

THE IMPLIED CHARACTER CURRICULUM IN VOCATIONAL AND NONVOCATIONAL ENGLISH CLASSES

Designing Social Futures for Working Class Students and Their Teachers

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This study combines data from three case studies of teachers moving from their university teacher education programs into their first jobs, with data collected through observations and interviews totaling six observation cycles over the 2 years of data collection. The curricula for working class students that the three teachers taught represent a range of explicit to implicit attention to character education, with one teacher teaching a vocational English class that included specific character education modules, one teaching a vocational English class whose curriculum implied character education for job preparedness without including explicit modules, and one teaching nonvocational English whose curriculum focused solely on the domain's traditional tripod of language, literature, and writing. The data indicate that across these assignments, the teachers instructed their students in *broad dispositions*, including having a *work ethic* and exhibiting *motivation for school work*; *respect* in a range of relationships, including respect for *authority figures*, *cultural conventions*, and *peers*; and *personal qualities*, including *self-discipline*, *perseverance*, and *time management*. The study concludes with a consideration of the ways in which working class and vocational students are assumed to lack character as indicated by their disengagement with school, the ways in which character education is an implicit part of the education for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and the assumptions that drive the belief that the academic performance of students from poor and working-class homes and communities can be addressed through instruction in character traits grounded in the Protestant work ethic rather than a reconsideration of the curriculum with which they must engage.

Jackson's (1968) account of the hidden curriculum helped to open educators' eyes to the

intangible, systemic forces that help to shape the behavior of people within schools. Jackson

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describes the ways in which students learn a deferential stance through the structure of the curriculum, the assumptions of the teacher, the respect accorded to texts, and other factors that place them in a subservient position. This compliance might come in relation to a host of factors: the authority of the teacher and her rules and expectations, the magisterial tone of information and perspectives presented in texts, the individualistic and competitive nature of classroom performances, the teacher's or larger system's notion of achievement, and other dimensions of an authoritarian system—all of which are built into the everyday, mundane practices and routines of what Jackson calls *life in classrooms*. This classroom life, he found, is often structured by ulterior mediators that reify this authoritarian relationship, placing students in compromised positions vis-à-vis adults.

The hidden curriculum is comprised of those “subtle or not-so subtle messages that are not part of the intended curriculum” (Nieto, 2000, p. 28) and is thus *proleptic* (Cole, 1996); that is, adults' assumptions about the social futures of children implicitly shape their present action to bring about those very futures. Rheingold and Cook (1975), for instance, found that parents often both anticipate and help to construct their children's gendered futures, decorating boys' rooms with transportation motifs and other worldly pursuits and girls' rooms with dolls, lace, and similar domesticalia. The shaping of children's environments by adults projects a life trajectory that is often reinforced across the many settings in which young people are socialized into appropriate adult roles.

This sense of optimal outcome, both for individuals and whole social groups, has been described by Wertsch (2000) as teleological; that is, as having a sense of grand design toward a preferred purpose. The constructs of telos and prolepsis suggest that every social setting has a motive, or broad social destination, that is continually encouraged through both explicit and implicit means (Wertsch, 1985). It behooves educators to consider

whose values become institutionalized in the school structure, what social futures are projected for students, and how teachers—either consciously or unconsciously—help to bring about those futures.

In characterizing the hidden curriculum, researchers have focused on both the micro- and macrolevels. Although he acknowledges the role of the broader institutional and cultural landscape, Jackson (1968) is primarily interested in the microlevel of the classroom and how teachers shape students' activity within it. More explicitly, McCutcheon (1988) argues that “The hidden curriculum is primarily the purview of the teacher ... as teachers communicate their values, expectations and other messages” (p. 198).

Others have argued that classroom episodes are microcosms of what goes on around them. Meighan (1981), for instance, argues that

The hidden curriculum is taught by the school, not by any teacher ... something is coming across to the pupils which may never be spoken in the English lesson or prayed about in assembly. They are picking-up an approach to living and an attitude to learning. (p. 314)

Apple and King (1977) insist that even school-level analyses are inadequate because they are ahistorical. They argue that schools serve as “institutions that embody collective traditions and human intentions which, in turn, are the products of identifiable social and economic ideologies.... The curriculum in schools responds to and represents ideological and cultural resources that come from somewhere” (p. 343), most likely those who historically have held and distributed a community's cultural capital.

Apple and King (1977) argue that a historical and cultural approach to considering curriculum will yield an understanding of the ideologies at work in schools. Ideology has always been present in U.S. schools. In the earliest classrooms, ideology was overt in the form of didactic texts such as the McGuffey's Readers (e.g., McGuffey, 1836) that fostered

such virtues as honesty, generosity, thrift, hard work, courage, patriotism, reverence, and respect for adults, particularly parents. Over time, this instruction became more implicit as schools shifted in purpose from their explicit focus on homogenizing and assimilating newcomers and diverse citizens to preparing them for participation in the machinery of the economy (Vallance, 1973). Apple and King describe the institutionalization of this hortatory curriculum as the ultimate "deep structure, the first hidden curriculum," one that subsumed the explicit curriculum (p. 346).

The hidden curriculum, argues Anyon (1980), is not monolithic. In contrast to Jackson's (1968) observation that schools prepare all students for docile roles, she found that hidden curricula are likely to vary according to the presumed social futures of the students. Anyon found that even in elementary schools, children of different economic backgrounds were subject to the reproduction of the social division of labor (Williams, 1977; Willis, 1981); that is, students from working class backgrounds were rewarded for obedience while students from more executive backgrounds were encouraged to show initiative and assertiveness (cf. Bowles & Gintis, 1976). From this perspective, a hidden curriculum may contribute to social stratification by shepherding students toward futures based on their parents' occupations and income. This process illustrates the manner in which a sense of teleological outcome and proleptic social practices work in conjunction to channel people into life trajectories.

Eckert (1989) has outlined the ways in which working class and affluent students experience school. She found that "jocks"—those students who resonate with school as a significant and legitimate institution—view school as a portfolio-building experience that they negotiate peaceably, if not necessarily enthusiastically, even when they find it tedious and disaffecting. As part of their academic "career," school is a place where they perform to excel so as to benefit in terms of college admissions and other thresholds through which

they must pass in order to achieve their life goals in white-collar positions. In contrast, "burnouts" tend to come from blue collar families and see blue collar work as their social destination. For them, school is a place that is irrelevant to their social futures, holding them in adolescent patterns and positions when they hope to accede to the world of work and accelerate their movement into adult status. Such rewards as good grades and teachers' approval provide little incentive to them, making school an exercise they are legally obligated to complete through age 16 and rendering graduation a goal to which they are often indifferent.

Schools, however, often take a deficit view of such students and their goals and means of achieving them. Rather, they tend to provide working class and lower track students with an education designed to enculturate them to school norms and create pathways toward social futures aligned with school values. Such an approach is consistent with Benjamin Franklin's view of social classes, with upward mobility of the sort accomplished by Franklin himself holding the greatest currency. In a letter to his grandson, Franklin opined that those who study hard in school "live comfortably in good houses," while those who neglect their studies "are poor and dirty and ragged and ignorant and vicious and live in miserable cabins and garrets" (as cited in Isaacson, 2003, p. 379).

