loved one.
Twelve Angry Men Reading Logs

Reading Log 1:

This play shows the effect that prejudiced beliefs can have on the outcome of criminal trials. Some of the jurors came to the deliberations with the assumption that the defendant was guilty merely based on the fact that he was from a poor area and is a minority. When trying to understand how someone could kill their father, the 10th juror says “It’s those people! I’m telling you they let the kids run wild up there” (10). He later says “You can’t believe a word they say. I mean, they’re born liars” (13). He is making a generalization about the people who live in the neighborhood where the defendant resided rather than focusing on the facts of the case.

The 3rd juror also bases his decision on preconceived ideas about the relationship that exists between a father and son. He apparently has a difficult relationship with his own son and he has gotten into various fights with him. He explains that he did everything he could for him and he was hurt by his son running away. For a long time during the deliberations, he fails to distinguish between the boy on trial and his own son and this makes him give a biased judgment as to the defendant’s guilt or innocence.

The jurors who are not prejudiced have a more impartial outlook on the case and are able to rely on the facts rather than their preconceived ideas of what someone from a “slum” might be like. For the 8th juror, the fact that the boy accused of murder came from a slum and lived a difficult life made him more sympathetic towards him and he wanted to make sure that they thought about all the evidence before agreeing to have him subjected to capital punishment. After describing the boy’s difficult upbringing, the 8th juror says, “He’s had a pretty terrible sixteen years. I think we owe him a few words”
Rather than being prejudiced, he uses the fact that he has had a difficult life as a motive to try his best to make the right decision. He has more of an open mind going into the case and while he is unsure of whether the boy killed his father, he wants to be convinced beyond reasonable doubt before deciding to have him put to death.

The 4th juror is another example of someone who looks at the facts rather than the boy’s background. When the other jurors are discussing the idea that the boy comes from a slum, the 4th juror says, “I think we’re missing the point here. This boy, let’s say he’s a product of a filthy neighborhood and a broken home. We can’t help that. We’re here to decide whether he’s guilty or innocent of murder…” (18). Although the 4th juror believes that the boy is guilty, he bases this belief on the evidence and the testimonies of the witnesses rather than his own prejudices.

Reading Log 2:

This play is shows what an American trial by jury is like. The jurors are meant to represent a wide range of Americans from various classes, backgrounds and ages and reflect a range of different opinions. The foreman is a serious man who is an assistant football coach. He takes his job very seriously. The 2nd juror is a quiet bank clerk who doesn’t seem very opinionated. He doesn’t talk very often and when he does, he doesn’t explain himself. For example, when he is asked why he thinks the boy is guilty, he says, “Well, it’s hard to put it into words. I just - think he’s guilty” (14). The 3rd juror is a business owner who has a troubled relationship with his sixteen year old son. He has strong opinions and a short temper. The 4th juror is a stock broker who seems to be wealthy. He is very serious and straightforward. The 5th juror works at a hospital in
Harlem. He grew up in a slum and seems to have a similar background to the boy on trial. The 6th juror is a painter who expresses concern about the possibility of freeing a guilty man. The 7th juror is eager for the decision to be made so he can make it to his baseball game. He is a salesman and he is very impatient.

The 8th juror is an architect who is originally the only juror who votes “not guilty”. Although he is unsure of whether the boy killed his father or not, he wants to discuss seriously and examine the evidence more closely since he feels reasonable doubt may exist as to the defendant’s guilt. He remains calm throughout the deliberations even when other jurors are angry with him and some lose their tempers. The 9th juror is an old man who relates to one of the witnesses because he can understand feeling unimportant and ignored by others. He quickly switches sides and supports the 8th juror. The 10th juror is a garage owner who is strongly opinionated and prejudiced and who never acknowledges the validity of anyone else’s arguments. The 11th juror is an immigrant watchmaker who is quite logical and reasonable. He admires the American justice system. He explains, “This, I have always thought, is a remarkable thing about democracy… That we are notified by mail to come down to this place and decide on the guilt or innocence of a man we have never heard of before” (50). The 12th juror works for an advertisement agency and pays close attention to the details of the case.

Although a wide range of people are represented, there are no women and all the men are white. However, this is most likely the result of the time period during which this case takes place.
Reading Log 3:

One striking thing about this play is that there are no names given throughout the entire play. The jurors are referred to by numbers, and the defendant’s name is never mentioned. There are various reasons that Rose may have chosen to do this. This play was meant to be a commentary on the American justice system. By not specifying the names of the jurors, the play displays a broader statement about juries in general and how they operate. The characters are more representational of the American population since juries are meant to represent a cross-section of society. Whereas in most plays the audience follows certain characters and gets a certain feel for them, Twelve Angry Men does not.