In prior work (Smagorinsky & Taxel, 2004, 2005) we have found that, particularly in states that have historically followed hierarchical social structures, character education has been viewed as especially important for those students who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who are from immigrant families, and who otherwise tend to be found in lower and vocational tracks in a school curriculum. For such students, an education in the tenets of the Protestant work ethic is presumed to provide a pathway to the workforce where they will be expected to be punctual, respectful, and in possession of other habits of mind that enable employment in the service sector of the economy. The problem, in this conception,

is not that schools are inattentive to what motivates these students. Rather, school is presumed to be an institution whose attributes are self-evident, and those who find it irrelevant to their growth and trajectories are in need of education in character attributes that will redirect their interests.

Weber (1930) described the value attached to hard work, thrift, and efficiency in earthly pursuits that in turn will yield eternal salvation. He argued that this ethic accounted for the economic success of Protestant groups in European capitalism because it combined the goals of material success and spiritual deliverance. The Protestant work ethic also stresses that applied exertion sustains the individual, who can attain a better life through diligent effort. Each person, in Weber's account, thus has not just a moral responsibility to work hard in school but a moral imperative to work hard in life if he or she is to reach heaven in good stead.

In this study we examine three high school English teachers from the state of Georgia. The data were collected prior to the implementation of the state's federally-funded character education program. In this program schools are directed to instill 27 character traits in their students, including citizenship, cheerfulness, cleanliness, compassion, cooperation, courage, courtesy, creativity, diligence, fairness, generosity, honesty, kindness, loyalty, patience, patriotism, perseverance, punctuality, respect for others, respect for the creator, respect for the natural environment, school pride, self control, self respect, sportsmanship, tolerance, and virtue (see, e.g., Sewell & Hall, 2003). In our study of character education programs (Smagorinsky & Taxel, 2004, 2005), we determined that this approach construed character education as the inculcation of adult values in children who presumably lacked them; and found that the proposal particularly identified working class, low income, minority, and immigrant populations to be especially in need of such attention.

In the present study we found that many of the values and specific character traits that

were later included in the federally-funded character education initiative were evident in the teaching of three beginning English teachers who either taught vocational track or working class students. Their instruction came to our attention in our analysis of data from their transition from their university teacher education programs to their first jobs. Two of the teachers taught some version of a vocational English class that had a character curriculum built into its workforce education curriculum; the other superimposed an implied character curriculum on her rural, working class students in a nonvocational English class as a way to improve their work habits.

Our effort to understand their employment of an implied character curriculum emerged through our attention to the following research question: In the instruction in the domain of English of these three beginning teachers, *What evidence is available of a character curriculum in the instruction of these three teachers, as provided through classroom observations, interviews, and teaching artifacts?* Based on answers to this research question, we draw conclusions about assumptions made about working class and vocational students in terms of their dispositions to learn and their future place in society.

METHOD

Each teacher in the study was a volunteer participant in research sponsored by the Center on English Learning and Achievement (CELA) that focused on the transition made when teachers go from their teacher education programs to their first jobs. Of the 16 teachers who volunteered for and persisted with the study, 10 attended a Southwestern university and began their teaching careers in the Southwest, and 6 both attended a Georgia public university and proceeded to teach in Georgia public schools. Of these 16 teachers, 3 emphasized character education in their instruction as indicated through the coding of the data. These 3 teachers were bracketed for the present study

because their many references to students' character or work ethic identified them as a subgroup from the sample amenable to a cross-case analysis of their approaches to character education. We followed each teacher for 2 years encompassing their semester of student teaching and first year of full-time teaching. After presenting profiles of the university teacher education program and each participant, we outline the data that we collected and analyzed for the study.

Teacher Education Program

Fresh from their university coursework, the three teachers appeared to have embraced their professors' emphasis on making personal connections with students. This focus was revealed in both the gateway interviews and

the interviews we conducted with both the two tenured professors who team-taught the program and their teaching assistants who supervised the teacher candidates' student teaching. (Neither these faculty members nor their teaching assistants are among the researchers or authors of this study.) Most vividly, the program's focus on connecting with students was depicted in two collaborative group concept maps that the participants in the study drew, first prior to student teaching and then immediately following student teaching. (See Figures 1 and 2.)

In both instances, the participants' prompt was to depict their conception of teaching through a concept map. What they produced on both occasions was a drawing in which a group of teenagers occupies the center of the image, surrounded by factors that contribute to

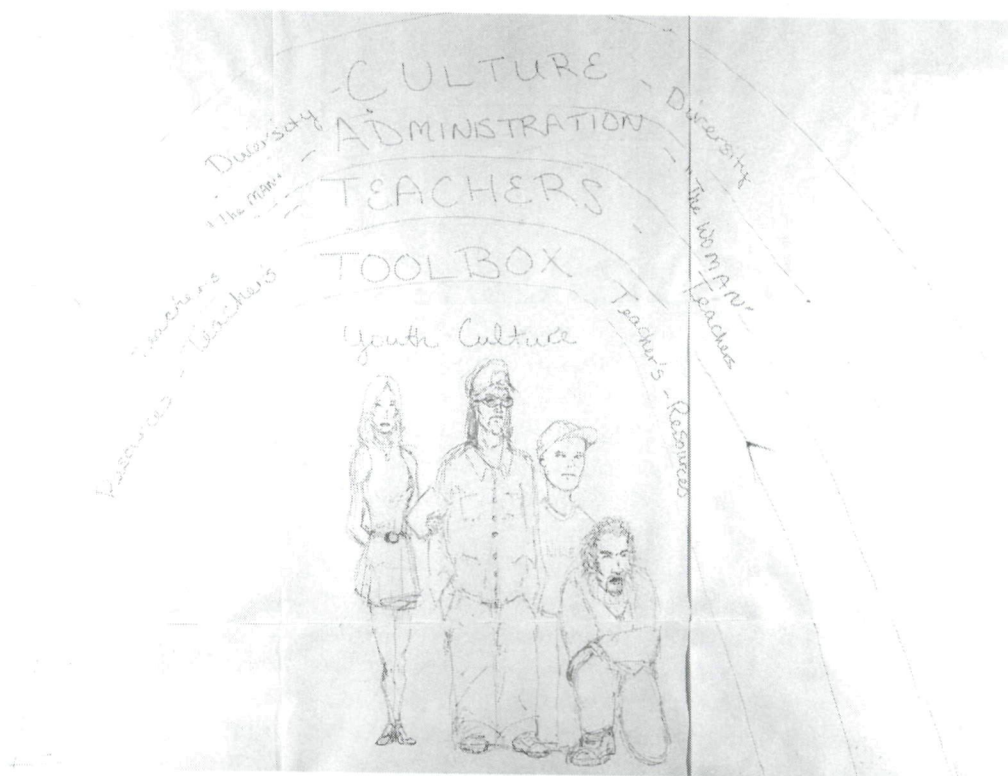


FIGURE 1
Concept map drawn prior to student teaching.

of latitude that appeared to erode their imperative to complete academic tasks. Even though the mentor teachers had a formal relationship with the students' professors that included frequent exchanges about effective practices of both classroom teaching and the mentoring of interns, participants often noted discrepancies between the two value systems once they were in the schools full-time and experiencing the *two-worlds pitfall* typical of teacher candidates (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985). This pitfall requires the satisfaction of the "two masters" of the idealistic university setting and the grittier, more problematic world of the classroom and its school-based supervisors and evaluators.

Each of the three teachers expressed, in the gateway interview prior to their student teaching, a resistance to authoritarian teaching methods such as top-down management, instruction in orthodoxies in interpretation and interpretive form, and other teaching behaviors that put the teacher's priorities in a dominant role in relation to students' interests and needs. Once in their teaching assignments, however, they tended to revert to this position that they had initially repudiated, with their belief in students' agency and their personal developmental trajectories replaced by their belief that the students were not taking advantage of their educational opportunities because they lacked such fundamental dispositions as a strong work ethic. The situated quality of their expressed beliefs suggests the relational nature of the data collection, with campus-based data collection yielding earnest statements aligned with their professors' values and school-based data collection producing views more consistent with the beliefs and practices of their mentor teachers and other local influences.

Participants

To contextualize our analysis, we next present profiles of each of the three teachers in this study, including demographic information about the communities in which they taught and the teaching assignments for which we

observed and interviewed them. (The names of all people and places are pseudonyms.) The first two, Joni and Samantha, were assigned to vocational track courses that emphasized both the domain of English and workforce readiness. In Samantha's student teaching, the vocational English class included "character education modules" as an explicit part of the curriculum. The third, Brandy, taught working-class students who were in nonvocational English, yet her conception of their needs corresponded well to the workforce-oriented curricula taught by Joni and Samantha.

Joni. Joni did her student teaching in the only high school in a rural county of roughly 46,000 residents. The community as a whole was considered by many to be socially and politically conservative. It was the site, for instance, of a dispute over whether or not the Biblical Ten Commandments could be displayed in front of the county court house, and during each class observed, consistent with state law, a formal announcement over the PA system requested that all observe a "moment of silence" for quiet reflection, meditation, or prayer. The class we focused on during Joni's student teaching was called Applied Communications II, which primarily enrolled 12th graders. The course was offered in the lowest of the school's four tracks. Her mentor teacher said that beneath the advanced placement/gifted, college preparation, and average tracks were the

Applied Communications students who are hopefully tech[nical] school bound, maybe someday. Probably the majority of them, though, will go into the work force next year, so we try to spend a lot of time [on workforce preparation], and I think it's real important for them to be ready for that. So [we teach] all kinds of communications skills, which is what this English is all about.... [The students] are all vocational because applied communications doesn't count [toward graduation] for the college prep students.... The main concept they're supposed to get in the class is how important communication is—good communication is in life and the workplace. And they

do that through learning about negotiation skills, good customer service.

Joni's first job was in one of 14 high schools in the state's second-largest, and among the most racially and culturally diverse, school districts. We observed Joni teaching a sophomore course in the vocational applied communications curriculum. She was assisted during class by Edith, a colleague from special education, who monitored the 15 students who required extra attention for behavior disorders, attention deficit disorder, and other special needs. Joni's assignment was to teach the content area while Edith oversaw the modifications of students with Individualized educational plans (IEPs). Joni described the curriculum as concerned with teaching students

workplace skills. They need to know things such as how to fill out—they're going to learn how to fill out résumés, fill out job applications, you know, write technical—technical writing, different things like that.... We're going to do the reading, writing, and thinking, but we're also going to add in the things you need to know for the workplace, since most of them are going probably directly into the workplace.

Samantha. Samantha did her student teaching in a town with a population density of 184 people per square mile, suggesting a rural setting for the schools. Roughly 8% of families and 9.7% of the population lived below the poverty line, including 12.3% of those 18 years old or younger. The lower income students tended to end up in vocational classes of the sort that we observed her teaching. Samantha said, "We have a lot of kids who come from families on welfare. We have a lot of kids who just have a hard time.... A lot of my kids ... read between a second or third grade reading level."

Samantha's mentor teacher, Jude, said that for her vocational English students,

We take the literature and their writing and gear it all towards workplace communication. And so just to help them make it in the

world, to be a constructive citizen. When they get a job to be a leader on that job, to be a good worker.

Students who enrolled in vocational English could choose either the applied or Coordinated Vocational Academic Education (CVAE) track, with CVAE regarded as the more advanced of the two. Applied 1, Jude said, was "a hands-on course, sort of work-related a lot of the time. You know, career-focused."

Jude described the students as "not planning on going to a four-year college" and said that instruction involved

basic life skills. This is how you write a letter. This is, you know, these kids are targeted because of low socioeconomic, low reading skills, writing skills, that sort of thing. They have to be recommended by their middle school counselor. So they're targeted as people that kind of need a boost [to get] them ready for jobs.

Samantha also described her students as not likely to attend college or necessarily even graduate, saying,

A lot of them have no plans on going to college, and Jude told me the sad fact is a lot of the ninth graders will drop out. So, I am looking at my kids, and I'm knowing that some of these kids could very well drop out as soon as they hit 16.

The students, she said, "are just not highly motivated" to succeed in school; "a lot of them have jobs, after school jobs, or girlfriends, or activities, [or babies, and they] put homework on the low end" of their priorities.

Brandy. Brandy did her student teaching and began her first job at the same school, one that enrolled 1,400 students and served the most rural and least affluent of the county's three school districts. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, people in the county earned on average 16% less per capita income than people throughout the rest of the state, and this number was even lower for the 12% of the total population who were African American. Only 7.5% of the adults in the county had

obtained bachelor's degrees, and 68% had graduated from high school.

Brandy taught no vocational English classes. Rather, we observed her teaching 11th grade Honors American Literature during student teaching and both 9th grade "regular" track students and 9th grade honors students in her first year of full-time teaching. Brandy often spoke about her students' lack of motivation and commitment to academics and how it affected her instruction. Prior to an observation, for instance, she cautioned the researcher that

When you observe me, it is not me, because I have found that I have got to be so stern with this class. We really cannot have fun because the minute we start to have fun, they take it and they run.... I have to be so very controlling in this class, and it's really frustrating because it's not me. I think learning should be fun. Should not be one task after another after another with no discussion. Discussion techniques do not work in this class. A lecture does not work. I haven't figured out what works.

Even in an honors curriculum, then, Brandy found that her students lacked the sort of academic dedication that she expected, a condition that she felt merited attention to both academic preparation and the personal dispositions that she believed would promote it.

Data Collection

The three teachers provided parallel sets of data consistent with all data collected across the range of campuses in this strand of CELA's focus of inquiry, a broad and diverse study of teaching and learning in the secondary school domain of English. Prior to each of the 2 years of the study, each teacher participated in a *gateway interview* in which she explained her teaching situation, beliefs about teaching, and how her beliefs corresponded to the expectations of the setting of her instruction. During both the semester of student teaching and first year of full-time teaching, we conducted three *observation cycles*. Each cycle included a pre-

observation interview, one or two observations depending on the distance from campus to the school, and a postobservation interview. During student teaching, interviews were conducted with both the university supervisor and mentor teacher, and during the first year of full-time teaching, mentors or significant colleagues were interviewed to provide a sense of the sort of guidance the participants were getting. Finally, artifacts such as planning sheets, assignments, etc. were consulted to corroborate perspectives provided during the interviews. All data reported in this study come from the interviews.

Data Analysis

We identified the following a priori major categories for our codes, developed in previous research in this line of inquiry (e.g., Cook, Smagorinsky, Fry, Konopak, & Moore, 2002; Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999; Johnson, Smagorinsky, Thompson, & Fry, 2003; Smagorinsky, Jakubiak, & Moore, 2008): *pedagogical tool* (i.e., the means through which the participants effected their instruction, such as a *character education module*); *attribution* (i.e., the source to which the participants attributed their knowledge of the tool and how to use it, such as the *mentor teacher*); and *problem* (i.e., the purpose toward which the participants employed the tool, such as the teacher's *perception of students* and anticipation of their needs). Each case study provided variation within this set of codes as participants described the specific pedagogical tools they employed in their teaching.