This play can be compared to The Glass Menagerie in that they are meant to have a universal feel or get across a certain point rather than have the audience be drawn into the specifics of a certain story. In the case of The Glass Menagerie, there are few props used and there is a screen that flashes pictures. This gives the play a somewhat unrealistic feel. The audience remains aware that it is viewing a play not seeing reality. In Twelve Angry Men, the use of numbers for the characters rather than names has a similar effect. These plays are meant to get across a certain point or evoke certain emotions rather than tell a more individualized or specific story.

Reading Log 4:

One idea presented in this play is the effect of peer pressure. The first vote is done by having the jurors raise their hands which makes it more difficult for them to not
be influenced by others’ opinions. The stage directions describe that “[s]even or eight hands go up immediately. Several others go up more slowly. Everyone looks around the table” (11). It is difficult not to let the opinions of others affect your own. Eventually it is determined that the only juror who voted “not guilty” is the 8th juror. The fact that he was not intimidated to be the only one voting the way he did shows a lot about his character. He is brave since it is difficult to stand alone against many. Despite what the other jurors might think or say, he votes for what he thinks is right. Immediately, he faces rude comments from the others. For example, the 10th juror says, “Boy-oh-boy! There’s always one” (11). Later in the play, the 9th juror describes the position that the 8th juror put himself in by sticking to his opinions. He explains, “Well it’s not easy to stand alone against the ridicule of others” (28). When the jurors vote again later, rather than raising their hands, they anonymously write their votes on slips of paper. This seems like a better system since it ensures that people are not being influenced by the opinions of others. Similarly, at the end of the play, all the jurors change their votes to “not guilty” except for 3rd juror. At this point the 3rd juror stands alone and probably feels similar pressure to change his vote. Both the 3rd and the 8th jurors are strong-minded and are willing to stand alone in order to defend their points of view.

Reading Log 5:

It is the jury’s job to decide if they think the defendant is guilty beyond reasonable doubt. While there seems to be a fair amount of evidence that points to the boy being guilty, the jury is able to uncover enough weaknesses in the evidence to give them sufficient doubt to find him not guilty. When the 2nd juror says he thinks the boy is
guilty because no one proved otherwise, the 8th responds by saying, “Nobody has to prove otherwise. The burden of the proof is on the prosecution. The defendant doesn’t have to open his mouth. That’s in the constitution” (14). Some weaknesses in the evidence include the fact that the witness from across the street who claims he saw the murder wears glasses and it seems unlikely that he would have had them on while in bed. If that was the case, he wouldn’t have been able to clearly witness the crime. Another idea presented was that the witness who said he saw the boy run down the stairs was old and would not have been able to hobble to the door fast enough. In addition, he would not have been able to hear the boy say “I’m going to kill you” over the sound of the train passing by.

These questions give the jurors reasonable doubt and so they are obliged to find the defendant not guilty. The 8th juror also questions whether the witnesses were giving completely accurate testimony. He explains, “There was a lot of circumstantial evidence, but actually those two witnesses were the entire case for the prosecution. Supposing they were wrong” (20)? Another principle in the American justice system is that a person is innocent until proven guilty. The principles of reasonable doubt and that one is presumed innocent both attempt to ensure that an innocent person does not get unjustly punished.

Reading Log 6:

The 8th juror has many admirable qualities. He is calm and rational even when he disagrees with the other jurors. For example, at the end of Act I, the 3rd juror loses his temper and attempts to physically attack the 8th juror. He threatens to kill him and the stage directions describe that the 8th juror calmly says, “you don’t really mean you’ll kill
me, do you?” (48). He also takes his responsibilities as a juror seriously and is tries hard to make the right decision. The 8th juror knows that the life of a man is in his hands and he doesn’t take this lightly. Unlike some of the other jurors, he bases his decision only on the facts presented rather than using any preconceived ideas of what a person from a slum might be like. He understands that his job is to think about this specific case and ignore all outside influences that may persuade him. He not concerned about when he will get home and he is the only one who is open-minded enough to think more deeply about the evidence and see if reasonable doubt exists. He questions the reliability of the witnesses and all the evidence presented rather than just accepting it even when the boy seemed obviously guilty to the other jurors. As he explains, “According to the testimony the boy looks guilty. Maybe he is. I sat there in the court for three days listening while the evidence built up. Everybody sounded so positive that I started to get a peculiar feeling about this trial. I mean, nothing is that positive… I started to feel that the defense counsel wasn’t doing his job” (20). It is a commendable quality to think deeply about things and look beyond what may seem obvious, especially when you are dealing with someone’s life.

Reading Log 7:

One interesting aspect about this play is that the audience never finds out whether or not the defendant was in fact innocent. I think Rose did this to emphasize the difficult decisions that juries often have to make where it is unclear if the defendant is guilty or innocent. In most cases this information will always remain unknown. In this case, the 8th juror is able to change all the other jurors’ votes by being persuasive, not necessarily
right. He does not come on too strong and he never states that he strongly believes that the defendant is innocent. He just says that he doesn’t know whether or not the boy killed his father and he expresses his concern that they not punish an innocent man unfairly. This makes him more persuasive because he comes across as rational and he seems to have reasonable questions.

The 8th juror never completely proves to the others that the boy is innocent but he slowly places doubts in their minds by making them notice things they had not originally seen. This makes them question their assumptions. Most jurors originally viewed the case straightforward since on the surface, the defendant seemed guilty. The 8th juror is able to subtly provoke them to examine the evidence more deeply. For each of his points, he calmly proves that another scenario exists that might make the evidence unreliable. For example, he suggests that it might not have been possible for the old man who lives on the floor below to get from his bed to the door in time to see the boy running away. He proves this by measuring the distances the man had to walk and then actually walking that distance while timing himself. The 8th juror’s calm reliance on facts makes him quite persuasive and respected by most of the other jurors.
Rationale

I chose to study three modern American plays, *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams, *All my Sons* by Arthur Miller, and *Twelve Angry Men* by Reginald Rose. I haven’t studied many plays before and I thought it would be interesting to explore this area of literature. All three of these plays in some way touch upon the themes of responsibility and guilt. *The Glass Menagerie* and *All My Sons* examine the responsibilities that a person owes either to their family or society and the guilt that comes with not fulfilling these duties. *Twelve Angry Men* deals with the American jury system and the way that jurors must act according to the responsibilities they hold towards society when they determine the guilt or innocence of a person charged with a crime. I learned through examining these three plays more about the ways people are affected by the obligations they hold towards others.

I wrote about themes from each of the plays in my final project. For *The Glass Menagerie*, I chose to write about the way in which the characters are caught in the past and how this affects their abilities to face reality. When reading the play and writing my reading logs, I noticed that this was a problem faced by many of the characters and I wanted to explore this idea further. In *All My Sons*, I chose to write about the ways in which the characters respond differently to Larry’s death. I thought it was interesting that the characters’ reactions varied significantly despite the fact that they were each facing the death of a family member. Finally, I wrote three newspaper articles about *Twelve Angry Men*, including a news article about the juror deliberations described in the play, a feature article examining the experience of the fifth juror in the trial, and an opinion piece on the fairness of the jury system based on this trial. I thought this format would give me
more chance to explore several aspects of the play rather than writing a thematic essay.

When reading the plays, I annotated and wrote my thoughts in the margins. I then wrote reading logs and further expanded on these ideas. Many of my essays were then based on a reading log I had previously prepared. I found that writing these logs helped me identify important themes of each of the plays that I could later explore more deeply when preparing my essays. I find writing reading logs easier than writing essays because I feel freer and less caught up with structure. One of my weaknesses in writing is that I get stuck on details and trying to make my sentences perfect. In the future, I feel I should try to write more quickly and spend time editing and fixing what I have written rather than getting it right the first time. Writing the newspaper articles for *Twelve Angry Men* was a new format for me but I liked the experience of changing the voice of my writing from that of a more straightforward analytical essay.

I enjoyed reading plays as opposed to novels for this project. It was a nice change although it did pose some new challenges for me. Sometimes it was hard to envision how the play would appear on stage and difficult to follow the stage directions included by the playwright. I had the opportunity to see a performance of *The Glass Menagerie* after I finished reading it. While some aspects of the performance were as I had imagined them to be, at times I was surprised at how differently I had envisioned certain scenes and characters while reading the play.

I feel my writing has improved as a result of completing this project. I am better able to analyze texts as a result of developing my writing process. I still hope to improve on my organizational skills since I sometimes find that I have trouble putting together my thoughts in a coherent way. I look forward to improving these skills in the future.
Works Cited


REFERENCES


Hesson, H. (2010). *To Track or Not to Track? Available from ERIC (ED509024)*.