The three focal teachers in this study were selected from their cohort because each emphasized *character education* as a pedagogical tool in her instruction. They were identified from the 16 teachers who participated in the research because of the preponderance of such codes in their data, and the absence of character education codes in the other 13 cases, none of which had a vocational education emphasis. (Of the 10 Southwestern teachers, 7 taught multiple subjects in elementary

schools, 1 taught English in a middle school, and 2 taught English in high schools; of the 6 teachers from Georgia, all taught English in middle or high schools.) Even when the focal teachers did not employ this term, we inferred a character curriculum through the 3 participants' description of the need to instruct students in aspects of a productive work ethic, using terms such as responsibility, respect, perseverance, and other terms indicating the type of disposition ultimately formalized in the state's character education program. Based on our identification of character education codes, we inferred that the teachers emphasized for their vocational and lower-track students a notion of character that would enable them to persist in school and enter a particular sector of the workforce successfully.

Our findings fell into three general coding categories, each with subcategories:

1. *Broad dispositions*, including having a *work ethic* and exhibiting *motivation for school work*.
2. *Respect* in a range of relationships, including respect for *authority figures*, *cultural conventions*, and *peers*.
3. *Personal qualities*, including *self-discipline*, *perseverance*, and *time management*.

We next present excerpts from our interviews in which the teachers talked about their teaching with respect to these coding categories. We should stress that the study was not designed to elicit such beliefs, but rather the beliefs emerged through interviews designed to trace and interpret the teachers' developing use of pedagogical tools. We assume that the emphasis on character education in their instruction was, in the case of Samantha, a function of the inclusion of character education modules in the vocational curriculum; in the case of Joni, a function of her own interpretation of job readiness in the curriculum and her resulting emphasis on developing good character; and in the case of Brandy, a function of her belief that her rural students needed a better work ethic if they were to succeed in school and subsequently in life. We thus report

on both explicit and implicit character curricula, with the two virtually indistinguishable in the three cases we present next.

RESULTS

We present our results according to the categories in which we located the teachers' implicit and explicit character curriculum: *broad dispositions* (*work ethic* and *motivation for school work*), *respect* (for *authority figures*, *cultural conventions*, and *peers*), and *personal qualities* (*self-discipline*, *personal responsibility*, *perseverance*, *time management*, and *honesty*). We infer that these values emerged in relation to values, practices, and circumstances that each found in the setting of her student teaching. Their shared belief in the value of each child's distinct value and needs—evident in both of the concept maps produced on campus—gave way to a less trustful sense of students and their motivation to perform willingly on school tasks. With students appearing to have less gumption than the teachers' initial theory of learning provided, they gravitated to character education, both implicitly and explicitly derived from the curriculum, to frame their instruction and channel students toward a particular kind of social future: work in the service economy, with upward mobility taking place within the confines of that trajectory.

Broad Dispositions

We next present evidence from the interviews indicating the ways in which the three teachers impressed on their students their view of a fruitful stance toward school, in the form of their work ethic and motivation for school work, through their implied and explicit character curricula.

Work ethic. To Samantha, the root cause for her students' lack of effort in their studies was their resistance to work: "It all ties back into work ethics. It all ties back into their attitude and the way that they're doing things," a problem that led to issues with classroom man-

agement, failure to complete assignments, and related resistance to classroom imperatives. With this observation, she characterized her students as lacking a fundamental willingness to take on school tasks. She had begun her career as an assistant in a Montessori school, a setting driven by the assumption that a teacher's role is to observe and support "the natural development of children" and to help "children develop creativity, problem-solving, critical thinking and time-management skills.... The basis of Montessori practice in the classroom is respected individual choice of research and work, and uninterrupted concentration rather than group lessons led by an adult" (<http://www.montessori.edu/>). This orientation envisions a supportive role for teachers, one in which children determine their own means and pace for learning and teachers provide an enabling environment for them to pursue their own interests.

In the vocational curriculum in the public school in which she did her student teaching, however, the students did not share this disposition for self-motivation. Samantha found that she needed to abandon this assumption and institute rules and consequences to enforce their compliance with academic responsibilities. In the absence of "work ethics" that would produce volitional cooperation, Samantha's recourse was to produce a more punitive structure that ran counter to Montessori's (1912) belief that when a teacher imposes a curriculum on students, "she finds it necessary to discipline her pupils into immobility and to force their attention" (p. 21). Although her teacher education program did not claim a Montessori orientation, the faculty did emphasize a student-centered approach to teaching, one that shared the assumption that students value and benefit from their education more when they direct its focus and practices than they do when put in positions requiring their compliance to adult priorities.

Even though she had several teaching assignments labeled "Honors," Brandy similarly lamented her students' poor work ethic. Of her "average" track students, she said,

They won't even pay attention in class.... The kids don't think much of [the textbook]. But I've about decided these kids don't think much of anything.... They just do not seem to want to put forth the effort, and they want to write sentences like "See Jack run." ... It makes me wonder if they have not been socially passed and are now expecting it.... They're in for a very rude awakening.... If you ask them to get out a pencil and paper and write something, their body language, they throw themselves around in their desks and, "Oh, I don't believe you're going to make me write two words." It is just—their attitudes need a lot of adjustment.... I'll sit down and I'll say, "What a good idea," plan something, and then it flops. And so far I haven't had any success with very much in this class. It's so depressing.

Her solution to her students' attitudes toward work, like that of Samantha, was to buckle down on discipline as a way to promote a stronger work ethic. To get students to complete an assignment, for instance, she provided a draconian due date for a complex assignment, and then relented and extended the deadline. In a subsequent interview she acknowledged that she had never intended for the original due date to be enforced, but rather had imposed it in order to motivate her students to work diligently in class. When the students "flubbed up" a test the previous week, she "tried to talk through the novel with them," which "didn't go over real well." Brandy then warned them that they needed to be better prepared for a test on Thursday. She informed them that "There will be an exam. You better read." Brandy figured that two students out of twenty had completed the reading, causing her to lose sympathy with their self-chosen interests and impress her authority on the class. On Tuesday and Wednesday, said Brandy,

They were just getting this blank look. They didn't have a clue what was going on in the novel because they hadn't bothered to read it. So Thursday they finally got a wake-up call because I wouldn't—I will be honest. I was really mad. So I kind of met them at the door and said, "You will need

your *Huck Finn* book and you will need about ten pieces of paper."

Brandy's punitive approach to her students worked in conjunction with the stern account of their behavior that she provided to their parents on Parents' Night. She said,

I really expected a lot of parents to go home and chew kids out, and then [for the students] to come in with [a bad] attitude. Instead, apparently parents went home and chewed them out, and they realized, "I'd better straighten my act out."

In the days that followed, said Brandy, the students

were actually interacting for a change and not sitting there like a lump on a log. And even their essays looked so much better this time.... The entire week they were angels, and they really put their noses to the grindstone and started working.

This angelic performance complied more with Brandy's notion of work ethic, one that produced the sort of labor central to the Protestant work ethic, regardless of how distasteful or painful that exercise of will might be for them, given that "all the early citations [to the phrase] refer to *holding* someone's nose to the grindstone as a form of punishment," an origin "in keeping with the notion of the continuous hard labour implicit in being strapped to one's bench" while carrying out unpleasant work (<http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/217200.html>).

Motivation for school work. According to Brandy, her students were "well below average; they have no motivation." Among the driving assumptions about the students articulated by the three teachers was that they were disengaged from school and would only do schoolwork when consequences were built in for not doing so. Joni therefore used assessments to make the students accountable for the work. She said,

I tried to be the liberated new teacher who wasn't going to have quizzes all the time

and stuff and found out very quickly that you have to give them quizzes, even though I didn't want to. And I tried to do activities sort of incorporating the quiz sort of technique. I'm not going to call them quizzes, but using discussion questions hopefully to get them to read. And we'll see if they actually do read because I had a really hard time the first time I taught the outside novel, getting them to read.

Joni experienced frustration in trying to enact an interesting curriculum for students who, she found, resisted her instruction. She described the limited effect that her curricular adaptations had on her students' degree of enthusiasm about the domain of English:

I just try to make any sort of connection, something kind of interesting for them to hope they'll grasp onto it. Because they're already set off of English. They all hate English. It's a horrible, horrible thing, you know, and they hate to read. So it's really hard for me to get them interested in anything. And unfortunately a lot of the stories in the books are not too interesting.... I thought they'd really get into [the Reginald Rose drama] *Twelve Angry Men*. Some of them did, but I almost think it's a worthless battle, me trying to search around and hunt for things, because they don't get into anything.

The students' dislike of reading, she felt, rendered much of her university training otiose. Joni assumed that activity-oriented instruction would not work with students who were so estranged from school:

We learned a lot of really neat things in the classes at [the university]. But I think a lot of them could only be used in certain settings with the students. And my students are not to that point. Maybe my seniors would be. But a lot of neat and innovative ideas, my students cannot handle them right now. I've tried to do things that make things interesting and neat, and they still don't respond.... A lot of things we talked about [at the university] were just group work, things that are done in groups. And my seniors can do group work, not too—they can usually handle that for a while. My tenth graders, at least the few times I've

tried, usually won't even do it at all. It's like pulling teeth for them to even write down answers on the paper. When they get in groups all they want to do is talk. So that was really frustrating.

Samantha too said of her students that "They're just not highly motivated. [My mentor teacher] and I are still kind of working on how to deal with that. So it takes a lot of hooking and prodding¹ to kind of get them to complete things sometimes." Samantha used assessment to help students stay on task, saying, "I can assess them to see if they can follow directions.... Another assessment I might be able to get from it is sort of a motivation, how motivated are they, how—and staying on task, those sorts of things I can kind of assess." She felt that she needed to provide extrinsic means of motivation because "They're just not highly motivated to do things on their own at home ... and a lot of them have jobs, afterschool jobs, or girlfriends or activities that they do that kind of put homework on the low end" of their priorities.

Her students shared characteristics of Eckert's "burnouts": an orientation to the adult worlds of work and romance that rendered school an adolescent environment to them, one to which they showed little commitment. All three teachers in this study, along with their mentors and colleagues, interpreted this indifference to school to be a lack of work ethic. In order to make school matter more to them, they felt, they needed to inculcate better work habits in their students, even if they needed to act punitively to engender them, and even if the students' ultimate capitulation came about in order to avoid harsh consequences than in order to meet genuine needs in their lives.

Respect

The teachers in the study also felt that their students lacked respect, not only for adults and their institutions but for one another. The following sections detail this aspect of the explicit and implicit character curricula in the teachers' engagement with working class and vocational students.

Respect for authority. The students' disrespect for authority was typically manifested in their attitudes toward the teachers' control of the classroom. Brandy noted that she had

a lot of behavior problems.... This is a class that has no respect for authority. As a teacher, I am told by this class over and over and over, "You can't do that." And I just look at them and say, "Watch me."

The students, she felt, would "just have to learn the hard way" that she was in control and that they would need to bend to her will and contribute to an orderly classroom.

They showed their disrespect when she provided latitude in their learning. With the school library not yet lending books to students due to a problem with the computer system, Brandy checked out a number of books under her own name, and four students had neither returned them nor repaid her for them. She said,

I checked [the books] out Thursday, and I let them check it out from me, and now I've got four books that the students just refuse to return, and I'm going to end up eating them. So, you know, there goes part of my paycheck. You know, a hundred and twenty-something dollars. And I'm not real pleased with it, you know?

Joni relied on the vocational curriculum to help instill in her students a sense of compliance with her authority as a teacher. She said, for instance, that as part of her grading of presentations they made on a vocabulary lesson, the students were assessed according to whether they

understood what they were supposed to do or not, especially following directions for the presentation. That was the main part of it, so I can see ... if they follow the directions, and if they can get up in front and talk with people and work in groups.

Following directions comprised the "main part" of the assessment for the students' projects and presentations.

Respect for cultural conventions. The teachers emphasized a range of cultural conventions, particularly in the vocational English curricula, that they believed the students would need in order to succeed in their jobs. Joni, for instance, said that the applied communications curriculum sought to teach students behaviors, rituals, and expectations that accompanied efforts to establish a career. To help meet this goal, she prepared her students for mock job interviews conducted by people from local businesses. Joni said,

The people they interview with are going to actually have like a check sheet sort of thing telling us how they do. It'll have a thing like how they dressed, how they spoke, correct grammar, all those types of things.

For the mock interviews the students needed to learn and speak appropriately for the occasion, demonstrating knowledge of the codes by which their interview performance would be evaluated in the work place.

Toward this end, Joni both emphasized appropriate clothing for a job interview and the proper form for filling out job applications. She collected their applications and distributed a handout titled "Questions Frequently Asked at the Job Interview," which she reviewed with the students line by line. The next day each student shared an article about the workplace that he or she had found in a newspaper or magazine, following which the students worked in pairs to conduct mock interviews with one another. Through the interview preparation the students learned codes of power that they might not be familiar with and were provided feedback by the interviewers on "how they dressed, how they spoke, how they answered questions." She said, "We'll probably talk more about body language. And one thing we need to work on is the handshake," a workplace ritual that required a particular approach, posture, and grasp.

Respect for peers. Joni noted that, in her initial fears about teaching,

I was more scared that we were going to have problems with respecting each other. They have more problems with respecting each other than they do respecting me. I know we need to work on respecting each other, and I talked to them again about that today. I had to pull a person aside and say something."

This respectful stance, she felt, would serve her students well in school, at work, and in their personal relationships.

Samantha also explicitly built instruction in peer respect into her teaching. In considering the relational problems she found among her students, she said,

I'm starting to feel like we need more of a community building kind of thing because people are going to have to learn how to work together in this class, 'cause I can't always say that so and so, so and so, so and so and so [inaudible] always be in the group together. They're going to have to be mixed up. Part of this is learning how to deal—and part of the whole Applied I philosophy is learning how to deal with other people and communication in the workplace and—so I'm starting to feel like we need some community building things, and that's one thing that I'm going to work on on Monday. I'm going to try to design with them a contract that we can all live by. And then [do] some more community trust-building kinds of things.

These community- and trust-building activities were supplemented by Samantha's use of "character education modules" that were part of the applied communications curriculum. She described these modules as follows:

Part of [applied communications] is doing things that are relating to the work force and that sort of thing. There's a whole set of modules. And what I mean by modules is they are booklets that have various activities having to do with interpersonal conflict.... It'll have a little introduction and, you know, things that you read about whatever the topic is. And then it'll usually have some sort of an activity, maybe a group activity or sometimes it's a personal activity. Like this is sort of like a [inaudible] quiz. It has questions like "Do you act like

a supervisor, even when talking to co-workers? Do you frequently [inaudible] other people's ideas?"

Samantha had the discretion to choose which modules to use in conjunction with the literature curriculum. She noted that her students were "really reticent with working with anybody but their best friends," and so chose a module on interpersonal communication:

It's communicating to solve interpersonal conflict, [which is] something that they kind of need to work on anyway, just because some of them are somewhat abrasive, and some of them dislike working with anyone who's not their best friend. And they've gotten better. I've kept them in the same groups for a while, and they know that I'm not going to switch them so they just deal with it. So they do fine with each other most of the time. But they still—you know, they still have their moments, and they really need to kind of learn how to work with people, especially the work environment when you can't choose.

The curriculum was primarily designed for workforce training, and so in addition to promoting the improved communication skills that Samantha desired in her classroom, the modules were employed to help the students learn appropriate interpersonal job skills, as she indicated in the following remarks. The applied communications curriculum, she said, prepared students

for the workplace or thinking about the workplace, and you can't choose everybody you work with. So that's a lot of the reason that I chose to do this one. It talks about conflict and working things out. And one of the sections they did today talked about looking at things from a different point of view from the other—sort of looking at it from the other person's viewpoint. And I felt like these are—these are things they really need.

Her students' tendency to engage in conflict would not suit a work environment, she felt, and so she believed that the modules would

help them learn conflict avoidance and resolution and thus exhibit good character at work.

Personal Qualities

The final set of dispositions that the three teachers hoped to cultivate in their students concerned what might be termed character traits, that is, personal qualities that would benefit them and advance their occupational prospects.

Discipline. Like many teachers, early-career or otherwise, the teachers in our studies found student discipline to be a problem among their low-track students. In reflecting on her students "horrible, horrible test scores," Brandy lamented that they

have absolutely no self-discipline and cannot establish their own reading schedule, and they just decide it's not important to read.... [It] falls into any teacher's realm to teach them self-discipline and the importance of following through. This seems to be their biggest weakness.

Joni drew a similar conclusion, saying of one class,

They're taking advantage of some of the situations in the classroom [such as] the constant talking when I'm talking. We talked about respect today, we talked about—basically I came in, and I said, "We have a lot of discipline problems in this room. I think we need to talk about it, and you could help me decide, or we could all decide what the problems are." We listed them on the board and what we think the consequences should be.

Samantha too found her students' discipline to be lacking. She said that in response to unruly behavior, she and her mentor teacher had come up with a variety of solutions, including establishing a seating chart and such measures as "detention and parent call.... I hate doing stuff like that. But I'm getting to the point where it's going to be necessary." Another solution she resorted to was to eliminate dead time. She said,

I want to keep them busy. I want to keep them so busy that they don't have time to talk to each other and don't have time to play practical jokes, like turn the heat up to 90 or erase things off the board that I've written.... They just do the whole screwing around thing and it's just really annoying.... I've got just lots of stuff planned, and my goal is to keep them busy so that they don't have time to do this stuff.... I purchased a timer and I've been setting it more often for activities so that when it dings—it's a nice mild ding, and I say, okay, time to move on to something else.

Samantha's mentor teacher influenced her belief in the value of keeping students busy. Jude, her mentor teacher, felt that "sometimes they have too much down time and they get silly," leading her to design instruction so that she would not have "one person finishing while every other person is still doing stuff," a measure that Jude believed could "help a lot with classroom management." Samantha agreed with this assessment, acknowledging that "That's really the way that we keep CVAE, our ninth-graders—that's how we keep them under control, for lack of a better phrase. And the ninth—it's just by keeping them busy."

The work she assigned to keep her students busy and thus out of trouble made few cognitive demands on them. Samantha described instruction on the Middle Ages and its literary figures, for which student groups made factual presentations. Following the presentations, said Samantha,

I wrote up a little paragraph about the Middle Ages, leaving out key words that were in the notes, and that was on their test. So and I'm going to let them know. It will be the same thing when we do the Restoration test. I will just—you know, I'll do the same thing. I'll write up a paragraph, leave out key words, as long as you study your notes, you'll be fine.

Samantha noted that literature of the Middle Ages was of little interest to her students and its rhetoric often left them baffled. She noted that many of her students did not do

homework, leaving her to read aloud in class and test students on their attentiveness. She said that some students acknowledged that

"I won't read it. I won't read it if you tell me to do it for homework. I just won't." Not really in a mean way, but just saying, "I'm sorry, Miss Johnson, but I don't usually do my homework." So it didn't offend me. I know that some people will go home and read it, and some people won't. But we're having—and then that's the reason I'm having the quiz on Thursday, is to find out who did read. Part of what I think is going on is—part of it is that they're not taking me seriously. Oh, she's a student teacher, you don't have to listen to her. They almost all failed the test that I gave.... Three people passed with 70s. They hadn't been studying. I gave a quiz game the day before. They hadn't been paying attention. And my mentor and I are both hoping that that was hopefully a wake-up call for them.... I'm trying to get them interested in the Restoration but I'm still also trying to keep them busy and keep them engaged so that I don't have to give anybody detention.

Keeping students busy, she felt, would help to address the discipline problems that interfered with the learning she hoped to encourage through the curriculum.

Perseverance. Joni described such character traits as perseverance and ambition in outlining her expectations for the students in her assessment on *The Giver*: "Can they stay on task, which we're having a hard time with.... The quizzes help assess if they can stay on task.... If they turn in extra credit, you know they have some ambition." Here Joni described the ways in which literary study, rather than focusing on the "big idea" questions available through the literature, was more oriented to helping the students to complete tasks and aspire to go beyond the minimum work quota. In the context of the applied communications curriculum, then, literature lessons served as vehicles for promoting dispositions. We infer that task completion itself was regarded and rewarded as a virtue, no matter how odious the task to the student and prospective employee; and that perhaps

the more abhorrent the task, the more virtuous the behavior in completing it.

Joni recognized their distaste for the novel when she said,

The thing they've had to struggle with the most has probably been the novel, *The Giver*. In the very beginning I fought them tooth and nail to read it.... It's just getting them to read is the hardest part. And I had to learn that I have to do quizzes. I didn't want to do quizzes, but I have to do them.

As Joni noted, the students' reading of *The Giver* included education about how to persevere even with tasks that they disliked. Joni found that with the students enrolled in this low-track course, it was often a struggle

just to get them to care about it and get them interested. A lot of them are probably repeating in the class. I hate to be all negative about it, but that's kind of just the facts, I guess. And we have a huge problem with absenteeism at this school.... That's been my main struggle with them, is just to get them to care and to do the work. So I have to adjust my teaching likewise, I guess. I try to take up as many grades as possible because if I don't take something up, they most likely won't turn it in or won't do it. So I have to collect almost everything they do and stress to them that it does count.

Joni's instruction in relation to *Twelve Angry Men* stressed the trait of perseverance in her students. Joni described how the worksheet she used promoted this disposition:

I like this worksheet a lot because [it helped to] remind them if they didn't remember what protagonist and antagonist was. It also made them go back through the story and find examples of it. So not only did it help them, you know, back up the protagonist and antagonist [inaudible] for that, but also made them go back through and reread if they weren't paying attention the first time.... They won't go back through and find things. They'll just sit there [and say], "I don't know, I don't know how to do it." But they did really well with that one. I was really excited.... They went back and found the things they needed, the examples,

without too much discussion or argument about it. And most of them got the right answers, too.

The character trait of perseverance, then, would enable students to complete tasks, even if they did not enjoy them, and thus develop the sort of disposition that would benefit them both in school and in the workforce. Perseverance would contribute to an improved approach to another critical trait, honesty, in the view of Samantha. Samantha remarked that her instruction strove to promote qualities that would serve students well in

the real world, 'cause they're getting closer and closer to graduation and closer and closer to adulthood. So things like that. And even moral things I think are important. This group especially, when I think about them, they just have a hard time with a lot of things.... Sometimes they don't see the problem with copying straight off of somebody else's paper.... They don't understand why I might suspect they were cheating if they talk during a test or something. They don't get that. And I do have some people who have tried to cheat. I caught one or two people cheating. Things like having their notes underneath the quiz.

Perseverance would enable them to complete tasks without needing to find excuses or cheat, and thus would benefit them in multiple ways.

Time management. Another character trait emphasized by the teachers in our research was that of time management, which Samantha considered to be an important dimension of what she termed her students' "work ethics." She gave an example of a typical occasion that revealed students' difficulty in organizing and spending their time wisely:

I was going to get them to write a first-person account of their experience. You know, to really reflect, that sort of thing. We never got to that because they took so long to do some of the other things, which is a lot of my frustration, which I believe I mentioned to them today, that that's one thing that really frustrates me, is when I have to pull their teeth. And it's something I'm really

hoping to pursue on Monday, the whole work ethics, wasting time. It takes us so long to get just certain small things done that we don't get to do everything that we have scheduled.... It takes so long for us to get in grooves and it takes so long for us to get paper out to take a quiz.... It's a work ethics issue definitely.

Her students' work ethic was revealed when their attention drifted from their academic assignments to talk about their personal lives. Samantha said that when her students were assigned discussion questions in relation to a literary reading,

They'd start talking about their boyfriends or something. So that—it goes back to the work ethics. I mean, it all ties in. It's really affecting what they're learning because I'm pulling teeth—I don't—I haven't found the right carrot to put in front of the horse.

Positive reinforcement, she felt, would be preferable to punishment, but at this early career point was not motivating her students to complete their work.

Brandy too remarked that her 11th-grade students had problems with time management, concluding that

Let's teach them time management. But how do you teach time management? You can give them the tools. You can't force them to use them. And I think that's ... their biggest downfall.... They haven't figured out how to organize things, how to prioritize things.

Among her solutions was to employ a timer to keep lessons moving briskly. Better time management would, she felt, help with other dispositions that the instruction was designed to promote, such as discipline, staying on task, and other attributes in both school and work.

DISCUSSION

Our analysis suggests that an implicit character education curriculum was at work in the instruction of two early-career teachers

assigned to vocational track English preparations and one early-career teacher who taught working class students in regular and Honors track classes. We next outline what we see as the assumptions behind the character-oriented instruction provided for students from working-class backgrounds and those presumed not headed for college.

We see two factors influencing the teachers' instruction. First, the vocational curricula in the different schools in which these teachers taught included a set of related assumptions that were interpreted and adapted by the teachers in their instruction. The courses were designed for students presumably not destined for college, but rather headed to jobs requiring only a high school education or less. Students were taught interviewing skills, including how to shake hands properly, dress appropriately, and so on. Students were instructed in character traits that correspond to the values embedded in the Protestant work ethic, such as responsibility, effective time management, and so forth as a way to impress their superiors with their reliability and prospects for promotion. These skills would position them for certain types of employment in jobs envisioned by the curriculum designers as desirable destinations for students from their backgrounds and with their presumed life trajectories.

This emphasis, however, produced a paradox in students' experiences of the courses. A primary goal of the curricula was to prepare students for service-level jobs and the formalities of getting them. To make this shift, students needed to learn whole new ways of dressing and behaving. Joni, for instance, was reported in the field notes to have said

that guys need to wear a tie this year. [One student] wants to know what color of shoes he should wear with his pants.... She cautions them not to put that they couldn't get along as a reason for leaving

a prior position. These behaviors would be assessed by local business people during mock interviews, following which they would provide "a check sheet sort of thing telling us how

they do. It'll have a thing like how they dressed, how they spoke, correct grammar, all those types of things." Joni further stated that she tried "to emphasize that you need to know exactly what you're going to say and be ready to say it because sometimes what comes out of your mouth isn't always what you planned to say." Among those statements might be an admission that they had left a job because of difficulties, a sign that they might challenge authority in the new work setting.

Students typically, however, regarded such preparation as irrelevant to their job prospects. A number of them already held jobs of the sort that their friends and family members regarded as career work: in auto shops, on construction sites, and so on. Joni was thus in the position of teaching students the codes, practices, and rituals of jobs that required résumés, formal interviews, shiny shoes, ties, and other routines and accoutrements. Yet her students contended that such knowledge was irrelevant to the kinds of jobs they sought and the procedures they had used to secure them. These means of job searching relied on informal procedures learned through the funds of knowledge available in community life: connections through friends and family, familiarity through social relationships and common interests, frequent appearance at job sites, and other ways of knowing more likely in working class communities than white collar environments (Eckert, 1989; Moll, 2000). Joni believed that the students did not "understand the seriousness of the résumé and the job application. So we're trying to emphasize that and what you need to be able to do it to get a good job." Yet, she reported, the students typically responded to this instruction by complaining, Joni reported, that "We already know. We've been through this."

The sort of character education provided through the vocational track, then, was not necessarily on target for what the students saw as their own vocational needs. The curriculum's notion of a "good job" did not always map onto what the students saw as a "good job," making the course's assumptions ques-

tionable and imposing on them a social future toward which they did not necessarily aspire.

A further paradox of the vocational curricula's character emphasis, then, concerns the construct of the reproduction of the social division of labor (Williams, 1977): the ways in which succeeding generations tend to replicate the economic patterns and status of their families of origin. This Marxist critique is aimed at the ways in which these patterns are manipulated by those who control capital, leaving working class people at the mercy of the power exercised by capitalists. Yet in this research, the desire for social reproduction came from within; working class students rejected the effort to redirect their life trajectories toward office environments that presumably carried greater status and more promising economic prospects, at least in the eyes of their teachers. In doing so they further rejected part of the implied character curriculum in that oil-stained overalls might be a perfectly appropriate work attire in the worlds they sought to inhabit, rather than ties and firmly pressed trousers.

A second function of the character curriculum concerned the low-level cognition and limited perspective available through the academic work assigned. Jackson (1968) describes students who appear to be learning because of the motions they go through. In the case of Joni's teaching of *Twelve Angry Men*, she expressed pleasure and even excitement that the students completed a worksheet successfully, demonstrating their perseverance with the task. Yet in response to a play that often provokes discussions about social inequity, the merits and problems of the U.S. judicial system, the role of the individual in a democracy, and other "big ideas," the students' role was reduced to finding and labeling characters as protagonist or antagonist, eliding more complex questions that might invite more committed responses. By emphasizing busyness, as Samantha did, and task completion regardless of the pleasure or knowledge associated with the tasks, the teachers restricted students' opportunities with literary response that could have easily found reso-

nance with the students' personal concerns, yet was shut down because it produced classrooms that violated the teachers' sense of order and propriety.

We cannot let the students off the hook in focusing on the teachers' imposition of their character curriculum on their vocational and working class students. Each teacher reported student disaffection, shenanigans, testing of behavioral boundaries, lack of commitment to academic assignments, and other behaviors that required a sort of intellectual lockdown in order to elicit some semblance of academic achievement in their classes. The students, felt the teachers, lacked motivation, and so needed to have their noses kept to the grindstone to keep them busy and accountable for school-work. As former and current secondary school teachers, we surely have no romantic illusions about young people and their commitment to academic performance. We would expect early-career teachers to have problems with getting their students to complete all assignments willingly and unproblematically. Indeed, all spoke of entering their first classrooms with somewhat idealistic notions of students' motivation to learn, and then having to clamp down with accountability measures when the students abused the assumption that they wanted to learn what was assigned.

The retreat to keeping students busy with work that they must persevere through to demonstrate their willingness to complete odious tasks, however, belies other evidence from the observations that students could engage in discussions of interest to them with compelling insights. In Joni's first year of full-time teaching, for instance, we observed an episode in which several students complained about the repetition of the word "nigger" in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. Both Joni and Edith, the special education teacher who supervised students with IEPs, discouraged the discussion by explaining that the book was a literary masterpiece and that Steinbeck himself used the word ironically as a way to reveal its insensitivity. Students had much to say on the topic, yet Joni and Edith provided rapid closure by

emphasizing the literary value of the work and then moving on. It appeared to the observer that this topic might have promoted lively discussion and interpretive writing, yet the class proceeded to rote learning exercises in plot facts and vocabulary.

The question then remains open regarding whether such students generally have no interest in academic work, or whether the sort of academic work presumed appropriate for such students misses the mark of what they might fruitfully engage with. Rote learning might help students demonstrate character traits such as work ethic, responsibility, and perseverance, but also might contribute to the general alienation that they feel from school that further disaffects them from participating willingly in any particular educational experience (Smagorinsky & O'Donnell-Allen, 1998). If a vocational curriculum consistently provides a joyless and unstimulating learning environment, it should be no surprise that students turn away from school as a place that meets their social and professional needs. We see this study raising questions about the value of an implicit character curriculum when it sacrifices learning for the promotion of dispositions that students may spurn due to their overall rejection of the institution of school and its values and practices.

Two of the reviewers solicited to evaluate this manuscript by *JRCE* were concerned that we simply selected bad teachers to study; that they knew of teachers who were successful with vocational students who would make for better studies of early-career teacher and their work with lower-track and low-SES students, because of the better example that they provided. In presenting these teachers' cases, our goal was neither to make blanket judgments about their abilities nor to make generalizations about the populations they taught. Rather, this study suggests the difficulty of the transition that beginning teachers experience moving from their university programs into their first jobs, even when that transition is mediated by extensive field experiences in the classrooms of handpicked mentor teachers

who have input into the conduct of the program.

All of the 16 teachers whom we have analyzed for the case studies in this line of inquiry experienced dissonance of some sort, often based on school value systems that ran counter to their stated beliefs upon emerging from university coursework. These conflictual settings typically revolved around the universities' emphasis on some version of student-centered or progressive teaching in the tradition of John Dewey, and the schools' emphasis on conformity to established norms: the alignment of curriculum and instruction with standardized testing mandates, the emphasis on conventional literary interpretations over student-initiated responses, the suppression of students' constructivist engagement with the curriculum in favor of the memorization of textbook-delivered information, exclusive instruction in formulaic writing such as five-paragraph themes on assigned topics at the expense of open-ended writing, and so on.

For beginning teachers to experience such dissonance thus appears to be more the norm than the exception. All of the teachers in the research attended their state's namesake universities, suggesting academic success on their part in attaining admission to their state's most competitive universities and further achievement in earning admission to a restricted major. If anything, then, we are reporting on relatively high-achieving teacher candidates who, in the Georgia cohort featured here, studied within a program that had won several state-level awards for excellence, and in a university-school collaboration that has been described in a number of cross-site publications. Dismissing these teachers as poor models thus seems to overlook the difficulties that even accomplished teacher candidates can have in learning to teach within multiple and conflicting settings, particularly those involving preparations in the lower-track course to which beginning teachers are often assigned (Kelly, 2009).

What we see in these three cases, then, is a confluence of teachers whose ideals come in

conflict with the dispositions of their students, teaching assignments that channel beginning teachers into situations where the interests of neither teachers nor students are well-met, a setting guided by limiting assumptions about the students and a curriculum that emphasizes their assimilation to a specific set of norms for which they find little useful application in their social and work worlds, and related sorts of contradictions.

Amidst these conflicting settings, these beginning teachers negotiated compromises in terms of how to manage their seemingly disaffected lower-track or working class students' academic performance. At times they appeared to gravitate easily to the imposition of a character curriculum, as was the case with Brandy and Joni; while at others the compromise came more grudgingly, as Samantha exhibited in clinging to Montessori principles in the setting of a vocational track teaching assignment. In each case, however, we observe the formative effect of the vocational assignments on the three teachers' early-career development of a conception of appropriate and effective instruction, one that emphasized character education in the form of teaching students a set of qualities associated with the Protestant work ethic as antecedent to performing acceptably in either school or their anticipated work destinations.

We again return to the objection that we have focused on mediocre beginning teachers when more dynamic and creative teachers are available to model effective teaching of low-income and vocational students. We are less concerned here with the behaviors of individuals than we are in the overall situation that helps account for their performances. Although a hidden curriculum may be manifest in individual teachers and classrooms, it does not occur in isolation. Rather, we turn to the cultural and historical setting in which such behaviors occur. Joni and Samantha implemented vocational curricula that were replete with assumptions about lower-track students and their social futures. Brandy arrived at similar conclusions about her students without the overlay of a vocational curriculum. We assume

that deeper forces within the schools, and within schooling in general, helped to shape their beliefs about the need for students to develop character traits in tune with the Protestant work ethic as prerequisite to their developing into responsible students and adults.

Our reviewers have argued that the problems lie less in the students' insufficient character than in the teachers' lack of creativity in eliciting their students' commitment to academics; had we selected different teachers, they maintain, we would have gotten better results. Our goal, however, was not to select exemplary teachers to model effective teaching. As in most research, we relied on volunteers from competitive universities; if anything, we had to take care that our sample was not exceptional, as is often the case with volunteer research participants (Rosenthal, 1965). Rather, we hoped to show how one set of teachers from a university program with a progressive emphasis and extensive field experience component struggled to teach low-track and low-SES students and, faced with difficulties in implementing open-ended instruction, resorted to character education as a way to induce compliance among their resistant students.

This study thus illustrates how character education is implicated in subject-area education, and how beginning teachers struggle with this facet of their instruction, whether it is explicit or implicit. Like all of the teachers we have studied in this line of inquiry, these three did not follow a linear path of developing a conception of how to teach, but rather followed a twisting path of concept development (Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003; Vygotsky, 1987) as it was mediated by different settings and relationships. Our study suggests that those interested in character education learn to recognize the different ways in which character education can be manifested, the difficulties that teachers have in appropriating principles of how to educate for character, and the potential mismatches between what adults believe is best for students and how students do and do not embrace

that perspective or see it as relevant to their lives.

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NOTES

1. "Hooking and prodding" is a rug-making technique requiring meticulous patience (see, e.g., Hubbard, 2002).

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